the Visible and the Invisible
Summa anthropologia philosophicae

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Not earth and water, for two came from one
and depths hide the beginning,
till the end of time...

The higher you climb, the lower you descend
many are roads, but the door only one;
leaving, one returns...

What is, becomes, and passing - remains.
no borders. yours is only all
that you have given away.

Life is stripe, stripe is death. The dead live
unless the living die. you find, unless you seek,
when two become one.
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Preface

The underlying theme of this work is the unity of human existence. It is only underlying because it is neither proven nor constructed from any more specific pieces of particular experiences. It is taken as the starting point from which all the variation of actual experience unfolds in a spiral of hermeneutical self-elaboration.

This elaboration, and our presentation, does not follow any deductive path of necessary causation or conceptual determination but is, so to speak, organic. We describe the emergence of gradually more differentiated experience where the subsequent stages do not follow logically from the preceding ones but emerge by dissociating new aspects which are present at most implicitly at the earlier stages. This form of presentation is applied not only in the first Book where the emergence of reflective experience is traced from its virtual origins. New elements appear likewise in Book II, where the reflective attempts to trace the unity of existence or, if one prefers, the epistemic attempts to find the ontological foundations, contribute various modifications to the very foundations they are seeking. Book III describes then the existential, and not only reflective, attitude which centers around the pivotal choice implied by the split of the experience into the spheres of the visible, reflectively determinable contents and the invisible ones which, although present in experience, cannot be circumscribed within the horizon of reflective actuality. This final Book also brings new aspects resulting from the change of perspective which is no longer a mere description of the existential situation but addresses the fundamental choice implied by it.

This form of presentation may cause some difficulties for the reader since the overall picture arises only after one has followed its considerable part, if not its whole. It has been chosen because it most accurately reflects the order of origination and dependence. Although signs of the ultimate conclusions can be thus observed from the very beginning, they remain only approximate before reaching their final formulations. Hopefully, the reader will be willing to postpone the concluding judgment, especially if it happens to be negative, until reaching the end.

More specifically, Book I describes the gradual emergence of what is naturally considered the beginning of reflection – the world of differentiated, separate experiences. This world is, indeed, a presupposition of reflection but it is not the existential beginning. As hermeneutics has taught us, reflection begins always in some already given context. But although reflection can be aware of this fact, it must renounce its claims to precision if it wants to incorporate it into its horizon. For this world, or rather this experiential horizon, which reflection finds ‘always already there’, does not result from reflective dissociations. Although it can be, like everything else, reflectively analysed, its existential significance is not captured by such analyses. It establishes structures surrounding all reflective experience which, being prior to it, are not amenable to description at the same level of exactitude as the precisely identifiable objects of reflective experience. The very fact of confrontation with the differentiated contents, let alone their definite circumscription, is a presupposition of reflection in need of an analysis which is the object of Book I.

Book II describes then the levels of reflection which, so to speak, repeat the stages of ontological founding from Book I in the reversed order. Reflection, starting with the most specific contents, follows them, through their more and more vague presuppositions, towards the virtual origin. As one used to say, what is last in the order of being, is first in the order of knowledge. But what is thus found by reflection is not any original truth of the innocent, unreflected being but its double. The world of reflection is constituted by the split into the actually visible contents and the sphere of invisible and vague, original
intimations which although, or perhaps exactly because, can not be captured by reflective thought, exercise fundamental influence on reflection, nourishing its existential thirst with the constant motivation to transcend the horizon of whatever happens to be actually available, that is, visible.

This reflective development leads to the primary dilemma of reflection: either to dispense with all vagueness of the original, and this means in particular, existential motivations and concentrate on the determinable, visible elements of experience, or to acknowledge the invisible origin. Whatever the latter might mean, it appears easily as an offence against the autonomy of reflection which is, equally easily, conflated with the autonomy of human being. Book III elaborates this choice and the character of the involved alternatives. Its main message is that what for the reflective thought appears as the renunciation of autonomy is, in fact, the genuine freedom. Just as reflection is driven by the search for the absolute, whether beginning or truth, so it rejects immediately every actual image appearing with the pretensions to absoluteness as not living up to its expectations. Such a rejection, justified as it is, carries however the danger of rejecting not only the absolute character of any visible image but the idea of the absolute as such. As nothing particular is absolute, so there seems to be nothing absolute. This amounts to the absolutisation of itself, of the reflective, or egotic, level of being which recognises only what it can grasp. The liberation may seem genuine since all particulars lose thus the binding power of idols which they possess as long as they can appear for reflection as absolutely valid. But it leaves reflection alienated, that is, surrounded by total emptiness – perhaps, free from all finite pretentions to absoluteness but, at the same time, not free to express any higher meaning. For every possibility of a higher meaning, that is, meaning which essentially transcends the sphere of subjectivity, disappears in the moment subject absolutises itself. Although reflection can not forget and completely ignore its existential origin, it often keeps insisting on the exclusive validity of its precisely visible contents, thus absolutising itself. Book III is concerned with the tension between the right rejection of the absoluteness of any visible image and the mistaken renunciation of the very idea of the absolute. The former rejection combined with the later renunciation amounts to the absolutisation of the reflective subjectivity and, thus, to the idolisation not of any specific, visible entity but of the visibility as such. Examples of this can be encountered already in Book I, but Book III describes the tension, as well as its opposite poles, in a systematic way relating them also to the sphere of subjectivity and reflection.

Sources and references

Although some readers will probably appreciate the frequent quotations from quite varied sources, for others they may appear cumbersome if not directly distracting. In the later case, one can simply ignore the fact that they are quotations and treat them as part of the main text into which they are merged. Occasionallly, several examples are given but then they are delegated to the footnotes. The quotations are only possible formulations of the discussed issues and could be replaced by others. They serve, at most, as the remainders of others expressing similar thoughts and, although they may give associations to particular schools or traditions, are never meant to attract one’s attention to them.

In particular, quotations come often from very different traditions and are brought together simply because they happen to express the same thought about the actual issue. They only pay tribute to the recognition that every thought of some depth has been thought before and that it might have been thought irrespectively of the wider intellectual context.
In general, quotations from a particular author do not imply any wider agreement with whatever is commonly associated with him or his schools.

One will, nevertheless, find particularly frequent Neoplatonic quotations reflecting more intimate relations to this tradition, in its whole span from Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius, through Eriugena, to Cusanus and Meister Eckhart. We do not, however, attempt any exegesis nor new interpretation of this tradition—only acknowledge its inspiration. The readers familiar with it will recognize the analogies and divergencies. For those unfamiliar with it, let it suffice to say that the views presented here can be fitted into it only at a very general level and, often, only by a dramatic reformulation of many central ideas. One may consider the presented views as, say, existential Neoplatonism which, dispensing with any cosmogonic and cosmological associations and explanatory pretentions, focuses exclusively on the only form of experience we know of, namely, the experience of an existing individual (shared with and, consequently, communicable to others as it might be). This makes the presented view—indeed, if one wishes to see it so—of Neoplatonism—a philosophical anthropology, a study not of man's place in cosmos but of man and his experience of cosmos.

The further one proceeds, the more frequently one will encounter quotations from Bible or other religious sources or wisdom literature. The fact that such references are virtually inadmissible in today's philosophy may be due to shame and professional arrogance or else fear and modesty. It is, however, doubtful that the deepest works of spirituality have exercised completely no influence on today's thinkers (true as this may be in many cases). Quotations from them will, hopefully, support the view that the differences of language and conceptual frames do not necessarily mean lack of any connections and that sterility of much of philosophical discourse does not mean sterility of philosophy.

* * *

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

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

Another referenced text, of much less dubious value, is a collection of early Freiburg lectures by M. Heidegger, Phenomenology of Religious Life [Phenomenologie des religiösen Lebens, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 60]. Some of these have been reconstructed almost exclusively from the notes of the students. Thus the reader should be warned that the quoted

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1W. Kaufmann, Nietzsche and the Seven Sirens.
formulations, although reflecting hopefully the intentions, are hardly Heidegger’s. (In any case, the English quotations are my translations, often from the Polish translation of the German text.)

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

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

Both MacKenna’s and Armstrong’s translations of Plotinus *Enneads* are used. The former are marked in the references as [MacKenna’s translation].

**Some conventions**

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

The references to all the works look uniformly as

Author, *Title* XI:1.5...

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

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

In few cases I do not know the origin of the quotation, or else I only (believe to) know its author. I chose to indicate such incomplete pieces of information, rather than skipping quotation marks. I have likewise indicated the use of unauthorized, or in any case unedited, versions of the texts found on the internet for which bibliographical data, except for the title and the author, may contain only the http-address. (For some, certainly very pragmatic reasons, books printed in the USA do not carry explicitly the year of publication but only the year of copyright. Consequently, the bibliographical information for such books refers usually to this date.)

* * *

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

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

I have tried to place more technical details in the footnotes which therefore can be, for the most, skipped at first or casual reading. They are not, however, addressed specifically to the scholars. Sometimes they elaborate the text but in general will be useful only for those who find some ideas interesting enough to follow them in other authors.
“In my opinion, to sum it all up, all things that are, are differentiated from the same thing and are the same thing” Diogenes of Apollonia, DK 64B2

Book I  (of indifference)

In the beginning ...

1 there was Nothingness

“Why is there something rather than nothing?” What makes one ask? Just because we have the intuition, if not of nothingness, then at least of a sheer possibility of nothingness, its empty intention? But an empty intention, a sheer possibility – is it worth pondering why it does not obtain?

Why? Because you are, because you were born. Birth is the separation from the origin and separation results in a confrontation of the separated poles: of the emerging existence with the transcendence. The transcendence withdraws gradually but it does not disappear. It not only envelopes and surrounds the existence but confronts it, gives rise to Something. Something is there because we exist and without us, or other existing beings confronting the transcendence, everything would sink back into the indistinct waters of the original nothingness.

Before any existence, before any experience, there was nothingness; no ‘what’, not even a ‘that’ which is not yet any ‘what’ – but just nothing. The original confrontation takes place in its midst – it is absolute. It is not relative to any particular being, because nothingness is the total lack of any particular beings, the total lack of distinctions.

You were born, and there was time when you didn’t exist. But then there was nothing – no distinctions which now fill the world you are living in.¹ To put it differently, if there always has been something then no beginning has ever taken place. Beginning, true beginning means precisely this – something emerges from nothing. If it emerges from something else, it is a beginning only in a derived, analogous sense given to the word in the practical context of daily experience. If it emerges from something else, it is not new, it is not unique – it is a repetition, no matter how different it may be from everything which preceded it. Absolute beginning, creation from nothingness, is the only way a unique individual, something that isn’t a repetition, can emerge. Birth is such a beginning and so

¹We are not intending here any implausible claims about objective world’s nonexistence before one’s birth. We only mean the simple fact that nothing of what constitutes one’s experience existed. And the objective world is itself a part of one’s experience. We will elaborate the concept of nothingness and then of the world which, like all our concepts, are meaningful only in relation to the concrete existence.
no existence can be repeated — it is unique.

3. **Confrontation**, encounter with transcendence, involves immediate self-understanding. But this self-understanding is nothing more than the confrontation itself, awareness of the very fact of confrontation. ‘Knowing’ oneself to be confronted is neither more nor less than simply being confronted, that is, existing. For that which ‘one is not’ throws one back to oneself and makes one’s own being an issue. For a solipsist there can be no ‘mineness’ for that, as many thinkers maintained, arises only in a confrontation with ‘not-mine’. The sometimes postulated all-embracing immanence of some spiritual unity is thus void of any ‘mineness’ except, perhaps, for the one which reminds it that it is not so all-embracing and immanent as it would like to believe. Only existential confrontation with transcendence, encounter with something ‘one is not’, can give a being the character of ‘mineness’. Unrepeatability of existence and its immediate self-awareness in the face of the transcending nothingness are both aspects of this initial nexus of unique individuality.

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

**Birth** is not an experience, it is the ontological event. It precedes any distinctions and so no one remembers one’s own birth. It brings forth an existence, a confrontation which is not a relation but a meeting. Only when seen as if ‘from outside’ can it be reduced to a relation of dissociated entities. But to be confronted means to be challenged, to meet something which does not remain external and insignificant but which, opening the horizon for the unfolding of life, puts claim to be taken into account, to be reflected. As such a challenge, the confrontation happens not at the outermost borders of one’s being but in its midst, that is, at the very beginning.

In confrontation the separated poles reflect each other. Not in the sense of one being some ‘mirror reflection’ of another, but because they together, and only together, constitute the uniqueness of the event. **Confrontation**, in all its later and more specific forms, can be likened to a fight, a game or a conversation in which one part reflects the other. Responding to the other’s punches, moves or statements, he is in fact an imago from which one reconstructs the moves of the other. In this sense of a direct contact, existence is imago of nothingness (and one would be tempted to say, imago Dei).

5. Although the original confrontation has many actual analogues, it does not belong to phenomenology — happening above everything visible, it is not a phenomenon. It only underlies all phenomena, surrounding everything that appears for ‘...’ with an invisible trans-phenomenal rest.

We witness many births, of people, of animals, even beginnings of things. Reasonably enough, we see the analogy and think that our birth was of the same kind. It was – when

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3 As all analogies, this one is not perfect either. Primarily, confrontation lacks the symmetry of a fight or interaction.
seen from outside! It is true that ultimate uniqueness of every person is also what is the same in all persons – those who like paradoxical formulations might say: every existence is a repetition of the unrepeatability of the beginning. But this fact, founding the deepest communion, is the matter of existential sharing in the origin but not of any objective analogy. If one reduces oneself to the objective mode of thinking, trying to ‘jump out of one’s skin’ and pretend that one is not here, only ‘out there’, one will never be able to appreciate the unique meaning of one’s birth, and hence neither of any birth.

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

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

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

Every genuine thinking, whether mythological, religious or philosophical, confronts the constant presence of the original indistinctness. Whether it confronts it at the beginning or at the end depends more on the order of exposition than on its actual significance. Let us give only one example. The ‘appearances are not things in themselves; they are only representations, which in turn have their object – an object which cannot itself be intuitied by us, and which may, therefore, be named the non-empirical, that is, transcendental object = x. The pure concept of this transcendental object, which in reality throughout all our knowledge is always one and the same, is what can alone confer upon all our empirical
concepts in general relation to an object, that is, objective reality.” The emphasized phrase is the point from which we would start remodelling Kant to fit our purposes. He speaks only about the pure concept of such a transcendental object, not about the object itself. Yet, there isn’t much which could distinguish the two, except for the presumption that the two should be distinguished. Allow us therefore to think them the same: emptiness of the ‘pure concept of x’ is the pure nothingness, indistinctness of x.

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

8. Nothingness is void of any experience. But it is as well the simple one, the origin, since everything in the world originates beyond world’s boundaries, comes from what embraces it, from the entirely other – in the world’s language, from nothingness. This does not mean that the one contains everything which then enters the world. If it did, the designation nothingness would be inappropriate. It is the virtual, not the actual origin, the germ from which everything arises, not a sum containing everything within itself – being indistinct, it does not ‘contain’ anything. It is the background from which and against which anything that is appears. And it is the background which, once the world has appeared, continues to encircle it.

It precedes the world in the ontological order of foundation. When one imposes onto it the image of objective time, it becomes natural to express this precedence in terms of the temporal order. In such terms, it is the state before things and the world emerged, when “the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” Things arise only from this formless homogeneity, from ‘the dark and indistinct waters’ which embraced everything before the creation of the world. The mystery is not how the mind forms, out of the diversity of perceptions and atomic properties, the idea of a sustaining, self-identical object, nor how the objective atoms ‘compose’ to form the experienced unities. Such questions address secondary constructions and can be asked and attempted answered with full visibility of their objects and contents. On the contrary, the mystery is how the original uniformity passes to the multiplicity of independent individuals, how the one becomes ‘many’, or how God creates the world from nothingness. “For the simple [absolute] could not derive from something else, but that which is many, or two, must itself depend on something else.” We will not understand this dependence as any causal derivation but as the dependence of a sign on the signified, of the appearance on the appearing – as the dependence on the necessary condition which founds everything that is differentiated.

9. Acknowledging that “visible existences are a sight of the invisible,” we start with the first and ultimately invisible: nothingness. Its invisibility is not any accident, any lack of our

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4I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. A109-110
5Gen. 1:2 [Septuagint has “invisible and non-composite” instead of “without form and void”.]
6Plotinus, Enneads. V.6.4
7Anaxagoras DK 59B21a
finite minds, but its very essence: where there are no distinctions, there is nothing to see.

We will not try to explain why the differentiated world emerges from the one. We will not disturb the tranquility of the mysteries attempting to answer any How? or Why?.

We only notice that the trivial fact that there are things harbours even greater triviality, namely, that there are different things. What marks the end of indistinct nothingness and a transition towards the world of experience, is that “God divided the light from the darkness,” is a distinction. The primordial act of creation is the event of distinction, turning the indistinct nothingness into something, pulling this something out of nothingness and letting it come forth, letting it appear. This is not appearing for anybody, for in the beginning nobody is there, but simply appearing, simply coming to being. This happens in illo tempore, against the background of mere nothingness, before we can talk about any person or subject. We could say, it is birth which is the first distinction in that a new being is separated from the origin. But it is immediately accompanied by a multitude of further distinctions which bring forth everything that is. For everything that is is a distinction from the indistinct.

Distinction breaks the original unity, the oneness of the one. Nothingness withdraws and becomes a mere background, a mere stage for the performance of the richness of the world. Every being will now carry within itself the element of the original nothingness from which it emerged. Or else, as the Pythagoreans could say, the limit introduced into the ageless indefinite (apeiron) results in the limited cosmos of distinctions which “inhale” the surrounding air, the boundless (apeiron) encompassing all the worlds. Distinction does not merely distinguish something and brings it forth. Primarily, it introduces the difference between the distinguished and the not-distinguished, between the ‘many’ of the actual distinctions and the oneness of the indistinct origin which they “inhale”.

Confrontation is the constant circumscription of the boundary of each thing and of the boundary of all things, limiting the unlimited, distinguishing the indistinct. Existence can be thus characterised equivalently as the being which makes the difference and for which things make difference, which distinguishes and hence for which there is not only the indistinct but also distinctions; in short, the being which is not merely enveloped by nothingness but which confronts it, that is, encounters something.

2 In the beginning there was only Chaos, the Abyss

2.1 Distinction

To “connect” means to relate distinct somethings; it presupposes distinct ‘thats’, and the difference between now and then, between here and there. In order to connect we first have to distinguish. To distinguish means to limit the unlimited, to cut out of the indistinct background. In the primordial sense, it is to draw the first border and thus to encounter for the first time – and only once; to encounter the entirely new ‘...’, a ‘...’ never encountered before. It is a genuine encounter, in the sense that neither the distinguished

\footnote{All ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ share the common ground: they ask for an explanation, perhaps, even for a demonstration. “Why” and “how” are questions more or less successfully addressed by sciences and common sense – the agents seeking explanations. But when directed towards the origins preceding the world, they can only produce conceptual analyses of dubious value, if not transcendental illusions. Why and how something happens are questions already involved in the differentiated world of experiences and concepts. And we, too, will get there, but at a later stage, not at the beginning.}

\footnote{Gen. I:4}
‘…’ was ‘there before’, as if waiting ready-made for being discovered, nor the distinguishing existence brought it about. The ‘…’ emerges from the indistinct (in this sense, is not merely ‘created’ by the existence) but it emerges for the first time (and in this sense, it was not ‘there before’ and is relative to the distinguishing existence). Being both a reflection and a creation, distinction is neither – it precedes both.\textsuperscript{10}

The emerging ‘…’ isn’t anything specific, it isn’t ‘this something’ as distinguished from ‘that something’. Distinction does not involve any relation, it does not distinguish ‘this’ from ‘that’. Distinction is anything that makes a difference; but making a difference does not require being noticed, making a difference does not require being perceived. It distinguishes ‘…’ from the background and thus makes it appear – not for anybody, not for so beloved consciousness which can hardly be postulated at this stage, but just appear: in the middle of indistinct nothingness.

Before anything recognisable emerges, something must be first distinguished. Primordial distinction is a cut from the indistinct, formless background.

Distinction splits the plane of the indistinct. It is naturally visualised as a line | dividing the plane in two, but it can be equally well imagined as a circle 0 which also splits the plane in two. This later image gives often more adequate associations with something being circumscribed and acquiring a border, something limited emerging from the indefinite background, like the first elements emerging from the primordial physis. Distinction carries this archaic connotation of a limitation. Thus, equivocating distinction and limitation (finitude), we would not see much difference between the in-distinct (indefinite) and the un-limited (in-finite), both reflecting possible meanings of apeiron, “from which came into being all the heavens and the worlds in them.”\textsuperscript{11}

11. Distinctions emerge gradually, in a top-down fashion, from the general and diffuse ones, they become gradually more acute and precise. They involve initially only some rough, vague categories rather than sharp, specific differences. Every distinction is, on the one hand, ‘real’ or ‘true’ in that it arises from the background, it pulls something out of the undifferentiated homogeneity of the one. On the other hand, however, it is ‘uncertain’ or ‘unsharp’, it does not draw an absolute, definite border between \( x \) and \( \neg x \), it merely sketches the distinguished pole. Distinctions are like the adjacent stripes of the rainbow, mutually distinct but without any definite boundary separating them from each other. Or else, they are like waves: here is one, there another, and there yet another, but where one ends and the next begins, nobody can tell. We only can point at the peaks and thus be sure that there are, indeed, different waves.

The so called “paradoxes” of Heap or Sorites appear as paradoxes only under the assumption that concepts draw rigid distinctions with uniquely identifiable boundaries and, as a consequence, uniquely determined negation. Although this may be the case with the concepts obtained within the sphere of prior reflective dissociations, it does not apply generally to the contents of experience. Primordially, \textit{panta rei} and even later concepts and apparently rigid distinctions still flow into others, the imperceptible shades of meaning attached by different people to the same understandings make them unexpectedly drift apart, as the differences come forth and drag one and the same thing in opposite direc-

\textsuperscript{10}The word “distinction” will be used in the equivocal sense: as the (f)act of distinguishing and as that which is distinguished. So far, there are no acts nor things distinguished, and distinguishing between the two would be misleading.

\textsuperscript{11}Anaximander, DK 12A9
2.1. Distinction

tions. Moreover, a *distinction* can be always refined, made more *precise*. Yet, although never reaching the final, definite, rigid form, *distinctions* exhaust the content of the world for, as Dr. Johnson observed, the fact of twilight does not mean that one cannot tell day from night.

From the very beginning *distinctions* aren’t limited to *sensations* but concern *structures* and objects which, according to traditional empiricism, would have to be ‘constructed’ from the material of minute *sensations*. Furthermore, a thing, understood as a definite, well-defined object, is by no means a fundamental component of our *experience*. What is *distinguished* from the formless background is pretty accidental and it may be just ... anything. It may be an ‘abstract’ property, like a shape, a size, or a colour; it may be warmth or movement or an emotional expression of another. The original *distinctions* do not discriminate between different *kinds* of objects because one thing is not distinguished from another but from the background. Everything counts equally: properties and relations, some actual things, sensations, changes, motions, continuous processes not composed of any parts, feelings, emotions. No things are more fundamental than others. Before we can begin to *experience*, we have to first make enough *distinctions*, from which the later *experience* can be built.

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

Certainly, something which later will be called a “thing” can be *distinguished*, too. This table can be *distinguished* too. To begin with, it is nothing, or else, as an integral part of the background, it is not at all. There may be a play of lines and shades which run indiscriminately through the table, the wall, the windows. But even such a complex thing as a table, when somebody pushes it aside thus effecting a *distinction* of the sub-chaos of lines, forms, shades and colours from the surrounding chaos, and, at the same time, giving them totality, may give this sub-chaos, which we call table, a new status – of something *distinct* from the rest. Originally, things, like other *distinctions*, are just cuts from the indistinct background of *proto-experience*.

A *distinguished* thing counts equally with a *distinguished* property, a *distinguished* sensation or a *distinguished* emotion. But this means that what is *distinguished* does not involve only *actual*, particular objects but also something *not-actual* and even universal.

Hunger is something that does not appear just like that. It increases gradually. When it eventually hits the barrier at which an infant begins to cry, it involves not just this moment now but the continuity of the whole development, of its gradual increase. It is never so that I am not hungry in one moment and then, in the next, I suddenly am. *Experience* of hunger involves something which is not, seen ‘objectively’, purely *actual*. Fear aroused by possibly very different circumstances, the atmosphere of love and acceptance not connected with any specific person or actions, security or insecurity, all kinds of emotions which, unlike sensations, cannot, in general, be classified as arising and occurring in a specific moment, are among things which are *distinguished* along with colour, shape, size, motion. ‘Objectively’ speaking, these *experiences* require more time to occur, but since the time has not yet begun to flow, they are all equally cuts from the indistinct background. *Proto-experience* itself is timeless and knows not only no difference between ‘this’ and ‘that’, but neither any between 1 second, 1 hour and 1 day. Consequently, something which is later determined as an object can be *distinguished* in the same way, on the same footing, and with the same status, as something we will later call a “property”, a “complex”, a “process”, a “feeling”, a
"conjunctive relation".

The primordial distinctions are not limited to objects given here-and-now. They may bring forth something actual, like this particular table, as well as properties, processes, emotions which, objectively speaking, span long periods of time.

2.2 Chaos

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

Chaos – the limitless manifold, the overflow of distinctions – is not nothingness any more. Nothingness has no distinctions, in particular, no subjective pole. But chaos exceeds something, it has a subjective pole, namely, the arising actuality. The actuality confronted with chaos appears powerless. Chaos, or overflow, is the first, differentiated analogue of the origin. Its proto-experience is the same as the proto-experience of the finitude of actuality, of the impossibility to embrace everything within the horizon of actuality, of definitely limit the unlimited. The confrontation with the limitless reveals not nothingness but the limited; the limited whose fragility dissolves in the overpowering overflow. This fragility, the finite reflection, the imago of chaos, is the site of actuality or – proto-consciousness; the limitless is its primordial correlate.

15. If we try to imagine – and we can hardly do anything more than imagine – proto-experience, it is like a continuous, irreflective flux of 'somethings'; a chaos of pure distinctions not only without any mutual relations, but without any sameness, without any sharp boundaries. One should not focus here on an object, on 'this pen on the table', because such an act involves already fixation and recognition. I may turn off my reflection and just stare at 'this pen here'. It is probably as close as I can get, but it is not a proto-experience, because there is nothing like 'a pen' in proto-experience. Proto-experience is not an experience of something nor is it an experience of nothing – it just isn't an experience. It is like "the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories. Only new-born babies, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have [such an experience] in the literal sense of a that which is not yet any definite what, tho' ready to be all sorts of what; full both of oneness and manyness, but in respects that don't appear; changing throughout, yet so confusedly that its phases interpenetrate and no points, either of distinction or of identity, can be caught." ¹²

All these lacking distinctions are what distinguish proto-experience from experience. But proto-experience is not nothingness any more because it involves distinctions. And whatever is distinguished already is. We can never find anything about which we couldn't,

¹²W. James, The thing and its relations.
in one sense or another, say that it is. The ‘univocal equivocity’ of the word “is” reflects this fact that to be is to be distinguished. Yet these are only pure distinctions, like mere facts of mere differences possessing no sameness, no self-identity; it is a flux, a light which isn’t darkness any more but where still there are no ‘thats’, no somethings at which one could stop and point.

Approaching it phenomenologically, we risk overinterpretation. Using words like “proto-experience” and “chaos”, we should keep in mind that there is no experience of chaos. Chaos never appears for us, and so there is no phenomenon of chaos, no experience of it. Proto-experience is not an experience but chaos which was at the beginning, after the darkness of nothingness was separated from the light, but before the world and anybody who could experience anything emerged. It is not accessible to any reflective introspection. “Born as we are out of chaos, why can we never establish contact with it? No sooner do we look at it than order, pattern, shape is born under our eyes.”

Born out of chaos, we become very quickly involved into specific distinctions and reflective representations which, giving us power of control, at the same time debar the access to the primordial aspects of experience. But as Husserl used to emphasize and as we will emphasize in what follows, the fact that something is not (an object of) an experience does not mean that it is not experienced! We could say that it is co-experienced. As nothingness and chaos withdraw beyond the horizon of experience, they do not disappear. They constitute an integral part of experiencing as well as of any experience and so are given along with it. They are only never given as objects of any particular experiences.

### 2.3 Spatiality/simultaneity

Except for being differentiated, proto-experience does not offer anything. It is properly continuous, not in the sense of a successive flux of distinct ‘nows’ and ‘thats’, but as timeless – without any ‘now’ and ‘then’ – manifold of heterogeneity. It is chaos, but not a chaos of objects (which is secondary) but just chaos – of pure distinctions, “without number or multitude”, of ‘thats’ which are not ‘whats’ and do not yet pretend to possess any meaning. It still carries the connotations of the Parmenidean indistinct ‘is’, but begins to move towards Anaximander’s apeiron, with its full ambiguity of both indefinite and infinite, both indistinct and unlimited. This second hypostasis precedes any more specific differentiation.

It is tempting to apply here the image of a flow, and such an image has indeed been often used to intimate the quality of chaos. But applying it, one should be careful with the elements which, belonging to the image alone, can distort the original. There are as yet no persisting entities and flux conveys this idea pretty well. Likewise, the contents are mutually distinct but their lack of self-identity means that they, so to speak, flow over into each other. This, too, is well captured by the image of a flux. But flux suggests also time, while no time has yet begun to flow. There is as yet no distinction between the actual and non-actual, not to speak about any succession. The heterogeneity of chaos is simultaneous, not because it was comprised into a simultaneity, because all ‘before’ and ‘after’ have been

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13W. Gombrowicz, *Cosmos. II*

14Borrowing the image of chaos from the translation of Hesiod, we should not forget that the Greek *khaos* refers to a gaping or opening up of a chasm. Hence one might prefer to translate it as abyss, the bottomless nothingness. The ambiguity should not cause any confusion, if only we keep in mind that our *chaos* marks the first stage of differentiation, of emergence from the chasm.
abtracted away, but because there is, as yet, no ‘before’ and no ‘after’. There is no sign of a distance, nor any measure. Distinctions are pure, merely distinct – not so that an x may be more distinct from y than from z, but only so that x, y and z are simply mutually distinct, and are not even any identifiable x, y, z.

Proto-experience is not divided into ‘now’ and ‘then’, it is timeless, that is, ‘objectively’ it may last one second as well as one day. In the images like “a flow of continuous change”, neither does the “flow” refer to some flow of time, nor does the “change” refer to anything changing. Rather, “flow” suggests the overflow of all involved contents, and “change” their flowing into each other. It is static co-presence of distinctions without any distinguished objects, mutual interpenetration of vaguely distinct contents devoid of any sedimented identities.

This feature of simultaneity – the flow which is not temporal, but a simultaneous overflow of distinctions – can be taken as the fundamental characteristic of spatiality. Thus spatiality (not space) is somehow prior to temporality. It expresses only that distinctions do not arise one after another, that the level of chaos involves immediately a whole range of mutually different, heterogenous elements. Chaos is the virtual co-presence of a manifold of distinctions.

2.4 Signification

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

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

The primordial signification, as the aspect of the first modification of the original confrontation, founds the permanent and indissoluble awareness of ‘something being out there’, expressed by the common uneasiness with all kinds of solipsism and subjectivism. Every actual object and situation, every actual experience is haunted by the all-permeating shadow, the non-actual rest. But experience is only “haunted” by it, because experience is always directed to something more specific, never to this “indefinite murmur of being.” We do not have any specific experience of the objectivity of the world, because this objectivity is rooted in proto-experience, is something preceding any experience, and thus more primordial than the world. We do not have any specific experience of it, only a sense of it – as imperishable as it is ineffable, as clear as it is vague. The ‘out there’ comes before

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15 This happens too, but it is a completely different – factual, and not, as here, virtual – process.
16 E. Levinas
any ‘something out there’; the separation of light from darkness finds place before any particulars appear.

3 In the beginning was the Word

Chaos, though created from nothingness and thus, in a way, opposed to it, is not yet 20. the world. It is like the materia prima et confusa from which world can be created. Or, to refer it again to the distinction as limitation, §10, it is like the primordial elements – apparently contrary as wet and dry but, in fact, without precise boundaries and merely dividing the indistinct plane into regions which are as distinct as they are inseparable. These first distinctions, providing the ‘material’ for all specific things, the background from which more specific things will be differentiated, are themselves no things. They are pure distinctions without any identifiable sameness. But in the world there are no pure distinctions, only things – things which may disappear and then return because they have some identity, some sameness; things which can be seen and thought because they can recur, that is, be recognised.

To recognise is to signify. The structure of sign in recognition is no longer a mere signification. For the burden of non-actuality carried now by a sign is no longer the mere indistinct rest but something more specific which only happens not to be here-and-now. Sign points from here-and-now to somewhere else or sometime else, ‘outside’ of here-and-now, and so far it involves signification. But it points also to something specific ‘outside’ the horizon of actuality, thus making present not only the indistinctness transcending all distinctions but also this specific something which transcends only actuality. Everything actual carries this structure of a sign, of a reference to something non-actual. Things are signs, words are signs and signs are what make the world emerge from chaos.\(^{17}\)

The exposition of proto-experience can be summarised thus: in proto-experience something 21. is distinguished but nothing is recognised. We have to speculate to the extent that we do not recognise and do not remember. Experience is pure, is chaos, to the extent it does not involve recognition. Any talk about it is thus bound to be a speculation. Or, if you prefer, it is a mystery how God created the world from nothingness, how He divided light from darkness and the waters under the firmament from the waters above it. But it is also a mystery how He, having separated these virtual elements, created the things which we recognise. But our concern is not with ‘how’ but with that and ‘what’.

Pure distinction does not distinguish \(x\) from \(y\); it only brings forth a manifold of distinctins against the indistinct background. Recognition is to proto-experience what distinction is to nothingness: a further and more specific differentiation. It cuts off what is recognised from the chaos, bringing forth not only a pure distinction but an appearance, that is, an appearance of something. To appear is the same as to be recognised. (It would be difficult to attach much meaning to unrecognised appearances.) But also only appearances bring forth ‘somethings’. Properly speaking, only from now on the word “something” can mean something which is not a mere reflex but a ‘this’, which has some character and sameness.

\(^{17}\)Thus, one might want to repeat after Hilbert: “In the beginning was the sign.” [D. Hilbert, The New Grounding of Mathematics. p.202] The signs of Hilbert’s formalism, however, are only the abstract, limiting cases of our signs, to which we will return in 4.1.1.
3.1 Sign and recognition

22. Recognition, the separation of actuality from not-actuality, founds a sign: not any more a merely virtual signification of ‘all the rest’, but a sign of something. Recognition refers ‘this here and now’ to ‘that then and there’, brings forth something actual as something else. Any connection between distinctions involves a sign in this elementary sense that an actual appearance signifies another, not-actual or even non-actual one. As yet no sign appears as a sign – sign means here just the ‘re-’ of the immediate recognition, which ‘re-’ does not refer to any repetition but only to the emerging distance between the actual and not-actual. It is a sign in the sense that something actual points to, or just is continued in, something else or something more, something not-actual and, eventually, non-actual. But the two are immediately merged into one and the sign is entirely transparent.

23. And how and when did the first recognition occur? Impossible question. As far as I am concerned, I do not remember. If there was a time when I did not recognise anything then I couldn’t remember that time. Because to remember means to remember something and when there is nothing, when something only begins to appear for the first time, then there is nothing to remember either.

A possible example might be as follows. 4-month-old babies were habituated to a rod which moved back and forth behind an occluder, A, so that only the top and the bottom of the rod was visible.

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

24. Recognition of object’s completeness and permanence testifies to the emerging distinction between the actual and the not-actual, where the actual signifies the absent, but also to the unity of both aspects. This is the stage where we can properly start talking about signs in the more common sense of the word. Infant sees two separate parts but fills this actual stimuli with the missing part and perceives one rod. The disrupted communication with the other makes the infant attempt to attract the other’s attention: it tries to fill the actual

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18 We will later distinguish between the not-actual things which could be actual but just happen not to be here-and-now, and the non-actual ones which never can be fully actualised. Not-actual contents presuppose non-actual ones and non-actuality subsumes not-actuality so, occasionally, we will omit one of these designations leaving it implicit.

19 A Slater, Visual perception and its organisation in early infancy. A multitude of examples is provided by the research on infant psychology, e.g., G. Bremner et al., eds., Infant Development: Recent Advances.
3.1. Sign and recognition

absence. This ‘filling in’, as phenomenologists might say, is what we mean by the structure of a sign: completing the actual by something not actual. Perhaps, we might even call it ‘intentionality’? Why not? Thus understood, intentionality is just the presence of the non-actual in and through the actual, the pressure it exercises on the actuality. It is a more crisp, sharpened modification of the virtual signification: the actual begins functioning as a sign of something which is not actually given.

This is also the germ of objectivity. Objects appear only to the extent they transcend the pure horizon of actuality, or better, this is what gives an appearance an objective character. An appearance, a sign, is actual through and through, is exhausted within the horizon of actuality. Pure subjectivity means pure actuality, mere appearance. Subjective is what, like the passing feelings or immediate sensations, is exhausted in the pure actuality of an experience and does not hide anything, does not keep anything from appearing. An object, on the other hand, bears the dual character consisting of the actual and the non-actual moments. This non-actual aspect is what gives it the objective character surpassing the subjectivity of a mere appearance. This is only the germ of objectivity because there is as yet no sharp difference between the not-actuality of an impression which is fading away in the retention and the not-actuality of a table seen two days before. But the dissociation of subject and object will emerge from this nexus by sharpening the distinction between the actual and the non-actual.

Although we have not yet attained a full dissociation of actuality from not-actuality, they have begun to be distinguished, to play the role of two distinct aspects. It is therefore too early to speak about abstract signs which we will encounter in the following section. Yet words, or at least some vocal signs, begin to appear at this early stage. It is, moreover, exactly the relative lack of dissociation of such signs from their meanings (characteristic for the current level) which accounts for their creative role.

A good example is provided by the Hebrew language (of the Old Testament) which did not distinguish clearly between word and thing. The primitive root dābar (dbr), referring to speaking and words, means also the things said/commanded and occurs often in the modified form as dābar (dbr), which relates to things. (The difference is purely the matter of grammatical form: b is only a modified form, ב, of the middle beth, ב, from the root.) Thus, for instance, dābar aher means ‘another matter’, while dāram (plural of dābar) – ‘the words/things said’ (the original title of the book which, in Vulgate, became Deuteronomy). The book of Chronicles is called dārei ha’amin (dārei is plural genitive of dābar) which, literally, means ‘the things/events of the days’, while dārei Elohim are ‘God’s words’. The singular genitive of dābar, dār, refers typically to the content of the things said, like dār mitzwa, ‘the essence/content of the commandment’, or dār Torah, ‘the content of Torah’. One senses the associations going from the word/speaking, dābar, through the thing said to the thing itself, dābar. (E.g., the ten commandments can be either aseret ha dārot, ‘ten pronouncements’, or aseret ha dārim, ‘ten things said’.) But trying thus to distinguish the two, one should keep in mind that dābar and dābar are not two words but two forms of the same word which are also pronounced identically.

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20 We should take language here in a very wide sense, namely, as a system of signs which, given actually, can make present something not-actual. The language as spoken by the most is only a paradigmatic example.

21 There are numerous examples where the translation – as thing, resp. word – emphasizes the difference not present in the original. E.g., Gen. XV:1: “After these things the word of the Lord...”; Gen. XXVII:42: “And these words of Esau...”; Gen. XXX:31: “And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me...” – where “thing”/“word” translate dābar/dābar. If the distinction were intended,
Now, the creative power of the Word which was in the beginning need not be taken so literally. But if we take the words in their more virtual form, the above conflation of thing and word seems to be not merely an accident but exactly the constitutive character of the primordial signs. This process can be easier discerned on the individual scale. A child learning its first language(s) is not in the position of an adult who recognises different contents and only has to attach to them appropriate linguistic expressions. For a child the words are tools, as many others, for drawing distinctions in the matter of experience. Acquisition of the first language(s) proceeds along with the process of differentiation in which no difference is given between the actual sign – the word – and the distinguished, signified content. Both emerge simultaneously and words are not merely ‘attached’ to things but are the signs which bring things forth. A child starts by using the same word or construction for what the adults recognise as different meanings or intentions. It can say ‘Like daddy’ and ‘Like ice-cream’, which we recognise as meaning “I love my daddy” and “Now, I would like an ice-cream”. But one should not therefore assume that the child has reached the level of distinguishing the two kinds of ‘liking’. Both can still be in the same nexus, where neither the different temporal scope of each (lasting continuity of attachment versus minuteness of an impulse), nor the more passive, less intentional character of the former and the active, volitional aspect of the latter, are distinguished. Providing the means of drawing the distinctions and organising their chaos, the first language contributes to the creation of the world. It comes to a child as naturally as the world does, for learning it is learning the world, is the emergence of the world for the first time.

### 3.2 Actuality

The lack of the spatio-temporal aspect in the chaos of distinctions is based on the lack of any proper difference between the actual and the non-actual. There is only simultaneity of distinctions and the virtual signification which refers a distinction to the indistinct rest but not to anything specific not-actual. Before recognition, pure experience is heterogenous but continuous or simultaneous – spatial (in very rudimentary sense) but not temporal.

Like distinctions, recognitions are not limited to minute immediacies. With recognitions the element of temporality begins to enter experience as the distinction and fusion of actual and non-actual. But recognitions are still cuts from the chaos with no ‘objective’ time-stamp on them. Whether it is a missing part of an object, a general schema of several instances, a lack of other’s attention or a lasting feeling of satisfaction – the experienced difference between the actually given and absent notwithstanding, the ‘objective’ duration does not matter for the event of recognition.

Something born at one moment and dead two hours later wouldn’t be able to recognise ‘a day’. There is no specific moment – no single act – when we encounter ‘a day’. Day, by its very nature, lasts, i.e., cannot be embraced by a single act within the horizon of actuality. (If it were explained to this something what ‘a day’ is, it might understand it, perhaps, acquire a concept of ‘a day’, but this would require development of the understanding of the objective world.) What takes time is not to develop a concept of ‘a day’ but to have enough experience to be able to cut from its background a unit which is denoted by this word. When the unit ‘day’ is recognised, it carries the non-actuality which, for the

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22 Especially, considering that logos of St. John seems to carry enough of the influences from Philo to be taken the way the tradition has taken it, that is, in a much more Greek sense of, say, providential reason, soul of the universe or primordial cause.
3.2. Actuality

moment, is just a vague intimation of its 'objective' duration. Initially, in illo tempore, what is recognised as such units may be anything which only later reflection will classify as single things or complexes, as immediate sensations or something endowed with temporal duration. But temporality has not yet entered the stage; a sign involves only a primordial separation of its actuality, on the one hand, and its meaning, on the other; the meaning which may embrace distinctions not only not actual at the moment but genuinely and essentially non-actual.

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

The name “here-and-now” should emphasize that we are talking here about elementary horizon of actuality, not any kind of time. It is equally spatial and what we call “not-actual” means as much ‘there’ as ‘then’, or rather, 'not-here' and ‘not-now’. Here-and-now is like a site, a location, a designated point in the midst of its surrounding; it is a spatio-temporal nexus, not yet differentiated into space and time. The horizon of actuality marks actuality but there is as yet no ordering, no past or future, no mutual relations between recognitions except that of being distinct and that of a sign: this actual which refers to, not to say contains, that not-actual. In a recognition of, say, the room I am in now as the room I left yesterday, the sameness of the actual object is its coincidence with the memory of it. But we are not, as yet, reached the past and future dimensions of temporality. Recognising one rod behind an occluder, ‘filling in’ the missing part between the two synchronously moving ends, isn’t exactly like an invasion of the past into the presence. Perhaps, no rod has ever been and there is no ground for speaking about recognition of something past. Recognition is not the same as re-cognition. ‘Filling in’ may be of any character: it may be filling in of something already recognised but, equally, it may be an unjustified and unfounded expectation, a wish to find something not actually given. The past is being accumulated but there is yet no experienced difference between something which receded into the past and something which awaits in the future. These two aspects of actuality and non-actuality mark only the first modification of spatiality from §17. The further breaking of the horizon of experience into temporal and spatial dimensions is based on this nexus of these two primordial aspects. Their tension will later give rise to temporality and its directedness, but here the ‘not yet’ is still indistinguishable from the ‘already not’, the thirst of an expectation is not yet different from the remembrance of a loss.

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

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

Describing spatio-temporality in a bit different language we might recall that it was time, Cronos who, castrating his heavenly father, Uranus, separated heaven and earth, Gaea. Before the appearance of time heaven and earth were married, but time separated them from each other, bringing forth multitude of distinct things on earth or – as the myth has it – the war with its heavenly father. Then, time keeps devouring its own children but, eventually, just like the highest and first gods, heaven and earth, had to give place to a more earthly time, so also time itself, Cronos, having entered the stage at the very beginning, has to yield its place to his son, Zeus, who does not any more rule over the heaven but over the sky, weather, thunder and other lesser gods. Cronos is from then on inaccessible to the earthlings, either ruling Elysium, the Golden Age of the origins, or imprisoned by Zeus in the abyss of Tartaros.

3.3 Awareness and self-awareness

29. The common understanding of consciousness originates from the reflective experience, where we can easily differentiate between moments of reflective – in the common language, just conscious – attention given to something, and the greater part of our experience which passes by without such a particular attention. Yet, if we weren’t immediately aware of ourselves and our activities, we could hardly pause to reflect over them. Beholding a view one can be completely absorbed in it, as one says, unconscious of it. Yet if interrupted and asked “What are you doing?”, one can immediately answer “I am beholding this beautiful fiord.” The answer involves an act of reflection, but it can be given only because one has already been aware of what one was doing. Calling this awareness “(self-)consciousness” is perhaps too generous, but it is what philosophy of consciousness used to do.

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

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

A lot of abstracting effort is needed to bring it down to the level of experience, because most of experience does not conform to it. Observing the fiord, I may not be reflectively
3.3. Awareness and self-awareness

conscious of it but, certainly, I am not unconscious of it. But wandering in the mountains I
may, in fact, not be conscious of anything in particular. My thoughts, or rather moods and
impressions, wander with me and stroll without stopping at anything particular. In many
situations I may experience the qualities and feelings of so vague character that any attempt
to identify their object seems futile. But I am not unconscious of what is happening, so to
speak, in my mental background. Principle of intentionality would, nevertheless, postulate
some specific intentional correlate. One is quick to specify that it is the correlate of an act.
But in such situations I do not seem to be performing any acts. Rather, I am involved
in some form of activity, some continuous movement. I am not unconscious, but I do not
focus on any specific something, as I do in the moments of reflective consciousness.

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

Proto-awareness is actuality.

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

All these aspects: recognition, actuality and sign are equipollent aspects of one nexus
of experience. Equipollent, that is, simultaneous and irreducible to each other. Accounting
for one of them, leads eventually to the others. Nexus can be thought differently, with some
of its aspects dissociated. Equipollence means that aspects are mutually conditioned, not
that they could not possibly be (thought) separated. For the most, they even get naturally
dissociated as we proceed towards more and more immediate, more and more precise deter-
minations. But in the nexus they are not yet dissociated, they are merged into each other
and only their later reflective dissociation allows us to view them as possibly independent
from each other. In this rudimentary sense, proto-awareness serves merely as an abbrevia-
tion for this equipollence, simultaneity and interplay, of these aspects centered around the
horizon of actuality. And nothing more! No subject-object relation, no consciousness-of,
no appearance-for. It is merely an emergence of mutually distinct, recognisable contents,
whether sensations, things, moods or feelings. A play of shadows can fill the horizon of
actuality equally well as a pen or an anxious feeling. And entering this horizon is the same
as entering the sphere of proto-awareness.

As the actual contents emerging in proto-awareness become more sharply recognised, we
may with greater confidence speak about awareness. There is no sharp border separating
the two. As recognitions emerge gradually from the chaos of distinctions, so does con-
sciousness emerge gradually from the pure actuality of proto-awareness. The former is a
modification of the latter effected by the sufficient degree of precision with which it dis-
sociates its contents. This dissociation amounts at the same time to the withdrawal, and
hence sharper seapration, of the non-actual elements. Awareness is still actual but only in
the sense that it is fully absorbed in the actual sign. This sign, however, carries now with
itself an element of non-actuality which is sufficient to indicate that it extends beyond the
pure horizon of actuality.

Awareness is the distance between the actual and the non-actual.

Again, it is not founded upon, it does not emerge from, it is not involved in – it is this
very difference. Awareness is actuality, experientially distinguished from non-actuality as
the horizon; the horizon of actuality in which all kinds of contents may emerge: some of them as vague as the original intuitions of chaos and nothingness, as apprehension of holiness or intangible evil, of meaning or meaninglessness; some of them more specific but still indefinite, without any univocally identifiable essence, as feelings and moods; yet other quite precise and, although containing the non-actual element, emerging in an unveiled and full actuality of a transparent sign like things and concepts or minute sensations – simple objects – which are eligible to a complete grasp by the acts of reflection. Appearances are actual, everything that appears does so only within the horizon of actuality. For most contents which themselves can not be fully fitted within this horizon, this means that they appear exclusively through their actual signs.

32. Appearances of contents recognised as transcending the horizon of actuality make particularly clear the horizontal distance separating the sign and the signified. Now, just like the distance from \( x \) to \( y \) is the same as the distance from \( y \) to \( x \), so awareness, as the horizontal distance separating the sign from its content, is the same as the distance separating the content from the sign. To be aware of ‘…’ is the same as to be aware of the distance separating this ‘…’ from the actuality of awareness. But this is the same as being aware of the very awareness itself, of the very fact of being aware. Self-awareness is an aspect of awareness. It is even an equipollent aspect, for self-awareness is nothing more than awareness of being aware, of the distance separating the sign from its content. Self-awareness is always and only consummated in the event of being aware of ‘…’, it is “by sight that one perceives that one sees.”

In the jargon of Fichte: Ego is equiprimordial with Non-Ego, positing non-Ego is also self-posting, while self-posting is only positing of Ego against non-Ego. Sartre would say that consciousness is equivalent to self-consciousness. Any consciousness, being a consciousness of ‘…’, is the consciousness of ‘…’ being different from the consciousness itself, i.e., is self-consciousness; and vice versa, any self-consciousness is only consciousness of being conscious, i.e., involves consciousness. If we subtract the differences in the vocabulary and concepts, all these formulations say the same: awareness and self-awareness appear simultaneously or not at all, they are equipollent aspects of the same nexus of experience and recognition. This equipollence precedes the more specific forms of consciousness.

33. Awareness is not any faculty of a subject – it precedes subjectivity of any experience. Neither is it any quality which can accompany some experiences – the two are equipollent aspects. It is not so that you (or an ant, or a bat) can have an experience without also being aware: to have experience is to be aware. It does not mean that one has to be reflectively conscious of what this experience consists of, what it presents. As Nagel says it, an organism is aware “if and only if there is something it is like to be that organism – something it is like for the organism.” There seems to be no need to distinguish this famous ‘to be like’ from experience – experiencing things can be taken precisely as that which ‘it is like’ to have … this form of experience. Although experiencing something one

\(^{23}\)Aristotle, On the Soul. III:2.425b12

\(^{24}\)It is tempting to mention an example of an apparently quite distinct nature. Proclus: “Every intellect apprehends itself. [...] Every intellect in its act knows that it apprehends. Intellect whose feature is to apprehend is not different from that which apprehends that it apprehends.” [Proclus, Elements of Theology. §§167-168.] Although the Neoplatonic concept of intellect (nous) cannot be identified with our concept of awareness, it seems that “intellect in its act” can be. Justification makes it clear “[...] since it sees that it apprehends, and knows that it sees, it knows that it is intellect in act [...]” It does not seem too far fetched to take this as referring to the same equipollence we are considering here.

\(^{25}\)T. Nagel, What is it like to be a bat?. 
may be unaware of some of its elements, so without any awareness one could not experience anything either. And to be aware of something means to experience it.

In the following section, we will see more and more sharp distinction between the actual and the non-actual, the sign and the content, eventually, the subject and the object. This will be associated with the gradual transition of awareness and self-awareness towards reflection and self-reflection — and the respective dissociation of the two. Consciousness is anything between the two extremes of awareness and reflection. It, too, is a matter of degree, which corresponds to the degree of precision. In the rest of the book, we will use "consciousness" in a non-technical sense but one may always exchange it with "awareness" or "reflection" — the results will hardly ever be incorrect, though usually different, as these represent only the limiting cases.

4 Reflection

We have thus arrived at some structure of the concept of experience: self-aware recognition completing the actual signs by something non-actual and surrounded by chaos and nothingness. The latter, although they do not constitute separate experiences, form the always present background accompanying any experience. The ultimate nothingness is the outermost horizon of experience — not only in the logical order, but also in the sense that it is the deepest aspect of any experience. The virtual signification of a distinction refers through the chaos to the underlying nothingness. And in the midst of ‘all the rest’, within the horizon of actuality surrounded by ‘something more’, there emerge recognitions, signs which not only refer to the origin but which carry non-actuality within themselves, confronting awareness with contents exceeding its horizon and, by this very token, constituting also self-awareness.

Thus we might think that the only thing to do is to study experience, to ask how it emerges, how it is multiplied, inter-related, refined. But study of experience is seldom what it pretends to be — instead, it is a study of experiences. Conceiving experience as a series, a totality of actual experiences, splitting experience into dissociated experiences, such an activity marks a new mode of being which, emerging from and, so to speak, within or into experience, places itself outside experience. Experience provides the inexhaustible source of novelty and surprise, the source of ever new recognitions. But isolation of a particular content from it, which can be identified and reconsidered in repetitive acts, amounts to leaving the flow of experience behind and establishing a new level.

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

Abstractly, reflective consciousness involves a mere registration ‘that ...’, that something is, that it is so-and-so. What underlies such grasping ‘that ...’ is precisely the dissociation of ‘...’ from the very act of ‘thating’. This dissociation, in turn, is founded in the dissociation of ‘...’ from its background. The ‘that ...’ points specifically to ‘...’, focusing on this particular ‘...’ rather than another. The conjunctive “that ...” expresses but this fact of isolating, cutting this particular ‘...’ from experience, which now becomes its background.

Reflection amounts to splitting experience into experiences. We may reflect over the whole experience as such, but such a reflection would require distinguishing ‘experience’,
opposing it to something else. Consequently, it either can not become an object of reflection or else becomes such an object only ceasing to be itself. Primarily, reflection focuses on a particular situation, particular context, a particular thing. When it does not and tries to capture some greater totality, it turns whatever it is reflecting over into its actual object which appears as an inadequate sign, never able to match the intended totality. In either case, one ends with a particular (object or situation) posited as an independent entity – independent because dissociated from the surrounding experience.

36. Such a dissociated item – a particular, limited totality of distinguished and recognised contents resulting from a reflective cut through experience – is an experience. It need not involve any deep thoughtfulness. Any, most common act of focusing on this rather than that, is an experience, a conscious experience, an act of reflection in this sense. Reflection in the more common sense, an attentive reflection is but reflection carried to its extreme. It brings perhaps a new quality to experience but it does not bring anything else which is new – it only dissociates further and more definitely, fixes and freezes the contents offered to it in the reflective experience. This ultimate possibility of reflection arises when the reflectively isolated ‘...’ becomes completely dissociated, that is, viewed as a thoroughly independent and hence self-subsisting entity, when distinguishable becomes dissociated, when separable becomes separated, when one declares ‘that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences’. This section will consider the aspects of such a dissociation.

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

These references are not appropriations. On the contrary, nothingness is inaccessible through the distinctions and chaos is inaccessible through the recognitions – precisely because the latter are just what transform the former, what change them into something else. Likewise, reflection changes experience into an experience, into ‘experience diversified into separate experiences’. From this perspective, experience remains an inaccessible horizon, surrounding the reflection and lending it the perpetual intention to integrate whatever it has dissociated back into the continuous texture of experience.

Inaccessibility does not mean that reflection is entirely unaware of experience or that experience has no contact with chaos. To say this would be to abstract, to dissociate. All these are aspects of an individual being, which experiences as it reflects, which is immersed in chaos as it experiences and which touches nothingness beyond chaos. Inaccessibility means only the impossibility of capturing the quality of the higher level using exclusively the categories of the lower one. It can be attempted reconstructed but reconstruction, assuming only the categories of its own level, is bound to apply only these categories. The problem is not to forget them, to erase them, to jump to the higher level, but to

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²⁶Sartre’s “positional consciousness” is a good expression denoting the same as our reflection. The ‘positional’ aspect is just the effect of dissociating the object from its background, ‘positing’ it as the only correlate of the actual thought.

²⁷D. Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature. Appendix [to be inserted in Book I.3.14 (p.161) after the words “any idea of power”, p.636]
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acknowledge the genuine difference of various levels of experience. Otherwise, the reflective dissociations from which reconstruction is attempted, gaining exclusive power, break the traces of continuity which might gather the distinct levels in the unity of one existence.

To be sure, recognitions effected already diversification of experience into various sub-totalities of signs and objects. But this means only that experience is not a homogenous background nor a pure chaos, it is not an indistinct but a differentiated flux of heterogenous variety and manifold. Recognitions differentiate experience but do not posit separate experiences – these are distinguished but not made independent from each other. This happens first through reflection. This means, in particular, that experience is not a totality of experiences. On the contrary, it is the level of being which, preceding, founds particular experiences. "When we speak of different experiences, we can refer only to the various perceptions, all of which, as such, belong to one and the same general experience." An experience emerges as a part of experience through an act of dissociation – reflective focusing on this particular aspect of experience, positing it as the actual object. Thus reflection is a new mode of being which dissociates from the flux of experience a particular totality, an experience. The basic rôle or the functional definition of reflection is just this: dissociation of experience into experiences.

Just like the earlier processes of distinction and recognition so, too, reflection can bring forth and fixate anything from experience. Which particular ‘...’ is dissociated into a given experience, is the matter of this particular experience and reflection. Just as before, so for reflection there are no universal principles defining what is basic and what is secondary, what is first and what last. The only general rule is that reflection, confronted with the excess of experience, like recognition was confronted with the excess of chaos, proceeds gradually from indefinite and vague towards more specific and precise. At some stage, precision of the distinctions results in reflective dissociation of external objects. This is equipollent with the dissociation of the actual subject from experience and, by the same token, from the object. These dissociated aspects form the structure of representation.

4.1 Representation

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

Reflective focusing on a particular content dissociates it from its surrounding and endows it with the character of an independent object. The object is no longer merged with the background of experience but merely related to other experiences. At the same time, however, the content remains involved in the texture of experience, it is not, in any case not at once, torn out of it and considered in absolute isolation. Its relations to other contents are traces of this involvement. It becomes as if doubled in that the experienced recognition becomes dissociated as the focus of attention. It is seen as that particular which became dissociated through the act of focusing and, simultaneously, as the same particular related

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28I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. B138 [We would not, of course, restrict the differentiation to 'various perceptions' only since, unlike Kant, we do not identify the 'matter of experience' with sensations. This and other conceptual differences notwithstanding, the quoted formulation and its underlying intuition fit the present context.]
to other things. This doubling is a form of repetition constituting representation. The word “re-presentation” expresses this double perspective on the same – as a moment of the unity with experience (presentation) versus as an entity extracted from it (re-). The reflected experience repeats the unreflected recognition. It does not repeat it as a new thing, but merely as a sharp contour which, drawn around the recognised content, dissociates it from its element. Thus, representation is not any copy, any miraculous internal duplication. It is just the next level of differentiation, it is a part of experience which has been more sharply isolated, a dissociated part which, retaining the traces of its involvement in the whole, is carved out from it.

Walking around in a room, you are aware of its space, colour of the walls, various pieces of furniture. But all these, although distinct and recognised are, so to speak, meshed into a continuous whole of the experience. And then you catch yourself staring at one piece of furniture. You stare at this cupboard and as you do it, it loses its earlier character of being just an indifferent aspect of the whole room. It gains importance of being on its own, of being in the focus. Sure, its surroundings, the whole room, are still present, but the cupboard has been pulled out of the room and is experienced in a new way. It has been doubled: you experience the fact of its being merged with the background, of being there but, on the other hand – and simultaneously – you re-cognise its particular status of a dissociated entity, which your reflection found there (in its form, perspective, colour, solidity, what not...), but found there only through its very act of dissociation. The two are the same but also the latter repeats the former, is the continuity of the former represented in the discontinuity of a single act. Representation repeats its object by merely drawing a contour around it, a border which not merely distinguishes but also dissociates it from the surrounding experience.

Thus it is not a repetition in the common sense of ‘recurrence of the same for the second time’. Yet, this common ‘repetition as recurrence’ is founded on the possibilities opened up by the primordial reflective repetition. The latter is not confronted by the problem of “how do I know that this is really a repetition of the same thing?” Starting with the ready made things, with the objects dissociated by reflective experience, the possibility of repetition presents a mystery. And one need not go as far as the possibly infinite series of repetitions – a single repetition, recurrence of one and the same thing only twice, is already something mysteriously ideal. This mystery of ‘sameness’ along the temporal line is but an example of the problem of identity when one tries to account for it starting with the dissociated actualities as the primary items. It is, in fact, the same problem as one faces whenever representation is assumed to be some ‘internal image’ of an ‘external object’. Although no temporality is involved here, there are two dissociated actualities: that of the object and that of its image. The questions about the relation between the two, about the sense in which the one is an image of the other, and the like, remain perplexing when the two distinct aspects are taken as genuinely dissociated items.

The original repetition is not any antic double but merely a sharp contour drawn around recognised contents. It is a dissociation from differentiated experience of its particular aspect; it is an emergence of a sign as a sign, of the difference between the repeating and the repeated, between the sign and the signified. This whole event does not involve two independent entities but two different perspectives on one and the same. In particular, it happens within the horizon of actuality and so there is, as yet, no way to talk about ‘second time’. Neither there is any duplication of things – it is the same experienced simultaneously from two angles, from two different levels.
4.1. Representation

Representation in the more common sense of the word is but a sharpened version of this primordial representation. It is a more explicit repetition – it presupposes something of which it is a representation as already given, that is, dissociated. To be represented, this something must be already more or less definitely and precisely dissociated from other objects. Our representation is the event of this primal dissociation. Thus dissociated units found then also the possibility (in fact, the need) of representation in the more common sense, of a one dissociated thing or image by another, in short, of abstract signs. (We will return to the abstract signs in a moment, §§4.4f, and to the question of ‘repetition as recurrence’ when discussing identity in II:2.2.2.i.)

The reflective repetition involves a double dissociation. The act of reflection dissociates this cupboard from the rest of experience as an independent object. On the one hand, it singles out a unit which is contained within the horizon of actuality with the exclusion of everything else. “The mark of the mind is that there do not arise more acts of knowledge than one at a time.”29 The object acquires thus a special status as compared to all the rest of experience which is ignored by reflection. (This implicit reference to ‘all the rest’ is the signification from 2.4 common to all signs.) The object, or an experience, is carved out of experience, it is, so to speak, torn out of the context. This gives it the character of an independent entity. The object has been dissociated from experience.

On the other hand, the object of reflection has been already experienced and recognised. The more intensely I try to grasp the cupboard by my attentive look, the more it loses its real presence, its reality withdraws and gives place to the domination of my reflective attention, becomes a mere representation. The background from which object is dissociated is not a collection of other objects but experience. Only dissociation will allow to view it as a context consisting of other objects. But dissociation from experience is, at the same time, dissociation from the experiencing actuality. The mere representation expresses this fact that the object is no longer only an aspect of recognition but, acquiring independence from the context, appears also as independent from its actual appearance. It no longer coincides with the sign through which it appears. We can visualise it by marking the recognised content by the darker area in the flow of experience and the actual sign by the line which carves out the actual representation:

The sign appears as a sign – it does not coincide with the signified. Representation hardly ever coincides with the recognition, even though it intends to capture the same content. In so far as it is a sign, it indicates the background; in so far as it does it as a sign, it makes clear the distance separating it from its object, their non-coincidence. This is the other dimension of dissociation involved in representation.

The original representation is carving an experience from experience, is a sharp dissociation of an object. This sharpness endows the object with independence from the background and from its sign. This double dissociation – of something from the background and, at the same time, from its appearance – characterizes the reflective representation as

29 The Nyaya Sutra. I:16
distinct from earlier recognitions and distinctions. We will refer to it as externalisation. Reflection externalises: it is not only aware of a distinct object but is aware of it primarily as distinct. The sharp contour, which dissociates it both from the surrounding and from its sign, is what makes its distinctness the primary aspect of the reflective act.

4.1.1. Signs and meanings

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

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

The point (ii) is primary and might be even taken as conditioning (i). It applies also when the object itself could not be comprised within the horizon of actuality. “This” is perhaps the paramount case of a sign which refers to something so immediate that it escapes more specific means of linguistic identification. But it can also be used with reference to some vague content which we are unable to circumscribe precisely but which has been sufficiently identified in the course of a conversation. Reflection over any more vague contents is bound to use words with only approximate meaning. As the object of discourse becomes more and more remote (pleasure, life, world, love, God), the distance separating it from the actual signs becomes longer and more clear. The distance in general separates actuality from non-actuality, §31. In the current case of reflective signs, it amounts to their inherent inadequacy, the impossibility to capture the signified. With respect to immediate, precisely identified objects, the inadequacy may seem negligible. It increases with respect to the vaguely recognised contents of experience and becomes virtually infinite with respect to the invisible origin.

The appearance of the distance amounts to a new discovery: the sign need not be an aspect of the signified, the two are dissociated and so may be put into a relation to each other. Thus emerge abstract signs. Abstract signs are the ones which, being completely dissociated from their correlates, can function independently from them. Artificial and conventional signs provide the typical examples. Smoke, as a sign of fire, is still only a sign, it means only that: fire. When used for the purpose of signaling it becomes an abstract sign. With this dissociation there appears also the trace which the prior unity leaves among the dissociated aspects: the relation between the sign and the signified.

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30A possible experience of the distance coincides with the experience of its increase or diminution, for instance, when somebody unexpectedly formulates an association revealing a deep insight, makes a very clear expression of a thought which seems to be as final and adequate in its revealing content as it is open for future and more specific interpretations. A moment of insight, bringing a sense of communion, diminishes the distance, and when the insight is provoked by (or in any other way shared with) another, it diminishes also the distance between the persons.

31An actual sign carries a trace of its origin and, to this extent, also of its actual opposite(s) dissociated
4.1. Representation

We call this relation "meaning". It is the bond which still keeps the actual signs as signs and the possibly non-actual or externalised distinctions together. Or else, it is the means allowing the use of abstract signs for actually drawing some distinctions.

A sign is the means of comprising (possibly non-actual) distinctions within the horizon of actuality. Appearing within this horizon, it most typically makes present something which transcends it. Most words provide the examples. "Red" or "perseverance" do not bring in all possible aspects of 'redness' or 'perseverance'. But they draw enough distinctions in the actual context to make 'redness' or 'perseverance' ... well, actually present or relevant, to bring them into the actual focus. We say, the signs actualise the respective aspects, they draw the respective distinctions. A sign is a way of actually drawing some (possibly non-actual) distinctions, is a form under which such distinctions may enter the horizon of actuality. The distinctions drawn thus by a sign constitute its meaning.

Meaning, as the relation between the sign and the signified, is but an expression of the distance separating these dissociated aspects. Contrary to what might be expected, words are the more meaningful, the longer is this distance. Simply, because deeper things reside further away from the actuality of signs. The difference between words and 'mere words' is exactly this: the latter fail to make anything present, while the former reveal. The 'mere words' are signs which try to ignore the distance, and trying that end up without any. But where there is no distance there is nothing to reveal either. The power of language seems to lie not so much in the rather dubious possibility to capture uniquely particular contents, but more in the possibility which it offers to say – and communicate – something very distant, something deeply meaningful which we do not quite grasp, which we can not make precise. What makes signs and words deeply meaningful, as distinct from merely meaningful, is the fact that they do not embrace the whole (reality) which they intend – they merely hint at it with sufficient clarity. After all, words are only signs, pointers. If you do not understand what is being said, perhaps, you do not know what the talk is about. And if you know, you need not the absolute univocity and precision of the expression – a mere indication, a vague sign will suffice.

Meaning arises in the context of sign's application, in some actual situations. Unused sign is almost a contradictio in adiecto, unless one wants to refer to the potentiality of being used as a sign which, however, can be ascribed to every thing. And to be used as a sign means to be applied in an actual situation to make some distinctions, to make a difference. "The arrow points only in the application that a living being makes of it."32 The context of use usually disambiguates the abstract signs – "Danger!!!" means something different from "Danger?", and both can mean quite different things depending on the context of usage. A "sweet danger" is so different from a "terrible danger", that we would never attempt any definite assignment of fixed meanings.

Actual meaning may involve all aspects of the actual situation. "It is sunny" means certainly that it is sunny. However, pronounced on a sunny day to a stranger, it might mean insecurity as to the stranger's intentions, an attempt to start a conversation. It could

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from the same nexus. Traces emerge as various relations between the dissociated entities. They come always 'from above' and are not reducible to the given context where they terminate as (relations between) actual signs. The following is perhaps a bit mystified but nevertheless adequate expression of meaning also of our traces: "As rigorously as possible we must permit to appear/disappear the trace of what exceeds the truth of Being. The trace (of that) which can never be presented, the trace which itself can never be presented: that is, appear and manifest itself, as such, in its phenomenon. The trace beyond that which profoundly links fundamental ontology and phenomenology." [J. Derrida, *Diﬀerence*. p.23]
mean “Are you interested...? In talking...” These, too, are distinctions which the statement
may make in the actual situation. Thus, (almost) every situation of using a sign results in
some meaning which, being dependent on the context, is unique.

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

46. We are thus far from equating the dependency of meaning on the actual situation of usage
with any kind of nominalism. The possibility of using an abstract sign in a given situation
is, in fact, conditioned by its meaning prior to this situation. “Here one might speak of
a ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ sense of a word. It is only if the word has the primary sense
for you that you use it in the secondary one.” One can scream “Danger!” as a joke or
to cheat others, when no danger is present. But one can make such a joke only because
“danger” means something prior to its actual usage. This prior meaning depends, of course,
on the distinctions sedimented in the language as a social institution. But this aspect goes
beyond our existential considerations.

In spite of the dependency on the context of use, the specificity of words is that, being
dissociated as signs, they are always signs, they always carry if not a specific meaning, so at
least its promise. In the outermost extreme, all encountered words signal this simple fact:
they are messages from other humans. Even if no recipient were ever intended, an author
has been there and this, too, is a part of the meaning of every word and text. Because
words are always already inscribed in the context of inter-human communication, they
carry their residual meanings independently from any actual situation. This ‘autonomy
of meaning’, as Davidson would say, is the fact of meaning’s independence from the pragmatics
of actual usage. Thus, whenever encountered, words can hardly fail to produce some
distinctions beyond the trivial distinction of their mere presence (which is a distinction
made by everything that is). It is the trace of the nexus of sign dissociated into the event
of distinguishing and the distinguished content, into ‘use’ and ‘meaning’, which makes the
one dissociated pole always carry the promise of the other, which makes every word and
sentence pregnant with meaning, and every actual meaning dependent on the used words.

Thus, the meaning of abstract signs has a twofold aspect: on the one hand, every

33L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. II: xi
actual use effecting some particular distinctions in a given context and, on the other hand, the potential for making various distinctions in various contexts, a floating and eventually undefinable kernel (in empiricist's terms: a family resemblance, in more linguistie ones: literal meaning). The former can be thought of as individual in opposition to the latter which carries the socially sedimented, common elements. The former is undefinable due to its uniqueness, the latter due to its open potential. Both are aspects arising from the prior nexus of a sign where the distinguished content, the 'common meaning', and the fact of distinguishing, the 'pragmatics of usage', have not been yet dissociated.

There are much more signs than there are words, and much more distinctions than signs. We are sceptical to all forms of reductionism and we are not interested in signs as such, let alone abstract signs. We will therefore stick to the disquotation schema of meaning which simply says that meaning of the linguistic signs is, typically, not determined and not definable by purely linguistic means. The meaning of a word, the distinctions it can actualise, transcends usually possibilities of the language simply because they are of non-linguistic kind. To know the meaning of "blue", no amount of linguistic or other explanations will ever suffice. One just has to know what blue is. That its use will be related to and mutually dependent on the use of "green", "red", etc. is only a reflection of the fact that blue is distinguished relatively to green, red and other colors. One might think that the story with trivialities like "blue" and "horse" does not generalise. But why should the story with any other words, like "perseverance", "hate", "eternity"... be any different? Because one assumes that the only reality is hic et nunc, is the pure actuality and everything which extends beyond its horizon is something mental, uncertain, suspicious. We have started to oppose this assumption and will continue doing so. There is a difference between the way in which "blue" means blue and "hate" means hate. But this difference is simply the difference between blue and hate. The shortest distance separating hate from an actual pronunciation of "hate" is incommensurably longer than the longest distance possibly separating an instance of blue from the actually spoken word "blue". We will have more to say about this difference, especially, in Book II.

Reflection externalising its contents gives rise to signs as signs, to the distance separating actuality of the sign from the drawn distinctions. The dissociation of the nexuses of sign and the more primordial signification results in at least three elements: a sign (which has now become abstract), its meaning – the distinctions it actualises (or, in general vagueness, which it possibly can actualise), and the actual situation, the background of the addressed distinctions. Reflection might be now taken simply as the sphere allowing these three aspects to function in a relative independence. In particular, it allows for a free play with the signs themselves, opening the door to creativity and, as the case may be, madness and alienated subjectivity.

This independence is embodied in the structure of 'as'. 'As' in sign as a sign signals the dissociation of sign from what it signifies. It comes in various concrete forms. Seeing something as something, x as y, is founded in the fact that x has been dissociated from its actual presentation and, now seen as y, could also be seen on other occasions as z. In the deepest sense, 'as' is a reflection of a variety of aspects of one nexus. One can view love 'as' enslavement and 'as' liberation, friendship 'as' obligation and 'as' gratification

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34Certainly, it can often be relatively precisely indicated. But indication, no matter how precise, is very different from definition. Given some elementary linguistic basis, meanings of more advanced words can be explained – indicated – as it happens whenever we explain the meaning of a new word to a child. Our concern here is this elementary basis, not advanced language usage.
and ‘as’... It is no coincidence that all such aspects, contrary as they might appear, are joined by "and" which represents the fact that they are only possible actual manifestations of a unitary nexus. In more mundane examples, one can see a duck-rabbit drawing ‘as’ a duck or ‘as’ a rabbit, one can see the drawing ‘as’ a glass cube or ‘as’ a solid angle or ‘as’ a wire frame or... Here we notice the difference: various ‘as...’ are now joined by "or" for, indeed, one cannot see it as both a glass cube and a solid angle. This difference signals the new status acquired by signs. In the previous example, the nexus, friendship, could be seen ‘as’ various specific manifestations. Here the situation is inverted. It is the sign which is fixed and can be seen ‘as’ representing various things. Sign as a sign, having acquired independence from its function and meaning, has become itself an object. It has become dissociated from its signification and can now represent different objects, depending only on ‘as’ what one sees it. The extreme cases of such a dissociation are purely formal systems, like those of mathematical axiomatic systems. Symbolic manipulation is governed here exclusively by the syntactic rules independent from possible meanings and arbitrary interpretations are admitted, as long as they respect the rules of manipulation.

This dissociation, where not only one nexus happens to have different aspects and actual manifestations, but where also one sign can represent different objects, marks clearly the independence of abstract signs from their actual meaning. The correlated sedimentation of some residual distinctions in the literal meaning of abstract signs, amounts then to the emergence of the system of language. It is not a necessary aspect of reflective experience but arises only with its more advanced, that is more definitely dissociated, forms.

4.1.2. The power of words

49. Identities carved from the flux of recognitions by reflective dissociations are sharper and more definite than those established by mere signs. As just described, they appear through abstract signs which, dissociated from their correlates, can function in a relative independence from the actual experiences. This involves a new form of the ‘creative’ power which words acquire as compared to the more primordial signs, §25. Signs lead to the emergence of differentiated contents of experience. Words ‘create’ now not so much by bringing any new distinctions but by strengthening the existing ones. They fixate in the precise and immediate – and that means, in particular, graspable and repeatable – signs the flux of experience. They ‘freeze’ something which, if unsaid, might pass almost unnoticed. As long as one is engaged in an undisturbed course of experience without talking about it, one is engaged in a flux where things, although identified and recognised, need not stand out sharply from the background. To experience is to participate in this flux. But if one pauses and observes, saying “Look at this! It is so-and-so but also a bit like that, consider this...”, one is giving it a more definite shape, is dissociating it. Such an act may give more intensity to this actual experience but at the same time, almost paradoxically, it also diminishes the quiet sense of experiencing: by isolating this one element, it removes it from the rest in which it lives. Of course, this dissociation needs no words but words make it sharper. Even if what is so dissociated remains vague and imprecise, the very act of ostentatious pointing towards it transfers the precision of the sign to the intended content. An objective axis around which attention can rotate is established – an act of reflective cut from experience has found place; the sign has extracted and ‘frozen’ the sediment of the actual content from the flux of experience.

35L Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations II:xi
4.1. Representation

Words bring forth something which has already been experienced and recognised. But, in addition, they give it a special status, a more definite form, which makes up a qualitatively new character of an experience. Even if they create only by focusing, they still create. Dissociated contents appear as independent from experience and this independence, sedimented in a word, can be repeatedly invoked whenever this word is used. "It would be odd to say: «A process looks different when it happens and when it doesn’t happen.» Or «A red patch looks different when it is there and when it isn’t there – but language abstracts from this difference, for it speaks of red patch whether it is there or not.»" Abstract signs lend their stability and independence from experience to the things. Words do not put the end to the uncontrolled flux of experience but, providing a system of signs beyond and above this flux, they enable us to ‘freeze’ its flow, to abstract from it.

Reflective dissociation sets the definite, even if not always precise, limits. By this it enhances (and sometimes even establishes) the identity of whatever is named or denoted. ‘Freezing’ endows thing with permanence. Dragging it out of experience, it establishes it as an independent – because isolated and permanent – element. As the expression of establishing the identity (proper names being the ultimate examples), words ‘give souls’ to things, like Adam who not only arranges but in fact enlivens all the things and animals by giving them names. Naming used to have a magical character and pronouncing a name could amount to contacting the transcendent dimension of the soul of the named person or spirit. The God of The Old Testament is quite busy giving names (or new names) to his people expressing their (new) identity.

By freezing, isolating and bestowing identity, words mean also power. The primal power of God’s over his people is expressed clearly by (if not simply equipollent with) his power to name them. Solomon, knowing the names of all the spirits, held them subject to his will. A spirit, a thing named, that is ‘frozen’ and dissociated from its surroundings, becomes subordinate to the one who so dissociated it: gaining independent identity it also becomes vulnerable. Even though it must appear in a wider context in order to be purposefully manipulated, its isolation is the first step necessary for inclusion of this thing into its complex context, and thus for manipulating this thing. This is the almost embarrassing triviality that in order to control x, x must be there, one must be able to distinguish x in order to manipulate it. The power of words is the power of reflective dissociation. To ‘freeze’ and set the limits, to externalise and to objectify, means to make visible. The structure of visibility – object’s identity, independence from the background and, above all, its limitation within the horizon of actuality – places object within the horizon of our control. Dissociating contents and externalising them as objects independent from the background to which they belong, we gain power. This power is not unlimited and, in some sense, it is even illusory. But it also marks the purely reflective attitude with the powerful and ambiguous tendency to control its objects, to outsmart the experience by means of its abstractions. This issue will be addressed further in 5.1, while its existential dimension will be central in Book III.

\[\text{36L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. I.446}\]

\[\text{37In a Hebrew myth written around IX-th century, the revolt of Samael’s is preceded by his defeat in the competition with Adam according to the rules set by God: “I created animals, birds and reptiles. Go down, place them in a row and, if you are able to give them names which I would give them, Adam will revere your wisdom. But if you fail and he succeeds, you will have to revere his.” [Beresheet Rabbati. p.70]}\]
4.1.3. Distinctions in the (same) indistinct

51. Just to anticipate a possible worry, which we will address in more details in the last section of this Book, in particular, 6.1.2, we comment briefly the ‘subjectivity’ of meaning and ‘arbitrariness’ of meaning of abstract signs.

Asking “How does a thought act?” Frege answers: “By being apprehended and taken to be true.” Distinction acts by merely being apprehended, although this means simply effecting some distinction. (And often the mere fact of a triviality being uttered, introduces distinctions far beyond the mere fact of the utterance.) Distinction can not be dissociated from its meaning because every distinction is its own meaning, is a distinction only in so far as it makes a difference, even if no practical and observable consequences follow.

Signs are actual tokens of distinctions which are drawn and made in the current situation, in the world but, eventually, in the indistinct. Every distinction makes a distinction in the indistinct, and so does (the meaning of) every sign. There is nothing ‘mental’ about the meanings of signs, unless we take “mental” to mean just the meanings of signs. A sign’s meaning is not something residing ‘in one’s head’ as opposed to some ‘reality outside’: a sign is a sign only to the extent it is recognised, its recognition amounts to drawing some distinctions, and distinctions are not drawn ‘in one’s head’ but in the world, eventually, in the indistinct. The meaning of the exclamation “There is a danger around the corner!” is the set of distinctions it effects, the way it changes the world. In this sense, every utterance is a true speech act: it effects some distinctions in the matter of the world.

52. Of course, the same announcement can mean different things for different persons. But this is possible only due to the abstractness of signs, due to the dissociation of signs from their meanings. What is ‘the same’ in the same announcement heard by different persons is, eventually, only its linguistic appearance and, possibly, its residual, literal meaning. The differences concern the actual meanings. This duality is exactly the dissociation introduced with abstract signs as signs.

Such signs, like words, being dissociated from their meaning, acquire existence relatively independent from their actual usage, an impersonal or social existence. They can thus function ‘as’ signs of various things and this exposes them to the (apparent and, eventually, factual) arbitrariness of meaning. For it does not any longer reside merely in the actually drawn distinctions but, primarily, in the sedimented residual, in the vague potentiality for actual usage, which is conditioned not exclusively by the actual applications but also by the relations to other words which rest deposited in the tradition and convention. The ‘subjectivity’ of the meaning of ‘the same’ announcement for different persons is the same as the indeterminacy of its meaning: ‘the same’ announcement can also have different meanings on different occasions. Although simultaneity of actualities of different persons is not the same as different actualities separated by some passage of time, both cases involve the same underlying dissociation: actuality is more and more definitely isolated from its surrounding (of others, of temporal experience) and, in the same process, actualities become dissociated from each other.

This dissociation, and the resulting arbitrariness of meaning, can be illustrated as follows. Encountering a seemingly arbitrary and incomprehensible combination of letters, we expect it to carry some meaning. We know that words are signs and letters compose words. Even if their combination appears meaningless, we suspect that it might, in spite of appearance, mean something. Only abstract signs can appear ‘as’ meaningless. Such

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4.2. Subject-object

an appearance requires objects whose constitutive function is to be signs irrespectively of the meaning they happen to express in a given situation. It is possible only due to the dissociation of sign from meaning, of the abstract function of a sign from it actually functioning as a sign of something.

Arbitrariness of meaning, the sign dissociated from the signified, arises from the more primordial nexuses: most abstractly, from the nexus of experience dissociated into reflective experiences. But the fact that the resulting elements, apparently not standing in any relations to each other, can enter arbitrary such relations, does not mean that they never have been involved in more intimate relations. Asking how and why a given word denotes what it denotes, how abstract signs relate to their meanings, may require endless investigations. For once dissociated they have lost any necessary connection. The connection, however, remains – as impossible to define as to deny – for it is the trace of the earlier nexus from which the elements arose, eventually, of the virtual nexus of the indistinct one.

4.2 Subject-object

Reflection externalises. Recognitions of awareness contain the germ of externality since they appear through signs separated by a distance from the element of non-actuality. But it is only when one pauses to reflectively consider an object, when it is pulled out of experience and captured by a single act within the horizon of actuality (even immediacy), that it appears as an external entity. The cupboard which, as one is attentively staring at it, both loses its anchoring in the surrounding ‘reality’ and gains independence, becomes a dissociated object. Objects of awareness, of experience, are not external in this sense.

Externality does not imply spatial relations. It is just an aspect of reflection which is self-aware, that is, aware of the distance separating it from its object. Focusing reflective attention on the actual sensation of pain, a particular memory, a particular feeling, makes them appear as external. Being dissociated as objects of attention, they acquire independence. They remain, of course, related to other elements of experience, but they are so related as dissociated elements to other such elements. They lose their anchoring in the surrounding experience, become alienated from it and, by the same token, alienated from the reflecting subject: they become externalised. Thus understood externality is more primordial than spatial externality. It is opposed to something like ‘internality’. One used to oppose the external sense and the internal one. But although sensations are easily classified as the former, the characterisation of the latter has always presented if not serious difficulties, so multiple choices depending on the conceptual context in which it was considered. We view minuteness of sensations as their specific feature which they share with acts of reflective dissociation. As such, they are opposed to the contents which are not dissociated but which still reside in the ‘inner’ flux of experience. In the moment they become dissociated as independent actualities, they leave one’s ‘interior’ and appear as external, even if not spatial, objects. They leave the deeper layer of experience and come to the surface, become clearly visible.

It would be common to equate the distinction external-internal with objective-subjective. A table is opposed to its perception, just like friendship is opposed to one’s understanding of friendship. We do not find it so easy to maintain the latter opposition. Friendship is not easily dissociated from its experience. Both are immersed in the unity of one’s being and are internal in a way neither table nor its perception is. Externality is the feature of contents which appear in the narrow horizon of immediacy. It expresses the vertical
dissociation of immediacy, whether of sensations or objects, from the deeper layers of non-actuality. But the events within the horizon of actuality involve also further, horizontal dissociation of the actual sign, of the appearance or noesis from the appearing, noema. The dissociation of the actual description of friendship from friendship, marks only externality of the actual signs in relation to the experience(s) of friendship which, overflowing the horizon of actuality, remains internal. A table, on the other hand, is captured within the horizon of actuality, both with respect to its subjective appearance and its objective content. Here, one can easily distinguish between the actual table ‘out there’ and its mere internal, or as we prefer to say, subjective perception. Only this latter dissociation of sign from its actually and precisely given content, leads to the subject-object distinction.

Objects and subject are the two poles of the double dissociation. The abstract signs mark the subjective pole of reflective acts. Objects are their correlates which are precisely dissociated not only from the signs (as also non-actual aspects of experience can be) but also from the experiential background. This precise dissociation is constitutive for objects and distinguishes them from other contents which, like friendship, transcending the horizon of actual signs, cannot be grasped equally precisely. Objects are sharply distinguished, externalised contents. This precision is an aspect of being captured in the unity of a single act and entirely inscribed within the horizon of immediacy from which all competitors have been suppressed. The fact that objects carry with themselves the aspect of non-actuality appears for reflection only through their externality and dissociation from their signs.

Subject is the signifying pole of reflective act, the mere fact of the reflective sign appearing as a sign, its non-coincidence with the signified experience. Whenever a sharp contour around the experienced content is drawn by an abstract sign, the sign appears as distinct from its content. This sharp contour is the contribution of reflective act to experience. The actual subject is the place, or better, the event of this contribution to non-coincidence.

This non-coincidence is only an aspect of the whole nexus of reflective dissociation: of actual object from its background, of subjective sign from its objective content and, by thus confronting the reflective subject exclusively with the actual object, of this subject from the deeper layers of its own being. This final aspect is what endows the actual subject with the character of an independent entity. For it is distinction (from the indistinct) which marks the being of something, and the dissociation which marks it as an independent being. (Thus, the three just mentioned aspects of dissociation establish also the respective independence: of object from ‘the rest of the world’, of object from subject, and of subject from ‘the rest of the world’.) Subject is thus dissociated not only from its actual object but also from its deeper, internal aspects which, non-actual as they are, slip out of the horizon of actual grasp by reflective acts. This dissociation becomes apparent whenever, trying to reflect over oneself, one notices that the correlate of the act is not any given object but something obviously transcending its actuality.

Notwithstanding this independent character, actual subject is not any new entity. It is only dissociated from the deeper layers of experiencing existence. These deeper layers leave the trace of substantiality which does not belong to the subject but only to the existence. Yet, narrowing the attention to the immediacy of a reflective act, and observing its contribution of a sharp contour drawn around the object, the question about the origin of this contribution results in substantialisation of the subject.39 Once the dissociated subject is ascribed this character of the genuine protagonist, it becomes impossible to

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39 This happens, for instance, in the criticised Cartesian transition from the mere act of «cogito» to the substantial entity, «ergo sum».
account not only for its relations to the external objects but also for its temporal unity.

The insoluble relation of subject-object is a trace of the prior unity which withdraws, but remains in the background, as the dissociation proceeds. It concerns the events of reflection and is therefore thought in terms of actuality: an isolated, purely actual object and equally actual, instantaneous subject. This is how the tradition, whether its idealistic, rationalistic or empirical branch, used to see it. But ignoring this trace of prior unity, makes an account of the insolubility of the relation between the dissociated elements appear impossible. On the one hand, a lot of transcendental machinery and long series of constitutions may be needed, in order to let the purely actual subject have anything to do with at least a shadow of the real world. Or, along a different line starting from the same dissociation, assuming only external objects or sensations which, nevertheless, should appear for at least a shadow of a real being, one has to perform a lot of constructions, associations, juxtapositions — intense and often ingenious sewing — before one is forced to unwillingly give up the reality of any subject.

In our view, subject and object are not any fundamental elements but arise from the unity of the prior nexus of experience and, more specifically, of actual recognition. Traces of this unity remain present as the non-actual elements transcending the horizon of reflective acts which are perceived by reflection as various relations between dissociated entities. We have followed the process of ontological founding, of the gradual emergence of different levels of being leading to this dissociation. Different levels mark distinctions in nature. But the distinction in nature between levels is but a distinction of degree which has been drawn so far, which has been so intensified, that it caused emergence of new aspects. The distinctions between an infant and a child, a child and an adolescent, an adolescent and an adult can be viewed as distinctions of degree. But the distinction between an infant and an adult becomes definite enough to allow viewing them as distinct in nature. There is a distinction in nature between recognition and representation in that the latter introduces signs which are no longer mere signs but are signs as signs. Yet, awareness is the nucleus from which reflective subject and object emerge in the process of further and more precise differentiation. In this sense, they are on the same, continuous line, on the same trace, and all differences are only differences of degree.

This applies also to objectivity. There are degrees of being an object, degrees of being captured by a sign within the horizon of actuality. Objects are the final hypostases, the actual limits (usually, only provisional and hardly ever necessary) of the process of distinguishing. Some contents fit better into our sensuous, perceptual and conceptual apparatus, into the scope of our horizon of actuality, and these are the objects: pens, pieces of chalk, blackboards reappearing with the immutable persistence whenever an example is called for. Others do not fit equally well, announcing immediately the inadequacy and insufficiency of the objective representation. ‘The whole world’ can, in principle, be posited as an object of reflection, but we feel easily that there is a significant difference between the two. Unlike ‘this pen’, ‘the whole world’ slips out of the horizon of apprehension leaving there the mere sign. Even friendship slips out of this horizon and, no matter how much discussed and considered as transcending the subjective determinations, refuses to appear with the precision of an external object.

The same continuity applies to the subject. Narrowing the horizon of attention to the minuteness of a single act, subject appears as the entity actually dissociated from the objective correlates. However, it appears as an entity because, dissociation notwithstanding, it remains involved into the unity of experience transcending the horizon of actuality.
Granting this, one can still try to isolate oneself as an independent entity, no longer a minute but a lasting, objective totality, and think of one’s, still only external, relations to the world and other people. But doing this one knows also that it is not the whole truth, that the objectivisation went too far leaving perhaps the most significant, internal aspects outside its scope. These internal aspects, interwoven into one’s existence and thus ‘subjective’ as they may seem to be, are nevertheless much more deeply experienced than their mere representations and so, after all, appear as transcending one’s subjectivity.

In short, subject and object, the experience of subjectivity and of objective contents, mark only the final station of the process of refinement of the existential confrontation. Their relations, inter-dependence and intimacy are founded in the unity of existence.

Before closing this theme, let us observe one more dissociation accompanying reflective experience: the dissociation of reflection from self-reflection. After Kant, one has been cautious to stress that the actuality of the subject is accompanied by self-awareness and not merely by self-reflection. The equipollence of awareness and self-awareness does not go over into the equipollence of reflection and self-reflection. Further dissociation has taken place and self-reflection is no longer a necessary aspect of the actual subject. In fact, reflection and self-reflection are incommensurable because they represent two different acts which are hardly ever performed jointly. Actual subject is directed exclusively towards the actual object, it is exhausted within the horizon of actuality. “The mark of the mind is that there do not arise more acts of knowledge than one at a time.”

Reflection is focused exclusively on its externalised objects, its acts are exhausted by its directedness towards them. Reflection can occupy itself with an object only by excluding all other objects, in particular, only by forgetting itself, only to the extent it does not reflect over itself. Reflection forgets itself and in order to catch a glimpse of the self-awareness which underlies its fascination with the objects, it has to actively gather itself to perform another act, an act of self-reflection. In a series of reflective acts, self-reflection can arise only as one of them. This is the site of infinite regress. The ‘I’ objectified in an act of self-reflection, being an object, is always dissociated from the reflecting subject. To make the two coincide, one has to posit an infinite chain of such acts and claim the existence of the fix-point obtained as its ideal limit.

This ideal construction is as much as reflective dissociation can do to re-construct the intuitted unity of awareness and self-awareness.

Thus, although object and subject are equipollent aspects of reflective experience, reflection and self-reflection are not such aspects – they are two different modifications of a reflective act. Reflective interest in self-reflection arises from the self-awareness which, however, reflection is unable to express in terms of its dissociated elements. And self-awareness is constantly present because, as before, the earlier hypostases do not disappear with the emergence of the new one. Reflection over x is one act and self-reflection another, but reflection is only lowest level of actuality which is underlied, that is, always accompanied by the higher ones. Every act of reflection is self-aware, and it is only this self-awareness which challenges it to, and makes possible, occasional self-reflection.

4.3 Time and space

Externality is different from the three-dimensional extensionality, and time of the objects

40Speaking a bit mathematically, if a single reflective act is represented by surrounding its object ‘...’ by ‘that(...)', then after ω iterations of that-ing one gets to the point ‘f = that₁(that₂(that₃(...)))’, i.e., a fix-point where no more that’s add anything new, so that that(f) = f.
and their changes (not to mention temporality of the flow of experience) is different from
the linearity of objective time. Yet they are steps in the process of emergence of the
objective time and space and we will now follow this process. The spatio-temporality from
3.2 involved merely the distinction between the simultaneous aspects of actuality and
non-actuality. Representation, the reflective repetition, dissociating an object, establishes
its identity and this experienced identity underlies the emerging experience of time and
space. As the identity pushed to its ideal limit of the residual point (or 'substance'), it
gives also rise to the abstract ('objective') structure of both aspects: linearity of time and
homogeneity of space. Let us consider the former aspect first.

4.3.1. Time

Reflection comes always 'too late', it represents something which has always already been
recognised in the flux of experience. And as any act involves its whole structure
within itself, no additional step is needed to establish the experience of after – it is the
distance separating the representing sign from what it represents. It does not matter that,
objectively speaking, this distance takes time 0 (whatever that could mean). It is there, in
the structure of the reflective experience and hence also in the experience itself: reflection
repeats what it reflects, doubles it, and this basic repetition is the same as the primordial
after.

This reflective after is not that of one actuality coming after another. We are still
within the scope of the horizon of actuality, where the first after finds its place. One
can, perhaps, view it as the Husserlian retention, as the primäre, frische Erinnerung. The
withdrawal of the just-perceived into the immediate past amounts to the impossibility of
actually grasping and retaining the object in the unity of the reflective act. But Husserl's
descriptions address only the flow of intentional contents, while our after is an aspect of
the emergence of such contents. It is the trace of the nexus of recognition which has
been dissociated into the external content and the subjective sign. After is the distance
separating the latter from the former. It is experienced simultaneously with the dissociated
poles, all elements of the relation after are experienced simultaneously within the horizon
of actuality. But this simultaneity is disturbed because its content has already withdrawn
into the background and has been doubled by reflective representation. It has thus already,
always already, been there and reflective dissociation arrives always after it.

This after does not merely happen to reflective consciousness. It is one of its constitutive
aspects. Ideally, its description should be free from references to the passing time because
it is what constitutes the very experience of time. Reflective experience is equipollent
with the experience of after. The more precisely reflection dissociates, the more definitely
this primordial after turns into the flow of time which, gradually, becomes more and more
'objective'.

Externality is the feature of dissociated actualities which become, so to speak, thrown out
or pulled out of experience. After is the same distance but viewed now from the perspective
of the reflective actuality. It expresses inaccessibility of experience to reflection as every
reflective act involves the self-awareness of having arrived at the scene after its object. It
is merely an expression of the change of level, of the distance separating reflection from
the experience which never has been, and never will be, reduced to reflective actuality.
As such, experience is for reflection the pure past, the past which not only isn't merely
a collection of past actualities, but which never had been any actuality. In fact, it is
present to reflection – not as its object, but as the horizon from which it arose. “This table bears traces of my past life, for I have carved my initials on it and spilt ink on it. But these traces in themselves do not refer to the past: they are present; and, in so far as I find in them signs of some ‘previous’ event, it is because I derive my sense of the past from elsewhere, because I carry this particular significance within myself.” One has to emphasise the ‘purity’ in the expressions like “pure past” exactly in order not to confuse it with a collection of other, though now past, actualities. Experience is not a totality of experiences; it is what precedes experiences and makes them possible. Preceding the dissociation into experiences, it also precedes time understood as a succession, in particular, the possibility of past experiences, of actualities which are not actual now but were so some other time. Past, thought as a past actuality, is founded upon the experienced duration and the transition from this experience to reflection. This foundation remains around reflection as the pure past, which alone makes it possible for actual experiences to recede into past turning into past actualities.

This establishes, perhaps, the dimension of the past, but what about the future? The future is not so different from the past. After, as the trace of the dissociated nexus of experience, as the relation connecting the actually given object and the background from which it emerged (or its equipollent aspects: the subjective sign and the objective content), is asymmetric and is experienced as such. The actual sign is distinct from what it signifies and, furthermore, it comes after. The actuality, this “strange crest of the time series,” appears as the point into which all experience converges, to use Bergson’s image, as the tip of the cone of the whole past. After means not only the distance separating the reflective sign from the experience but also its impassability – reflection can never re-capture the experience, because it always comes post factum. This asymmetry, this reflective thirst after its object and object’s indifferent independence, gives the time arrow its direction.

The rest is uniformity by analogy – the actuality of reflection comes after the past which, by the same token, came before the ‘now’ of reflection. We might say: actuality, seen as a ‘now’, is the consummated future of the past. In more plain terms, after is asymmetric: 1) objects are what is experienced through the actual signs of reflection which involves them in the relation after, but 2) after is the same relation as before – reflection coming after x means the same as x coming before reflection; 3) in a sense, reflection is the future of its object which is always past and after which it arrives; more abstractly, 4) future – and now it is the future of reflection! – is just what is after the actual reflection. Future is to the actual sign, what this sign is to what it signifies, i.e., just like ‘now’ of reflection is after what it has captured, future is after ‘now’ of the reflection. It is a point of reflection over the actual experience or, as the case may, the point of reflection over actual reflection.

This future which lies before is, of course, indeterminate, unlike the past after which reflection relates to a particular, definite experience. Past is something actually reflected and in this lies its definite, determined character. Future, established by mere analogy, has only the character of potentiality, of a possible reflection. This analogy by asymmetry determines the dimension of the future. It can be found in the immediacy of an act in the form of protention, anschauliche Erwartung, which presents (an aspect of) the object in some definite (e.g., expected) form augmented, however, with a sign of indeterminacy, the possibility of unfulfilment, or else protention which anticipates the immediate action, like

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41 M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. III:2 Merleau-Ponty borrows probably this idea from Bergson.

42 E. Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*. B:2 §26
the electric potential which can be measured over the entire scalp a fraction of a second before a finger movement which one has already decided to perform.

4.3.1.i. The unity of time experience

Temporality as just described is objective in the sense of being an aspect of the experience of externalised objects, but it isn't yet the objective time dissociated from subjectivity and its apprehension of things. It is still time of an experience, still temporality with a designated actuality, 'the present now' of here-and-now. Such temporality pertains to any being which has reached the level of discerning independent objects. A dog bringing a ball and looking unexpectedly into one's eyes, waiting for the ball to be thrown away is, too, involved into temporality, just as it is when looking in the bushes for the ball just thrown.

But neither past nor future is limited to the (affectively presented) contents, to the immediacy of retentions or expectations. Past is encountered in the indefinite recession of one's memories and future in the general sense of openness of one's life. Eventually, past is also the objective past of the 'whole world' and future is the abstract future of the 'whole world'. Both dimensions can be extended beyond the horizon of experiential actuality and this extension founds the objectivity of time.

"A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe his master will come the day after tomorrow? – And what can he not do here? – How do I do it? – How am I supposed to answer this?"43 The phenomenal time of actual now, with its retentions and protentions, does not suffice here. Expecting somebody's arrival the day after tomorrow (or next year) presupposes the ability to relate to the objective time, simply because having at all the idea of 'next year' requires such a ability.

This significant dichotomy is well expressed by Husserl. He describes two kinds of time consciousness: the consciousness of time as it unfolds in the actual experience along the axis of retentions and protentions, and another, uneigentliches Zeitbewusstsein, which relates to the time of remote past and of lifeless recollections. "We could say: temporality stands against the inauthentic representation of time, of infinite time, time and time relations which are not recognised in experience."44

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

\[ A_0 \quad A_1 \quad A_2 \quad A_3 \]

\[ \bullet \quad A' \quad A'_2 \quad A'_3 \]

\[ A_0 \] marks the initial point of the actual experience, the Urimpression of, say, an object \( A \). The horizontal line indicates the objective time in which the object may undergo some continuous changes, indicated by the points \( A_1, A_2, A_3 \). \( A'_1 \) represents the actual impression of \( A \) at the time-point 1, \( A'_2 \) at the time-point 2. The point 3 may here represent

43L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. II:i
44E. Husserl, Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time. A:1.1 §6
the idealized *immediacy* of ‘now’ in which the impression $A'_3$ corresponds to the actual appearance of the *object* $A_3$. The whole idea is that this impression relates not only to the *immediacy* of the *object*, $A_3$, but also to its immediate past. In a sense, it keeps and contains the whole line $A_0 - A'_3$ with the intermediary impression-points $A'_1, A'_2$, etc., as indicated by the horizontal dotted lines. The same happens at $A'_2$, which keeps and contains the past $A'_1$, etc., so that “each passing now retains retentionally all earlier layers.”\

But now, there is also “inauthentic consciousness of time: a part of a perceived melody drained off a longer time ago. [...] We say, that of which I am retentionally conscious is absolutely certain. How does it now stand with remoter past?” Analysing a continuous experience, like that of listening to a melody, one may still keep, towards its end, some living memory of its beginning. But consciousness of time stretches much further than that. *Attentatively*, we usually recall things which are not in any actually recognisable (*anschaulich*) continuity with the ‘now’. “For the emergence of this time consciousness, reproductive recollection (intuitive as well as in the form of empty intentions) plays important role. [...] Only in recollection I can re-enact an identical time object, and I can also state in remembrance that what was earlier perceived is the same as what is later recollected.” The reproductive recollection does not have the capacity to actually bring the original object or experience to life (*Anschauung*). It can only intend it, as if *posing* the objective identity across the time which broke the continuity of the experience of the object. Once such an abstract ‘past now’ is *posed* in the *dissociation* from the actual experience, it can be multiplied extending indefinitely into the past. The flow of time becomes a succession of time-points and “[t]his process is obviously to be thought as unlimited, although the actual recollection fails in practice.”

An actual object or event retires into the past, dissolving gradually in the horizon, that is, *disappearing beyond* the horizon of actuality. Once that happened, we can no longer make it actually alive; we can only reproduce it, as if recalling it from beyond the grave. This broken continuity makes the two kinds of experiences so fundamentally different that one might perhaps legitimately ask what makes them both experiences of the same time? What does the time of retentional actuality and fresh remembrance have to do with the time of remote, dead and only revived recollections?

In the actuality of a temporal experience, Husserl finds merely “the intentional unity, that which in the stream of the flow is intentionally given as unity. [...] And even this intention is unclear [impossible to fulfill, imperceptible], is an empty intention, and its correlate is the objective time series of events, which is the dim surrounding of the actual recollection.” The unity of the remote and immediate past, of the objective and experienced time, is given merely as an intentional fact. There is nothing in the content of the actual experience accounting for this unity, but the unity is meant, we do experience the two as the same, though intention of this unity is empty, is not fulfilled by any phenomenal content.

The question what happens to the contents between their disappearance from the retentional actuality and their reappearance as remote recollections, is not legitimate for a phenomenologist. It asks for ‘something’ which is not given in any act of consciousness but which happens between two such acts. One can discern in the act of recollection the

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48Ibid. A:I.2.§32.
intentional identity of the originally experienced and the now recollected object, but the unity of the past time and the time of the actual recollection is only an ‘empty’ intention.

This conclusion is characteristic for thinking which takes actuality as the only source of possible justification. The methodological limitation to the actuality of a dissociated phenomenon makes it difficult, or rather impossible, to account for the ontic unity transcending actuality. Similar problems are met whenever immediacy is taken as the only site of evidence.

For us, the question is not how to establish a unity from the dissociated actualities but, on the contrary, how the dissociated elements arise from a prior unitary nexus. The ‘dim surrounding of the actual recollection’ is, in fact, the dim surrounding of every actuality. Retentions disappearing in this surrounding on their way toward the remote and dead past, become inaccessible to the actual analysis until they reappear as recollections. For us, primary is exactly this process of disappearing, the process of dissociation of actuality from the surrounding horizon of continuous experience.

What seems a bit disturbing in the figure from §65 is the origin, the point A₀, the Urimpression. Such impressions appear spontaneously, like everything else in the stream of consciousness, but with the special role and effect of marking a new ‘now’. Husserl notices that, as a matter of fact, even without any new Urimpression one experiences the flow of time; even to the point that the very lack of any new impression may become a new Urimpression marking a new ‘now’. But ‘now’ has no beginning, no particular point at which it becomes a new ‘now’, as opposed to the (or rather, a) previous ‘now’. I notice a pricking which has become so intense that I feel the difference between the moment now and a few minutes ago when no such pricking was felt or even present. But once it has become irritating, I also realize that it has been there for a while before I noticed it, as if interleaved with its absence, its irrelevancy. The Urimpression is only the peak which marks a new quality, but which radiates its gradual presence into the surrounding field of its increasing absence. ‘Now’ does not begin, it is here-and-now, especially when I reflectively notice it, but it arises constantly from the past – primarily, from the pure past of experience and then, once this pure past has been dissociated into actualities, from the just past, but never precisely definable, ‘now’. It is, as Husserl always emphasized, a continuous process. Continuity of experience is a counterpart of the vagueness of distinctions. It is like the continuity of waves: we can point to one and to another but never to where, exactly, the one ends and the other begins. Continuity means only that there are no sharp beginnings, for every beginning, except for the original one, is but a continuation of what has been before. ‘Now’s’ are only points of marked intensity. Whether a hammer which misses the nail (and hits the finger instead), a malfunctioning tool which calls for the attentive reflection, or else a beautiful view which makes us stop and gaze – the attentively registered ‘nows’ arise breaking the continuity of the flow of experience.

James suggests: “Let us call the resting-places [the ●'s] “substantive parts”, and the places of flight [between them] the “transitive parts”, of the stream of thought. It then appears that the main end of our thinking is at all times the attainment of some other substantive part than the one from which we have just been dislodged. And we may say that the main use of the transitive parts is to lead us from one substantive conclusion to another.”

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50W. James, The Principles of Psychology. I.9.3.
Such breakpoints, such ‘substantive parts’, mark only the particularly intense ‘nows’, the reflectively dissociated moments. But the rest, the lines leading to these points, are also part of experience. These ‘transitive parts’ appear to reflection as its opposite, as a differentiated but continuous and not dissociated stream of consciousness. The ‘substantive parts’ break this continuity yielding the (apparently) discrete ● after ●. But they do not completely veil the underlying matter of experience; they are not any unfortunate accidents, any falsifications of the flow of ‘true temporality’. They are aspects of the new level of reflective experience. Splitting of experience into multiplicity of experiences, splitting of durée of temporality into a succession of ‘nows’, is a necessary element, an aspect of the emergence of reflection. Reflection is the exact opposite of continuity, one might perhaps say, it is the attempt to stop the flow of temporality by extracting from it ‘substantial parts’. But although the flow recedes in the background of reflective experiences, it remains present as a succession of dissociated ‘nows’, as Bergson would say, as a spatialised time.

One may rightly claim that “[t]he transition between the thought of one object and the thought of another is no more a break in the thought than a joint in a bamboo is a break in the wood. It is a part of the consciousness as much as the joint is a part of the bamboo.” It certainly is, but this does not change the fact that it still is a joint and “the joint connects two things.” The unity of the flow across such joints is certainly felt and experienced but it is of different character than the unity of the flow discernible within a single ‘now’.

Recollection fetches its contents from beyond the horizon of actuality. It does it by finding there another, now past, actuality. But dissociation of what is beyond horizon of actuality into actualities, is founded on the prior unity of experience which transcends reflection. This transcendence of pure past is for reflection an open and unlimited horizon. And so, the process of positing earlier ‘nows’ “is obviously to be thought as unlimited, although the actual recollection fails in practice.” Consequently, one should continue the line $A_0 - A_3$ from the figure in §65 not only indefinitely into the future beyond $A_3$ but also into the past, to the left of $A_0$. This would dissolve everything into a single line (or two parallel ones) and might please pupils of Cusamus but does not seem quite satisfactory to us. Instead, we would draw the whole (the whole!) process as in the figure below, as a spiral emerging from the origin.

The figure can be thought of as enfolding of the original figure from §65 with the point $A_0$ of Urimpression collapsed to the origin of the spiral. An actual point is anywhere on the spiral, and the (dotted) lines linking such points to the origin correspond to the vertical lines $A_i' - A_i$ from figure in §65.

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51 W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, I:9.3
52 Empedocles DK 31B32
4.3. Time and space

The spiral traversed backwards, say, from C past B and A towards the origin, corresponds to the line $A'_3 - A_0$ of the collected past. An actual experience comprises a small segment of the spiral, say $A - B$. At B the frische Erinnerung of A is still present. As the ‘now’ of B moves forward leaving A behind, it loses gradually the later from its view. At some point, e.g., at C, the line connecting the ‘now’ with the past A must cross the inner part of the spiral. One could take this as representing the point when A definitely left the span of RETentional presence – from now on, it can only enter ‘now’ as a reproductive recollection. As we pass through more and more rotations of the spiral, the earlier points become screened from the view by ... the memories of the earlier ones. The point $C'$ is inaccessible for direct introspection from C, it can be reached only through the memory of an earlier point, $C'''$. Memories, de-vitalised recollections emerge in the same process as retentions, one might say, are long distance retentions, but this very length of the distance amounts also to a change of nature.\textsuperscript{53} This happens with all events but, in particular, after the first rotation the origin becomes inaccessible getting gradually immersed under ever new and wider rotations. We do not retain any actual memory of it because, as we have said, the original lack of distinctions gives nothing to remember. But we retain an incontestable certainty of it. When the temporality of experience has been turned into the flow of objective time, this certainty of having the origin becomes the reflective certainty of not having been here always, of having a beginning in time.

One will ask, of course, what happened to the ‘objective’ line $A_0 - A_2$. It seems that we have retained only the primed points of impressions. Almost. All ‘objective points’ collapsed to the one point of origin, the only Urimage.\textsuperscript{70} This may certainly seem worrying, though our development so far should have made it less so. One possibility would be to say that any point circumscribed by and within the spiral so far, any point between the current ‘now’ and the origin, as well as the whole spiral can be taken to represent possible objects. But we prefer to say yes, in a sense, there is only one. All we ever do is to distinguish and thus, even if only indirectly, address the indistinct. Yet every point on the spiral is a distinct perspective from which the one is experienced and, moreover, is involved into different, steadily accumulating past which modifies and screens earlier experiences.

4.3.1.ii. The objective time

As reflection dissociates sharper and sharper its actuality, moving away from the continuity of experience into multiplicity of experiences, it leaves also the unity of experiential temporality and encounters time as succession of separate actualities. The pure past becomes a line of its past actualities and the openness of future the actualities to come.

But even this is not yet the ultimately objective time. Although the time experience stretches past the retentions and protentions towards remote recollections and expectations beyond the horizon of actuality, it is still time, so to speak, subjectively localized, centered around the here-and-now, which has become ‘now’. The objective time – the ‘time of the world’ – requires yet further abstraction. The relation after has already been dissociated from its context of the actual representation and begun connecting arbitrary objects, dissociated actualities. The final step is removal of the designated actuality which is my actuality. Purely objective time emerges as a consequence of ‘abstracting oneself away’, of dissociating the experienced time from the experiencing existence.

\textsuperscript{53}One would also like to allow for the living memories arising, like with Proust, not as mere images but as revitalised moments. The current abstraction does not make such fine distinctions, but it does not exclude them either. We will return to this issue discussing memory in II:2.2.2.1.
This dissociation begins with the externalisation of objects and their dissociation from the subject. But a single object does not yield the objective time. This happens with positing the totality of objects as the actual object, 'the world'. Although reflection is determined by representing one object at a time, it is aware of other objects – it is involved into experience. Likewise, an actual object can be a complex involving several objects. Any simultaneity, and such a co-presence in particular, is spatiality. It founds also the image of 'the whole world', the simultaneity of all objects posited itself as an object. (Although such an object is only an ideal reflective construction and, according to relativity theory, even an impossibility, positing it as an object is a quite common act.) Combined with the idea of actuality, it yields something like 'the totality of the world at this particular point of time' – the 'now' of the world. The relation after applied now to this object – the whole world – and extended indefinitely leads to the time of the world. The 'objective time', the abstract time of the abstract world-object, is characterised by this paradoxical removal of the existence which is the site of actuality and, at the same time, retaining some abstract 'now' of the world-object.

71. The isolation of this one object, which is also the totality of all objects, i.e., excludes all transcendence, leads to the total, linear order of time. Temporality of experience is not linear. It is arranged rather like a multilayered surrounding centering in the focal point of actuality and opened toward future which has as many dimensions as possibilities. Experience unfolds surrounded by transcendence, by the presence of the pure past and by the open possibilities (lived and experienced) of something else, something more, something different. My temporality is interwoven into the temporality of all things and other people. But if something is considered as an independent 'whole', as an isolated object, if we, so to speak, suspend the transcendence, then there is nothing which can bring in the variation of multiple futures. The future of an isolated object may still be indeterminate but it will be unique. There may be internal changes of this object, but not a multiplicity of other, alternative objects and their time paths. Such an abstract 'now' – actuality of an isolated object – has only one, unique before and only one, unique after: these are just states of the isolated object which, being one and alone, can only be in one state at a time. In case of the 'world time', what is posited as an independent object is the ideal totality of objects. It then 'includes the times' of all the objects it 'contains', as particular intervals, projections of its own, global, objective time. This time itself, however, as the time of the single world-object dissociated from any transcendence, is itself linear.

As the final step, after positing the totality of objects as one 'world' and endowing it with its own 'now', one can perform the final dissociation, the ultimate abstraction with respect to time. It took quite some time before European thought arrived at the idea of empty 'time in itself', flowing independently from any things and events. It appears as the ultimate abstraction and, as it seems, even modern science does not need it any more, and so we will not be occupied with it at all.\footnote{Although Zeno's arguments assimilated time to a geometrical line, it was still relational time of events, the 'numerical aspect of motion with respect to its successive parts'. Nicolas Bonnet in the XIV-th century, Bernardino Telesio in the XVI-th, Francisco Suárez, all involved still in one way or another into Aristotelian physics or cosmology, postulated true mathematical time in one form or another. The immediate predecessors of Newton proposed independent time not requiring motion or any objects, were Pierre Gassendi and Newton's tutor Isaac Barrow.}

72. Summarising briefly: dissociation of an object involves reflection into the relation of being after the object and, as a matter of fact, after the whole experience. Reflective act is
surrounded by the experience which, in this context, acquires the character of the pure past. The reflective project, founded by the externalisation of objects, is the same as the project of stretching across the distance of after which separates reflection from its object. This intention of grasping and appropriating the dissociated objects turns out to be the same as the project of ‘freezing’ the objects in the immediacy of reflective acts – ‘freezing’ which, because it never finally succeeds, makes the flow of time the more transparent. Perhaps a bit paradoxically, the foundation of the experience of time marks also, at the same time and by its very nature, the attempt to erase time, the thirst for the ever escaping, ultimate entity ‘beyond time’, dissociation from which is but another aspect of reflective actuality.

Objective time, the time of the whole world, arises as the ultimate abstraction of this reflective process. As Bergson constantly repeated, this objective, spatialised time, is only an image of the existential temporality. But we would not, for this reason, consider the one authentic and the other not, the one eigentliche and the other not, the one legitimate and genuine while the other only a result of inauthentic mode of existence and thinking. We would not consider the time of the world as a mistaken redundancy falsifying the true temporality. We only observe the difference in the matter of experience, the difference between the lived existential temporality and the dead time of the objective world. The latter is an aspect of reflective experience of dissociated objects – good reasons for diminishing its importance are as many as for making it the only measure of the absolute truth, that is, none. The identities of objects stretching beyond the horizon of actuality, as well as the idea of the totality of the ‘world’, make more sophisticated reflective experience possible. Discovery of the objective time (and the objective world; not only a single object) is what extends the horizon of our reflective experience beyond the mere lived actuality, beyond the unity of a single act which reaches its end in the same moment in which it leaves its origin. Relations to the world and life are not exhausted by the contents of immediate experiences, by the actually given, retentionally present and protentionally expected. Restricting them to such actualities amounts to a reduction, perhaps, to the level of animal experience of time which, true and genuine as it certainly is, does not probably reach the long term memories and abstract recollections of forgotten past. This reduction, like every other, is a diminution and pauperisation. The objective time and world provide powerful means of inquiry and control. Their legitimacy can be questioned only in cases of misuse. Viewed existentially, they are the reminders, the traces of the original unity of the existential confrontation, retained in the midst of reflective dissociations.

4.3.2. Space

We have discerned the element of spatiality – as simultaneity – even before experienced recognitions, already in chaos, §17. Temporality is like stretching of this simultaneity along the dimension before-after. Its emergence amounts also to a sharper distinction of spatiality. Only isolating from the here-and-now the element of after allows the element of simultaneity to be isolated as well. For the dimension before-after acquires its temporal status by leaving the static simultaneity of the contracting ‘now’. This simultaneity, this actual ‘here’ is dissociated – from here-and-now – as the place distinct from other, but simultaneous places, just like ‘now’ is dissociated – from here-and-now – as the place (or rather the “point of time”) distinct from the places which come before and after it. These two ‘points’ are originally the same nexus of here-and-now. They acquire different status, and names, only as the spatial and temporal dimensions are dissociated from this nexus.
There is thus a complementary duality: things have the *spatial* aspect to the extent they are seen as simultaneous, and the *temporal* aspect to the extent they appear *after* each other. The final *dissociation* of space from time happens when this complementary duality gets *distinguished* into exclusive 'either ... or ...', when we begin to conceive things separately either as simultaneous or as ordered along the *before-after*.

74. *Spatiality*, centered around the actual ‘here’, has infinitely many dimensions: any object marks a possible dimension (if one prefers, a direction for a course of action). Indexicals like below, above, in front, behind, etc., are already further abstractions. In some form, related to a multitude of aspects like social organisation or religious system, they emerge in the primitive world-view. For instance, the tribe of North American Indians, Zuñis, arranged all natural objects, and even abstractions, in a system of seven regions of space: north, south, east, west, zenith, nadir and center. Everything in the universe had its place in one of these seven static regions, each having also certain colour and clans belonging to it. The celebrated three dimensions of space are but a further, highly convenient abstraction. The fact that localisation in objective space can be represented abstractly by a choice of a reference point and three coordinates seems a very bad reason to postulate them as the original truth of ontology. They are just a convenient representation of the objective space abstracted from experience.

75. It arises in an analogous process to the one from 4.3.1.ii. Firstly, *spatiality* becomes extended beyond the horizon of actuality and becomes the spatiality of (arbitrary) objects. Then it loses its designated ‘here’. The simultaneity within the horizon of actuality is the constitutive aspect of reflection. Once objects emerge as dissociated entities, the abstract signs allow positing any of them as simultaneous. As the unity of experience gives rise to the totality of all objects, the ‘whole world’, its simultaneity, the snapshot of ‘now’, becomes the abstract ‘here’, the space of the objective world.

Since this ‘here’ comprises everything, it does not any longer stand in any relation to other ‘heres’, it has become a dissociated and isolated unit. (Yet, the questions creating the first antinomy, like “What is outside the space?”; are most naturally asked, indicating precisely that the ‘objective here’ arises from the ‘subjective’ one, from the limited and situated, actual place.) This lack of ‘outside’, of any transcendence, is just the opposite side of the emptiness of objective space. Just like the objective time of the world-object becomes the mere linear succession void of any objects, so the objective space becomes the empty simultaneity.\(^{56}\)

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\(^{55}\)E. Durkheim and M. Mauss, *Classifications primitives* [after F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy*, II: 23]

\(^{56}\)The implication from the emptiness of ‘outside’ to the emptiness of ‘inside’ is not, of course, physical or logical. But it is of fundamental significance. Here, we see only its rather sterile, almost formal version. It does not apply to any single objects but only to their *posed totalities*, the ultimate containers. ‘Everything’, thought as the totality of all objects, excludes the possibility of any more objects ‘outside’ – ‘outside’ there can be only emptiness. But this emptiness surrounding such an ‘everything’ has the contagious effect on what it embraces, it spreads to the ‘inside’. Therefore, single objects ‘within’ space must appear as separated by void, while objects or events thought in the totality of time are, likewise, separated only by its emptiness, its ‘pure flow’ (which is as hard to imagine as it is to avoid). In short, that which is supposed to fill the space between the dissociated objects is that which surrounds their totality, the ultimate background or limit. Empty space, the space between the entities residing in it, is ‘filled’ with that which limits it (like ether did in the XIX-th century.) This dependence reflects only the fact that, starting with mere objects, some bits and pieces conceived as the ultimate building blocks, construction can at most arrive at their collections and arrangements but is never able to ‘fill’ the emptiness between them, which is only another expression of their dissociation. The more fundamental version of this dependence
But if this replacement of the designated ‘here’ by the abstract one of the world-object yields the objective space, where is extensionality? This, after all, is a constitutive aspect of space: objects in space are exactly the ones which have extension. The answer is: extension is what we have termed simultaneity, once the space has been dissociated and then re-filled with the objects. It is not something that explains possibility of co-existence, of simultaneous presence of distinct objects – it is this very simultaneity. One more distinction must be noticed to obtain spatial extension. Just like a distinction is what is being distinguished, a dissociated object is a limit of distinctions, is the boundaries seaprating it from the surrounding. An extended object is one in which these boundaries are themselves cut from the object, are distinctions made within (around) the distinguished object itself. The extension of an object is the very simultaneity of its boundaries (left, right, lower, upper, etc. In the same way a temporal object appears as extended when the limits of its time span are dissociated and posited in abstract simultaneity as points on the time line.) Spatial distance is just another way of saying extensionality. It only depends on which boundaries are considered. With respect to an independent object, the simultaneity of its aspects is extensionality; with respect to a collection of different objects, their simultaneity is the distance between them.

There is, of course, a difference between a measurable distance between two objects in space and the non-measurable distance between, say, two items of a mathematical definition. The difference consists in that the objects in space have an identifiable boundary which can be dissociated from them. Other things simply are their boundaries. A mathematical item, say, the commutativity property, \( x \cdot y = y \cdot x \), does not have a contour, it is its own contour, is exactly the distinctions it makes. Objects which do not reside in the objective space (or in the objective, spatialised time), have the property of being their own contour: either like mathematical items which coincide with their own definitions, or like unsharply delineated emotions, ideas, nexuses which, having no precise definitions, are exactly the distinctions they draw. The constitutive aspect of the spatial extension is the difference between a sharp contour and the object itself. Say, the table in front of you has an identifiable contour which separates it from the surrounding space and other objects around. But the table is not its contour. Of course, there are also spatial objects which do not have such a sharp contour. But when we see such objects, we already have the experience of objective space and we blame their unsharpness on our ‘subjective’ indisposition. An objective view of space would postulate that even the stripes of a rainbow conform to this claim, since their interpenetration is only our approximate perception of a multitude of particles which all have exact boundaries in the objective space.

If we imagine the boundaries of an object collapse, we obtain a point. A point has no extension. Is it in space? No, since it is not extended. But yes, if it is posited there, that is, if we imagine it co-existing with other points (or system of coordinates, or its surrounding, or any other moments identifying its position among other co-existing things). Once the ‘container’ of the objective space has been encountered, almost anything can be imagined ‘in it’. It may be a bit too advanced a gymnastics of imagination to try to think a single point, and the fact that points are typically considered in mutual relations, like in geometrical arguments, accounts for the extension of the space between them. But if we manage to imagine a single point, then it is no longer in space, it has no spatial

\footnote{was encountered in §3 as the confrontation with the transcendence conditioning the contents of my being and whose lack would remove any character of mineness from a solipsistic subject. Its existential dimension will be addressed in Book III.}
aura – precisely because it is thought in a complete isolation, without any simultaneous counterparts. It appears ‘in the midst of nothingness’, as if surrounded by darkness. No matter how much we are trying to focus on the point and ignore this surrounding nothingness, it remains there, as the ineradicable remainder that the point is not, after all, completely alone. This might be taken as an image of the virtual background, not yet spatiality, from which the distinction, the point, arises.

Finally, there remains the idea of homogeneity which is the same as infinite divisibility. It applies equally to the objective space and time. Homogeneity results from the two steps of dissociation: of the respective relations (after and simultaneity) from their components, and thus allowing them to relate arbitrary objects, and then of the actual ‘now’, respectively, ‘here’, which become the properties of the posited totality of the world-object. The first ‘fills’ the whole (time or space) with homogeneous distinctions, which, although in themselves highly unlike and heterogeneous, by being viewed as mere objects acquire the homogeneous character of independent and residual actualities. In the extreme, most abstract sense, an object is a mere indication of independence, of an isolated, substantial entity, of a mere fact of its being, in short, a point. (This abstraction of a point, however, like the other abstractions we are addressing at the moment, is not something which requires a conscious effort. It is given along with pure distinction. Conscious effort is needed only to bring it to actual consciousness, to establish it as an explicit representation.) The second step removes the designated point of reference thus effecting a true uniformity, ‘equivalence’ of all points spread along the time line, respectively, in space.

The idea of infinite divisibility emerges now by the extrapolation similar to that through which infinite time/space emerge from the extension of the actually anchored after/simultaneity to the world-object. With infinity of objective time and space we are by far in the realm of ideality. Their very foundations – the objectified totality of the world-object, its all-embracing ‘now’, the homogeneous points ‘filling’ space and time – all these are posited abstractions, that is, not representations of the lived experiences but their ideal limits. Now, there is the experience of divisibility, the encountered distinctions and the potential for always making new ones. This does not in itself account for infinite divisibility of objective time and space. At every stage, one has made only such and such, so and so many distinctions, and one lives through these – not through the possibility of making more. The lived process is a process of possibly unlimited distinguishing but not of infinite distinguishability. But as lived temporality and spatiality have been stretched to the ideal and infinite limits, so infinite divisibility is the ideal limit of distinguishing, posited for the homogeneous totalities of objective time and space.57

4.3.3. Objective or constituted?

Identity of the dissociated objects transforms the original temporality into time and spatiality into space. But we should state clearly: time and space are not the conditions of possibility of the objects, nor other way around. They are equipollent. There are no objects without space and time. But neither could we arrive at the objective time and space, if we didn’t also reach the representation of objects. Instead of conditions of possibility we rather speak about the order of founding, and there it is the continuity of proto-experience,

57 One notices that our objective time and space do not comply with the current scientific accounts. Such compliance is not our objective. We are considering the emergence of objective representations and their existential role, not the possible objectivistic constructions of the ‘world in itself’.
4.3. Time and space

timeless as it is, which precedes both spatio-temporality of actual recognitions, and which, in turn, precede space, time and objects.\textsuperscript{58}

To be sure: we are not doing here the impossible, we are not constituting objective time nor space – only a representation of objective time or space. More precisely, we are constructing a representation of spatiality and temporality. These are still aspects of undissociated experience and can be concretely experienced in the simultaneity and flow of distinctions. They can not, however, be reduced to any concept. When we attempt to represent them, we arrive at the objective time and space which, in terms of experience, are only empty concepts of empty containers. These, conversely, can not be experienced but only constructed, these are constructions. Flow and simultaneity are aspects of experience equipollent with its founding actuality. The successive ordering of world’s stages and the simultaneity of the totality of all objects are conceptual constructions of reflective thinking, are extrapolations of the categories of actual experience to the posited totalities which are never experienced.

So, after all, we have not obtained any objective time or space but merely ‘subjective’ representations? For, do we not reduce the objective time to its phenomenal constitution, do we no strip it of its ‘objectivity’? Does not, after all, the whole process of distinguishing and gradual emergence of time and space happen already within time and space, within objective time and space?

Well, we certainly want to emphasize that the time and space as we experience and understand them are relative to our experience and understanding. Constructions need not be false or unreal because they are constructed – but they are only to the extent they are constructed. The shortest meaningful unit of time is relative to the minuteness of objects which we are able to distinguish and relate. It is conceivable that a consciousness “could live so slow and lazy a life as to take in the whole path of a heavenly body in a single perception, just as we do when we perceive the successive positions of a shooting star as one line of fire.”\textsuperscript{59} The world and the time of such a consciousness would involve very different contents than ours. A being living for only a fraction of a second, whose whole life consisted of a single event, say, a division in two beings, might have an extremely poor experience of time.

But one would still say that the differences here concern only different time-scale, not the time itself. All these beings can be considered as living in the same, objective time. Indeed, they can but to the extent they are so considered they are placed within not so much my or your experience as in, well, the objective time. Once the sphere of objectivity has been dissociated, everything can be placed there if only it is viewed as an object. But every object, including the most abstract ‘objectivity’, requires an existence which distinguishes

\textsuperscript{58}Thus we deviate not only from the Kantian account of time as the condition of possibility of objects but also from the objectivistic attempts to account for time in terms of the given objects. An example of the latter is the ‘proof’ of the unreality of time, of A-series, in J. E. McTaggart, \textit{The Unreality of Time}. The ‘givens’ are its silent but crucial assumption. The past, present and future are only time-stamps of objectified particulars, “are characteristics of events. We say of events that they are either past, present, or future.” Indeed, we say so, but reducing understanding to the average ways of speaking is a dubious business. To dissociate anything (a thing or an event) as an independent object, is equipollent with its involvement into time. Trying to account for time using the prior givenness of (series of) dissociated events is indeed circular and this circularity will appear vicious whenever the goal is to reduce one aspect to another. Common sense will admit that saying “a series of events” one has already said “time”. But one says “time” already when saying “event”, even if to recognize this equipollence, one has to step beyond the common language usage.

\textsuperscript{59}H. Bergson, \textit{Time and Free Will}. III:p.195
it. And so is it with time. “When I say that the day before yesterday the glacier produced the water which is passing at this moment, I am tacitly assuming the existence of a witness tied to a certain spot in the world, and I am comparing his successive views: he was there when the snows melted and followed the water down [...] The ‘events’ are shapes cut out by a finite observer from the spatio-temporal totality of the objective world,”[60] eventually, from the unity of the indistinct. “Time presupposes an experience of time.”

81. But is not this claim an unfortunate inversion of the famous phrase, according to which exactly the opposite is the case, namely that “perception of succession presupposes succession of perceptions”[61]? This phrase (like the whole paragraph, and the whole book), however, does not concern the unity of the objective time but of the consciousness of time, with its double intentionality in which conscious reproduction of a past event in the present ‘now’, perception of succession, is itself involved into the flow of time embracing this very ‘now’, into succession of perceptions, §§66-69. The succession of perceptions, which one might want to interpret as some objective succession, refers only to the transcendental level which constitutes the actual consciousness of succession. With this one is immediately “referred back to the crucial problem, that of time of transcendental constitution. According to which time does it take place? Is it a time itself constituted by an atemporal subject? Is the subject itself temporal?”[62]

Our view does not meet this problem, because we are not opposing the ‘subjective’ experience of time to the ‘objective’, experienced time. We are only describing the emergence of the experience of the objective time from the temporality of experience. We do not inquire into what, possibly, might reside beyond any experience, what and how might, possibly, be distinct beyond any distinguishing. We do not constitute anything, we distinguish, which in the last instance means: discover. True, what we discover is only our view and perception of the world, our ways of distinguishing the indistinct, but this is also what for ever keeps the hammer of some indefinable ‘objectivity’ over all sorts of subjectivist reductions. We did not constitute objective time – only its representation. And this representation is ‘true’ because objective time is nothing more than objectified temporal experience, than succession viewed in abstraction from the experiencing existence. Having once arrived at this objectivisation, reflection naturally turns around and applies it to all its objects. Objective time is a necessary aspect of the experience of the ‘objective world’. It is an aspect of the conscious actuality which, emerging after its dissociated objects, discovers in this very act both the temporal character of its objects and its own temporal relation to them.

The fact that every experience is relative to the experiencing being does not in any way diminish its objectivity, here, the objectivity of time. Every distinguishing is relative to the distinguishing being, but it is a distinction in the homogeneity of the indistinct, drawn through or from the chaotic heterogeneity. As such, a distinction made by you is as objective as a distinction made by an ant. The human experience of time is as objective as the experience of an ant, even though the latter probably does not reach as far as an experience of the objectivity of time. But objective experience does not require an experience of this very objectivity. Experience of the objectivity of time requires a reflective dissociation of the experience into external objects, and ants probably do not reach this level. Yet their experience involves distinctions and time which are as objective.

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as ours. For objectivity does not reside beyond and independently from any (form of) existence but only in experience. Thus, we would accept both phrases quoted above but only when taken together: time presupposes experience of time and experience of time presupposes time. And this equipollence is only an expression of both aspects arising from the prior nexus of spatio-temporality, of their dissociation in the same process which dissociates also subject from object.

One might object that by “objectivity” we mean exactly that which is beyond and independent from any experience. Purely ‘objective’ inquiries require one to dispense with any such relativity. But their pragmatic relevance does not change the fact that their philosophical foundations remain, to put it mildly, problematic. We may, perhaps, consider the space-time of relativity theory as more ‘objectively true’ than the Newtonian empty containers. But this is so only because the former takes into account a wider scope of experiences than does the latter. We would not, however, claim that any has reached some final truth about the ‘objective time in itself’. Both are, as scientific results in general, merely approximations. And they do not approximate any ‘objective truth in itself’ but only the totality of experiences taken into consideration at a given historical moment. The ultimate objectivisation would like to abolish all relative distinctions. But as all distinctions are relative to the distinguishing existence, such an abolishment would lead to the indistinct – a highly non-objective, not to mention non-scientific, thing.

Such a collapse would be prevented if one found some ineradicable distinctions, the ultimate ‘atoms’. The residual sites of such ‘atoms’, the points, appear in the limit of all objectivistic inquiries. But as points are not ‘real atoms’, while all characterisations of the latter turn out to be only temporary and approximate, one takes recourse to intersubjectivity. We can be partially sympathetic to such a recourse, if only we remove from it all flavour of sociologism and conventionalism. Time and space emerge as objective in the sense that they are not relative to any particular existence. Of course, once you die, other people will continue living in the same time. This “of course”, however, is not grounded in the inter-subjectivity but in the experience of every individual. The consensus about time’s objectivity reflects only the common form of existence, the fact of time’s presence in every reflective experience. Speaking about time or space without any existence, is to project distinctions into the indistinct, is to forget the differentiating existence in the very moment of making the claim of its irrelevance. Experience of objective time not so much presupposes ‘objective’ time as brings it forth, just like any distinction brings forth whatever it distinguishes. Like every other experience, it is both a discovery and a creation: a creation because it is relative to the mode of the distinguishing existence, and a discovery because it reveals the way such an existence does, or even is bound to, experience the world, to confront the indistinct.

The experience of objective time involves much more than the mere registration of the ‘objective passage of time’. There are modes and levels of experience which do not involve objective time and which, so to speak, suspend the validity of its flow. Thus, even if our setting can remind about the Kantian forms of intuition, the analogy is restricted to the level of reflective experiences (which, discovering the objective time, is already involved into temporal experience). The a priori of our existence reaches deeper than the actual flow of time, to the mere fact of distinguishing and, eventually, to the confrontation with the indistinct. Every experience is experience of experiencing – and although one would like to say “is also” we would rather say “is only”? We discover objective time but this discovery is conditioned by the structure of our being which brings the original nothingness and
84. It is this fact, that we discover and not merely constitute time, which accounts for the natural interweaving of our experience of time with the objective time. These are not experienced as two different times – simply, because they are not two. On the contrary, the temporal experience, when arriving at the experience of the objective time, finds itself already not only in the prior temporality but also ‘in’ this, just discovered, objective time – the two are but two views of the same, existential and objective, internal and external. Our order of founding, once the objective time has been discovered, is seen to have evolved in this objective time, because what has been constituted is not some time ‘in itself’ but only its reflective experience, an experience of temporal experiencing. As object gets dissociated from the subject, the objective time, dissociated from the subjective actuality, arises as the time in which this subjective reflection has been constituted.

This objectivisation involves the change of level, the change of perspective. As objectivisation involves dissociation of the external contents from their internal origin, these two perspectives can be set against each other. Although we do not intend to do this, we have to acknowledge their mutual irrelevance. Our existential perspective does not offer much ground for objective considerations, except for illumination of the emergence and place of objectivity in the experience. Objective perspective, on the other hand, requiring dissociated objects, is of little use in existential considerations. When applied unrestricted to elements which are not objects, it leads to antinomies and we will see examples of that in the following section.

5 Reflection and Experience

Words, the paradigmatic signs of reflective dissociations, make something transcending actuality present. Yet, the constitutive feature of reflection is dissociation, positing its actual object in the isolated independence from the not-actual surrounding and from all the non-actual rest. Thus reflection, nourishing itself on the experience and, in particular, its non-actual aspects, performs its function in an apparent opposition and, in the extreme cases, perfects its function in a direct opposition to it. The present section is devoted to this tension and to suggesting some problems which we will try to avoid later on.

5.1 Actual and non-actual

85. We have observed in 4.1.2 that the reflective dissociation, by identifying and isolating
objects, brings about the possibility of control over these objects. The power of words reflects the processes of distinguishing and recognising the identities. Eventually, and in most generous sense, it is the power of dissociating and connecting, of setting some actual limits and, by the same token, establishing connections (borders) between things. But the power of reflection is, in another sense, only illusory. This power is only over that which enters the horizon of actuality, over the actual signs and not, in any case not always and not without much further ado, over what these signs may possibly point to. Reflection, taken in itself, gives power over signs and only over signs. But the distinctions and the world of experience are much more than the actual objects which can be fully grasped within this horizon. The distinctions slipping out of this horizon find also their expression in words, but the reflective power over them diminishes with the increase of the non-actual element.

5.1.1. Beyond actuality

“I spent two weeks in Prague with my girlfriend.” What am I talking about, what am I referring to by this “two weeks”? A concept ‘two weeks’? Hardly, and if so my girlfriend wouldn’t be pleased. A phenomenon of ‘these two weeks’? Perhaps, though I do not attempt to obtain any adequate intuition of it. I do not intend only what appears to my consciousness but also all that might have escaped me. I use this phrase to point to this experience. I am referring to these particular two weeks, to all the moments, events, moods I experienced during these two weeks but, above all, to the whole experience of these two weeks, also its unregistered aspects. Whoops! “the experience of two weeks”? What is that? Isn’t experience something which always happens here-and-now, within the horizon of actuality? I can experience the table in front of me, the window to the left, the present situation – but two weeks? What kind of thing is ‘two weeks’ that we can experience it? For we do experience such things, not only as a sum of single moments but as a one whole.

I see – perceive – a detail of a building. In itself it would hardly pass for an experience anywhere outside the philosophical tradition, but since this, too, can be a source of the unexpected, let it pass. I watch Vltava from Karlův most enjoying a gentle breeze. I do it both – simultaneously or interchangeably – being aware and unaware, conscious and unconscious of this experience. In a while the pleasure of the moment becomes so clearly intensified that I am actually beginning to half-reflect over it, perhaps recalling other similar moments, perhaps just staying in this one with full – reflective – appreciation. During the walk uphill to Hradčany, the breeze and Vltava dissolve gradually in the labyrinth of the narrow streets, but nothing has broken the continuity of the experience. The same moment from the bridge is now extending to the chrám sv. Mikuláše, the buildings around Malostranské náměstí, the steepness of Zámecké schody. It is the same experience furnished by a more variation in the material of the world. When I meet my girlfriend uphill at the portal of Katedrála sv. Víta, we have a brief recollection of a quarrel from this morning which changes the mood. But none of us is really up to a quarrel in such a nice weather and place, and we start enjoying the surroundings together. It isn’t any more exactly the same experience from the bridge and to the cathedral. But it is now the same experience of being together in Prague, furnished by yet more variation in the material of the world.

63 Instead of control and power, we could speak here (and elsewhere when only reflection is concerned) about manipulation. Its Latin etymology reflects the fact of being graspable, fitting into the hand (manus), and being underlaid the authority of one’s commands, like a a handful of soldiers (maniple).
perceptions, moods and feelings.

87. Just like the whole walk, the whole morning, the whole day is experienced and can be an experience, so are the whole two weeks. But one might say: I only know that I was there for two weeks but what I experienced were only single moments. This certainly does not have to be so. Surely, a lot of different things happened and I do remember some of them. I have encountered various moods, ups and downs, different weather, places, people, etc. But all these variations were underlaid by a constant mood, the feeling of congenial surroundings and company, which persisted through – above or below – all the moments of different small experiences.

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

In either case, the phrase “two weeks in Prague with my girlfriend” refers to some totality (perhaps even unity) of experience; not to any concept but to a concrete experience. This experience is not fully contained in what is being said. But the phrase does not abstract anything from it, it does not convey any ‘conceptual’ or ‘propositional content’ distinct from and alien to the experience. The phrase only refers to or points towards it. It is an actual – and abstract – sign of something which, in its concreteness, lies beyond actuality. When I say “two weeks in Prague with my girlfriend” I recollect my girlfriend, Prague, some particular experiences, perhaps, some unifying mood. It would be strange if the phrase meant the same to my girlfriend and you but, as words in general, it carries enough literal meaning to establish some degree of common understanding among all who hear it.

88. Likewise, what does it mean that I recollect Prague, what does the word “Prague” mean? Well, if I had never been to Prague, it would be just a point on the map, a rather abstract object, some place I have heard of. But what place, which place? What is a place? If this building is a place, and this square is a place, is also this-building-and-this-square a place? And the city where this-building-and-this-square are placed? If I was born there and it was the first city I ever saw, its experience did not happen at any point, it simply took time to develop – not the concept, but – the experience of my home-city. And what is it? What is a city, what is an experience of a city? Where does a city begin and where does it end? What can it mean “to experience a city”? I walk around and see buildings, streets, people. At what specific moment do I experience the city Prague? At none but, at the same time, at all. Each moment is an experience of an aspect, is a part of the ‘city experience’. But there is no one in which I can say “Now I am experiencing the whole Prague”. There is no single, actual experience of Prague.

89. One might ask, if not only single moments, then why two weeks? Why not two years, twenty years? Why not the whole life? If not only this-square, then why Prague, why not ... the whole world? Indeed, why not? The experiential limit of unity is my whole life, and all particular experiences are only actual modifications, manifestations of this fundamental
unity. Some might resist the idea that we experience totalities which go far beyond any particular moment of time, beyond the horizon of actuality. Yet, we communicate not only the experiences gathered during the stay in Prague but also the experience of Prague, not only different things seen there but also what Prague is like. It is so natural because experience does not consist of a totality of minute experiences, is not a mere sum of some ‘objective’ or ‘subjective’ intervals marking separate experiences. An experience, a reflective dissociation from the horizon of experience, finds place only against the continuity and unity which precede and found the possibility of such a dissociation. Experience is a mode of being which is not restricted to the pure actuality of here-and-now, but which develops in a temporal continuity, in the unity of time experience exceeding every actuality.

Experience exceeds the horizon of actuality, and any particular experience may exceed this horizon. The unity of experience is not obtained from a totality of minute actualities but, on the contrary, founds such a totality.64

5.1.2. Not concepts, not phenomena

Due to the non-actuality interwoven into recognitions as well as the fact that distinctions need not be consciously registered to make difference, our experience and what is experienced comprise much more than phenomena, not to mention the experience of empiricism. When a phenomenologist analyzes a phenomenon of, say ‘life’, or ‘his life’ or ‘world’, he does not analyze anything which actually appears in his consciousness when he thinks (anschaut) ‘world’. In the moment when we think ‘world’, nothing specific appears, because what we know about, mean by, experience of the world cannot be given within the horizon of any single act of consciousness. One searches one’s experiences, follows a chain of associations, looking for the aspects and properties related to the ‘world’. In particular, one follows this chain beyond whatever is present in one’s consciousness in the moment of thinking ‘world’. What is its intentional object supposed to be? The best one can say is that it is some totality out there, but we have no clue what this totality is nor what “out there” means. What is its essence supposedly resulting from the eidetic reduction? And if you find any then how long did you spend looking for it, and how much more – or less – would you find if you looked two more years? Likewise, is there any phenomenon of ‘life’? The intentional object of ‘my life’ is my life but it is again something which nobody knows precisely what it is. And nothing indicates that the situation might ever change. We do not have any experience of life, life is not any object or complex one might experience at any particular moment and whose essence one might hope to grasp with full adequacy. But we experience life all the time, in a sense, to live is to experience, and so just as we experience our experiencing, we likewise experience life.

64Quoting and referring extensively to W. Stern, Psychische Präsenzzeit, Husserl recognisesthe unity of an act which extends beyond the ideality of a pure ‘now’. “That a mere succession of tones gives a melody is possible only because the succession of the psychic processes ‘simply’ unifies itself in one total form. In consciousness they follow after each another but they fall within one and the same total act.” [E. Husserl, Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time. A:1.2§7] The “total act” is an expression inviting to a thorough deconstruction. The ‘now’ becomes an extended interval which imperceptibly emerges from the previous one, becomes the next one and, eventually, dissolves beyond the horizon of actuality?). In a sense, we only extend this image of continuity and unity of the Husserlian ‘now’ to the temporal unity of the whole existence. On the other hand, we invent the perspective and do not ask about the constitution of unities from the actual data, but only about the emergence of actualities from this prior unity of existence.
‘Life’, ‘beauty’, ‘meaning’, ‘God’ and most other things of significance are not reducible to phenomena, are not reducible to actual contents of consciousness. These, however, are aspects which truly matter – whenever present in experiences, and even more so whenever absent from them. No such things can be analyzed by looking at the actual contents of consciousness alone. If I start thinking about them I will almost for sure arrive at different essences than you. And this is so because their meaning, transcending actuality, is a derivative of the form of existence, and then of experience. They transcend any actuality and even the posited totality of all actualities. They can be pointed to and even addressed in specific ways, but they cannot be captured fully and adequately in precise, actual terms. A definition must fail whenever it attempts to appropriate experience, to actualise the essentially non-actual. Experience constitutes a unity not reducible to any totality of actual experiences and signs. And signs which forget that they are only signs turn into mere words.

Experiences appear for reflection, within the horizon of actuality, only as signs which refer to them. These signs are the actual data of reflection.

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

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

5.1.3. Confrontation with transcendence

92. An experience, a reflective confrontation with experience, is the source of novelty and surprise. It always comes to reflection and is never brought about by it. Reflection contributes to experience the sharp contours but the dissociated contents appear as transcending its actuality. An experience is always given and never taken. This aspect of transcendence
is not limited to the externality of actual objects. Like every actual sign is permeated
by the distanced presence of non-actuality, so an act, limited to the horizon of actuality,
encounters not only an external object but also the context of experience reaching beyond
this horizon.

Precise visibility of a reflected object, clarity of a reflective thought is achieved by dis-
sociating an experience from this continuity which, for reflection, remains vague and inac-
cessible, conceptually unattractive and yet existentially fascinating. For reflective thought,
experience furnishing all its objects, phenomena and novelties is the horizon of transcen-
dence. It remains ‘outside’, reflection can never appropriate it but, at most, conform to it
in the constant dialectic of domination and subordination. This transcendence, this pres-
ence is the constant aspect of reflective experience. It surrounds the variety of changing
actualities with the unity which is as certain as undefinable. “For the intellect, the unity is
only a postulate, an act of faith. For the spirit, the harmony is the experienced reality.”

Experience is a gift of transcendence. It is an experience only to the extent it confronts
reflection with something transcending its actuality.

Words can refer not only to experiences but also to the experienced, to all levels of expe-
rience. As we will see again and again, the deeper layer of life, the more constant it is but
also the more ephemeral, because the less fixed, are its actual manifestations. Furnishing
the signs for these deeper layers, words endow the in graspable and non-actualisable with
the character of recognisable and repeatable permanence. Although the distance separat-
ing such words from what they express may be impassable, they nevertheless bring the
most fundamental, the least expressible aspects of life closer to the actuality of reflec-
tive consciousness. Their ‘creative’ character consists here in the fact that the form of
manifestation of the transcendent is almost totally dependent on the choice of the actual
expression, on the used signs, on the assumed attitude.

Yet, this ‘power’ concerns only the actual manifestations. Reflection dissociates expe-
rience but does not create it. It does not even create its experiences. It exercises its power
only by means of signs which sharpen the already recognised distinctions. These signs are
neither arbitrarily chosen nor voluntarily generated, they are only the actual expressions
of the non-actuality which is not reducible to the actual categories and, hence, can not be
captured by the objective determinations. The reflective power, the power of the sign
over the signified, is the greater, the lesser the distance separating these two aspects. It is
greatest with respect to the precise objects grasped fully within the horizon of actuality,
and diminishes as the contents transcend this horizon becoming more and more non-actual.

There is only a difference of degree between ‘this building’, ‘the two weeks in Prague’ and
‘the whole world’. This is the difference in the distance between the respective contents
and the reflective act positing them. However, this difference marks also a distinction
in nature which, due to the difference in the distance, involves different ways of positing.
Positing can be taken as representation: dissociation of the actual object, of ‘this building’,
from the experience and, by the same token, from the reflective subject, §42. ‘Two weeks in
Prague’ are also posited in this sense, they are dissociated by drawing a merely temporal
or also experiential border around them. But the difference in the time scope between ‘(the
impression of) this building’ and ‘these two weeks’ is real and is marked by the precision
of the respective contours. One can attempt to capture ‘these two weeks’ within the horizon
of actuality, expressing their essence, mood, understanding. But all such attempts are

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65S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*. III:7
perfectly self-aware, that is, aware of their insufficiency. They may succeed in pointing towards the appropriate distinctions but not in capturing them with full adequacy.

The difference becomes quite significant with the objects like 'the whole world', 'the whole life', 'the totality of time'. These, although corresponding to some aspects of experience, are not experienced in the same way. The underlying unity of existence, giving rise to such objects, is represented only by projecting into it the totality of actual distinctions: the vertical distance separating the reflective actuality from the site of this unity is virtually infinite and is not prone to an adequate representation in terms of the horizontal distance between interrelated dissociated objects. (Representation of) such an object is posited as an ideal limit, as a totality trying to reflect the experienced, but reflectively only postulated unity. Such positing amounts thus not only to drawing a border around the actual object but to actually constructing it from the reflectively available pieces following the intimations of the experienced unities. And reflection's power over them is minimal. Although we can exercise some control over various aspects of our life or of the world, such a control is much lesser than that we have over a single building.

Finally, we can also speak about positing in the exclusive sense of constructing, without attempting to capture any traces of sensed unity. This is the case, for instance, with the pure phantoms or actual creations, put together almost arbitrarily from the dissociated bits and pieces of earlier reflections. As object is here constructed from the signs, the distance between the two is practically absent. Although such objects can be extremely complex, our control over them is virtually unlimited.

"Positing" is used equivocally about all three kinds of acts – dissociating an object, reconstructing an aspect of experience or constructing an abstraction – and the intended meaning will, hopefully, emerge from the context.

5.2 Some problems of reflection

In a sense, reflection does something inappropriate, it violates the order of things by dissociating them from the rest, positing as independent entities and bringing them under its control. This can appear as a desecration of the innocence of experience, especially, as the reflective subject begins to thirst for the pre-reflective, 'original truth' (which can be almost anything: the original state of nature, obviousness of senses, certainty of immediacy, frenzy of an orgy, strength of a violent will, feelings, authenticity,...). This thirst expresses awareness of reflection's insufficiency. Reflection comes always too late. The awareness of the confronting transcendence makes it impossible to forget that the reflective act is only embracing a mere sign of something which forever evades the look, let alone the grasp. The subject of a reflective act is as isolated as is its object – both are not only dissociated from each other, but primarily from the rest from which they arose. When limited to the precision of immediate visibility, in the constant attention paid to all the details of actual objects and situations, reflection can not find any other form of higher, vertical transcendence than narcissistic self-reflection. But self-reflective narcissism cannot avoid confrontation with its underlying derogatory self-awareness: "I swear, gentlemen, that to be too conscious is an illness - a real thorough-going illness." 66

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66F. Dostoevsky, Notes from the Underground. I:2
any historical epoch, reveals only an existential possibility which, typical perhaps for that
time, can be also encountered at any other. The psychologism of the Victorian time,
confronted with its scientific positivism, can be seen as the paradigm of absolutisation of
the reflective dualism. Let us look at some expressions of this possibility: first, in 5.2.1,
on the self-destructive consequences of this absolutisation, then in 5.2.2, on the general
mechanism of extending the reflective attitude to the whole of existence, and in 5.2.3 on
the resulting antinomies.

5.2.1. The original truth

Much of our experience passes without any attentive reflection. "One can find a great many
valuable activities, theoretical and practical, which we carry on both in our contemplative
and active life even when we are fully conscious, which do not make us aware of them. The
reader is not necessarily aware that he is reading, least of all when he is really concentrating;
nor the man who is being brave that he is being brave and that his action conforms to the
virtue of courage; and there are thousands of similar cases. Conscious awareness, in fact,
is likely to enfeeble the very activities of which there is consciousness." But the lack of
attentive reflection is not the same as the total lack of consciousness, not to mention, of
(self-)awareness. When the dualism of subject-object is taken as constitutive for our whole
existence, there emerges the image of the 'original truth' which remains inaccessible not
only to our reflection but to our very being. One starts naturally with the acceptance of
the reflective dualism, in a sense, admitting the finitude of reflection. But this naturality
is only an expression of the danger of identifying one's own being with reflection, in which
case it seems that this very being is thoroughly and fundamentally dualistic. This dualism
is not entirely satisfactory, it should be overcome and thus, although beginning with it,
one does not accept it after all. This aspect has innumerable forms, so we give only a few
examples.

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

\[ s \rightarrow r \rightarrow o \]  

(i) involves one immediately into the self-reflective regress. For \( r \) is itself a relation observed
by the subject and so can be, and in the moment of being addressed in fact is, a new
object. This is nothing but the contentless irrelevance of the 'I think that I think that
I think ... ' As we observed in §59, the empty formality of this operation does not apply
to (self-)awareness where awareness (of an object \( o \)) is equipollent with the immediate
self-awareness (of \( r \), and hence also of \( s \)). But this equipollence does not belong to the
nature of reflection which involves their dissociation.

As a result of this dissociation and, at the same time, of the awareness of the more
primordial unity, one asks for the constructions avoiding the infinite regress. Thus appear
meta-considerations and meta-modeling. One terminates the regress by postulating just
one (or only a few) level(s) above the basic one from (i), whether it is the level of intelligible
forms above the material contents, or else of transcendental subjectivity above the empirical
ego. Of course, we do not want to simply confute all, often very different, variants of this
basic idea. But we do claim that various appearances of 'meta' (or 'trans') originate

\[ \text{Plotinus, Enneads. I:4.10} \]
eventually in this basic element: the need of relating dissociated entities avoiding, at the same time, the infinite regress.

Consider, as an example, a simplified hylomorphism. The relation (i), where \( r \) is taken epistemically as something like ‘knowing’ or ‘understanding’, is prevented from regress by isolating the intelligible ‘form’, which reaches directly the subject, from the merely perceptible ‘matter’ which remains on the side of the object. The relation \( r \) becomes thus more refined, say, something like:

\[
\begin{align*}
  s & \xrightarrow{\text{form}} \text{matter} \\
  o & \xrightarrow{\text{subject}} \text{object}
\end{align*}
\]  

(ii)

Unlike in the simple-minded case (i), attempting now a self-application of the schema becomes hardly possible. The problem which is addressed with the form-matter distinction begins with the dissociated subject and object. The distinction itself, in a sense, prevents one from asking about self-application and infinite regress. And it does so by providing the meta-categories of ‘form’, ‘matter’, etc. which, remaining fixed, solve the initial problem.68

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

\[
\begin{align*}
  s & \xrightarrow{\text{form}} \text{matter}
\end{align*}
\]  

(iii)

The dualism remains, albeit only in a residual form, since matter is now reduced to the amorphous material entering the subjective pole through the sensations where the differentiation can be plausibly assumed. The forms (of perception, understanding, reason...) require, by definition, matter and hence are not self-applicable. The meta-level of transcendental subjectivity, giving form to all appearances, liberates the original relation \( r \) to the external object from the problems of self-reference and infinite regress.

The infinite regress, preventing the coincidence of the thought with its object, is but another form of the respective non-coincidence, dualism, of subject and object. Meta-modeling, helping against the former, might seem to help also against the latter. However, the very notion of a meta-level is constructed on the top of the dissociation and, consequently, can never bring the dissociated elements together.69 The problem returns always with the increased force (even if with less impact) with respect to the meta-level. For if understanding requires sensuous matter, how is it at all possible to understand the very relation of understanding? What is the matter of and what are the categories used in

68We view the distinction form-matter itself as a mere consequence of the dissociation of subject and object and would limit its validity (if any) to the sphere of reflective dissociations. D. Davidson, *On the very idea of a conceptual scheme*, argues against this distinction, the ‘third dogma of empiricism’, proceeding similarly from the holism which negates the validity of the distinction between the subjective and objective (elements of knowledge). We do not, however, claim the unreality of the subject-object distinction as such, but only its non-absoluteness, its relativity to the sphere of reflection.

69Unless we are willing to turn to mere formalisms and utilise some fix-points reached after \( \omega \) or more steps, cf. §59 and footnote 40.
the understanding of the role of the transcendental subject in the process of understanding/constitution? Thus, bringing together subject and object through a meta-relation which, to avoid infinite regress is not self-applicable, introduces the dualism of understanding and non-understandability of this understanding.

You will, hopefully, excuse this simplified presentation of the vast area of problems. Its only intention is to exemplify a general tendency which takes reflectively dissociated elements as primary. (For instance, the empirical approach would be symmetric to that in (iii), with the form reduced to a residual point of subjectivity. The respective problem is then to identify the objective atoms whose combinations might possibly account for the unity of experience.) The problematic dualism arising from the subject-object dissociation propagates to the meta-level and can not be overcome using exclusively reflective terms.

The ‘original truth’ did not enter explicitly the above examples, but its trace can be discerned in the very project of overcoming the dissociation of subject and object. The following gives it a more prominent place.

“How is the immediate belief in the independent existence of the world pertaining to the natural attitude possible?” The natural attitude is probably something to be found outside the philosophical study chamber. Then, the attitude in this chamber is ... unnatural? The unnaturally might be, perhaps, discerned in the exaggerated reflection, reflection unable to accept anything but precisely defined objects in dissociation from experience and even from reflective experience. For such an extreme reflection, the independent existence, this witness of transcendence anchored beyond the horizon of actuality, dissolves in the empty cracks between the dissociated signs. Pressing the opposition between the two attitudes, the natural one appears as lacking what is the proper element of the other. And when one is not careful with observing the differences of degree, this proper element appears not as an exaggerated reflection but as reflection simpliciter. The opposite pole becomes thus some irreflexive, purely experiencing being.

A well-known form of this abstraction is some imagined pre-reflective state of nature. But it has also another specific form in which the reflective inquiry is opposed simply to its passive object: the scientific objectivism. Eventually, in the long run, science will uncover all the secrets of the world and life and will show that our experience, our subjective experience is only a particular instance of some general, objective laws. Although we will leave such projects to those who are able to believe in them, let us for the moment assume that one manages to reconstruct the whole reality from the objectivistic assumptions, to eliminate all the qualia and impressions and demonstrate that “we are all zombies”, to prove that freedom is a subjective illusion and that everything is really governed by the inviolable laws of nature. Besides causing some confusion in various intellectual circles, this would probably give us powerful means of influence and control. Yet, would it really eliminate all the aspects of our existence which, as epiphenomena, were thus reduced to some inviolable principles? Sun is, after all, still rising above the horizon, even if everybody knows that it is earth rotating. Would I change anything in my way of viewing and reacting to people and situations, in my preferences and values, in my hopes for life? Well, I could, perhaps, if I didn’t like a concert, take a pill and feel I liked it after all. Still, I would take it only because I did not like the concert.

The projects of a total reduction, and reduction to scientifically determinable objects

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70It is probably no coincidence that the two appear in the history of European thought at approximately the same time. The post-Cartesian scientism of Enlightenment’s rationalism is accompanied by Hobbes’ idea of natural egoism and, on the other hand, Rousseau’s noble savage.
in particular, have been around for long enough to suggest that those who claim their all-embracing and universal applicability, should come with final justifications and not merely references to further research. There is first the great ‘if’ concerning the very possibility of such a reduction. Even if this turns out to be possible, there remains the second, even greater ‘if’: would it actually give us the control over all the aspects of our existence. We are not even able to control fully the processes of society which is, so it seems, fully human creation. Until these millennia old ‘ifs’ obtain positive solutions, their champions can be safely left for themselves as the victims of the \textit{reflective} sickness to the original and irreflective truth, that is, to the lack of \textit{self-reflection}. Every explanation is a reduction and reduction is \textit{the} means of all science. However, when proposed as the ideology of scientism and objectivism, that is, when seen as a (never ending) attempt to overcome the \textit{reflective dissociation} by ignoring one of its \textit{aspects}, it represents only the outermost limit of irrelevance to our considerations.

The ‘original truth’, whether imagined as a pre-reflective state of nature or an external \textit{object} of scientific \textit{reflection}, is not only a \textit{reflective} construction. It is ‘always already there’ – \textit{reflection} comes always too late and it knows it. “Philosophy, following after the world, after nature, life, thinking, and finding all that as constituted earlier than itself, asks precisely this earlier being and asks itself about its relation to it. It is a return to itself and to all things, but not a return to immediacy, which withdraws to the extent philosophy tries to approach it and melt with it.”\textsuperscript{71} But positing the ‘original truth’ as the goal, perhaps only an ideal limit, of the \textit{reflective} project of appropriation, is exactly the misunderstanding increasing the \textit{reflective} thirst for \textit{immediacy}. No such return is possible because \textit{reflection}, occupied with its \textit{objects} as it must be, cannot lose \textit{self-awareness} from which it originates and which accompanies all its \textit{acts}. There is no such return because the ‘original truth’ is itself a result of \textit{reflective dissociation}, of projecting the \textit{vertical} distance separating \textit{reflection} from \textit{experience} onto the \textit{horizontal} dimension where, so one hopes, all the \textit{dissociated} entities can eventually be related in a unifying harmony.

The attempts to reduce the whole \textit{experience} to the \textit{reflective}, \textit{objective} visibility encounter \textit{reflection} and cannot pretend that it is not there; eventually, they must ask the question about \textit{reflection’s} relation to the \textit{rest of experience}. “When this question of second order was once asked, it can not be eradicated. From this moment on, nothing will be able to exist the way as if the question never occurred.”\textsuperscript{72} This can breed despair if, identifying the truth with the ‘original truth’ and one’s being with the impossibility of coincidence, one starts suffering the presence of \textit{reflection}. But then, as soon as one has constructed a ‘solution’, an irreflective being explaining everything, \textit{reflection} finds itself missing and cannot rest satisfied with a result where it is not taken into account. And now, one suffers the absence of \textit{reflection}.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[97] As the final example, or rather the final stage, of the search for the ‘original truth’, we observe the disappointment. Even the proponents of the scientism recognize it as only an ideal limit. If the ‘original truth’ does not reside in any single \textit{object}, and their \textit{totality} evades the final grasp, perhaps one should better accept the failure. In order to be satisfied, \textit{reflection} seems to need embrace everything (whatever “embracing” might mean). But as nobody can believe that finite \textit{reflection} can grasp the richness of the whole world, there seems to be something fundamentally wrong with the \textit{reflection} itself. As the difficulties with taking \textit{reflection} into \textit{reflective} account increase, so does the thirst.
\end{enumerate}
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\textsuperscript{71}M. Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Visible and Invisible}. Inquiry and intuition:p.129
\textsuperscript{72}Ibid. Inquiry and intuition:p.126
5.2. Some problems of reflection

for the ‘original truth’. Only that, by its reflective inaccessibility, it becomes pure and complete ‘otherness’. Without admiring Bataille’s vocabulary and metaphors, one can still accept the point that every system must leave some, perhaps even some most significant aspects ‘outside’. Collecting everything into a reflective totality is a simple impossibility. The intellectual bias, which accepts only reflective precision, together with the thirst for the all-embracing universality, turn this impossibility into a despair much stronger than the thirst for the ‘original truth’ of some pre-reflective being. Now the despair becomes purely destructive: reflection cannot embrace everything – and truth is its entirely ‘other’ – consequently, get rid of reflection. This reflective hostility to reflection, and perhaps to rationality in general, is the intellectual form of the reflective disappointment, the utmost consequence of the search for rational precision and systematic totality. Although the mere socio-historicism, occupied with sociological transformations and historical progress, can see such a search and despair as disappearing in the past of modernity, it is a genuine, existential possibility of reflective being.

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

One can start thinking that reflection’s only goal is to eradicate itself, is to cease thinking in systematic, logical, understandable, representational, communicable – in short, reflective – terms. Instead, renouncing itself, reflection should open itself onto everything that any system must leave ‘outside’, onto all ‘otherness’, without any presumptuous attempts to control and organise it. Instead of thinking in the old, reflective way, to ‘think otherwise’, to let the absolute ‘otherness’ embrace one in an ecstatic fusion of multiplicity, that is, as everything seems to suggest, of cacophony. This delirium is only the final disappointment of the failed search for the ‘original truth’. Since the detailed richness of experience cannot be reflected in a totality of a system, and since system anyhow is alien to our life, stop thinking system and start ‘thinking otherwise’.

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

Lacking any proper expression, we hear calls to speak and talk ‘otherwise’. But are
not such calls to break the barriers and reach beyond, very similar to the search for the ‘original truth’ of lost innocence? Equally thirsty, reaching equally ‘outside’, equally impossible... The only difference is that while the latter retains some of the naive faith in its possibility, the former have renounced it. The thirst to “get rid of one’s personal ego and become embraced by the otherness which one believes to be one’s essence”\textsuperscript{73} is, according to Durkheim, a characteristic sign of the altruistic suicide; a suicide committed with the best intentions, for the others’ sake, but still only a suicidal self-destruction. Attempts to overcome the sense of alienation turn into even more advanced forms of estrangement when their goal is to overcome every distance, now, by dissolving reflection in the ‘otherness’ of ‘the other’.

This estrangement reaches its culmination and, as the case may be, returns healed to itself, when ‘the other’, once we stop its/his apotheosis and attempt to communicate, starts showing its/his face. For this face appears strangely familiar. There is no such thing as ‘thinking otherwise’, there are not different kinds of thinking just like there are different kinds of formal logics. To be sure, there is non-thinking; and there is always the possibility of misidentifying the basic recognitions which form the starting point of others’ thinking. But whenever we encounter a human being – which in particular means: one with whom we share a good deal of basic recognitions – we can also understand, even if only imperfectly, his thinking – and that not in spite of it being his but because it is thinking. There is always a space for failures and misunderstandings, and there is always, even primarily, a space for other forms of communication. But anthropologists do understand thinking of strange tribes, just like a German can understand thinking of a Chinese or like one (say, ‘modern’) man can understand thinking of another (say, ‘primitive’) man. For thinking is not a matter of solipsistic activity screened from any contact with the world and others. On the contrary, it evolves only through such a contanct, by drawing and connecting distinctions which are eventually made in and from the indistinct – one and the same for all. Even if many of the most precise and actual distinctions are drawn differently by distinct people or distinct cultures, they are all involved in the same structure of human experience and thus share in the presence of its deeper aspects. Speaking otherwise, thinking otherwise, writing and acting otherwise may be egotic needs of adolescence trying to find and mark its place in the world. Among the adults, ecstatic intensity, like the intensity of madness, may be seen only, and only at best, as an attempted medicine. Against what? As it appears here, against its own nature which, having become unbearable, tries to become some ‘other’. But there is no otherness without sameness. Without self-understanding and self-respect one is unable to understand and respect anybody else.

5.2.2. The objectivistic attitude, the subjectivistic illusion.

The unlimited power of reflection consists in the universal possibility of turning anything whatsoever into an object, of bringing anything within the horizon of actual observation and inquiry by means of signs. It is possible for the ‘I think that ...’ to be added to all my recognitions.\textsuperscript{74} It is possible to turn every recognition into an isolated representation,

\textsuperscript{73}E. Durkheim, \textit{The Suicide}. IV:1

\textsuperscript{74}It is only possible, requiring an additional act of reflective dissociation which constitutes representation. This ‘I think’ is not the ‘primitive apperception’ which “must accompany all my representations, for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought;” [I. Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}. B131]. Kantian apperception corresponds rather to our (self-)awareness which founds the possibility of the self-reflective ‘I think’.
5.2. Some problems of reflection

to posit every aspect of experience, even one which never is a thematic object of any experience, as the actual theme of reflection.

This power, due to its universality, lies at the bottom of the basic reflective attitude mistaking the universal possibility for the universal reality: that everything can be made into an object, that everything can, as a sign, appear within the horizon of actuality, is replaced by: everything is an actual object. The horizon of experience is identified with the totality of reflections, the world and its multiple dimensions become a totality of objects.

A few examples should illustrate the generality of this attitude.

(i) The not-actual aspect of an object has itself an objective character. If I see a building, while actually I am only seeing its front-side, its back-side is also intentionally given (gemeint); and it may become an object, too. What distinguishes here the actual content from its rest, the front-side from the back-side, is the mere fact that the former is perceptibly present within the horizon of actuality, while the latter is here only potentially – actually it is not, but it might be. Its potential actuality is its present not-actuality. As Husserl shows, it is there, is an integral part of the experience, but it is there in a different way than the actual aspect. Turning the not-actuality of the building’s back-side into a ‘potentiality’, we have already assumed the objectivistic attitude, we have already started viewing the unity of experience as a collection of dissociated actualities.

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

(iii) One might think that we are not looking for all possible aspects and instances but only for the appropriate concepts, the eventual essences. This, however, is not very different. Objectivistic attitude postulates the essences as surrogates for the missing actuality of things which slip out of its horizon. Unable to grasp higher things (nor, for that matter, the totality of all things) under the actual spell of its objectivistic look, it replaces them with something eligible to such a look and treatment – its own signs. Essences and concepts are means of doing that (and we will devote them more attention in Book II:1.2.2). Objects turn into essences, matter turns into form, and these reductions, in the midst of the triumphant objectivity, unveil the subject (essence, form, perception...) which, as a matter of fact, has never disappeared. In one respect, this is the opposite of the objectivistic reductions exemplified above. However, metaphysical ‘objectivism’ and ‘solipsism’ are distinguishable only on the basis of the reflective dualism from which they arise. Each sacrifices one aspect for the other and both live only by this negation. The two are the same in so far as both see only actualities: one of the objects, the other of their signs.

(iv) The mood of the thirst for more extensive knowledge is different from the mood of the thirst for more intense experiences. However, as far as they search for more, whether
in the *objective* or *subjective aspect*, they reveal the underlying assumption that all that is is a *totality* of things from which one gets less unless one grasps for *more*. Hysterical tourism, search for the exotic and undiscovered corners of the world, rummaging after intensity of new *experiences*—these are common modern forms of the attempts to fill the emptiness of objectivism and boredom of subjectivism through *more*. Insatiability, this equivalent of avarice, is a cardinal sin because it treats the world in a flattened, purely extensional manner, where *more* becomes equivalent with better. But it does not matter much if Icarus intends to actually conquer heavens or only grows exsullated by the thrill of flying. What matters is that the overstepping of the limits, resulting from the uncontrolled search for *more*, leads to destruction. Searching for *more*, one finds less.

101. *Objective* knowledge can deceive itself pretending that it has completely dispensed with the *subject*. Intensity of an *experience* can pretend that the *objective* order of things is of negligible relevance for its *subjectivity*. This mutual negligence is possible due to the *dissociation* of subject and object. However, the *dissociation* does not erase the *traces* of the neglected *aspects* and of their inseparable connections. No matter how much exclusive importance is attached to one of them them, the other is its indispensable companion. If actually ignored, it will sooner or later announce its presence either as an equally valid opposite or as the limit of the one which, for some time, has gained the exclusive rights. The problem is not to choose between the *subjective* and the *objective*, but to realise that this opposition is played on the grounds of *externality*. No matter the choice, once it is absolutised, the whole world and *experience* become merely the collections of the external, *dissociated* actualities which only repeat the chosen element. In so far as it is only a choice, made for merely pragmatic reasons, without implying any claims to absolute validity, we will call it, interchangeably, the “*objective/subjective attitude*”. However, when extended with the claims to the universal validity, it becomes a *reflective* mistake, no longer a mere attitude but an *illusion*.

102. The illusory character of this attitude can be illustrated as follows. As we travel, say, by carriage, the speed with which various objects pass by is inversely proportional to our distance from them; the close ones pass by very quickly, those which are not so close much slower, and those which are so far away as to be almost indiscernible seem to remain motionless. New impressions and things emerge from beyond the horizon but what remains constant and unchangeable through the whole journey is, if nothing else, the simple fact of this inverse proportionality and the very presence of the horizon. To claim that beyond the horizon there are the same kinds of things as those closest to us is right only if one has already placed oneself there. Such a placement, however, is a displacement. It falsifies the character of the experience which, emerging from the most intimate center of one’s being, retains its *trace* as the immovable horizon of the *absolute origin*.

The illusion urges us to view things as if no horizon were *present*. This removal of the distinction between the *actual* and *non-actual*, between the *external* and internal, dissolves the layered structure of *existence*. As the *vertical unity* of experience is replaced by the flat, *horizontal totality* of actualities, the structure of *existence* is replaced by a *complex* of *objective* or *subjective* pieces which dissolves, under analytic scrutiny, into a residual point of subjectivity—as incomprehensible as immovable. The illusion forgets that all human considerations are made from some *actual* position, are made from within a horizon which, variability of its contents notwithstanding, is *absolute*. Fruitful in *objectivistic* matters as such an abstraction might be, pretending that there is no designated place and urging one

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75 One might also use the phrases like “forgetfulness of Being” or “metaphysics of actuality”. 
to view things as if one were simultaneously at all places, it simply deprives one of the place to which it always tries and never manages to return. Its mistake lies in ignoring the concreteness of the human place which is not the mere hic et nunc with its contingent actual contents, but the ever present sphere of the essential non-actuality, the deepest aspects of experience from which there emerge all actual experiences. Its impossible project is to represent the origin in terms of its dissociated objects.

A disease affects only those whose constitution exposes them to its effects, a virus deadly to humans can turn out harmless to rats. The objectivistic illusion has a sound basis in reflection's very nature. It results only from the identification of the reflective mode with the being of the whole person, when all relations to the world are viewed as if they were relations of the dissociated subject and object, of external entities.

Such an identification happens very naturally. For, indeed, wherever one travels in the world, one does not encounter new modes of vision – whether in Paris or London, one encounters new buildings, new people, new roads. True, one can encounter new ways of seeing the world and new attitudes but they, too, are of the same character as those one could, at least in principle, contemplate at home. And reflection will only encounter new external contents even if it searches for something else. No matter how long and attentively one reflects and analyses, one does not encounter any qualitatively new modes of presentation. All the new observations are of the same character – they present one with more external contents (subjective feelings and actual impressions are as external as objects and never bring one out of the circle of reflective actuality). The process of analysis and reduction is even by its proponents recognised as potentially infinite. All declarations of its infinity, all mere prolegomena and introductions one keeps writing in the hope that others will carry on the research, are expressions of the attempt to view the world and experience as a mere totality of visible actualities. Analyses become longer and longer, books thicker and thicker and the essence more and more evanescent. They leave one perhaps pleased but deeply unsatisfied. “Life is, however, rich enough when one only can see; one need not travel to Paris and London – and that does not help, when one can not see.”

5.2.3. Antinomies of actuality

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

In our language, all these can be seen as examples of positing as object something which inherently isn’t one, typically, positing a non-actual aspect of experience as actually given. What is so posited, appears for reflection as a complex of dissociated objects. Thus something which in experience arises before the reflective objects, is attempted thought in terms of the objective categories, a non-actual unity is attempted modeled as a totality.78

77I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. A415/B442
78This might seem opposite to Kant’s diagnosis, according to which antinomy “arises from our applying to appearances that exist only in our representations, and therefore, so far as they form a series, not otherwise than in a successive regress, that idea of absolute totality which holds only as a condition of
Kant’s sharp distinction between appearances and ‘things in themselves’ makes illegitimate the questions leading to the antinomies. We only say: there are other modes of experience than the objective, reflective one. The totalities posited as objects often have some counterparts in experience, but not in the objective experience.

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

The very antinomy of the subject-object relation arises from the attempts to think the underlying unity in terms of the reflectively dissociated poles. One first posits a subject and an object as completely dissociated entities and then scratches one’s head over the question how they possibly might have anything to do with each other. Beginning with the dissociated poles, one can only end up reducing one to the other or admitting fundamental dualism. Any unity respecting the genuine distinctness of the two must appear as transcending the dissociation, as something mystical beyond the admissible categories. Most generally, antinomies arise as a result of applying the categories, that is, distinctions of lower levels to various higher aspects of experience – eventually, the categories of visibility to the sphere of invisibles.79 We look at a couple examples which will also be of some relevance for our later considerations.

5.2.3.i. Matter vs. spirit

106. The dissociation of subject and object draws its pervasive power from the obvious experience of the duality, perhaps even opposition, of mind and body. But when pushed to the extremes of metaphysical principles, it turns into an irreconcilable dualism of spirit vs. matter, with the associated attributes, like active vs. passive, eternal vs. temporal, higher vs. lower, etc.. The following fragment illustrates well the way of extending the actual distinction of body and soul which, in the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition, had primarily a moral character, to the metaphysical opposition of the material and the spiritual.

“Suppose a person to make all kinds of figures of gold and to be always transmuting one form into all the rest – somebody points to one of them and asks what it is. By far the safest and truest answer is, That is gold; and not to call the triangle or any other figures which are formed in the gold “these”, as though they had existence, since they are in process things in themselves.” [I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. I:2nd Division.2. Book 2.2.7 [A506/B534]] But the schema of inapplicability of categories across distinct levels is the same. The only difference might be in that Kant considers only actual representations as experienced and criticizes application of noumenal unity to them. We, on the other hand, consider unities to be also aspects of experience and see antinomies as arising from the attempts to view such unities as mere totalities of lower elements.

79 We do not distinguish ‘categories’ from ‘concepts’ nor ‘patterns of understanding’ from ‘understanding particular things’. We will say a few words about the issue in Book II, but all such forms are just particular cases of (drawing) distinctions.
of change while he is making the assertion; but if the questioner be willing to take the safe
and indefinite expression, “such”, we should be satisfied. And the same argument applies
to the universal nature which receives all bodies – that must be always called the same;
for, while receiving all things, she never departs at all from her own nature, and never in
any way, or at any time, assumes a form like that of any of the things which enter into her;
she is the natural recipient of all impressions, and is stirred and informed by them, and
appears different from time to time by reason of them. But the forms which enter into and
go out of her are the likenesses of real existences modeled after their patterns in wonderful
and inexplicable manner.”80

This is a perfect example of ‘analogical’ modeling which, following the dictates of the
objectivistic attitude, applies the actual dissociations to the deeper layers of experience.
The trivial distinction of actuality between the material from which a thing is made and
the thing itself, is applied to the ‘universal nature’, which is posited as an ideal limit, an
indistinct substratum receiving possible forms. The dissociation of purpose and achievement,
plan and its execution, which permeates the daily activities, is elevated to the principle
of the highest level. Thus matter becomes “formless, and free from the impress of any
of these shapes which it is hereafter to receive from without. For if the matter were like
any of the supervening forms, then whenever any opposite or entirely different nature was
stamped upon its surface, it would take the impression badly, because it would intrude its
own shape. Wherefore, that which is to receive all forms should have no form.” And due
to its passivity and receptivity, it is in need of an external principle, “that of which the
thing generated is a resemblance.”81

Matter is an ideal limit posited on analogy with the ‘stuff from which physical things
are made’. But when posited as anything more than the physicality of particular actual
objects perceived by the senses (designate matter as Scholastics might say), it simply
dissolves losing all its supposed qualities. “For my definition of matter is just this – the
primary substratum of each thing, from which it comes to be without qualification, and
which persists in the result.”82 It is that “which remains when all else is stripped off.”83
When extrapolated beyond the limits of actuality as the primordial substance, matter
becomes “an incomprehensible somewhat, which hath none of those particular qualities
whereby the bodies falling under our senses are distinguished from one another.”84

We see here the workings of the objectivistic attitude. As the world is viewed as the
totality of objects, the experience of change is extended to this totality. But as every
change presupposes something which is changing – and hence persists in the result – so
matter fills this role for the totality of all changing things. It is the dissociation of the
objective time from the experiencing existence which requires the ‘objective’, persisting
subject of change. But time, and hence change, arises with the reflective dissociation of
objects from the primordial unity of existential spatio-temporality. Here it means that
change presupposes not so much a permanent subject of change as the permanent subject
experiencing the change. This experience is conditioned by the experientially established
identities. When one observes the gradual replacement of the planks in the ship of Theseus,
the only subsisting subject is the observer – and his way of identifying this ship. If he
considers its identity as constituted by the material from which it is made, no ‘objective’

80Plato, Timaeus. 18
81Ibid.
82Aristotle, Physics. I:9
83Aristotle, Metaphysics. VII:3 [modified]
84G. Berkeley, A Treatise.... §47
subject of change survives the process. But if he considers this identity as constituted by, say, its functional and legal status, then the item 'Theseus' ship' survives the replacement of its planks. In either case, it is the question of the borders drawn, of how the existing subject identifies the object. (We will enter a more detailed discussion of identity in Book II:2.2.2.i.) The only permanence is the unity of this existence which can experience change even when there is no 'objective' subject of change.

108. Matter is an image, a symbol. Of what? It intends to stand for the external objectivity raised to the level of the absolute. But then, losing all its qualities, it turns into the absolute indistinctness. On the one hand, as it resides in physical objects, so one asks in an empirical manner more and more specific questions – atoms? quarks? strings? – in search for the limit of the distinctions, for the most immediate in the hierarchy of Being: the simple and indivisible. In a more materialistic fashion, matter, as the universal substratum, the always formed formless, is the limit of distinctions, namely, the ever indistinct. The differences of the tendencies and the apparently opposite directions notwithstanding, the two seem to coincide, for beyond the limit of distinctions there remains only the ultimate indistinct.

If one can form any non-relative concept of matter at all, it is simply that of the indistinct. But the image of something 'which remains when all else is stripped off' is as easy to posit as difficult to maintain, when conjoined with the totality of dissociated objects. In the language of substances and accidents it must emerge as the ultimate substance. But substances are also given the status of independent – and individual – existents. Such 'something' – an individual, independent existent above all temporal distinctions – might perhaps be thought of not as matter but rather as ... spirit. Yet spirit, as the similarly ultimate principle opposed to matter, is an equally empty result of the same absolutisation of relative aspects. We can admire Berkeley’s arguments but not the attempts to reduce the opposition to one of its terms. Granting primacy to spirit over matter is as good as doing the opposite. In either case what is left is only some contentless and propertyless void, while one remains involved into the dualism – if not of the claimed elements, so in any case of the used concepts, of spirit opposed to and abolishing matter or vice versa.

109. The primordial distinctions, the first acts of creation, do not introduce matter as opposed to spirit, body as opposed to mind – birth separates self from the one and the following chaos of distinctions does not single out any of them as more basic, more fundamental; it does not even oppose one to another. So far, that is all; there is as yet no structure, which the distinctions matter-spirit, not to mention body-mind, presuppose. Before subject gets dissociated from the object, before spirit gets dissociated from matter and mind from body, there is still only the nexus of chaos, where Being and Thinking are not two different things, not even two different things which mysteriously happen to coincide, but just one, as yet undifferentiated nexus. The primordial indistinctness is that which, in a sense, is underlaid all distinguishing and change when confronted by existence. However, it remains forever constant and indistinct, withdrawn beyond the horizon of temporal existence, for distinctions do not diminish it, do not change its eternal presence as the indistinct. Matter can be thus taken as the image of this 'ultimate objectivity'.

If one wanted to discern some materialism here, it would amount to saying that the stuff from which mind is made is the same as the stuff from which stars and galaxies are made, mind and body are made from the same one. But in the moment one thinks the one as matter which is opposed to anything whatsoever, one has already gone too far, one has projected some distinctions onto the indistinct. If, on the other hand, one says that matter is the same as one, then one has said nothing about the matter and merely used a
misleading, because endowed with specific connotations, name for the one.

5.2.3.ii. God vs. matter

The opposition of spirit and matter can be pushed even further into the transcendent sphere where it is the God or the One who stands on the other side, opposing matter. It is only a continuation of the previous antinomy but it makes the matter-spirit equivocity, which creeps in with a recurrent insistence, acutely clear and deeply unpleasant.

The following two fragments illustrate well the problem which has been facing the long tradition. “There are two, and two only, that cannot be defined, God and matter. For God is without limit and without form since He is formed by none, being the Form of all things. Similarly matter is without form and without limit, for it needs to be formed and limited from elsewhere, while in itself it is not form but something that can receive form.”85 “And this similarity between the Cause of all things [...] and this unformed cause – I mean matter [...] is understood in contrary sense. For the supreme Cause of all things is without form and limit because of its eminence above all forms and limits [...] Matter, on the other hand, is called formless by reason of its being deprived of all forms. For by it nothing is formed, but it receives different forms.”86

Matter, which “is negatively defined as not being any one of the things that are,”87 is very hard to distinguish from “the One which is beyond thought [and] surpasses the apprehension of thought, [...] the Universal Ground of existence while Itself existing not, for It is beyond all Being.”88 The apophatic language of the divine, just like the negative descriptions of the ultimate substratum, point to the equally all-transcending, indefinite and indistinct. Both opposites turn out to be just nothing. But one definitely does not want to identify God with matter, so some conceptual distinctions must be introduced. One has to distinguish the indistinguishable. From a vast variety of ingenious attempts to keep the two indistincts distinct, let us only mention one common, though dubious, motif. As the One is the giver (God is the creator), while matter is passive potentiality, one is easily led to maintaining the ‘analogical’ image of God as a handyman busying himself with transforming raw materials into various artifacts. The distinction between the two – formal and material – causes, extrapolated to the virtuality of the indistinct, seems to differentiate the two indistincts. Even if one tries to avoid this image, it invades and disturbs thinking once matter as the ultimate and formless substratum is admitted as a legitimate concept.

Matter appears in all respects like God – only with a huge negative sign making it actually the opposite of God. The experience of the actual dissociation of subject and object extended to the opposition spirit-matter finds the anthropomorphic, in the most negative sense, expression in ascribing power, activity, spirituality and other positive attributes to God and, on the other hand, mere potency, passivity, formlessness to materia prima.

This dualism projected into the indistinct carries moral dimension. The calmness of humble and dedicated contemplation is naturally opposed to the abruptness of sudden passions, the certainty of deep convictions to the unrest of hollow feelings. In an exaggerated and simplified form, the goodness of the soul is opposed to the corrupting influences of the body and, stretching this movement ‘upwards’ and ‘downwards’, one ends with the ultimate Good on the one, divine, side and the ultimate Evil on the other, material one.

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85J. S. Eriugena, Periphyseon. I:499D;499-500A
86Ibid. II:167-169
87Ibid. II:141
As God becomes a mere limit of perfections, the ‘most eminent’, ‘more-than-...’, the totality of positive predicates, so matter fills the need for the corresponding negative principle. “If it is necessary that what comes after the first should exist, and therefore that the Last should exist; and this is matter, which possesses nothing at all of the Good. And in this way too evil is necessary.”\textsuperscript{89}

The Orphic-Platonic devaluation of body and matter, extreme ascetism obsessed with “the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh,”\textsuperscript{90} the suppression of body and senses – all that may have particular reasons representing a response to real dangers. But we would not consider this traditional tension as a conflict of two opposite principles, spiritual and material, but as an existential possibility of breaking the continuity of Being which, dissociating the actual from the non-actual, sets the abruptness of minute impulses against the calmness of eternal presence. Since we are not addressing here the opposition between Good and Evil (we will in Book III), we only notice that its association with the opposition between God and matter is of a very dubious value. It seems to be merely a result of extrapolating the possible tensions between reason and lust to the metaphysical dimension. We question the very idea of matter as any fundamental principle which would be opposed to another, equally formless and contentless but, contrary to matter, good principle. God and matter, in so far as their ontological characteristics are concerned, seem to be indistinguishable – they both function as symbols of one and the same.

112. Viewing the indistinct as both the place of birth and the ultimate origin and identifying the negativity of God and matter, we might seem to maintain a heresy. Pantheism always threatens the back-rooms of Neoplatonism and its associate – negativity of the absolute. We do not, however, propose any pantheism. Neither do we identify God with matter. So far, we have not encountered anything divine about the one, while matter simply has no significant meaning in our setting. There is only one indistinct which is not identified with anything. Thinking of it in any specific way is already a mistaken projection, and identification of God with matter is only a resulting temptation. For the time being we will take the risk of offending some theological sensibilities and put the issue to rest. It will return in Book III, while a critique of pantheism will be given in 6.2.2.

5.2.4. Reflective thirst

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

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

'the end of discursive thinking', or other ends beyond which one hopes to encounter the suppressed 'otherness'. Otherness, like any relation, presupposes distance. To exist means to be confronted with the non-actuality of experience, with chaos and the indistinct; in the most actual form, this confrontation is just the reflective distance to the external object.

On the other hand, the projects of reflective reconstruction or conquest are, as it seems, doomed to failure. Perfect mimesis (whether in the artistic form of ancient sculpture or academic painting, or else as the scientific fantasies of doctors Frankensteins, AI, robotics or genome research) appears as one of the basic driving impulses. It, too, is an expression of the reflective thirst for the coincidence with – by the re-creation of – the original truth. This original, however, vastly transcends the perspectives of objectivist attitude and its possibilities. Consequently, no ultimate conquest is to be expected. For such a conquest would require reduction of whatever transcends the actuality of reflective act to the signs which can be grasped within its horizon. But as the higher levels are not accessible in terms of the lower distinctions, the reduction can never happen to be complete. Collecting the building-pieces, putting stone next to stone never finishes and “the stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”

So the construction starts anew...

The suggestions to renounce the reflective project express the thirst for the intimacy with reality, just like does the search for objectivity. Both aim at abolishing the distance between the actual and the non-actual by eliminating one of the confronted elements. But as this distance constitutes the very reflective being, abolishing it, even if it were possible, could not satisfy reflection leaving it alone in a solipsistic universe or cutting it off from the objective one.

Reflection, one's subjectivity, is not doomed to suffer because of the involvement in actuality which, after all, is its constitutive feature. Externalisation is not the same as alienation in the middle of an estranged world. It becomes so only under the spell of the objectivist illusion which, absolutising the actual dissociations, tries to find the absolute among them.

The subject of reflection does not constitute the whole being of human person and reflection becomes concrete when, remaining occupied with its objects, it avoids falling into the objectivist illusion. Concrete reflection is still reflection, it still operates with actual distinctions. But there is a big difference, even if no sharp border, between the two modes. One uses the signs to hold on to its objects, to conquer time by the objectivist spells conjuring the ghost of experience from its dissociated actualities. The other trades control for enjoyment and, merely noticing, allows things merge back into their element. It does not absolutise the actuality of its signs, it does not create an idol from its way of thinking, from the externality of its objects and the associated precision of the most rigid distinctions. Admitting its situation, it admits only its own nature; instead of the impossible attempts to abolish the distance, it simply acknowledges it. Only distance makes a relation, and hence community, possible. And to keep the distance, one has to be oneself. Although reflecting person is aware of something more than the actual object, reflection's ability does not extend beyond it. It does not even extend beyond the sign under which its object appears. The surrounding invisibility can be made present through the signs, but never enslaved. Admission that its only power is over the signs, its actual objects which do not exhaust the world, won't make reflection impotent. On the contrary, like all true humbleness, it makes stronger, that is, more real.

— Ps. CXVIII:22
6 In a few long words...

This section summarizes first, in 6.1, the current development, emphasizing the central points. In 6.2, we discuss some alternatives and a few possible questions.

6.1 Actualisation of virtuality

6.1.1 Two kinds of causes

Plato observes that “we may distinguish two sorts of causes, the one divine and the other necessary.” The distinction has been maintained by much of the following tradition. Unfortunately, the two kinds completely different and using the same word leads easily to unwarranted conflation. We distinguish sharply the vertical order of ontological founding, in which various aspects of more virtual nexuses become distinguished and, eventually, dissociated, and the horizontal order of dependence between elements of any given level which at the level of reflective dissociations can be taken as the usual causality. The latter does not concern us very much but the former is of central importance. It amounts to actualisation of virtuality, to dissociation of an aspect from a vague nexus and bringing it into the horizon of actuality, grasping it in a single reflective act, making it visible.

Actualisation of virtuality is to be sharply distinguished from the actualisation á la Aristotle which only materialises one among the given possibilities. Virtuality is distinct from possibility. The latter is a category of actuality, it is something definite and actual, even if only potentially. It is, so to speak, ready-made and its realisation is a mere assignment of the label here-and-now—a mere selection of one specific item from a list or, in the case of general concepts, specialisation and individuation. If \( x \) contains a possibility of \( y \), this possibility can be in some way read from \( x \), the actual shape of \( y \) is, in some sense, already given with \( x \). This is the sense in which the possibility of a fall is given along with balancing on a tightrope. This is also the sense in which a general concept contains its possible instantiations: an actual \( y \) is an instance of \( x \) only in so far as it conforms to the pattern already fully prescribed by \( x \). A view considering (our relations to) the world as consisting of only two dimensions, the actual and the possible, would be an example of objectivistic illusion, in that everything would consist of mere actualities, with some of them being only marked as not given here-and-now.

The relation between higher and lower, the founding and the founded, is not that of the general to the particular, that of instantiation or specialisation, nor that of selection of one item from a list of equally well-defined items. It is the relation of expression, possibly of incarnation, and in the ontological form addressed so far, that of actualisation. Thus, for instance, the origin does not actually contain all the hypostases—they are present only virtually. Birth founds the ultimate site of individuality which contains its possibilities only virtually and actualisation is differentiation which brings forth something which was not given prior to this event. In particular, what emerges as its result is entirely different from and in no objective way similar to that from which it emerged. The example, so beloved by the hylomorphic dualism, of a “perfect artisan [who] has a distinct knowledge of everything to be done before he does it” hardly applies to any more genuine creative activity than a mere construction work following plans and drawings made usually by somebody else. The example itself is flawed and our actualisation corresponds closer to

\(^{92}\text{Plato, Timaeus. III.37}\)
\(^{93}\text{J. Duns Scotus, Opus Oxoniense. I.d2.q1.a2}\)
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the truly creative process. An artist does not start with any precise, ready-made ‘form’ in mind which he so ‘applies’ to the ‘matter’ ‘actualising’ its ‘possibility’. Starting a work he will typically have only a vague intuition which lacks any precise form. The ‘creative impulse’ is exactly the pressure with which this vagueness cries for an actual form which it does not possess. Indeed, “how irritating is this introductory phase when one has to fetch from within the first shape of the work, so awkward, not yet enriched with all the tiny inspirations which the pen will encounter only later on.”

The process of artistic work is exactly the process through which this vague intuition for the first time finds an actual form and expression; it is like birth and not like causation. “A true artwork emerges «from the artist» in an arcane, mysterious and mystical way.”

Once it has emerged, only the artist or his close friends may be able to discern some traces connecting the artwork with its true origin. The discussions about the specific meaning of a particular work of art exemplify usually the attempts to capture this origin in actual terms, to grasp the conceptual ‘form’ to which the work was tailored. The impossibility of terminating most of such discussions witnesses to the fact that this ‘form’ is rather formless, that it “is only a trace of that which has no form; indeed, it is the latter which engenders form.”

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

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

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94 W. Gombrowicz, The Diaries. 1957:II
95 W. Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art. VIII. “[T]he craftsman goes back again to the wisdom of nature, according to which he has come into existence, a wisdom which is no longer composed of theorems, but is one thing as a whole, not the wisdom made into one out of many components, but rather resolved into multiplicity from one.” [Plotinus, Enneads. V:8:5] Kant notes that the schematism of our understanding, leading to the appearance of the actual object “is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover.” [I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. Analytic of Principles; A141/B180] A more recent example recording the problems with expressing the origination of the actual from the virtual is the following “What happens when we make an effort – say in writing a letter – to find the right expression for our thoughts? […] Now if it were asked: «Do you have thought before finding the expression?» what would one have to reply? And what, to the question: «What did the thought consist in, as it existed before its expression?»” [L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. I:335] The latter question can be hard to answer precisely and unambiguously, but this need not imply the negative answer to the former. The lack of a linguistic expression need not mean the absence of everything. The very effort to find the right expression is itself an expression of a prior presence which, in our view, is some virtual, not fully actualised element.
96 Plotinus, Enneads. VI:7:33 [MacKenna’s translation]
viewed as stages of the process of differentiation and actualisation of the virtual origin, they are but distinctions of degree.

117. The series of drawings below captures some of the essential aspects of our development.

0) 

1) 

The line 0 represents the indistinct one and the point • in 1) the birth. The born being begins to ‘grow’ which is represented by the gradually larger circles, as in 2) below. The main analogy concerns some properties of the so called stereographic projection, which can be applied in the moment the point has turned into a circle.

2) 

There is, namely, a one-to-one correspondence between all the points on the infinite line and all the points on the circle. The mapping is obtained by, starting with a point on the line, say A, drawing an imaginary line to the pole of the circle marked with •. The point where this line intersects the circle, A’, is the image of A. All the different points of the infinite line will thus be mapped to different points on the finite circle and vice versa. The point at which the circle touches the line will be mapped to itself. The points close to it will be relatively exactly mapped on the lowest part of the circle. The further away from the circle the points lie on the line, the ‘denser’ will they be mapped to the points closer to the pole •.

The pole •, the ‘origin’ is, too, an image of something originating from the line. Of what? Of its infinity. Two lines are parallel if, being in the same plane, they do not intersect. Put in a somehow more abstract language: two lines (in the same plane) are parallel iff they intersect in infinity. The further from the circle we move, the closer to the ‘origin’ the images of the points will be; the line determining the image B’ of B, as B moves towards infinity, will be ‘more and more parallel’ to the bottom line. The two lines; the bottom one and the one parallel to it and touching the circle at its top pole, will intersect in infinity. The ‘origin’, reflecting the so called “point in infinity”, is thus the image of the infinity of the line on the finite (but unlimited) figure of the circle.

As all analogies, this one is not perfect. It may suggest the dualism of the circle and the line. Although we do claim the genuine separation by birth, this is not to be understood as dissociation of two alien elements. The point of origin, which in the image has been split into the pole of the circle and the infinity of the line, is one and the same. Existence, carrying the trace of its origin as the most constant and deepest aspect of its life, ‘touches the infinity’ in the virtual centre of its being. As Plotinus says it: “[t]he soul is not a circle in the same way as a geometrical figure, but because there is in it [as centre, our •] and around it [as circumference, our line] the ancient nature, and because it comes from an origin of this kind.”

118. 2) represents (an early) stage of experience with chaos lying somewhere in-between 1) and

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\(^{97}\)Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI:9.8. We might imagine the ‘ends’ of the line bent to meet at the pole •, forming an ellipse containing the circle. More adequate in some respects, this would distort the rest of our analogy.
2), one could say, immediately after 1), when the circle is still very small.

The short dotted line represents the level at which actuality is constituted as distinguished from non-activity. 3) represents the stage of reflective experience. The circle became big enough to cross this line which now marks two spheres; what lies below it (e.g., \(A'\)) represents the actual and what lies above (like \(B'\)) the not-actual and, eventually, the non-actual aspects of an experience.

What lies on the circle ‘under’ the dotted line represents the actuality which we have also characterised as simultaneity. With respect to 2) this means that all the distinctions, all the images on the circle are simultaneous. Time has not begun to flow and all distinctions still coexist in a manner similar to the chaotic co-presence. At 3) the simultaneity becomes limited to the actual contents, to the horizon of actuality.

Imagining further ‘growth’ of the circle, we would soon reach the stage where the actual part is almost negligibly small compared to the non-activity above it.

We should also point out how the origin, the pole, and the chaos of distinctions, the ‘dense’ images of the remote points compressed closest to the pole, withdraw during the ‘growth’ further and further away from the actuality: the vertical distance between the two is marked by the growing number of distinctions which separate them, the points on the circle between the dotted line of actuality and the pole •.

Finally, imagine the circle ‘moving’ along the bottom line. As the circle in 3) ‘moves’ to the right, the image \(B'\) of the point \(B\) will ‘slide down’ the circle from its presence ‘up there’, close to the ‘origin’. At some moment, when also the actual point \(B\) on the line gets close enough, it enters the horizon of actuality. (Eventually, if the circle stops at the point \(B\), the two would coincide.) This could be taken as a picture of the process of actualisation which ‘pulls’ the vague image \(B'\) out of the compressed density close to the origin and isolates it in sharper and sharper form as it becomes actual.\(^98\)

The actual experience is thus a juxtaposition of the actual contents of the line (close to, or under the circle, like \(A\) in 3) and the traces of these contents as they enter the sphere of actuality on the circle ‘from above’ (\(A'\) in 3). This goes equally well with the Gestalt-like psychology of perception, with the ‘filling in’ of the unperceived aspects by the ‘mind’, as with the deeper phenomena of vague anticipation and foreknowledge, things and events which are, consciously or subconsciously, anticipated and which are as much reflections of the approaching events as of the psychic and intellectual structure of the person who happens to be receptive to this kind of experiences. The traces are what connect the actuality with its non-actual and invisible roots.

Let us push this analogy just one step further. During a finite ‘life-time’, the circle will traverse only a finite portion of the line, will collect only a limited number of actual

\(^98\)Of course, technically, the image \(B'\) is equally precise, no matter how close to the pole it is. By “vagueness” we should understand here the density of the images which are closer to the pole (“what is closer to the one, is lesser with respect to quantity” [Proclus, Elements of Theology, §179]), as opposed to their ‘more adequate’ representations, the closer they are to the point where the circle touches the line.
experiences. We mark the two extreme points on the line: \( L \) and \( R \) – the limits of the actual experiences the circle ever may have. The drawing 4) below illustrates the situation when the circle is on the \( L \) extreme – the image \( L' \) is on the edge of the horizon of actuality. (The dotted line of actuality is adequately lowered indicating the ‘growth’ of the circle. \( L' \) coincides now with the point of intersection of the circle and this line.) The points lying on the circle above it, that is between \( L' \) and the pole, will never enter the horizon of actuality (because the circle can move only to the right).

4)

The point \( R' \) is the current image of the other extreme \( R \). The points on the circle lying (clockwise) between \( L' \) and \( R' \) are those which never will be images of anything within the horizon of actuality on the line – their pre-images lie either to the left of \( L \) or to the right of \( R \). Now, as the circle moves towards this other extreme point \( R \), \( R' \) will ‘slide down’ reaching, eventually the edge of the horizon of actuality (symmetric to the current \( L' \)), while \( L' \) will ‘slide upwards’ reaching the point opposite to the current \( R' \). These two images, the current \( R' \) and the analogous position for \( L' \) obtained when the circle moves to the \( R \) extreme, induce the sphere which is marked with the dashed line. This sphere represents (relatively to the circle, not to its position on the line nor to the line itself) the part of the circle which never corresponds to any actual experience. It is the most condensed collection of the images originating beyond the limits of ever experienced actualities between \( L \) and \( R \), where “since all things [are] together, nothing [is] distinguishable because of its smallness.”

Irrespective of the position of the circle on the line between \( L \) and \( R \), the four levels can be distinguished in its structure. They correspond to the birth from nothingness (the ●), chaos which turns into invisibles (above the dashed line), visible experiences (below the dashed line) and actual reflection (below the dotted line). Every actual experience contains all levels.

The objectivistic illusion ignores, if nothing else, at least this fact. It bases its understanding exclusively on the fact that anything between \( L \) and \( R \) is given in some actual experience. This is then extrapolated beyond these limits. Now, there need not be anything wrong with such an extrapolation. If this (or some other) circle moved beyond \( L \) or \( R \), it would encounter new actualities. But it becomes an illusion when the totality of actualities is taken as all that is, when the non-actual aspects of every experience, the higher parts of the circle, are abstracted away. The illusion attempts to grow the circle to infinity in which case, in an unimaginable, Cusanus-like fashion, the circle would become the line itself, coinciding with it at every point, comprising everything within its all-embracing actuality. (Let us not ask what would happen with the pole and ‘all the rest’ of the circle.) Such an operation not only does not help to understand the finitude of the circle. It creates also a confused mixture of this finitude and the infinity of the line, obliterating their respective character and, consequently, their confrontation.

99Anaxagoras DK 59B1
6.1. Actualisation of virtuality

6.1.2. To be is to be distinguished

Birth, the original separation is the only ontological event. But do not later distinctions have any ontological significance? Certainly they do, they give rise to different beings and different kinds of beings. Instead of Berkeley’s esse est percipi, we would say esse est distinguere, to be is to be distinguished, to make a difference. To exist is to distinguish, existere est distinguere, but this marks only the specificity of existence which, too, is a being by being distinguished, separated from the one.

This fundamental role of distinction accounts for the common association of ‘being’ and ‘independence’. Independence, as being distinguished, is not a property of something that is – it is what makes it be. The association can be, and was, pressed to the limit by claiming that only particulars ‘are’ – particulars, that is, the most definitely distinguished entities, eventually, completely dissociated ideal substances, prone to enclosure within the ideal limit of the horizon of immediacy, in a single point. But being is not only the event of the utmost immediacy; it begins at the very beginning.

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

On the one hand, ‘Being’ can be viewed as the transcategorial transcendent, the univocal property which can be possessed by various things, but by all in the same way which simply makes them ‘be’. “‘Being’ is something fixed and restful in being(s).” According to Aquinas, it is a a pure that, a divine act above the duality of form-matter, which endows a ‘what’ with the actual existence. It is “the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual; for nothing has actuality except so far as it exists. Hence existence is that which actuates all things, even their forms. Therefore [...] it is not compared to other things as the receiver is to the received; but rather as the received to the receiver.”

We note here the insistence on actuality. Indeed, the non-actual existence might seem a contradicio in adjecto. The problem is, however, exactly in the fact that attaching the label ‘being’, we think ‘being actually’, perhaps even, ‘being physically given’. If something is not so given, it is not. Now, there is an obvious difference between the building actually standing here and the one which is only imagined. The difference is not conceptual, it consists only in attaching the additional label of ‘being’ to one and the same ‘conceptual object’. But in order to attach a label to a ‘conceptual object’, this object must already be itself, even if it is not physically given.

The need to attach this label at all is grounded in the prior dissociation of being from that which is, of existence from essence. But since essence, or that which is assumed eventually to be, is itself not nothing, it must somehow be even before it acquires the actual existence. Whether it is in the ideal world of forms, or in the mind of God, does not concern us here. What concerns us is the involved identification of being with actuality

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101 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I.q4.a1.ad3
and the simultaneous negligence of the fact that the postulated essences also are and, in fact, are with the assumed specificity of actual beings.

124. The characterisation of the other line might start with the observation that “Being” is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing.\textsuperscript{102} Although the observation is shared by both lines, the consequences drawn from it are different. ‘Being’ does not seem to be any real predicate—it is conceptually empty, as is, logically, every predicate which can be applied indiscriminately to everything. This suggests that one should, perhaps, identify it completely with things which actually are. After all, there is only that which is, ‘to be’ is necessarily ‘to be something’: ‘essence and existence are not two things. On the contrary, the words “thing” and “to be” signify one and the same thing, but the one in the manner of a noun and the other in the manner of a verb [...]’\textsuperscript{103} This identification is a general tendency of the empirically, and later also analytically, oriented philosophy (the difference being only that the former renounces Being on the grounds of atomistic ontology while the latter for its irresolvable involvement into more specific conceptual and linguistic contexts.) In a more analytical formulation: “There are as many kinds of existential statements, as there are kinds of the objects of discourse.”\textsuperscript{104} Why not follow such a line of thought all the way and say: “There are as many kinds of existential statements, as there are [...] objects of discourse.” Now, the kinds seem to disappear and we are left with: “There are as many [...] existential statements, as there are [...] objects of discourse.” Assuming only particulars versus their kinds may be the distinction between nominalism and (some form of) conceptualism which does not concern us here. In either case, the tendency is the same: as being means being a particular individual, Being has no meaning except, perhaps, as a totally equivocal abbreviation. It is dissolved in the multiplicity of actual ‘somethings’, in the empirical fact of distinctness of actual things.

Unlike in the previous case, here the dualism of existence-essence need not be so problematic. But this happens only because one aspect is dissolved in the other, ‘Being’ in that which is. The reduction to actuality is even more transparent, in that the transcendent vagueness of ‘Being’ is removed completely, leaving only the actual existents. This whole line of thought, from Ockham to modern empiricism, is characterised by the atomistic ontology of particulars, each of them being in its own particular manner. Yet, no matter how many kinds of existential statements one manages to postulate or even identify, they all are still existential statements. No matter how many distinct particulars are, they all are. Admitting the conceptual emptiness and pronouncing it a mere homonymity, may excuse one from conceptual analysis. But philosophy is not merely conceptual analysis. It becomes such only when it has first dispensed with the existential relevance. And when it has done that, it will hardly find it again.

125. These two, apparently contrary tendencies, are elaborations of the two aspects of the unitary event of distinction. ‘To be’ is to be distinguished and as soon as you distinguish, you distinguish something and this something is. It is even if it remains vague and unclear ‘what’ it is. Consider, “for instance, when somebody, approaching from a distance, causes in me a sense-perception with the help of which I can judge only that what I see is an existent. In this case it is clear that my first abstractive cognition (first, that is, in order of origination) is the cognition of existence, and of nothing less general; consequently it is

\textsuperscript{102}I. Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason. I:2nd Division 3.4, A 598-599/B 626-627}

\textsuperscript{103}W. Ockham, \textit{Summa totius logicae. III:II.c.xxvii}

\textsuperscript{104}N. Malcolm, \textit{Anselm's ontological arguments. III}
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not a specific concept nor a concept proper to a singular thing.\footnote{W. Ockham, \textit{Quoddiheta}. Iq.13} We can recognise that something is without knowing ‘what’ it is. Even the most primordial \textit{distinctions}, marking the essentially \textit{non-actual aspects} of later experiences, which can never be grasped as any specific concepts, essences nor particulars, introduce the differentiation in the \textit{indistinct} and announce something that is. When we try “mentally remove all the things that participate Being, nothing seems to remain.”\footnote{Nicholas of Cusa, \textit{On Sacred Ignorance}. I:17[51]} \textit{Nothing} seems to remain and yet, in its immediate vicinity, something unclear and almost indistinguishable, yet already distinct, begins to appear. And so Heidegger still asks: “\textit{Was ist das ‘es’ das gibt}?”\footnote{\textit{Es gibt} is the German ‘There is’, which literally says “it gives”. One can be led by this German phrase towards something ‘that is’ (and gives) easier than by its English equivalent.} What remains is the \textit{indistinct}, but followed immediately by the ‘first event’, \textit{distinction} which breaks the silence of \textit{nothingness}.

If something remains not \textit{distinguished}, it is not even a ‘something’, it is not even an ‘it’ – there remains \textit{indistinct}, but it is not ‘it’ that remains \textit{indistinct}, it is not \textit{‘es’ das gibt}. The mere fact of \textit{distinction} relates to the primordial emergence of all contents from the \textit{one} and the same which remains always \textit{above} them. “\textit{To be}” signifies nothing determinable because it merely pulls whatever is \textit{distinguished} out of its \textit{indistinct origin}. The copula lends its subjects the universal privilege of participation in Being, of being \textit{distinguished}. \textit{Distinction} is only secondarily a \textit{dissociation} of \textit{x} from \textit{y}; primarily, it \textit{distinguishes} \textit{x} from the \textit{indistinct} background, and \textit{traces} of this \textit{aspect} mark all \textit{actuality}. The universality of … – the concept? the idea? the intuition? – no, of the \textit{experience} of ‘to be’ is coextensive with the universality of \textit{distinguishing}, that is, with all life. This is the univocity of ‘to be’. Brought to the level of language, there is, of course, no need for a particular word, since ‘to be’ is \textit{present} in every word. As Derrida, quoting Benveniste, observes discussing the transcategoriality of ‘to be’: “the strangeness is in the facts – that the verb of existence, out of all verbs, has this privilege of being present in an utterance in which it does not appear.”\footnote{J. Derrida, \textit{The supplement of Copula}. The Remainder as Supplement… p.202. One can recall here the example of Semitic languages which dispense with the use of ‘to be’ as copula and express it in the nominative sentences (e.g., “Pegasus winged horse.” for “Pegasus is a winged horse.”)} It is there, and it is everywhere, because every word and gesture brings in a \textit{distinctions}, while without \textit{distinctions} there would be no world and no words.

The celebrated equivocity of “\textit{to be}” is the equivocity of \textit{distinction}. \textit{Distinguished} contents may have nothing in common, no common genus, no links of similarity, except for being \textit{distinguished}. The equivocity is the possibly unlimited differentiation of the distinguished contents. But it is always accompanied by the univocity of the mere fact of \textit{distinguishing}. “[T]he difference between the existence of chairs and the existence of numbers seems, on reflection, strikingly like the difference between numbers and chairs. Since you have the latter to explain the former, you do not also need ‘exist’ to be polysemic.”\footnote{J. A. Fodor, \textit{Concepts}. III:p.54} There is whatever is \textit{distinguished} and, beyond that, \textit{nothing}, the \textit{indistinct}.

6.1.3. One is

But now, if to be is to be \textit{distinguished}, then \textit{one}, as \textit{indistinct}, is not. It certainly is not \textit{a} \textit{being}, is not a something. “Being must have some definition and therefore be limited; but the First cannot be thought of as having definition and limit, for thus it would not be the
Source but the particular item indicated by the definition.”

But, as a matter of fact, “it is and it is not so, that it is not.”

It is not by being defined but by being distinguished as the indistinct. It is distinguished from everything which, being differentiated, falls under the categories of distinctions. It is nothing because it is indistinct, undifferentiated, but it is distinguished from all the distinctions.

127. But still, is it only by being so distinguished? Although our point of departure is birth founding the confrontation, that is, the insoluble relation between the existence and the one, the latter retains also primacy in spite of this apparent dependence on the existence. For the one “does not need the things which have come into being from him, but leaves what has come into being altogether alone, because he needs nothing of it, but is the same as he was before he brought it into being.”

If no distinctions were ever made, if no existence came to being, the indistinct would simply remain indistinct. It is not relative to any distinctions being made. It is thus both distinguished from the totality of all distinctions and not relative to any distinctions, that is, absolute.

In particular, it is not something which merely ‘appears’, not to mention mere ‘appearing for me’. It does not appear at all; as indistinct it can not possibly appear. It is, it is above any existence and, consequently, above anything that is. It is transcendent, ultimate reality which founds the reality of all specific things and distinctions. The eternal presence of this transcendence makes it for ever impossible to accept various forms of immaneitism, subjectivism, solipsism. We know that is, and we know that the more, the less it ‘appears’ to our understanding and conceptual constructions.

128. Because it does not appear, but is, we know that with unmistakable certainty. But this does not imply any ‘what’ – we know that one is, but not what it is. We can say that there is, but ‘what it is’ is already the question about relative distinctions. Insisting on that and opposing all ‘whats’ with respect to one, we are not trying to actually distinguish these two aspects. On the contrary, as Scholastics used to say, its being is its essence, its that is its ‘what’. The inability to say ‘what’ is not due to our imperfect knowledge and limitations – it is simply because there is nothing to know about its ‘what in-itself’, because there is no ‘whatness’ beyond that, hidden from our view behind the eternal veil. Dismissal of any ‘what’ is the proper knowledge of that, of the fact that one is none of the things of creation, that it involves no distinctions which first can provide any material for (knowing) ‘what’. The assumption that beyond, behind, above, there hides something which we should be able to grasp, although we can not at present, is to turn one into something, at least in principle, graspable, an epistemological limit. One becomes thus something relative and gives rise to the objectivistic illusion, according to which there is actually something more to be known, some ‘essence of all things’, some ‘maximum’, which isn’t known only because of the finitude of our mind or whatever limitations one finds adequate to postulate. Believing that something hides, that one is more than the indistinct, is to project the assumed possibility of distinguishing, if not any particular distinctions, into the indistinct. But it transcends our being in this simple sense that this being is constituted by birth and distinctions. It is not merely an epistemological limit beyond which no distinction has been as yet drawn. One can always draw more distinctions without in the slightest affecting the absoluteness of the one, without approaching any limit. It is the ontological limit, the absolute beginning and the source of everything that is. It is that which never is

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111 Parmenides DK 28B2
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distinguished, no matter how many distinctions we have made. It is the residual site which always and forever remains indistinct. It is indistinct and this is the only truth one can and need say about it. This is the only way of ‘limiting’ it against that which ‘delimits’ it – the world of distinctions.

It is not any ‘thing in itself’ which self-awareness adumbrates to reflection and which epistemology postulates realising its limitation to the ‘objective’ knowledge threatened with complete ‘subjectivity’. It is not any unknowable, inaccessible $x$. It is perfectly well known, if only we allow ourselves such a (mis)use of the verb “to know”: we know that, we know that is. This irrevocable certainty, equipollent with the certainty that we exist, has only one counterpart – the certainty that we are not everything. In more specific terms: that we were born and will die. These seem to be the only absolutely certain things in life. The only things and, as a matter of fact, one and the same thing. That which is, becoming present through birth, is the transcendence above the existence. To exist, to be confronted means to know that one is finite. (To avoid misusing the word “know” again, we can reformulate it: to exists means to live the fact that one is not the master.) “That which has become has also, necessarily, an end.”\textsuperscript{113} Beginning is the end – they are but temporally differentiated epitomes of the ultimate transcendence.

Separation by birth founds thus the fundamental certainties of life which are all variations on the theme of the absolute that. Deriving from the confrontation with transcendence, they have all ‘negative’ character. One knows that one will die, but not when, how. One knows that one can not control everything, but there is hardly anything particular which one could not, at least in principle, bring under one’s control. Etc. The apparent lack of ‘positive’ content in such certainties expresses, however, the fundamental positive insight: that is. It opens in fact the horizon of concrete freedom – it expresses only the ultimate that above any ‘what’, leaving ‘whats’ to the actual relativity of existence.

The absolute transcendence of the one must not be taken as some alien remoteness – it is not an inaccessible, epistemological limit. As the ontological source it is present in everything that is, it is present “everywhere and everywhere entire.”\textsuperscript{114} This presence has, however, the specificity of not residing in any particular things but, so to speak, between them. It is nothingness which separates one thing from another and which reminds constantly that all distinctions come from the indistinct. As this apparently empty space, which separates one act from another, one situation from another, it is present as, on the one hand, the source of whatever is actually given and, on the other hand, as the source from which new things, not actually given, can emerge and enter the actual situation (in reflective terms, as the unpredictability of the world). In this sense, we might call it “immanent”, if only we do not consider it as opposite of transcendence, but rather as its intimate presence. In both senses, it remains above (or between) the actual distinctions. But this apparent remoteness from the actually given is the same as existential presence.

It is also present “everywhere entire” because indistinctness does not admit any measure. It is not ‘something’ that is indistinct which might be smaller or bigger. ‘Something’ is already distinct and only distinct things allow gradation. A ‘tiny bit of indistinctness’, if we allowed ourselves such a figure of speech, is the same as indistinctness itself, for it is not any bit which is indistinct but indistinctness which is present. Putting it differently, indistinct, not knowing any ‘it’, does not have any subject or, rather, is its own subject. It either is entire or, when any distinctions are admitted, withdraws ‘between’ them and

\textsuperscript{113}Anaximander DK 12A15

\textsuperscript{114}Eckhart Latin Sermons Ga.III:16-22 [B. McGinn, ed., Meister Eckhart... XXIX, God is one]
is not at all ‘in’ them.

131. Let us gather these aspects of one’s being for future references:

1. One is distinguished from all distinctions but, primarily, preceding (in the order of founding) all distinctions, it is not relative to them being made. If no distinctions were made, then the only remaining would be the indistinct. It is thus both distinguished from the totality of all distinctions and not relative to any distinctions, that is, absolute.

2. It is not only indistinct but indistinguishability-as-such, not something which has not been distinguished ‘as yet’, but something which by its very nature never can nor will be differentiated. It is the ultimate limit of all distinctions, the limit beyond which no distinctions are ever drawn. As it happens, unity is exactly a limit of distinctions. In Book II (especially, 1.1.2 and 2.2.2.i), we will discuss the identity of particular things as such a limit. Here it is the absolute unity of the one. As the horizon surrounding all distinctions, the one founds the unity of the ‘whole world’, makes all differences appear not merely as a chaotic multiplicity but as the unity circumscribed within the limit.

3. The indistinct is one and the same for all. Two indistincts is an impossibility, “for if there was another of this kind, both [as indistinct] would one.”

4. It is immutable – no matter what distinctions are made, it remains unchanged beyond and above them, as the eternal horizon. All distinctions belong already to the world, and leave indistinct behind – unchanged, unaffected, untouched. The indistinct nothingness does not diminish as a consequence of all distinctions. ‘The First remains intact even when other entities spring from it.’

115 It does not shrink while science makes its progress; nor as God does, according to Lurianic Kabbalah, in the first stage of «tsimtsum» (contraction), making space for the creation through the introvert act of self-limiting withdrawal. Spatial analogies may require shrinkage or dissolution of the indistinct as distinctions enter the stage, but these are only quantitative, imperfect analogies.

5. It is the origin of all distinctions – not necessarily in the sense of being the source emanating them in an eternal necessity or else creating them by an act of free will, but in the sense that all distinctions are made into it and arise from it. It is the first and necessary condition of all distinctions.

6. Remaining above all distinctions it is invisible, ultimately transcendent. Yet this transcedence does not contradict its presence in the midst of all distinctions. It is immanent in the sense of accompanying every actual situation, of being the origin of all actual distinctions and the source of ever new possibilities.

6.1.4. The asymmetry of being

One is, existence separated directly from it is and everything distinguished, the whole ‘sublunar world’ is, too. Yet, this univocity of being harbours the equivocity of different

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115 Plotinus, Enneads. V:4.1. Plotinus does not, of course, use the word “indistinct”. Eckhart does: “all distinct things are two or more, but all indistinct things are one.” [Eckhart, Commentary on the Book of Wisdom. (Ws VII:27a) [after B. McGinn, ed., Meister Eckhart… p.167]]

116 Ibid. V:5.5 [MacKenna’s translation]

117 Transliteration follows that used in G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism.
kinds of being. We are not so much concerned with the difference between being of a chair and being of a pen which, indeed, is only the difference between chair and pen. But we classify beings according to the hypostasis to which they belong and we should emphasize one important aspect of this hierarchy.

One central distinction concerns beings vs. *existence*. *Existence* is separated directly from the *one*, not as its part, but rather an *imago*, §4, it is begotten, not made. As such, it is not relative to anything except the *one* from which it is born. ‘Being’ of all other beings means to be distinguished, it is relative to the one who *distinguishes*. Significant differences between beings depend not on what they are distinguished against, as when *x* is judged distinct from *y*, but on the background from which they are distinguished, on the level of *founding* at which they emerge. For everything is that from which it is distinguished in this sense. The pen is blue being distinguished from ‘blue’, which relation does not obtain when we view the pen as distinct from the ball.

The most fundamental *distinction* is *birth*, *separation* from the *one*, yielding units from the *unity*, *henads* from the *monad*. Being separated from *one*, *existence* is *one*. But it is not *one* in the sense of identity. It is in fact distinguished from the *one* and *one* is not the *existence*. *One* is not the *existence* but the *transcendence* which makes the *existence* ‘be’ – not by coinciding with it but by *confronting* it. The higher remains *above* the lower but the lower ‘is’ only in virtue of the higher’s *presence*. “I am not in them; they are in Me.”

Chaos, as the first hypostasis, *is one*. But *one* is not *chaos*, it remains *above* and beyond *chaos*, as the *transcendent unity* limiting all differentiation. Speaking a bit paradoxically, *chaos* is *one* because *one* is the limit beyond which *chaos* ceases to be chaos. It is only by being its own limit that something at all ‘is’. *Experience*, arising from *chaos*, *is chaos*. This does not mean that it is chaotic, only that *chaos* underlies it, is its *founding* element from which all elements of *experience* emerge. And again, being such a *founding* element, it remains beyond and *above* *experience* – *chaos* is not *experience*, but its horizon which limits the *experience*, beyond which we cease to *experience*. Finally, *reflective* *experience* with its ‘beings at hand’ is *experience* but not vice versa; *experience* is the limit of *reflection*, usually called “its beginning”. But such a name tends to *de-concretise* *reflection* forgetting that it remains ‘in’ *experience*, that the *founding* element does not recede in some pre-reflective past but remains *present* *above*, or underneath, the new level. In short, “there is from the first principle to ultimate an outgoing in which unfailingly each principle retains its own seat while its off-shot takes another rank, a lower, though on the other hand every being is in identity with its prior as long as it holds that contact,”

This asymmetry of being is reflected in the fact that higher level, *founding* the lower one and thus constituting its ‘being’, is not accessible to the categories of the lower level. The *unity* of the higher level is at best reflected only as some ideal *totality* of the *distinctions*.

118 *The Bhagavad-Gita*. VII:12
119M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion*. II:3 §24
120Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:2 2 [MacKenna’s translation]
of the lower level, but such totalities never sum up to yield the unity they only imperfectly reflect. This higher unity appears as a mere totality exactly when we attempt a thorough reduction of the higher to the lower. Put a bit differently, if ‘x is y’, the asymmetry means that y transcends x, is above x. But at the same time, x is ‘in’ y, participates in it, and thus y is thoroughly present, immanent. y appears for x remote and inaccessible exactly when x tries to drag y down to its own level, when it tries to appropriate y. But if only x ceases to insist on capturing y, on shaping y according to x’s expectations, y becomes more clearly present and x gains concreteness. Taken to the extreme, one, seen from the perspective of the actual existence, is remote and transcendent. Yet, every existence is one, participates in one, as confrontation with it constitutes the very existence. Thus one is also immanent, most intimately present. “Nothing is completely severed from its prior.”

But it becomes severed when, retaining its own mode and insisting on its own categories, it tries to appropriate the prior. We lose by chasing.

6.1.5. Virtual co-presence

134. The asymmetry of being involves an aspect which we have frequently mentioned and will now comment more closely. We have described the emergence of reflective experiences in terms of a temporal process which, indeed, finds place. But we have also repeatedly emphasized that this development should not be viewed merely as a linear process in which one actuality replaces another. On the contrary, the actualisation of virtuality is something which, once the level of reflective dissociations has been reached, finds place at every moment. Like ontogenesis repeats phylogenesis, so every actual experience reflects, or is surrounded by, all deeper levels of existence. The hierarchy of levels, once established, remains constant, reflecting the ever present order of ontological founding. In this order, the founding element is prior primarily not in the sense of having existence independent from the founded ones, but in the sense of, on the one hand, being their necessary condition and, on the other hand, of not being relative to the character of these lower elements. When lower levels are established, the higher ones do not disappear but remain present. All our considerations are made with the view to this co-presence of actual and virtual elements, the co-presence of all levels.

135. This implies, in particular, that ontological priority of the higher levels notwithstanding, they are not to be dissociated from the lower ones. They are present only through or underneath the lower ones. Thus, in so far as we can legitimately speak about the one, it is not the one ‘in itself’ (nor ‘for itself’), but only its presence, that is, its transcendence confronting existence. It is a pure virtuality, a background behind the chaos – it has no presence except through differentiation, staying always above it. Although it is the first, it is inseparable from the second; although it is one, it is present only through the chaos of many. In this sense the double meaning of the Greek arche applies to one: it is the ‘origin’ from which everything emerged and the ‘principle’ governing all, not in any specific sense but merely as the constant presence surrounding – and penetrating – every actuality.

The unchangeable Platonic Being is not the opposite of temporal becoming and impermanence. The two do constitute different ontological levels but not disjoint ontological spheres. They are only the two extremes of the continuous line stretching from the origin to every, most minute immediacy, the extremes between which existence unfolds. We should never dissociate virtual elements (whether aspects of one nexus or levels of one trace) and

121 Plotinus, Enneads. V:2 1 [MacKenna’s translation]
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consider them 'in themselves', as separate entities. They have meaning only in connection with each other, only when seen in the unity of the process in which they are involved.

All levels belong to every experience, all higher levels and forms of transcendence remain present, though not actual. The successive stages are not passed to be left behind - they accumulate. "For we are not cut off from him or separate, [...] but we breathe and are preserved because that Good has not given its gifts and then gone away but is always bestowing them as long as it is what it is."¹²² Just like pen, distinguished from 'blue', is no longer 'blueness' but remains blue, so existence, separated from the one, remains one. This 'remaining' is the asymmetry of being what one has emerged from, no longer identical to it, but ontologically participating in it. Nexuses of earlier distinctions are gathered underneath the later ones. Beyond the actual horizon of every relation, there remains the background - not only in its horizontal dimension as merely more objects of the same kind, but as vertically transcendent, as something truly inaccessible to this new form of relation, as an "indefinite murmur of being" under the newly emerged, visible surface of things. Inaccessible as it is, it is constitutive for the being of the lower elements.

Thus every actuality remains interwoven into other aspects of the nexus from which it emerged. Even if various aspects become completely dissociated, the presence of the whole nexus is marked by its trace. It lends the dissociated and substantialised entities an underlying unity, either as their limit or some relation between them (e.g., the relation of meaning between the abstract sign and the signified, as the trace of sign; the relation after as the trace of the unity dissociated into reflective subject and its object; the objective space and time relating distinct places and nows, as the traces of spatio-temporality).

In this way, the ultimate nexus of the origin survives in the trace of 'all things hanging together'. It does not help much to understand how they actually hang together, but it marks all our understanding with the underlying idea of unity. For such a nexus, the mythological language can often be better than the philosophical one. Birth from the one can be found in the archetype of a seed or egg, like that which, according to Aristophanes, Nyx (Night) laid in Erebus (the Darkness of the Underworld) and from which, in due time, Eros (according to some versions, the very first of gods) was born. Or else like that which, according to Basilides' gnostic, was deposited by God before generating a series of beings and eventually the visible universe. It is not obvious that philosopher understands more of it, even if he expresses it in an apparently more precise language: "The One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle of all things, not all things, but all things have that other kind of transcendent existence; for in a way they do occur in the One; or rather they are not there yet, but they will be."¹²³

Nexus is not a term of explanation. It does not provide sufficient reasons nor efficient causes. It is the term of the origin, indicating only that some things belong together, not in a mere 'togetherness' of dissociated entities, but in the most intimate, germinal closeness. Even when dissociated and posited as independent entities, they remain inseparably bound together by their origin in the same nexus. Commenting on Parmenides' poem, a scholar remarks: "Parmenides creates the impression of the archaic argumentation in which, once the system and the convictions are given, the premises and conclusions tend to appear in the presentation as merely put next to each other."¹²⁴ This "merely" signals the derogatory view of such a 'putting next to each other', which is quite understandable when one's

¹²²Plotinus, Enneads, VI.9.9
¹²³Ibid. V:2.1
¹²⁴G. Calogero, Studi sull'eletismo.
aim is an explanation. But the ‘mere putting next to each other’ can also express an intention deeper than mere explanation. Nexus is the central element of such an archaic understanding which does not dare to dissociate all things in order to, having grasped them with full precision, bring them under one’s control. For it senses that, by such a precise dissociation, they lose their original concreteness. Instead, trying to give an account of this original togetherness, which marks their ontological priority, it keeps them in their primordial vagueness, as “opposites that still are not opposed.”

Useless as such a mode of thinking may be for providing precise explanations, it retains an aspect completely absent from explanations: concreteness. Although common language usage will hardly distinguish the two, concreteness is almost the opposite of precision. Precision grasps, concreteness opens. Precision requires narrowing of the horizon of attention to the most immediate and minute in order to draw the borders in a... precise way. Precision amounts to excluding, cutting off (praescindere) all that threatens with slipping out of immediate control. This exclusion is what is precise about, for instance, a concept. Its ideal limit is a point and mathematics its ideal image.

But mathematics is also abstract – not because it is not precise but because it is not concrete. Concreteness requires presence of all higher levels, of deeper aspects of experience. Like precision, it is a possible feature of actuality, of actual signs or actions. But unlike precision it does not require univocal exactness. On the contrary, it will typically involve some undetermined element, something which slips out of the reflective grasp and must be left to the concreteness of experience. “It is possible to ‘understand’ something, deeply, intimately, without ‘grasping’ it rationally, for instance, music.” This deep intimacy – and ‘understanding’ – is what makes musical experience very concrete. “When I recognise one thing among others without being able to say what its differences or properties consist in, my knowledge is ‘confused’. In this way we sometimes know ‘clearly’, without being in any doubt, whether a poem or a painting is good or bad, because there is a certain je ne sais quoi which pleases or offends us.” Such a clear recognition is concrete, even though it is ‘confused’, not precise. The phrase je ne sais quoi (‘I do not know what’, ‘a certain something’) expresses quite accurately the rest, the impossibility of grasping this ‘certain something’ by any narrow, precise definition. Transcending the horizon of actuality, it reaches to deeper layers of experience. Likewise, we cannot speak precisely about suffering, love, hope, damnation. Yet, these are the most concrete elements of experience. And they are such because they penetrate to the very depth of existence, because every actuality marked by them cannot pretend to be dissociated from the sources which, indefinite and imprecise as they may be, fill it with trust or despair.

6.2 Some discussion

Some questions concerning our exposition have certainly arisen. We cannot anticipate, and even less treat in detail, all of them. We will address only a few which seem particularly important.

125 Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI:6.3 [MacKenna’s translation].
6.2. Some discussion

6.2.1. One – not Many

Chaos is a pure manifold, where “pureness” denotes the lack of any internal relationships, the mere heterogeneity of distinctions. As manifold of distinction is the daily bread of reflection, it might seem that chaos is easier to imagine than the nothingness of the one. Why do we start with the one then? Why not start, as many would, from a manifold? Why Parmenides and not Democritus, Plato rather than Aristotle, Spinoza rather than Descartes, monotheism and not polytheism, holism and not atomism?

For the first, positing chaos of differences is an act of exactly the same kind as positing the one. It is neither easier nor harder, it is neither closer to experience nor further from it. It is an act of positing – in one case, of the unity, in the other of the totality reaching beyond the experience.

The classical argument is that “you cannot conceive the many without the one.”\textsuperscript{128} Positing a totality of differences, you posit one totality. One can not posit pluralism without positing a pluralistic universe. One might nevertheless still claim that this concerns only the order of ideas and thinking, but that ‘out there’, ‘in reality’, things are actually other way around, scattered and independent from each other, without any unity except of being placed in ... well, not one world, but just scattered around. To such empirically grounded suggestions there is one main question: what multiplicity? Why not multiplicities?

The fact that we can not think any multiplicity without thinking it as one multiplicity, might be an argument, but it would be only an argument. And our objective is not to argue but to point towards the aspects of experience which might possibly justify our way of thinking. The argument might be answered by pointing out that, thinking multiplicity, you do not at the same time think one. One is in the background, so to speak, surrounds your act of thinking. It is a condition of the actual thought rather than (of) its content. Simply, every thought is a single act and thus, being one, presupposes oneness. But it is not the same oneness, say, macrocosmic oneness, which is claimed to be presupposed by the chaotic multiplicity of all things. The image of all things residing simultaneously in cosmos does not presuppose any genuine unity of the cosmos – only the unity of this image, of this very thought.

This latter unity, however, presupposes a more genuine one, namely, the unity of the thinking person. It does not presuppose it in the strict, logical sense. Nothing contradictory seems to follow from the image of a single, unitary act of thought, performed by a momentaneous subject in a total dissociation from everything (if anything) which preceded and will follow this spontaneous act. If somebody wished so, he might probably build his world around such an image. For us, this appears simply as an abstraction from experience obtained by narrowing the temporal horizon to the ultimate limit of immediacy. The presupposition of a more genuine unity is not of any logical but of existential, or even simply empirical character. The unity of the experiencing existence is the fundamental aspect of every experience, is like an axiom – unprovable but indispensable.

We will not pretend to possess any independent arguments against the view according to which pure chaos, the manifold of dissociated entities, is the ontological basis of the world. Referring to the individual sense of personal continuity and unity of experience could be convincing only to those already convinced. Our objective is not to argue. We can only claim that, accepting our description of the emergence of reflection, such a view appears as a misunderstanding. If it is not, its proponents expecting arguments owe us a

\textsuperscript{128}Plato, \textit{Parmenides}. 
I.6. In a few long words...

final specification of these supposed ‘things’ constituting the ontological fundament of the world. And they have owed it since Leucippus and Democritus.

141. It is easier to agree on the presence of the need to comprehend all things in form of some unity (and not merely a totality). One can attach various weights to this fact and, in particular, not finding any specific reason nor fulfillment of it, ignore it. We, on the other hand, attach to it much weight because we see in it a reflection of the deepest event, the ontological event of birth. It is a reflection of the unity of existence, not only of actual thought or apperception. It is much more than a mere application of reflective thinking, with the unity of its every act, to the totality of everything. Such an application is only a source of antinomies and impossible questions, exactly because, assuming a multiplicity of things, it tries to form some actual unity of them. However, their unity is not any sum total of dissociated pieces. The one is not a ‘one’, is not an object, and reflection positing it as such for the purpose of discourse must remember that. It is not an object whose identity and unity has to be established. It is the indistinct, that in which no distinction is possible, because everything distinguished enters by this very token the world of distinctions leaving the indistinct behind. As the limit of all distinctions, the indistinguishability-as-such, it is the very essence of unity and identity. Circumscribing the ‘whole world’ by setting the limit of indistinctness around it, it gives unity to the totality of all differences. As the origin of both identity and differences, it comes before them and hence cannot be explained in their terms – either we start with it, or else we will never reach it.

An empirical pluralist, a lover of manifold, is afraid that one would take from him the glorious variety of actual multiplicity. The lifeless monotony of a de-concretised ‘one’, just like that of an over-rationalised universe of rigid laws, is hardly appealing. But one, being the virtual origin of manifold, does not negate it, does not oppose it, does not abolish it. In fact, as a pure virtuality, it is present only through chaos, only through differentiation. It only remains invisibly present above it.

6.2.2. Against pantheism

142. Admitting one as transcending all multiplicity and distinctions involves opposition to any form of pantheism. Putting aside any considerations of divinity, one might define (a secular version of) pantheism as the view that no higher unity obtains above the mere totality of all distinct things. The highest entity, not to say the (image of the) absolute, is just the sum total of all particulars, the ‘many’ which we have just subordinated to the one.

However, we have also said that everything lower is that from which it is distinguished, in particular, existence is one. This, too, might be taken as pantheism, especially, in its medieval version where it denoted the lack of distinction between the individual soul and God. Most thinkers in the Neoplatonic tradition met the accusations of pantheism. That such accusations are unjustified is witnessed by the asymmetry of being which, in one form of another, has been consistently maintained in this tradition.

143. In our case, the center of existence, its point of origin is indeed the one, the nothingness of existence is the same as the nothingness of the one. However, everything lower is that from which it arises not in the sense of the symmetric identity but of the asymmetric participation. Participation in the higher amounts to its presence: not in the lower but, in the case of the actual things between them and, in the case of actual subject, underneath it, in its depth. The higher constitutes a deeper aspect of the lower, constantly present but never identical to it. Its transcendence can be pictured as an overflow, inexhaustibility.
6.2. Some discussion

That existence is one means that it touches nothingness in the center of its being, but this touching happens, so to speak, only in one point. This point is one full and simple and yet it marks only a particular place of one's presence. As a rather crude analogy, we can think of the pen which, being fully and completely blue, does not exhaust the 'blueness' which can be found also in other things. This immanence of the higher, its full presence can lead one to think of pantheistic flattening and dissolution of the higher in the lower. But then one ignores the equipollent aspect of its transcendence, of its overflow, of the fact that, present fully as it is, it stretches far beyond any actual manifestation.

In relation to the actual things, one is present not in every thing but behind every thing or between all things; not because every thing is 'its part', but because every thing points to it being surrounded by the invisible rest. By being distinguished a thing ceases to be indistinct, it becomes a part of the differentiated world. And since to be is to be distinguished, every thing is not the indistinct. Remaining undifferentiated (and indifferent) above not only the totality of all distinctions but also above the existences through which things come forth, one remains ultimately transcendent, inaccessible to any actual look. Our way of expressing these relations may seem confusing since, on the one hand, we postulate that everything is one from which it is distinguished and, on the other hand, is not one exactly by being so distinguished. This may be helped by viewing 'being one', in particular in the case of an existence, as origination and participation, while 'not being one' as the overflowing transcendence of the higher, non-actual element over the lower ones. As Plotinus puts it: "All these things are the One and not the One; they are He because they come from Him; they are not He, because it is in abiding by Himself that he gives them."\footnote{Plotinus, Enneads, V:2:2.} Only disregard of this aspect of one's vertical transcendence can lead to the pantheistic identification of the absolute with the totality of all things. Such an identification is yet another example of objectivistic illusion.

6.2.3. What makes one differentiate

The simplest answer to this question is: nothing. Nothing makes one differentiate, because one is the for ever undifferentiated, the indistinct, "it is in abiding by Himself that he gives”. And it remains so, constantly present, as the peak of the hierarchy of levels surrounding every experience.

This answer, however, seems only to evade the problem. For even if one rests, it "rests by changing."\footnote{Heraclitus DK 22B84} We are confronted with the profusion of distinctions which, originating from and participating in one, are not identical to it. We have described a process of gradual differentiation, a process starting with the indistinct one. It is the origin of all distinctions, so what starts the process?

Here we have to recall that the process we have described does not start with one but with birth. Our starting point is not one ‘in itself’ (nor ‘for itself’). It is birth, the confrontation of existence and one. The reason is that we are not concerned with abstract metaphysics, let alone any speculative explanations, but with philosophical anthropology, existential description. We do not address the question what might have been ‘out there’ before any distinctions were encountered by some existence. It is existential confrontation which differentiates the one and this is the process we have described. The names we have used for the one, like indistinct, origin and nothingness, have meaning not as characterisa-
tions of some entity as it is ‘in itself’, but only as it is in confrontation with an existence. Their meaning is existential.

Accepting one as the origin and being as differentiation, the question “What makes one differentiate?” is the same as “Why is there something rather than nothing?”. Since we are not trying to explain why, we referred this question in §9 to the very definition of existence as confrontation and differentiation issuing from birth. A question “Why?” asks for an explanation which both assumes distinctions and expects them in the answer. The indistinct, possessing none, can never answer such a question. But then, it should not be asked about either.

It is asked about only when it, as well as existence and all differentiation, are viewed from the objectivist perspective, in terms of dissociated objects in the objective time. For instance, “if we follow the theologians who generate the world from night, or the natural philosophers who say that ‘all things were together’, the [same] impossible result ensues. For how will there be movement, if there is no actually existing cause? Wood will surely not move itself – the carpenter’s art must act on it.”\footnote{Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics}. XII:6 [my emph.]} The ‘analogical’ modeling, a typical example of the objectivist attitude, is transparent here. Asking for an actually existing cause of differentiation implies that one is posited as some ‘one’ different from ‘another’, a being among beings only raised somehow above their differentiation. It involves an irresolvable antinomy. For ‘one’, as the origin, must involve some principle of generation. Since it is ‘the first’, such a principle can not reside outside it. But since it is ‘indistinct’, no such principle can reside within it either.

Such a question, based on the objectification of the ‘one’, goes hand in hand with the imposition of the objective time onto the origin. This gives almost literally Kant’s first antinomy. For when origin is thought as the objective beginning of the world, its presence amounts to the thesis, while the objective unlimited time applied to it implies the waiting time of the ‘one’ before its differentiation started, which is the cornerstone of the (proof of the) antithesis. Applying the dissociated image of the infinite time, no answer about the absolute beginning can ever be satisfactory.

Our one is the absolute origin – not, however, in the sense of accounting for all objective issues but in the sense of not being relative to any distinctions, objective ones included. It is the aspect of existence, not of the objective world. Questions about what was going on before the Big Bang can and must be left to the objective treatment. Objective forms of the question about the absolute origin and limit (e.g., When and how did the world begin? When and how will it end?) recur so naturally not because of any particular importance of the objective beginning of things but because of the intuitions about the absolute origin. Every existence lives the confrontation with its origin, lives it concretely in every moment. Viewing it in the objective terms, makes it into the beginning/end of the objective world. Such objective forms of these questions are asked with the implicit expectation that, given the answers, we would learn ‘everything’ – also about ourselves. They only reflect the fact that existence carries its origin through all life and that its deepest interest concerns its relation to the absolute. Scientific development, this paradigm of objectivism, helps us to sort out which questions can be addressed in the objective terms and which can not. But while objective terms are always relative, they can never approach the absolute.

Although the two perspectives were not univocally distinguished, the tension between them can be easily identified in the history of Neoplatonism (if not of the whole philosophy). On the one hand, the personalities like Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius, and then Eriugena,
Eckhart, Cusanus mark its existential dimension of personal experience. Due to the negativity of the absolute and its central place, it puts emphasis on the mystical aspect of existence. On the other hand, this existential dimension is easy to degenerate, once the existential hierarchy is conflated with the objective structure of the world ‘in itself’. Taken as the metaphysics of the objective world, hypostases are supposed to explain the emergence of souls, people and particular things in the process of objective generation. And now, as the objectivistic attitude is also the subjectivistic illusion, the absolutisation of the objectivistic perspective involves the reduction of existence to a subject. The personal dimension of mystical experience becomes thus a mere subjective control, magic. While Plotinus lived, “he lifted his pupils with him. But with his death the fog began to close in again, and later Neoplatonism is in many respects a retrogression to the spineless syncretism from which he had tried to escape.”

His most prominent successors like Porphyry, Proclus, lamblichus not only commented extensively on the theurgic ground work, Julianus’ Chaldean Oracles, but mixed religious devotion with magic statuettes and oracular images (their power resulting supposedly from the natural sympathy linking image with original) as well as with conjuring spirits and gods in mediumistic seances which would be hard to distinguish from the practices of modern spiritualists. This tendency becomes reinforced in the Neoplatonism of the Renaissance which, joining it with the newly imported Cabala, applied the system to magical purposes. Such applications seemed possible because the natural world was seen as literally dependent on the higher, celestial and supra-celestial, objectivities. The whole hierarchy turned thus – in the hands of Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandolla, Cornelius Agrippa, John Dee and many others – into a system of objectified, because usable, entities, whether angels which could be conjured, or letters and symbols which could be manipulated according to the numerological formulae. The epitome of this degeneration is the Renaissance magus personified eventually as doctor Faustus.

In our case, the separation of concerns should be quite clear. We are concerned with philosophical anthropology, the unity of the existential confrontation, not with metaphysics of abstract principles nor objective theory of everything. We leave the latter to those who want to investigate distinctions which are not drawn by anybody. (By this, we do not deny them every value. We only see that this value is, at most, relative and never sufficient to respond to the deeper existential concerns.)

To conclude, the question about the metaphysical principle of one’s differentiation, involving the application of the objective categories to the invisible origin and expecting an objective answer, yields an antinomy. From the existential perspective, it should not be offending to declare that creation is a mystery, which means simply that the traces of every actual appearance can be followed towards its origin only to some point beyond which they dissolve in the mist of the invisible and chaotic element.

If one nevertheless insists on a metaphysical principle, we might refer to a more modern image: Bergson’s élan vital – the force of creative differentiation. We could say that one is the primal force of life giving. And life is what at once establishes distinctions, life is the force of distinguishing. The first primitive would then be the one understood as the life giving force. But this force has to start somewhere, so take also the pure, indistinct virtuality which, to begin with, should be the same as the force itself. In principle, we might accept this image: the one is the force of ‘bearing’ existences. But to retain our existential perspective of the constant presence along this objective one of the causal-like

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133 F. Yates, The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age provides a good, general overview.
precedence, bearing must be taken with both connotations: of giving birth and support, of originating and sustaining.\footnote{One notices that such a principle does not add anything to what we have already said. In the search for an objective entity, it merely objectifies the event of birth.}

6.2.4. Relativity, inter-subjectivity, objectivity

As objectivism is only a mode of existential attitude towards the world, it is itself relative to the existence assuming such an attitude. But then objectivity seems to lose its objective character. It is only an adventure of existence while one would expect that, on the contrary, every existence is an adventure of the objective world. To repeat once more, the objective perspective is possible and legitimate but its fruitfulness can never satisfy existential thirst. As soon as objectivism approaches the limits of its current knowledge, these limits acquire the aspects of the absolute limits which are lived concretely but which cannot be moulded in objective forms. Objectivism either gets involved into antinomies or delegates the existential intuitions to the ideal limits of its own inquiries.

Objectivism, claiming that only objects exist and only objective inquiries merit attention, is another example of objectivistic attitude. But when kept within the limits of actuality, it retains its relative value. Still, from our perspective the objective determinations arise as relative to the existence. Every objectivist has to discover the objectivity of the world before becoming an objectivist. So one may still wonder how much of the 'objective reality' is left in our account.

\footnote{149. Some things are called ‘subjective’ because they are relative only to me or only to you, only to one actual subject. But this does not help much because one existence, in one actual moment, can experience something objective, and do it not only entirely on its own but even in spite of everybody else. So one keeps distinguishing: something relative exclusively to one’s thought or also to one’s perception, something relative exclusively...}

To be is to be distinguished. Does it mean that everything (which we distinguish) is? Yes, it does. And dreams, and square circles, and Pegasus? One would say “Pegasus is a horse with wings” or something like that. A cheap, grammatical trick would be to point to the “is” in this sentence, but we do not rely fully on mere language usage, let alone grammar. Of course, that Pegasus is. It is in a very different way than the horse grazing on the pasture, but still it is, it is distinguished and even distinguished as something. That it, perhaps, does not have material existence, that it is not a living being, that it is a concept or a mythical figure are truths which do not in the slightest affect the fact that it is – we all know ‘what’ it is, so we should not be so concerned whether it, in fact, is.

The dream you had yesterday is, the image, the phantom of perfection you are chastising is, the illusions you nourish are, the feelings you have are. It is impossible to get rid of this ascription of ‘being’ in spite of the fact that one might want to say that all these things are not. They are not because they are only subjective feelings, imaginations, ideals... Yet, to be an image, is not that also ‘to be’? That they are all subjective does not in the least deprive them of being because they, too, are distinguished, even distinguished as these specific ‘whats’. They are called “subjective” because they are relative only to one person. But relativity to a particular person or a group of people is a further differentiation of the distinguished beings, of things which are. There is nothing wrong with ‘being’ of a thought – a thought is as much as a horse, a table, or a meaningful relationship. They all are different things and, at most, different kinds of beings.
6.2. Some discussion

to a unique act or to a repetitive series of acts, something relative exclusively to one’s experience versus something relative also to the experience of others, something relative to an experience of a particular existence or to a particular form of existence (particular human versus human existence in general), something relative to human experience or to the experience of ants, etc. All these are secondary distinctions, as witnessed by the fact that the supposed ‘realities’ they postulate, being of a limited scope, turn out to be of limited validity: the physicalist ‘reality’ is threatened by the ‘reality’ of subjective qualia, the ‘reality’ of perception by the ‘reality’ of feelings, the ‘reality’ of public consensus by the ‘reality’ of personal convictions.

Granting that all these are ‘realities’ of some sort, one would like to arrive at something which is constant and fixed, one and the same ‘for everybody’. But populism and consensus is no measure of reality, although it is certainly the measure of the reality about which there is a consensus. Seeing a tree when feeling dizzy, you can see it distinctly but dizziness makes you wonder: perhaps it is only a hallucination? So you ask the accompanying person and his confirmation gives you more confidence that the tree indeed is ‘there’. As Davidson would say, ‘it takes two to triangulate’, and this analogy to the three-dimensional vision (requiring at least two eyes) attempts to establish the reduction of objectivity to inter-subjectivity. But relativity to a group of persons is still relativity. You could be both dizzy and hallucinating. If no objectivity were given to every one of you, such a consensus would never establish it. For objectivity is there already from the beginning and only its indefinable sense makes you wonder if what you are seeing actually is ‘there’. No triangulation could place this wonder ‘into your head’, for all it could do would be to make you wonder if the other person also sees the tree you are seeing. Inter-subjectivity does not account for objectivity. At most, it can provide some (and for us, rather dubious) criterion of what may count as objective.

But as two persons can hallucinate simultaneously so inter-subjectivity can never stop trying to expand the scope of consensus. As the scope of possible people – relativity to whom would constitute, eventually, objectivity – expands, the content of this objectivity becomes only less and less definite and threatens with dissolving in the indistinct. Interesting and important as the degree of relativity of distinctions often is, it is not very useful in determining any ‘objective reality’. It posits only an ideal limit, ‘that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you’. But do you need any consensus to know that the edge of the rock at which you are standing is real? Do you have to wait until ‘information and reasoning finally result in’ the conclusion that the ice-cream you are tasting is sweet?

Reality, and its unmistakable sense, has the foundation in the existential confrontation, in the concrete presence which draws a horizon of transcendence around every actual moment and the whole life. Yet, at the level of reflective subject it acquires an additional element. As signs become dissociated from their meanings and subject from object, there arises the possibility of subjective manipulation, of more or less arbitrary arrangement of dissociated signs. As the number of distinctions exceeds the number of signs, there arise the questions of the relations between various kinds of distinctions and signs, for instance, between visual and auditory distinctions, between perceptual and conceptual ones, or else between distinctions recognised by one person and by others. Thus, subjectivity becomes opposed to something ‘independent from the vagaries of you and me’. The problem is now, as several times before, to model the higher by the lower. The absolute reality of

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135C. S. Pierce, Some consequences of four incapacities. p.69
the one, accompanying or, as the case may be, haunting every existence, gives rise to the attempts to find this *absolute* reality among the *actual objects* and their constellations, in the visible world. As one confuses the *subject* with the *existence*, everything *existential* seems subjective and the real source of all reality is substituted by the ‘objective reality’. The search for its definite characterisation is yet another example of *objectivistic illusion*. Seeing that *actual objects* are *external*, and assuming them to be independet not only from a particular *existence* but also from *existence* in general, it looks for the objective determinations of this independence.

Such an independence can be taken as the definition of ‘things in themselves’. As such ‘things’ no longer seem a satisfactory answer about the nature of the ultimate, ‘objective reality’, one begins to ask for its criteria, rather than for its nature. But all such criteria, inter-subjectivity including, lead to positing some form of being as ‘the being’, ‘the real’, and delegating all others to ‘unreality’. Then come some observations, or else arguments and critique, suggesting that the ‘unreal’ is, in fact, ‘real’ too. “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”156 Sorting out what is and what is not real generates only discussions and arguments, but never any consensus about the conclusions. The search for the ‘objective reality’, for something which both satisfies some determinate criteria and is not relative to our way of *existing*, if not taken at once as a contradictory project, either posits some ideal limit of the eschatological consensus or leads back to the abyss of ‘things in themselves’. In either case everything we know and *experience* dissolves in the phenomenal ‘unreality’.

152. We do not dispute the distinction between the subjective whims and hard facts, between the fleeting appearances which disappear in the moment they emerge and the constant elements encountered repeatedly in the world. We do not even dispute the distinction between the lasting constructions raised from the *dissociated signs* as models of *actual* things and the ways in which these things may be perceived by others and surprise the one whose construction turns out to be inadequate. We only contest the primacy of these distinctions and the absoluteness of their objective pole.

‘Reality’, when opposed to anything, in particular, to the mind as something mind-independent, is a metaphysical extension of the *actual dissociation* of *subject* and *object*. As *existence* reduced to an epistemic *subject* relates only to *objects*, the only ‘reality’ it can find is their *totality*. This ‘reality’, as distinct from ‘unreality’, arises as a supposed medicine against the *existential* insecurity of a *subject* who, relating only to the *objective*, *reflectively* comprehensible truths, delegates everything else to ‘unreality’. But there is nothing unreal. How could there be? It takes a lot of disappointment to rise a suspicion, and then a lot of suspicion to claim that reality consists of two parts: ‘real’ and ‘unreal’.

153. The genericity of our notion of being implies that we do not reduce it to any specific region, least of all, to the *objective* being. *Objectivity* is not the reality but only part of it. It is the part which can be grasped as *objects*, as *reflectively dissociated* entities appearing with enough *precision* within the horizon of *actual*ity. This circumscription makes them appear as *external*, for *externality* marks the trace of *transcendence* from which the object arises and which surrounds its appearance. This, as we have noted in §54, can be the case also with *subjective* feelings and sensations. They are not objects in the usual sense but, when *posited* as *actual objects* of *reflection*, they become prone to equally objective treatment.

Among *objects* further distinctions can be made, for instance, that between something

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156Pp. CXVIII:22
which only I can see at the moment and something which everybody is seeing, or else between something which I recognise as a hallucination or as accessible to others or to me at some other time. The later poles of these distinctions seem to mark higher degree of objectivity than do the former. But they do not suffice as any general criteria. I can repeatedly experience the same hallucination and seeing together can be equally, and sometimes even more, deceitful than seeing on one’s own. Moreover, such distinctions are possible also with respect to things which are not objects. Euphoria of a crowd need not be shared by all who are present; there is a difference between a momentaneous feeling of powerlessness and the lasting sense of not being the master. Although the same distinctions as in the previous examples separate the opposites here (relativity to one versus many, minuteness versus constancy), one would not typically call a shared euphoria or a lasting sense of dependence objective. They seem to be too relative to the experiencing persons. They may be posited as objects of an inquiry but they are not ‘real’ objects in the ‘objective world’. Such objects are pieces of chalk and tables mentioned whenever an example is called for, objects whose externality became only spatial externality. They provide the paradigmatic examples. The ‘objective reality’ seems to be nothing more than the assumed totality of such objects, the totality of things which are spatially external in relation to each other, in short, material things in the objective space. The problem for this version of the objectivistic attitude is to specify finally and objectively, in a complete dissociation from possible subjects, ‘what’ is objective, ‘what’ are the ultimate objects independent from experiencing existences. This problem is, as it always has been, left to the future investigations.

Delegating reality out of experience to ‘things in themselves’ or inaccessible limits, is as good as ‘bracketing’ it in order to save the tranquility of epistemological ruminations. One might imagine us doing essentially the same, by postulating the eventual reality of some invisible one. However, the intention and the conceptual unfolding are exactly the opposite. On the one hand, we do not deny reality to the actual objects and, what amounts here to the same, do not apply any rigid distinction between objects and appearances. We only deny them absolute reality. On the other hand, we recognise the presence of absolute, non relative reality. For the members of the epistemic family (‘bracketings’, ‘in-itselfisms’ and, in the extreme form, also various scepticisms), beyond the horizon of the visible ‘whats’ there remains only the unknown and uncertain. And since ‘Being does not add anything to the concept’, one can and should dispense with it. We take the opposite stand saying rather that no concept adds anything (of significance) to Being. The concept of Being (if we have any) is only a concept, a sign trying to indicate its meaning: the indistinct ground of all distinctions. It is not unknown waiting for a successful conceptualisation – it is known perfectly well, as the indistinct, as the absolute that. It is not uncertain but, on the contrary, the most certain of certainties, not in spite of but exactly because it transcends all relative distinctions, all actual appearances including. Perhaps, this certainty means only that everything visible is only relative and hence uncertain. Perhaps, but there is more to it and we will return to it in Book III.

We do not ‘bracket’ the reality, we do not ‘bracket’ the Being above the epistemic subject. We only ‘bracket’ everything that critiques wanted to save for the rational knowledge, everything that epoché wanted to leave untouched – all the distinctions in their relativity to existence. We do not by this token refuse them real being, we do not reduce them to mere appearances – their being, founded in the one, is perfectly real, and their ‘whatness’ may be perfectly objective. We only refuse them any absolute reality. Our objectivity,
the element of transcendence behind the actual object which keeps it at a distance from its actual sign, is not the reality but a part of it. It is the rest of the higher hypostases left on the traces leading to the actual appearances. It is the sign of the ultimate that, of the one confronting existentce. Its ‘what’, like all other ‘whats’, involves at once relativity to the actual subject.
“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.”

Gen. XXVIII:12

Book II  (of curiosity)

Between Heaven and Earth

We have followed the order of ontological founding, of the gradual actualisation of the original virtuality, the differentiation of the indistinct – of something emerging out of nothing. We have thus arrived at the level of reflective experiences, of the dissociated objects appearing within the familiar horizon of actuality.

In principle, one might imagine some further differentiation of the reflective contents which might, perhaps, offer new and more precise means of control. But this is possible only, so to speak, in a merely quantitative way. Having reached the level of dissociation, where objects are posited in complete independence from each other, where they appear as autonomous and self-contained ‘substances’, there is hardly any possibility of further differentiation. Certainly, one need not accept any actually given limits of distinctions as ultimate. A thing can be further differentiated into its properties and constituent parts, the parts can be investigated with increased precision leading to more and more minute atoms and particles, recognisable only with the help of more and more sophisticated equipment. But all such differentiation yields only new dissociated objects, more of them and more particular ones, but still only objects. It does not establish any new hypostasis, any new level of experiencing which would be qualitatively different from reflection – it only increases the precision of dissociation.

Dissociation is the terminus of distinguishing and is the dwelling place of reflection. In the previous Book, we have described the emergence of this terminus, which emergence could be also interpreted in temporal terms. But we have emphasized that the primary meaning of the hierarchy is the static co-presence of all levels. In this Book, we will be occupied exclusively with this static aspect. We will consider reflections of the ontological hierarchy, the ways in which various levels find expressions in the actual experiences. We will thus proceed with the categories of reflection, with some limits of distinctions, and move in the direction opposite to the order of ontological founding. But although “the way up and the way down is one and the same,”¹ it looks and feels very different when walked up and down. The levels which, so far, had primarily the ontological dimension, find now actual reflections and acquire existential relevance.

1 The existential levels

As the earlier hypostases gather underneath the differentiated contents of actual experiences and permeate them with the invisible rest, they are also experienced. They are never

¹Heraclitus DK 22B60
experienced as *actual objects* but as layers which surround any such object, as *aspects* of any *actual experience*. This constant *presence* of the whole hierarchy makes it existentially relevant for *reflection*. Even though *reflection* performs its function exactly by dissociating itself from the higher levels, it can not ignore them completely.

Augmenting figure 4) from I.§120, we can mark schematically the levels of every *actual experience*: 1. *immediacy* is the ideal limit of *spatio-temporality*, impossible and unavoidable companion of *reflection*; 2. *actuality* is determined by the contents within its horizon; 3. the level of *mineness* encircles the limits of *my* world and *my* whole life, contributing the personal *aspect* to every *actual experience*; 4. *invisibles* are the ever present but essentially *non-actual aspects* of every experience – they can be *manifested* in particular experiences but always *transcend*, and *transcend* essentially, the *horizon of actuality*.

5) ![Diagram](attachment:diagram.png)

An *actual experience* involves all the levels and does not consist of some ‘four parts’. (Imagining the circle moving along the line, only the actual contents but not the levels become affected by its changing position.) Nevertheless, *reflective acts* can be directed towards contents of distinct levels. Although *dissociation* of distinct levels from each other is an illegitimate abstraction, it should be allowed for the purpose of presentation. We will thus attempt to characterise each level from its limited perspective, but will often encounter relations to other levels. Each level is a *nexus* of various *aspects*, among which we will address the following:

1. the character of the *signs*, of the *actual* appearances, specific for the contents of a given level;
2. the correlate of the experience – its ‘objective pole’, the character of its contents;
3. the character of the ‘subjective pole’, or the self-understanding which *reflection* acquires in confrontation with the contents of a given level;
4. the form of *transcendence* pertaining to the contents of a given level; there are two different aspects which, together, constitute the character of *transcendence*:

   (a) the *horizontal transcendence* of the correlate, of the ‘objective pole’ of an *experience* at a given level; as a variation of the *horizontal transcendence*, one will usually encounter the merely quantitative transcendence of other correlates with respect to the *actual* one

   (b) the *vertical* or qualitative *transcendence* which, referring to the *non-actual aspects* of the experience at the current level, points towards the higher one.

One factor which can be helpful to illustrate the differences between the levels is the temporal scope of the involved experiences: from the ideal timeless point, pure *here-and-now* of a single *object*, through the finite and limited scope of *objective complexes*, then the finite but unlimited time of *one’s* whole life, to the – again timeless, but now living – eternity, the immovable *presence* of the *origin*. Using this as the basis of distinctions, let us nevertheless remember that it only indicates the whole *nexuses* of *aspects* distinguishing various levels.
1.1 Immediacy

It is not easy to determine, in objective terms, the exact time span of a shortest possible experience. The difficulty may lie in the fact that no such thing exists, that since every particular experience is only a narrowing of the experience to the horizon of actuality, its supposedly sharp limits are only an abstraction from the continuity of experience. Yet, this abstraction is exactly the effect of reflective dissociation. One can imagine a shortest possible time span as the (objective) time in which we can still experience, feel, sense – discern, i.e., dissociate – something. Such a minimum might be, perhaps, a single sensation, a punctual, localised, feeling of pain, pricking, heat. It might be hearing a noise, a single sound, seeing a simple thing. It might be, perhaps, a single thought, an isolated image, appearing instantaneously in our imagination. It might also be several such aspects together in one moment.

As we know, sensory cells and neurons register more minute events than those reaching the threshold of conscious perception. Yet, even at this cellural level, one finds some minimal temporal quanta which limit the possibility of discernment. Events which, in the objective time, are separated by smaller distances are not distinguishable. But we are not asking if a durational ‘specious present’, minima sensibilia, can or can not be further divided into more minute, objective l’atome du temps of Poincaré, ‘quanta of time’ of Whitehead or ‘chronons’ of some contemporary physicists. The objective duration does not concern us, only the presence of such minima (whose objective duration may even vary) and what remains as the possible experience. And since we are not inquiring into the objective mechanisms of perception, our question concerns only such minimal experiences which are reflectively identifiable, as those listed in the previous paragraph.

They mark the level of pure immediacy. We might think of experiential immediacy as the lowest level of distinguishing at which a child development turns and starts to consciously construct the world. It is impossible to say when, exactly, a child leaves the state of relative passivity and becomes active because it is only a matter of degree and none of these aspects ever occurs without the other. But we notice as the irritating (and sometimes charming) short attention span of babies, where cry can replace smile in the matter of seconds, becomes gradually longer. The child gets less and less determined by the immediate presence of stimuli. It can, for instance, wait for the mother a few minutes, even become distracted by other things, before it begins to cry. Slowly, from the minute bits and pieces (which also arise all the time along the way), it begins to rise complex constructions which reach beyond the immediate stimuli towards the actual objects and non-actual limits. Immediacy, left behind as the constructions proceed, remains however at their bottom as that which is im-mediate because it has no time to be mediated. What is experienced immediately may vary but it will never last two hours, it will be always comprised in a tiny, not to say infinitesimal, instant of time, at the limit of actuality. We will devote a few paragraphs to its experiential basis but most of the section will be concerned with the status of the reflectively posited, ideal and infinitesimal limits.

1.1.1. The signs

We have seen in Book I how signs emerge as the actual tokens of recognitions which, differentiating experience, establish the distance between its actual and non-actual aspects. As experience approached the level of reflective dissociations, signs became more definitely dissociated from their actual meaning leading, eventually, to the abstract signs
as signs. Although there is no sharp border separating the latter from the former, we can to some extent distinguish the meanings of the original signs of experience from the contents appearing for attentive reflection under its abstract signs. We will describe these two extremes of signs separately.

1.1.1.i. Original signs

3. The original sign of an immediate experience is not announcing anything, or better, it is announcing itself and only itself. Whether it is 'subjective' or 'objective', whether it is sensed pain, heard noise, felt dread, perceived object, imagined thought, it is a sign which fully coincides with the signified. It has been cut out of the horizon of experience but attentive reflection has not yet had time to carry out its representing explication. When one gets burned by a glowing spark thrown out from the fire, one does not experience a sensation and a spark, it is the spark which hurts, one might cry out "Ooh, it burns!" 'It' is equally the spark and the place of one's body where it burns. Within the temporal scope of immediacy, there is hardly any difference whether the sign has some 'objective' or else only 'subjective' correlate. The sign and what it possibly signifies may be, perhaps, distinguished by subsequent reflection, but they coincide in the immediate experience. There is no intentionality, but only the event. The experience has the form of a pure 'state' with a definite quality (pain, warmth, meekness, etc.)

4. An immediate sign coincides also with the reaction. Pain, like that caused by a burning spark, is nothing else than the immediate withdrawal, or attempt to withdraw, reaction of avoidance or defense which, typically, is taken care of by the autonomous part of the nervous system. Similarly, a pleasant sensation is nothing else than the response of the body to its attraction. (This may become reflectively realised first when the pleasant stimulus withdraws and one attempts to approach it but, originally, there is no distinction between the pleasant stimulus, its attractive force and the reaction of approaching or preserving it.)

Such reactions are reflexes, elementary reflections. They are extremely narrowed – not, however, to an ideal point, but to a particular, minimal spatio-temporal span. Bergson, identifying sensations with perceptions of one's body, says it this way: "The psychical state, then, that I call 'my present', must be both a perception of immediate past and a determination of immediate future. Now, the immediate past, in so far as it is perceived, is, as we shall see, sensation,... and the immediate future, in so far as it is being determined, is action or movement." Re-action, this act or movement which follows within the immediacy of sensation, is what we call 'reflex'. It involves both receptivity, the re-, in so far as it is triggered and not mediated, and also activity, the -action, in so far as it is actually doing something, performs some movement.

There is no subject of such an event. Sure, it is I who experience the pain, but in its immediacy it is not even relative to my body, but merely to a particular sense, particular organ, particular point of the body. Its minute localisation refers it to the reacting organ which, so to speak, only happens to be mine. The experience itself does not involve myself, only the affected place of my body. In fact, a more reflective act is needed to refer such

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2H. Bergson, Matter and Memory. p.138. The immediate past and future, so aptly related here to receptivity and action, which Husserl turned into retentions and protentions, are images furnished by the narrowing of such an immediate experience to the idealized point. Our goal is not any objective theory of sensation and perception and so we will stay with the mere quality of 'experiential minimum', immediate experience.
an experience to a subject, to myself. As long as I do not perform it, I ‘drown’ in the immediacy of an experience and reflex, which are mine but do not yet appear ‘as’ mine.

1.1.1.ii. Reflective signs

They appear ‘as’ mine first upon a subsequent reflection which, dissociating the appearing content from its surrounding, dissociates also the appearance from the appearing. The question analogous to that asked in §2 would be now: what can reflection focus on in a ‘shortest possible moment’? What content can be circumscribed within the minimum of immediacy, which also means, with the utmost precision? It must be something exhausted in the disappearing limit of immediacy, given completely here-and-now, not anything extending beyond this limit like Prague, life, love. But the disappearing limit can harbour only disappearing content, its residuum. Even if it is some specific content, a particular sensation or object, which reflection tries to capture in such a limit, even if its properties, its being so and so, remain present, they withdraw from the horizon of immediacy leaving there the mere fact of its being. Such a reflection registeres only that it is.

One can sometimes experience the astonishment at the fact that this something, given here is, that it at all is. Existentialists made such an experience into a nauseous feeling of unbearable, meaningless presence. But it may also be quite a detached and full of gratitude realisation that it is while it might not be. We have associated with the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” some other connotations, emphasizing the implied search for an explanation. But it, too, can express such a reflection, the amazement at the naked being of this something, the mere fact that it is.

This reflection, underling the whole ‘metaphysics of actuality’, shares with the original sign the full consummation within the pure, experientially unextended immediacy. But as reflection it is already doubled. The object of such a reflection appears in a total dissociation. The strangeness of its being at all is the strangeness of its being ‘on its own’, of its being so strangely alone before – more in the spatial sense of ‘in front of’, rather than of temporal precedence – the reflective act. The reflective sign does not any more coincide with its object. But reflection does not have time to reflect over the distance which remains merely experienced – as object’s astonishing being. The noetic quality of the dissociation is here experienced as being of the noematic residuum, the dissociation effected by the reflective act enters the correlate as its independent being. Both coincide in the infinitesimal limit of immediacy.

1.1.2. Substances, objects, particulars

An object, appearing in the reflection that it is, appears as “a complete indivisible being.” This residuum of being is like the “ultimate substratum which is no longer predicated of anything else; but of which all else is predicated.” In short, an object of the reflection that it is appears as a substance.

A physical thing of daily experience is the paradigm of an object, but it neither exhausts the extension of the word “object” nor coincides with its intension. This word, suggesting

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3G. W. Leibniz, Correspondence with Arnauld. to Arnauld 28.11/8.12 1686. [In whole this section, we exclude living beings from our considerations. Likewise, here we exclude the specificity of Leibniz’ notion of a substance which ends up with a monad (corresponding roughly to our existence). Here we are only concerned with the characteristics assigned to substances.]

4Aristotle, Metaphysics. VII.3
“both separability and «thisness»,\(^5\) emphasizes the substantiality which, possessing various accidents, is nevertheless independent from them. It reduces the actual thing to its mere being something, one could say, to a point.

The intuitions of Leucippus and Democritus in this respect can hardly be overestimated. The Greek “atomon” means indivisible, and the speculative theory of atomism is the first tribute paid to the idealized notion of a substance. It captures the abstract idea of the least building blocks of the universe which, in spite of apparent similarities, can be seen as the opposite of the primordial elements inherited by the Ionian philosophers of the ultimate nature from the earlier religious thought. Unlike the vague qualities of earth, water, air and fire, it stimulates the search for the definite entities identifiable by the empirical procedure. Although the substantial point is a rather abstract image, it motivates the empirical mind in its search for such points in experience. These can be identified with sensations, perceptions, clear and precise ideas, objective things, atoms, elementary particles, quarks, strings... But all such identifications are only particular stations in the course of the development of knowledge and science. They only try to put some identifiable cloths on the evanescent shadow of the immediately simple, “that bounding point [which] indeed //Exists without all parts, a minimum //Of nature,”\(^6\)

7. All the criteria for something being a substance reflect various features of a limit of distinctions solidified as a positive entity and are gathered in this ideal limit of a pure point. We mention only a few examples.

The definite dissociation of an object from the surrounding experience gives rise to the idea of its complete independence and self-sufficiency, its existence ‘on its own’. This independence is clearly experienced in the reflection that it is as the object’s naked being. But it is not limited to the objective aspect of an experience. It occurs also when, for instance a sensation, posited as an actual object of attentive reflection, becomes independent from the reflecting subject. As long as it is only felt in the flow of experience, it remains its integral part. But its immediacy gives the possible reflection a localised focus. As one attentively dissociates it from this context and posits it as an object of reflection, considers it ‘as it is in-itself’, it loses its concreteness and appears as a depersonalised entity, external in relation to the reflecting subject. If it belongs to the subject, is its internal sensation, it does so only because the subject’s being is not exhausted in its reflective act.

A related aspect of sedimenting a limit of dissociations as a positive entity or, eventually, of positing an ideal point as a measure of reality, concerns temporality. On the one hand, point gains the place in the, by now objective, time as the extensionless ‘now’. An object felt, if not intended, as a residual point of pure being something, becomes itself timeless. It resides in the purified ‘now’ which, by this reduction which is also abstraction, has become dissociated from time. A substance, abstracted in this way from time, appears as an unchangeable being. It appears so not by any analogy, not because it is permanent or because we have extrapolated to it observations of something relatively constant, but because it has been pulled out of time, confined to the ideal, timeless point of ‘now’.

Another aspect of this timeless immediacy, of the determinacy of isolated independence is the idea of a perfectly clear, unambiguous presence (or absence) of the point, that is, of a perfectly clear and unambiguous knowledge. Idea of such a knowledge is, originally, with Aristotle or there about, merely another side of the idea of a substance: well-defined, clearly cut out, independent and self-same entity. It would be futile to follow here the history of

\(^5\)Ibid. V:8

\(^6\)T. Lucretius, On the Nature of Things. I:5
1.1. Immediacy

dthis idea, but we can remark that, in the epistemological context, it leads to the image of knowledge coinciding with its *object* – no longer in the way intellectual realm of Plotinus or Scholastics, containing eternal intelllections, was self-same with their objects, but in the way in which the original sign coincides with the signified in the *immediate experience*. The hunt for the infallible, certain knowledge and the hunt for the ultimate atoms are inseparable companions. Both emerge from the idealization of *immediate experiences*, from the narrowing of the *horizon of actuality* to the *immediacy* of a point.

A point, as the ontological residuum and phantom of infallible precision, is also the limit of 8 possible *distinctions*, that is, of comprehensibility. ‘In itself’ it is unknowable, not however because it hides some ultimate content from us but, on the contrary, because it does not hide anything which could be *distinguished*, and hence known. *Positing* the substantial points, one *posits* by the same token the epistemically inaccessible ‘beings in themselves’.

Those pointing out how Aristotle’s thinking was determined by the structure of the Greek language and common sense, might agree that the attempts to capture the idea of a substance end up with the attempts to define what, in the daily life, counts as things. And they end badly. That which “is first in every sense – in definition, in order of knowledge, in time”; that which can exist independently from all else; “that which is primarily, i.e. not in a qualified sense but without qualification”7 – such characterisations, attempting to capture the independence of the *dissociated objects*, threaten with dissolution in nothingness. The subject of predication, so obvious for the common sense, when pushed to the extreme of a substantial residuum, a pure ontological limit devoid of any relative accidents, disappears from the horizon of epistemic accessibility. But then, it threatens also with a complete disappearance. Already in the IV-th century St. Basil suggested: “Do not let us seek for any nature devoid of qualities by the conditions of its existence, but let us know that all the phenomena with which we see it clothed regard the conditions of its existence and complete its essence. Try to take away by reason each of the qualities it possesses, and you will arrive at nothing. Take away black, cold, weight, density, the qualities which concern taste, in one word all these which we see in it, and the substance vanishes.”8 It does not even need vanish because the substantial residuum, the non-composite simplicity of any particular, has never actually been there: “there is no body of which I can say for certain that it is a substance rather than an aggregation of several substances, or perhaps a phenomenon.”9 Any particular can be analysed as consisting of other, more minute particulars, like any *distinction* can be refined by more *distinctions*. St. Basil’s remark remains virtually unchanged in the XX-th century: “what are the simple constituent parts of which reality is composed? – What are the simple constituent parts of a chair? – The bits of wood of which it is made? Or the molecules, or the atoms? – “Simple” means: not composite. And here the point is: in what sense ‘composite’? It makes no sense at all to speak absolutely of the ‘simple parts of a chair’.”10

Just like any particular can be viewed as a composite, so any composite can be made into a unitary particular. What’s wrong with the (in)famous heap of stones? What does it lack to be a respectable substance? An inherent principle of organisation? A genuine unity? A substantial form? What particular does not lack all that? If it turns out that this very heap of stones was set up on purpose as a signpost, will it acquire some of these

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8 St. Basil, *Nine Homilies of the Hexaemeron*. I:8
9 G. W. Leibniz, *Correspondence with Arnauld*. to Arnaudi, draft, 28.11/8.12 1686
lacking aspects? And if not then, perhaps, when it turns out that not only it was not just a heap functioning as a signpost, but that its exact form and the number of stones had specific meaning?

9. **There are no such metaphysical entities as particular substances. A particular thing is a limit of distinctions signified within the horizon of actuality.**

A particular is a limit of distinctions, is a place at which the possible process of further distinguishing is terminated, or in any case, suspended. Particular thing as a limit of distinctions – signified within the horizon of actuality – can be equated with this thing being everything it is not, being the totality of distinctions which are excluded and left outside this limit. In this sense, opposites create each other.¹¹

Violence creates mildness, hardness creates softness, repulsion creates attraction and both create indifference, etc.. Likewise, very advanced objects are determined only as limits of distinctions. Roman pragmatism created Greek rationalism, reformation created catholicism, etc. Of course, all such things might have existed before: mildness might have been the general mood of life before the first act of violence interrupted it; Greeks were Greeks before Romans marked their presence; the church was catholic and Trent only clarified various points in opposition to the Protestants whom it, in turn, created as one entity from the dispersed groups fighting each other, as the opponents of the Catholic church. “Creation” means here a sharpened degree of sorting out, of becoming more precise and conscious. The distinctions have already been made, they become only fully actualised, precisely visible.

Mildness which has not yet been contradicted by anything is certainly recognised, is experienced. But it is not yet dissociated from experience, is not yet opposed to anything. The first misfortune or act of violence draws a border between the two, causes mildness not only to be mildness but to appear ‘as’ mildness, ‘as’ opposite of violence. Primary distinction, entering the world for the very first time, at the very beginning, pulls out an x from its background but does not relate it to y nor z. Chaos does not involve any relations. An x distinguished for the first time from its background is not more distinct from y than from z. Only at the lowest level, where reflectively dissociated objects are surrounded by the recognitions of differentiated experience and by other objects, they appear related to and against each other: the sharp border of one is the equally sharp border of its opposite, or else several elements are mutually contrary only when all are equally sharply distinguished. This is the creative power of the abstract signs from I:4.1.2, which assist reflective dissociation in sharpening and fixing the prior recognitions. Particulars are the limits of this process of dissociation which can be confined with the horizon of actuality or, ideally, immediacy.¹²

10. But if substances are not ‘in themselves’, they seem to be “[f]ictions of the mind, everywhere; and if we cannot discover what is truly a complete being, or a substance, we will have no stopping-point [...]”¹³ Indeed, there is no stopping-point. Yet, the lack of any underlying objective substances does not mean that distinctions and their limits are fictions of the mind. On the contrary, they are discoveries – distinctions of and from the indistinct. They

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¹¹ Binary opposition exemplifies only the general possibility of a series of contraries. Blue does not create red, but not-blue and not-yellow and not-... all together give red.

¹² Our examples, like mildness or Greek rationalism, do not look like what is usually understood by particulars. Yet, the latter arise only as limits of the same process which, at its earlier stages, involves the former. More detailed distinctions will be made below in 1.2.2.

¹³ G. W. Leibniz, *Correspondence with Arnauld*. to Arnauld 30.04 1687.
are found and not created, even if found only by the distinguishing existence and hence relative to it. Relativity means neither arbitrariness nor subjectivity. Some of things are more practical to fix as objects, to stop their further differentiation; mostly, those which are prone to be perceived within the horizon of actuality. In the attentive reflection that it is, it is ‘I’ who determines the termination point. But for the most, the limit of distinguishing is determined by the sensory and perceptive system, by the abilities to discern, by the intellectual criteria or tradition. The common character of these systems makes ‘us’ mostly agree to what counts as particular things. Starting from such a basis one may attempt characterisation of the things about which there is a wide consensus.

But at the bottom of it anything – a piece of chalk, a chair, a leg of the chair, a heap of stones, an atom, redness, anxiety, Prague, independence, love – can be posited within the horizon of actuality, that is, turned into an object and thus given the status of a particular. This does not mean that particularity is a fiction of the mind – only that metaphysics of particular substances is an enterprise of a very limited validity founded on the equally narrow basis as the metaphysics of actuality.

Distinguishing stops somewhere, usually, for purely pragmatic reasons. It is much easier to handle a sofa, a coffee-table and each of the four belonging armchairs as separate objects than to consider the whole as one indivisible ‘sofa group’. But the latter is possible, too, as is the case whenever you must buy the whole group instead of only one armchair which you actually like and need. Every object admits further distinctions, the group contains sofa, and table, and...; a chair has all its parts, composed of their parts, atoms, etc.. The limit circumscribing an object has nothing absolute about it, it can be pushed further up or down, depending on the circumstances. And thus one has never managed to specify a single substantial form of any substance. For substantial form is not an inherent property possessed objectively by a substance, but the mere fact that we have to and hence always do stop distinguishing somewhere, that even if the process can always be continued, it is always suspended at some point, though the points may vary. What determines this point may be very strange in any particular case and quite different in different cases, because it is not determined by the ‘substances in themselves’ but by the confrontation of the subject’s pragmatics with the matter of experience. The only invariable element is the necessity to actually stop somewhere.

Every distinction is a boundary, creates two poles of the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ or, perhaps, just ‘left’ and ‘right’. The positive characteristics, the ‘internal natures’ are not more primary than the respective ‘exteriors’. They emerge at the end of the process of distinguishing and carry always the burden of everything which has been left ‘outside’. Of course, the process establishes elaborate structures of distinctions. When we distinguish the chair from the table, we are already in the room and not in the desert, when we distinguish the concept of a group from that of a monoid, we are well within the mathematical curriculum and not in the forest. Reflection does not have to explicitly negate the nature, then a forest, then this forest, etc., in order to arrive at a monoid. But reflection does not have to do it only because all these ‘negations’ have already happened when reflection focuses on its actual object.

We would thus go much further than Lotze who says that a thing is what it does – a thing is everything that it is not. If this seems paradoxical, than observe that the whole work is done here by the word ‘everything’. A thing is but the sum of all that it excludes, the limit of distinctions from all that it is not. This is the whole ‘positive essence’ of anything and knowing one is the same as knowing the other. In this sense, everything
indeed reflects the whole universe, every word means something specific only in the context of all other words, microcosmos of every particular reflects the whole macrocosmos. This is also what makes it possible to dissolve (as one says, “deconstruct”) any issue, any concept, any construction – in short, any identity – in the interminable web of correlations, themes and exclusions by a systematic, that is, merciless analysis.

12. But one might still object for, after all, it is so obvious and natural to think in positive terms. Standing in front of a house nobody thinks an infinite series of not-… No, but distinction is much more than thought, not to mention reflective attention. We certainly distinguish this house from what surrounds it, this is what makes one see this house at all. Learning the concept of a group, nobody thinks an infinite series of not-… No, one thinks perhaps a monoid and adds a few axioms. But this only means that, making new distinctions, we usually introduce them within some given context, whether the context of actual situation, the context of discourse, the context of mathematical definitions, in short, within some ‘positive’ determinations. But there are some things to observe here. All examples (mentioned here, and usually used elsewhere) concern reflective distinguishing, that is, distinguishing which starts with something given. This ‘something given’ is the ‘positive’ background to which some more ‘positive’ attributes are added, as it happens with genus to which one adds differentia specifica or a species to which one adds material accidents to obtain a particular. But where does this ‘positive’ background come from? It is already distinguished from other ‘positive’ backgrounds, the ‘positive’ backgrounds mutually limit each other.

All ‘positive’ content arises only as the limit of distinguishing it from others. The ‘positive’ character of the givens is the simple matter of efficiency. Having $n$ distinctions which, in general, divide the space independently from each other, we obtain up to $2^n$ distinct sub-spaces, each one given by a combination of positive or negative (‘inside’ or ‘outside’) value for each of $n$ distinctions, \(^{14}\) (If we denote distinctions by $D_1, D_2, \ldots, D_n$, and the ‘inside’, respectively ‘outside’, of $D$ by $D^+$, respectively $D^-$, then a sub-space $S$ corresponds to a choice $D_1^{s_1} D_2^{s_2} \ldots D_n^{s_n}$ where each $s_i$ is either + or -.) A new distinction will give $2^{n+1}$ sub-spaces, effecting the exponential increase in their total number. Thus if we were to identify every particular thing explicitly by the set of all distinctions separating it from all the rest of the world, we would be exposed to this exponential growth which would quickly put a limit to our finite abilities. But assume that we want to make a distinction $D$ which is relevant only relatively to one, call it $S$, of all the $2^n$ sub-spaces. (E.g., we only want to distinguish blue – our current $S$ is the sub-space of colors.) In principle, it would require a new level of $2^{n+1}$ possibilities from which only two are of interest: those within $S$ which lie on the ‘inside’ or on the ‘outside’ of the new $D$. Having fixed $S$, perhaps giving it a name “colors”, i.e., turning it into a ‘positive’ entity, we may now refer to the new possibilities as $SD^+$, “color blue”, respectively $SD^-$, “color not-blue”, instead of the whole sequences $D_1^{s_1} D_2^{s_2} \ldots D_n^{s_n} D^+$, respectively $D_1^{s_1} D_2^{s_2} \ldots D_n^{s_n} D^-$. Explaining to somebody what “blue” means, we do not start by saying that it is not a body, nor the taste of lemon, nor the view from Mount Everest, nor… We start by saying that it is a color – this limits immediately the horizon of attention to the relevant sub-space. Thus, stopping the distinctions at some points and assigning to their limits at these points ‘positive’ determinations – which simply forget the chain of negations which constitute it – reduces the burden of explicitly handling further distinctions which might appear within

\(^{14}\)Limiting, for the sake of simplicity, the attention to binary distinctions, cf. footnote 11. Admitting distinctions with up to $k$ contraries does not affect the argument: we only replace the basis 2 with $k$. 

II.1. The existential levels
these, not ‘positive’ and for the current purpose irrelevant, sub-spaces. The ‘positive’
determinations allow one to forget the – enormous and typically reflectively unknown –
number of distinctions which, although present, would only disturb dealing with the actual
object confusing the context with a multitude of irrelevancies. Nevertheless, the full series
of such ‘negative’ distinctions behind every ‘positive’ determination can always be invoked
– sometimes, for a creative enrichment and, sometimes, for a destructive disturbance.

Thus, although we grant the positive determinations with their eventual expression in

the idea of a substance all practical value, we view them exclusively as such: pragmatic
deVICES. The ontological status of substances, substantial forms and the like is, like of most
other things, the same as their epistemological status, which in this case is: the limits of
distinctions. Omnī determinatio est negatio.\(^\text{15}\)

We bring thus an element of negative theology into the trivial matters of distinguishing
 particulars. But we do it because we are interested not only in these trivial matters but,
primarily, in their relations to and anchoring in the unity of existential confrontation.
Certainly, possible and most natural issues for discussion and investigation are where the
actual limits are drawn, what ‘positive’ contents they determine and how such ‘positive’
determinations relate to each other. But as the Aristotelians and others have spent on
that few thousands years, we could hardly contribute to the discussions in any way. From
the existential perspective, we also consider their focus slightly mistaken because they are
underlied by the objectivistic assumption of studying the ‘real’ substances and essences, as
they are or even must be ‘in themselves’. We do not believe in the metaphysical status of
any particular substances, we do not take the particular things as anything more primordial
than the horizon of actuality. Nor vice versa. For just like a particular thing is no ultimate
substance, so neither is the immediate limit of the horizon of actuality, ‘the shortest
unit of experienced time’ any absolute unit – it is just an aspect of an experience of a
particular thing. The two mutually condition each other, form a nexus, a whole system of
correlated and mutually dependent aspects. Immediacy is constituted by the minuteness
of an experience of a particular thing, and a particular thing would never appear if it were
not dissociated and narrowed down to the limit of immediacy.

The eventual dissolution of any thing, as its supposedly accidental features and properties
are being removed, is now a standard objection against the very notion of a substance,
We share it and, as stated in §9, do not find ‘out there’ any objective and indissoluble
substances. But we find them everywhere where our thoughts, perceptions, feelings, acts
and activities stop for even a shortest moment, bringing out of the chaotic flow of ‘trans-
itive parts’ of time the ‘substantive parts’ which can be retained and carried over to the
next moment, I:§68. The idea of a substance is founded in the elementary operation of
reflection, in the observation that it is, which posits a being at the limit of distinctions. It
is a constant aspect of actual experiences, in which reflective dissociation carries its work
to the extreme limit of immediacy.

\(^\text{15}\)Let us only remember that living beings are excluded from the present considerations. We should also
recall, from I:6.2.2, our objections to pantheism which might seem weakened by the above phrase. We
are now working with some established distinctions, within a differentiated world where, indeed, choosing
some determinate contents amounts to excluding others. With respect to our earlier development in Book
I, the more appropriate formulation would be Omnī negatio est determinatio. The two can be accepted
jointly as expressions of the dual aspect of distinction: by drawing a border, splitting the space in two, it
both negates (whatever falls ‘outside’) and determines (whatever falls ‘within’).
1.1.3. Subject

As we have observed at the end of §4, immediate experience has no subject. It is relative to an organ, a part of the body, a single act. In reflective terms, however, an act involves a subject, and reflection will find it wherever it finds an object.

The idea of a purely immediate subject, a subject which no longer has anything to do with human existence but merely with the logic of the universal, and as momentaneous as timeless constitution, may appear as the extreme offense to common-sense, as well as to the objectivistic seriousness. But it only acknowledges a subject which is a true accomplice of the givenness of the object. The reduction of things to the ‘substantial’ points effects an analogous reduction on the side of the subject. Its experiential ‘unreality’ is due to the fact that it must reside within the equally narrow, whether temporal or spatial, horizon. It emerges clearly with the epistemology and immediacy of Cartesian cogito and reaches its peak with the problematic of constitution within German idealism. The transcendental subject operates always in the ideal immediacy of an unextended point, its object appears in the immediacy of a single act which, carrying the burden of the constitution of the whole world, becomes as complicated as it is instantaneous. Contents appearing at a point dissociated from its surroundings, from its temporal and spatial context, appear as arbitrary or, whenever one wants to give more positive connotations, as spontaneous. The spontaneity of an immediate subject is just the other side of the arbitrariness of the object emerging no matter how intricate meanders of transcendental constitution ex nihilo, not even in the actuality of here-and-now, but in the ideal limit of pure and timeless immediacy. Consciousness whether Descartes’ cogito, Kant’s ‘I think’, Fichte’s ego, Husserl’s transcendental consciousness or Sartre’s for-itself is actual through and through, is an immediate, instantaneous and by the same token, or rather only in this sense, spontaneous act of constitution of an object. Spontaneity of this act of endowing with form (in-forming?) is, as we just said, only another side of the arbitrariness of the appearing matter. Both aspects, dissociated from the surrounding background of experience, find no other justification beyond the positive connotations of the word ‘spontaneous’ which could equally well be replaced by “whimsical”.

As far as we can discern any subject of an immediate experience, it is simply the signifying pole of the reflective act, is the fact that such an act involves representation, a dissociation of the sign from what it signifies. The subjective aspect is the actual sign, the sharpness of the effected dissociation (cf. I:4.2). Substantialisation of the subject, endowing it with a being beyond the limit of immediacy, is only another side of the permanent substantiality sensed behind the immediacy of an object. This mistake, however, is grounded in the fact that just as the immediate contents arise from the wider, also in the temporal sense, sphere of being, so reflective acts are acts of a real existence whose being is not exhausted by their immediacy. We will proceed towards this wider sphere in the following section 1.2.

1.1.4. Transcendence

Reflection that it is experiences the transcendence of its object primarily as its externality. We could say that it is nothing else than such an experience, that externality is the universal content of every reflection which merely notices that it is. This is even the case with the spark which burns me. Although the sign, object and reflex coincide temporarily, the very localisation, the very narrowing of the horizon of the event and reaction, amounts to externalisation which becomes apparent in the moment I direct my reflective attention
to it. It is not me, it only affects me; it does not involve me, only a part of my body. *Externalisation* does not have any inherent connection to extension or space, only to the narrowing of the temporal horizon to a minute, *immediate experience*. It is the eventually abstract minuteness which constitutes the sense of being somehow foreign, not quite mine, *external*. The aspect of *spatiality* enters this relation as simultaneity, in that the *external object* is experienced simultaneously and ‘as’ simultaneous with the *subject* of this very experience.

This simultaneity harbours all the ambiguity of different levels. It is co-extensional with the *horizon of actuality* but, as an aspect of *reflective dissociation*, it involves the experience of *reflection* arriving after its contents. In I:§55, we have seen how reification of *externality*, when limited to the actually given contents, leads to the *horizontal transcendence* of objects, which appear as independent from the *subject*. This independence, revealed in the *reflection that it is*, involves the dissonance between the *immediacy* of the given *object* and its temporal sliding out of the *immediacy* of reflective grasp. The reflective *after* is exactly the experience of *externality* with the germinal element of *not-actuality*, the most elementary form of *horizontal transcendence*.

We have also pointed out the character of double *dissociation* involved in *externality*, 17. I:§42. On the one hand, *externality* is an aspect of consciousness encountering its *object* as distinct from itself, which amounts to self-consciousness, I:3.3. But the sharp distinctness of the *object* is but another side of its *dissociation* from the background, from its *experiential* origin. An *object*, imprisoned within the horizon of *immediacy*, has been *dissociated* not only from the *subject* but also from everything else. This double *dissociation* gives object’s independence ambiguous flavour. On the one hand, as independent from the *subject*, it is, it appears as a residual, substantial point which is. But on the other hand, as isolated from everything else, as hopelessly alone, it is almost unreal. The strangeness of an *object* appearing in the *reflection that it is*, the strangeness of its being at all is the strangeness of its being ‘on its own’, so strangely, intensely and yet almost unreally alone.

This ‘unreality’ points towards ‘something else’, towards something from which the *object* has been *dissociated*. An *object* dissociated from its background and surroundings, a pure ‘substance’, appears as a spontaneous (arbitrary) fact that it is – as intriguing as it is meaningless. Not only has it no reason to be so and not otherwise – it has no reason to be at all. “*Why is there something rather…?*” This gives rise to the existentialistic nausea exactly when one concentrates on the aspect of meaninglessness, unreality. But it may also be grasped with a grateful fascination or detached thankfulness. This, however, is possible only because the experience already involves ‘something else’ than the pure *immediacy* of the given. The apparent ‘unreality’, which becomes unbearable when *dissociated* from other aspects of *experience*, marks the trace of the virtual *signification*, of ‘something else’, which is felt the stronger the more *reflection* insists on the mere *immediacy* of the *objects*. This is the vertical aspect of *transcendence*, reminding *reflection* of the anchoring of its *immediacy* in deeper, that is, wider layers of *experience*.

### 1.2 Actuality

Let us now consider much more mundane cases of what, in the more common sense of the word, would be called “experiences”; situations which are not reduced to a single moment but which are organised within a relatively short, yet not *immediate* time span; *experiences* with a finite and limited but no longer experientially extensionless temporal scope.
1.2.1. Complexes

18. Entering a room for the first time, gives first a vague, general impression of its character. It may be ugly, cosy, warm, cold, dark, pleasant... After a few moments in the room, its experience changes in that one becomes more attentive to its various aspects and parts. Looking around, one notices the arrangement of furniture, the colors, the fracture of the walls etc. At the same time the room itself recedes in the background, one no longer perceives the room but this window, this corner, this armchair. If, however, suddenly asked "How do you like this room?" one can at once posit it as one totality. Describing its elements and their interplay, one address the actual object, this room. It is both a unity and a multiplicity. Trying to grasp all of the room one will easily fail. Trying to embrace simultaneously all its details in one act, one can, at best, summarise them in a general impression. Very often, the very same impression one had on entering the room. But one also knows that this totality involves more than this impression, this original sign which is all of the totality one can actualise.

A room exemplifies what is typically considered an object of experience. Actual experiences involve not just isolated objects but their complexes, unities which are totalities, objects which are not simple but internally differentiated. No such complexes are more fundamental than others. Before a child sees that a chair can be moved away from the table, the two can be experienced as one complex: one, because neither is yet definitely dissociated from the other, and complex because itself internally differentiated. A picture hanging on the wall is not part of the wall, nor something on it. To begin with, there is neither a picture nor a wall but a totality of one complex. Once we have learned that chairs and tables come separately and that picture may be taken of the wall, we live with the immediate consciousness of these complexes whenever we encounter them. But this is the end rather than the beginning of the story.

19. A variety of elements becomes one complex when it is cut out of experience as both differentiated beyond the actual given and yet posited as one totality within the horizon of actuality through a unifying, actual sign.

Complexes are like objects which emerge not due to any metaphysical 'substantial form', but due to their particular relation to the horizon of actuality. Their constitutive feature is that, being grasped with the horizon of actuality, they are recognised as units, but units which are totalities presenting themselves, so to speak, incompletely. Although given in an actual experience through a unifying sign, they are not fully actual, they always carry some recognised distinctions which slip out of the horizon of the actually given.

Entering the room, the first, in the order of founding, experience is not of furniture, walls, pictures etc., but of ‘…’, of the unity of the actual experience. One does not look attentively into each corner, contemplate the ceiling, the floor, in order to finally conclude "Yeah, it is this room". At first, it is ‘…’, a new actuality emerging from the background of experience, one might say, from the background from which one entered the room. Only in terms of the reflectively dissociated 'substantial parts', this new actuality seems to be added to the preceding series of actualities. And thinking in such terms, trying to specify the objective features which constitute this new actuality, one looks for the more and more specific atoms which might account for the discontinuity of attentive reflection. But experientially, it is not added to the previous experiences but, on the contrary, subtracted from the background, dissociated from the continuity of experience.

The correlate of the reflection that it is was called "object". Its specific feature is
that, appearing within the immediate limit of the horizon of actuality, its experience coincides with its sign: the sign, that is, the fact of simply being. The objecthood of something is conditioned by the possibility of grasping it fully, without experiencing that anything was left outside, in the immediacy of one act. Complexes are, ‘objectively’, the same things. But in addition to being experienced as objects, involving merely the unity of residual being, their experience involves also multiplicity, totality of various elements. The experience of complexes involves therefore not only their objective unity but also the experience of their being complex, even if not of their full complexity.

1.2.2. The signs

The signs of complexes refer thus not only to the immediate givens but also to the aspects which, at the moment of experience, are not given within the horizon of actuality – and are experienced as such (like all the parts of the room which one knows are there but which are not given in the same way as those one is actually looking at). The unity of a complex is experienced independently from the potential, reflectively constructed unity of the objective contents. Even if, objectively, a chair may seem to possess more unity than a heap of stones, the unity of both is simply the unity of being comprised within the horizon of actuality. But this unity is differentiated. It is a multiplicity of simultaneous elements which is experienced along with their unity. In this sense, every actuality, every situation, involves a complex, a unity of multiplicity. The differences between various signs of complexes concern primarily whether they focus on the aspect of unity or multiplicity. The original signs do the former and the reflective ones the latter.

1.2.2.i. Original signs

I wake up and feel strength, a lot of vital energy, a joyful vigor. Is it the sunny morning which is the cause of that? Was it the light supper yesterday evening? Is it...? It does not really matter. Hopefully, it will last the day long but it may also easily disappear very shortly. No matter what its reasons might be, the mood does reveal something, if not anything objective then, as Heidegger puts it, how I am now. And this both reflects and will be reflected in my perception of the situation, for I will act differently (even while doing the same things) than I would if I woke up and felt fragile, feeble and low.

I leave the house, drive to the city, park my car and enter a cafe. I am enjoying the perspective of a quite hour over a cup of coffee and a good book. The coffee I get is not exactly the best, but it is not enough to spoil the mood. Unexpectedly, I see a friend approaching my table. He asks how long I have been here, how I came here, where I parked my car. At this moment I realise that I locked the keys in the car. Oh sh...! The mood of the expected quietude disappears suddenly and I am getting upset. What makes me so? Not the keys locked in the car because, in themselves, they are not relevant to the sense of quiet enjoyment. It is the whole complex of the situation, the anticipated trouble, the money I have to pay, the spoiled hour at the cafe. The simple fact of locked keys is certainly the focal point of the whole situation but getting upset unveils much more than this simple fact. The impression unveils the significance of the simple fact, its placement in a broader, complex context of related facts and consequences.

Calm voice of my friend, reassuring me that it is no big problem, we just call this and that number, wait outside smoking a cigarette and they will come and open the car, helps a lot. One could say, he only rationalises away my impression. Indeed, but how? By
II.1. The existential levels

bringing into the situation aspects, points of view, possible solutions and, not least, his
calm attitude, which all together modify the complex and, consequently, my mood.

21. The original signs of actuality are all kinds of such moods and impressions.\(^{16}\) They
are direct and original in the sense that they can be experienced without the respective
complex being actually given. In fact, they often appear before the respective complexes.
I can get a feeling of fear without knowing exactly what is frightening me. I can be in a
bad mood without knowing exactly why. In this respect, a mood not accompanied by the
respective complexes, merely announces ... the general mood.

Even if some complex is present, the border between it and its impression can be very
vague. The differences between a ‘violent passion’ and a ‘passionate violence’, between an
‘intense curiosity’ and a ‘curious intensity’, between an ‘unpleasant meeting’ and the ‘sense
of distaste’ are as discernible from the objectivistic perspective as they are experientially
negligible. In the evening we are sitting with some friends around a table in a pub having
an enjoyable conversation about nothing. After some time the neighbour who was sitting
on his own joins in. There is some intense curiosity in his eyes, as if slight irritability
in the way they search through the whole place. But he seems to be doing quite well in
joining and even modifying the conversation. After a few questions and answers he focuses
on something particular one of us said and follows it up with more and more detailed
questions. “So what did you really mean by that?” …Hmmm. “Was it this or that? But
then, you see, you would have to say that...” His acuteness seems a bit uneasy, perhaps,
impolite and too detailed but, so far, there is nothing directly wrong with it. And nothing
wrong happens later on, either. After leaving the place, all of us have the same impression
of the guy with a somewhat inquisitive attitude, as if afraid of unveiling his own meanings;
interrogative, perhaps not quite a Porfiry Petrovich but still a bit like a detective. It is
impossible to say at which point this impression started to make itself felt. Was it when he
started to ask the questions? When he joined our conversation? Was it already his fidgety
look? It is equally impossible to say to what precisely this impression refers. We could
mention a lot of small examples, things he said, ways he looked but it is not the mere sum
of such minute particulars. Saying “the detective” means much more the impression he
created than any particular of his ‘objectively given’ features. Of course, there is far from
here to any judgment of the person, but the impression has already painted a whole, even
if incomplete, picture. Referring to him, we will now say “the detective”.

22. We can thus list three characteristic features of the original signs at the current level. These
signs announce complexes lending them their unity, they comprise a totality of a complex,
a situation or an object, into a unity of one sign, the distinctive quality of the mood or
impression. An impression, “is always a simple predicate substituted by an operation of
the mind for a highly complicated predicate.”\(^{17}\) This unifying function is the fundamental
function of the original signs of complexes.

Another common feature of all the above examples is that the given mood allows a
certain variation of more minute impressions, perceptions and immediate sensations. One
can experience the same mood in different situations. The original signs of actuality can
incarnate in a variety of lesser forms. “Every one knows how when a painful thing has
to be undergone in the near future, the vague feeling that it is impending penetrates all
our thought with uneasiness and subtly vitiates our mood even when it does not control

\(^{16}\) One might say, for instance, that moods are lasting impressions or draw even more specific distinctions.
But we will not differentiate here any further.

\(^{17}\) C. S. Pierce, Some consequences of four incapacities. III.p.58
our attention; it keeps us from being at rest, at home in the given present.” A more pervasive mood, like that induced by the pending expectation, allows for modifications of more minute moods and, in particular, for a large variation in the sensations, perceptions, thoughts and other immediate signs. But it penetrates this variation with the constancy of a unifying sign.

Consequently, moods have a less reactive character than immediate signs. They are to some extent independent from the variation of the objective elements, are not fully determined by them. A joyful vigor or pending expectation announce the significance of some complexes and, as such, can be viewed as caused by something. But, in practice, this cause is often impossible to determine precisely because it is not any single element but their interplay, complex. Complexes have a very wide meaning: a table, a room, a situation, two weeks in Prague, inquisitiveness of a person, are all examples of complexes, of things which are differentiated into variety of aspects but which, nevertheless, appear as totalities, as focal points of all the involved differences. Mood can be seen as the interplay of these differences or else as that which gathers the interplay of just these differences in a unifying sign. It is not relative to any single of them. It admits inclusion of further elements and their variation until, eventually, it wanes giving place to a new mood.

1.2.2.ii. Reflective signs

Reflection of a complex no longer stops at the mere observation that it is but notices that it is so-and-so. It goes beyond the positing of something that merely is and, differentiating the unity of an object, surrounds it with dissociated accidents, predicates, properties. Eventually, reflection creates lists, lists of properties, aspects, features, and then tries to reconstruct the unity of the complex out of the totality of these scattered parts. We will call these reflective signs of complexes “concepts” and “thoughts” – totalities organised around a unity which, however, for the attentive reflection remains often only a mere sign.

Concepts are externalised impressions, explications of the unity of complexes as totalities of more specific determinations. Discussing the detective or the locked keys, one will collect a whole series of thoughts which make up the important aspects of the situations. Eventually, the whole complex may become a single thought, although this will merely mean establishing a simple sign, like “the detective” which now, in a truly artificial fashion, signifies the respective complex. There may be a difference between ‘the detective’ taken as such a concept or as an impression, but it does not concern their objective correlate, only the mode of its presentation. This concept of this detective may be very vague. Yet, in so far as it is explicated, it is a concept, a list of features gathered around the unity of his person.

Unity and multiplicity

Just as an impression “is always a simple [sign] substituted by an operation of the mind for a highly complicated predicate,” so a concept substitutes a ‘complicated predicate’ arrived at by analysis for the simple original sign. Impressions, as the signs of unity precede, in the order of founding, concepts which only explicate the involved complexity.

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18W. James, Essays in Pragmatism, I.p.13
19We do not aim at any (im)possibly detailed analyses of thought processes and their dependence on the available and unavailable concepts. We allow ourselves even to conflate the thought and the concept, just as we earlier conflated distinction as the act of distinguishing and as the distinguished content.
20The Latin conceptus reflects well the tension between the unity of the origin/embryo (retained in the English “conception”) and the multiplicity which it gathers and stores as in a container.
But as *impressions* involve also internal differentiation, the transition between the two is only a matter of degree. A person can *recognise* ‘BC’ without understanding what ‘B’ and ‘C’ are. Take ‘B’ to be ‘brown’ and ‘C’ to be ‘cat’. A child growing up with only ‘BC’s, but with no separate ‘B’s or ‘C’s, might learn to distinguish ‘BC’s from ‘ZY’s, even have a word “be”, without ever getting the idea of dissociating ‘B’ from ‘C’. But meeting ‘BD’ (a brown dog?), can give rise to separate recognitions – even *dissociation* – of ‘B’ and ‘C’. As long as ‘B’ and ‘C’ appear only in ‘BC’ they may be, to some degree, *recognised* but they are not (necessarily) *dissociated*. What happened with ‘BC’, can now happen to ‘B’ and ‘C’, which remain ‘primitive’ only as long as further *distinctions* are not drawn. Do the repetitive encounters with ‘BC’ give rise to the same *impression* or recognition of the same *concept*? We leave attempts to answer it uniformly to those who find them worthwhile.

25. Unity precedes multiplicity in the order of *founding* yet, once the level of *reflective dissociations* has been established, new units may arise from multiplicity, from a series of particular *experiences*. Although this is typical for construction of advanced *concepts*, it applies equally to *impressions*.

Entering a room, one need not get immediately any specific *impression*. One can have none and get one first after being in this room for a while, after having discovered different aspects and objects collected there which, together, build up a unified *impression* of the whole. Looking for a way in a foreign city, one can be forced to stop at each cross and ask for directions, to consult the city’s plan, etc. Eventually, one finds the way. The next day one may still have difficulties but the intermissions won’t be that frequent. After a few times one knows the way ‘by heart’, one has it as a one entity, given in a single moment not with all its details but with the clarity of the single *sign*: “I know the way.” One has ‘built a totality’. Sure, to begin with one might have had a mere idea of this way from the hotel to the restaurant but now one has an *experience* of it. Shall we call it a “concept” of this way? An “impression”? We leave such quarrels to those who find them worthwhile.

26. One might want to say that “I know the way” expresses neither a *concept* nor an *impression* but an intuition: a unitary grasp of a *complex* which “relates immediately to the object, and is single.” An example illustrating the generality of such intuition, and of a *concept* emerging after the experiences of its parts, is given by reasoning, like that involved in understanding a mathematical definition. To begin with, one has to work one’s way through the notation, then through the other concepts applied, then their interrelations, finally, its implications and relations to other definitions. Then one may understand it but it is not the same as ‘getting it’. To ‘get it’, one has to grasp the whole in one act – of intuition – which gives perhaps a wrong *impression* of certainty that, even if one does not know all potential implications and applications of the definition, one knows *how* it possibly can be used, that is, where it can not be used, ‘Getting it’ is an *impression* of several things falling on their place, of having understood, which accompanies acquisition of a *concept*. Such an intuition arises when “at the end of a certain time ordinary meditation produces what is called acquired contemplation, which consists in seeing at a simple glance the truths which could previously be discovered only through prolonged discourse.”

Thus understood, intuition might be taken as the common element of unity involved both in the experienced *impressions* and in understanding of *concepts*. In its technical,

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21I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. A320/B377 [Without, of course, agreeing to the Kantian limitation of intuition to sensuous perception.]

22Although the passage refers to the development of spiritual insight, it is equally applicable in the present context. The quotation is from St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Homo apostolicus* Appendix I:7.
philosophical meaning it relates primarily to the conceptual understanding signifying its unitary pole gathering the multiplicity of the differentiated contents. In the more popular meaning, it comes closer to the impressions which provide only a hunch suggesting a vague, yet not arbitrary, direction for further elaboration.

All reflective efforts are guided by the search for a unifying intuition. To become a concept, a totality must be gathered in a unity. Starting with the dissociated elements, the unity does not appear as any prior but as a goal to be achieved. The whole tradition of epistemology and theory of knowledge is marked by various attempts to obtain unities from the ‘given atoms’. Abstraction (of higher concepts from particular instances), induction (of general laws from special cases), deduction (of elaborate consequences from simple axioms), construction (of complex structures from atomic data) – all assume some simple and dissociated givens and try to construct from them structured unities.

But as the assumed givens are only dissociated objects of reflection, it is never entirely clear what can be counted as a genuine unity. If we list a series of more or less arbitrary properties, we do form a concept. Its unity, however, does not reflect any inherent interrelations of the involved properties but only the unity of the act of positing. Possible deeper motivations of this act do not remove from the result the aura of a voluntary fiat. In many cases the unity can be reduced to more specific aspects, like coherence, consistency, purposefulness. Yet the need for such a variety of aspects to account for the variety of unities, as well as many cases where none of them is discernible, suggest an accidental and almost arbitrary character of what counts as a unity. A single stone is a unity and so is a heap of stones. Unity is accidental, or primitive, in the sense that it amounts to drawing in the matter of experience limits which are not determined by any metaphysical, substantial unities. The actual unity of a concept, not having any metaphysical necessity, is primitive, is established often irrespectively of how coherently or incoherently, how logically or illogically the involved elements are related. Even if reflective efforts result in the acquisition of a unitary intuition of the limited actuality of the comprehended complex, this unity has a different character from the reflective constructions, it is as if ‘given’ (intuited) – “for the intellect, the unity remains only a postulate, an act of faith.”

*Concepts vs. impressions*

Concept requires explicit presence of the differentiated elements which it gathers in the unity of one sign. Impressions can also arise as signs unifying a multiplicity of more minute elements. However, these elements need not be explicitly given in the experience. Impressions not only often precede the discernment of such elements, but also occur without their, anterior or posterior, discernment. Focus of a concept is the interplay of distinct elements, focus of an impression is their unity. And so, psychologically, the two are incommensurate: at any actual moment, it is either a concept or an impression but never both. If, involved in a situation, one tries to observe the arising impressions, they become polluted and falsified. One can not reflectively catch, not to mention, control oneself, in the moment of getting an impression. Trying something like that, dissolves any actual impression, makes it withdraw behind the imposed reflective contents. Likewise, proceeding

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23 Unity as the limit of distinctions lacking any conceptual unity is the reason why most concepts are not definable. For instance, “‘doorknob’ is primitive (unstructured); and, for that matter, so is too practically everything else [every other concept].” J. A. Fodor, *Concepts*. VIIp.147] This primitive undefinability concerns only the unity, the line where the limit of distinctions is drawn. Multiplicity within this limit implies various relations which make some concepts more potent and relevant than others.

with a conceptual analysis, one can not pay attention to the impressions which, possibly, accompany it in the background.

Yet, although the two can not be reflectively given simultaneously, so every complex, containing the element of both unity and multiplicity, elicits both modes of apprehension. On the one hand, we know the possibility—far from universal but not entirely absent—of talking one out of an impression, like the friend’s arguments which calm me down and bring me out of being upset. Also, a unified impression, like a vague intuition, carries already the possible results of decomposing it into a series of thoughts. Even if it does not contain them explicitly so, once the relevant complex has been dissected, we find in the analysed results the reasons of the original impression. On the other hand, every reflective sign, every thought has a mood, it creates an associated impression which reflects the unity implied by the thought. (Of course, receptivity to and above all the significance one attaches to such moods may vary tremendously.) “Every concept in our conscious mind, in short, has its own psychic associations. While such associations may vary in intensity (according to the relative importance of the concept to our whole personality, or according to the other ideas and even complexes to which it is associated in our unconscious), they are capable of changing the ‘normal’ character of that concept.”

Every system of thought has a mood, every philosophy has, besides its system of concepts and ideas, a general mood which hangs like a cloud above and flavours its more specific aspects. And just like the understanding of the situation with the locked car keys influences its impression, so one’s understanding of a philosophical system influences its mood, the shape and the density of the cloud.

Moods and impressions are considered as subjective, only privately mine, while concepts as objective or, at least, public and shared. As most claims within this dualism, this one is of little interest and sounds as plausible, as it is misleading.

For the first, subjectivity of impressions is not different from the subjectivity of concepts and understanding. Just as different persons may have different impressions of a given complex, they may have different concepts of it. A person with an obsessive fear of revealing his privacy might experience our detective as a persecutor, while one with a purely social interests as an annoying snob. The concept of ‘the detective’ formed by each person will gather perhaps different aspects of the detective, but all these aspects may be equally objective. In each case we are dealing with the character of the confrontation involving both a subjective and an objective element. Having different emotions in a given situation is just like having different understanding of this situation. Incapacity of some persons to share the emotions of others witnesses to their subjectivity as much as the incapacity of some persons to understand the concepts understood by others witnesses to the subjectivity of concepts. “Human emotions are to a large extent socially objectified, and not subjective. Only a part of emotional life is subjective and individual.

29 C. G. Jung, Approaching the Unconscious. p.29

26 This mood is like the sign of the typical experience underlying the given philosophy (provided that it has character—for as Nietzsche says: only “if one has character one also has one’s typical experience which recurs again and again.” [F. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil. 70]) Say, for example, the mood of Heidegger: gnostic thirst for the hidden truth and resentment over its absence in the lower world and among common men; the mood of Nietzsche: unrewarded intensity turning into violent despair, heroic scream lost in the darkness; the mood of Spinoza: noble man need not judge others, but nobility of particular acts originates from the unity with the world; the mood of Wittgenstein was accurately described as empirical mysticism or, perhaps, mystification of empiricism; etc., etc. Finding such superficial and general characteristics insufficient does not change the fact that one, nevertheless, recognises their origin, one understands the mood.
thinking can be very subjective and often is so; thinking can be more individual than emotions, it depends less on the social objectification [...] Currently, one admits more and more often that there exist emotional apprehension [Erkenntnis]. It was claimed by Pascal, Scheler, and was emphasized by Keyserling."27 Let us only add that the emotional apprehension need not be merely a result of social objectification. Rather, it results from the fact that emotions, like conceptual understanding, relate to the objective complexes.

The tendency to classify impressions as subjective arises from disregarding their character of signs which reflect aspects of objective complexes. Instead, one views them analogically to the immediate sensations, as signs coinciding with the signified. They appear thus as if locked within one's subjectivity, as subjective signs dissociated from any 'objective outside'. But once we operate within this dissociation, concepts become also dissociated into their subjective thoughts and 'objective outside'. It has never been easy to specify what this 'objective' correlate of a subjective concept is. We leave this issue for the moment and will return to it in §§66 f.

Even if one admits some objective element of impressions, their subjectivity may be taken as referring to their vagueness, impossibility to identify precisely their content, what they exactly are. The explicit list of dissociated elements involved in a concept, on the other hand, makes their identification and interplay plainly visible. This is reflected in the view of the subjectivity of impressions as their privacy, incommunicability. The unified sign of an impression cannot be dissolved into more precise components without changing the impression. Its fleeting vagueness, reflecting so much the given complex as the background of the person experiencing it, can not be transferred outside the borders of the subject. Concepts, on the contrary, can be shared and publicly communicated.

Impressions are not, however, completely dissociated from the objective and intersubjective world, locked within the isolated subjectivity. Even if each of us paid attention to somewhat distinct aspects, we all got the impression of a detective. One would like to claim that this is not a common impression but only some rough, approximate common denominator of the impressions each of us had in his privacy. But this assumes that impressions are some definite entities or events, having some sharp borders which separate them from each other; that each of us had such a precise impression and that the ‘detective’ is only their common part. Now, certainly, each of us might have had slightly distinct impression. But the ‘detective’ is not abstracted from any atomic impressions of all of us. On the contrary, the impression each of us had was something which only further specialised the impression of ‘the detective’. Each of us can trace his particular impression to the nexus which he, like everybody else, experienced and which we agree to call “the detective”. This impression is something genuinely shared by all of us and, consequently, genuinely communicable.

Now, various people have various capacities of empathy and sympathy, of sharing other’s emotions. Just like various people have various intellectual capacities and skills, but if one is unable to recognise what another person is feeling, and one is unable to do so in principle, then one should have one’s psychology and emotional constitution looked at. All people have, at least in principle, the capacity to face the same situations, to address roughly the same (limits of) distinctions, to relate to (roughly) the same totality of a situation, which involves also the reactions and feelings of other persons. Sharing another’s feelings is, at bottom, just sharing his situation and problems. Whether one does it using one’s emotional intelligence or distanced reflection is certainly a psychological difference.

27N. Berdyaev, I and the world of objects. I:1
But in itself it is of no deeper significance as long as the results are (roughly) of the same character.

31. We have just admitted that every one of us might have had his own impression, a more specific version of the shared impression ‘detective’. These might seem genuinely private. But they are no different from ‘the detective’. Every limit of distinctions can be refined and it can be refined in various ways. It is only the question of how specific distinctions we want to communicate. If your impression was of an annoying snob and mine of a persecutor, there is nothing which could, in principle, prevent us from communicating these more specific impressions to each other. Such a communication would have to turn rather personal and intimate. And here we see a clear difference from concepts. The latter are not opposite of impressions in that they are communicable, but in that they are easily and impersonally communicable. The objective explication of the elements involved in a concept, their externalisation, serves the purpose of being accessible to an intelligence and education of the appropriate level – not to particular personalities. Communication of feelings and impressions, on the other hand, presupposes some personal community.  

32. But one might still object. The impression I had was this particular feeling, this very specific and unique event which could not possibly belong to anybody else. We can, perhaps, communicate the meanings and significance underlying our impressions but we can not share the specificity and uniqueness of actually feeling them. My view of the city is not your view of the same city. I cannot communicate to you exactly and precisely all minute sensations and impressions affecting me when beholding a view. But it is not because they are not communicable but because they are inexpressible. I can not communicate them even to myself. Their occurrence is registered but their possible specificity and particularity remain below the threshold of attentive, conscious distinguishing. All we can do is to capture the experienced impressions. When we succeed, we can express them to ourselves and, consequently, communicate them to others.

But even when I manage to communicate them, I do not share them, they remain privately mine. Thus, underneath all communicable impressions, there is a sphere of subjective privacy. It is not expressible and hence, verbally or conceptually, as inaccessible to others as to me. But it is there, it marks something which is mine and only mine. Notice, however, that their private mineness amounts to their minutely dissociated immediacy. Surely, my view of the city is not your view, my sensation of pain is not your sensation of pain. In so far as it is a view of the city it is communicable – only its infinitesimal uniqueness is not. But then also the retinal image in one’s left eye is different from the retinal image in the right eye. No two of the assumed ultimately private, minute and atomic impressions can have anything in common. Simply because the atoms, by their nature, are dissociated from each other. This ultimate subjectivity results from viewing the experience as moments of minute impressions – as dissociated from each other as one pure ‘now’ is dissociated from another. The uniqueness of feeling the actual impression can not be shared with other people just like it can not be shared with, repeated in any following actuality. Its uniqueness, its dissociation within this actuality is what, by this very token, makes it non transferable to any other actuality. Feeling exactly the same as another person, or expecting another person to feel exactly the same as I am feeling, are futile projects of overcoming the sense of alienated subjectivism. But it is equally

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28We will say more about sharing in III.3.3. §§120 ff. Here we only signal that feelings and moods, relating eventually, as everything else, to the indistinct one, are not so privately subjective as commonly assumed.
hopeless to try to find for the second time *exactly the same* feeling one had before. It fails by necessity, by its very nature, since it places the site of one’s being in the minuteness of immediate act which is *dissociated* not only from other people but also from other immediate acts.

As said in §15, every single act has its *subjective aspect*. Such an ultimately *dissociated* subjectivity obtains when this *aspect* becomes substantialised, *posed* as an entity which, in its being, *transcends* perhaps the horizon of immediacy but is still viewed as nothing but a *totality* of separate acts. For such an atomism, no sharing is possible because any unity can be only arbitrary and nominal – not only the unity of *shared impressions* but also unity of one subject. But it, too, strives after some unity, because that is *experienced* irrespectively of the degree of *dissociation*. Unity is primitive, that is, we stop distinguishing at some points for pragmatic and not metaphysical reasons. If we do not want to stop, nothing will force us to – nothing, except for the limited time and finitude of *reflective* capacities. The call to neglect or, as one prefers to say, overcome these limits is the mark of *objectivistic attitude* which is now clearly seen to be the same as *subjectivistic illusion*. Here, it triggers the search for the atomic impressions, which can be certain only when *immediate* and *precise* only when *dissociated*. Its mistake lies not so much in the recognition of the sphere of subjectivity, as in viewing it as the field of particular, *dissociated* feelings which one attempts to capture ‘in themselves’, in their *dissociated* particularity, forgetting that they are only splinters of the *unity of experience*.

**Understanding**

Summarising the above, we can say that *impressions*, just like *concepts*, are not ‘internal’ events of private and incommunicable subjectivity, but reflections of the confrontation of the *actual subject* with *complex objectivity*. Both draw and mark limits of *distinctions* – *distinctions* in the actual situation, in *experience* and, eventually, in the *indistinct*. *Conceptual distinctions* may require higher degree of *precision* and explicitness than vague *distinctions of impressions*. But in both cases, these are not (in any case not always) arbitrary *distinctions* relative only to subjective wishes. In this respect, the *precision* of *conceptual distinctions* is more voluntary, more relative to the *subjective actuality* than are *impressions*. We only seldom *recognise* precise limits. Their sharpness, imposed on the *recognitions of experience* by attentive reflection, is a more definitely *subjective* contribution than *vagueness of impressions*.

Both are modes of understanding. For understanding is *recognition* of limits. Understanding Prague is to know, more or less, where it ends and ceases to be Prague. Only objectivistic reduction would try to equate it with the knowledge of geography or administrative borders. To know Prague is equally to know what makes Prague different from Paris. Some *conceptual* explication is certainly possible here (e.g., Prague is the capital of Czech Republic, Paris of France) but it will be very limited. Likewise, to understand irritation, not in the sense of understanding its causes but what it is, is to know, more or less, where irritation ceases (or begins) to be one. Recognising these limits – which is not different from experiencing it, for feeling irritation is not to feel tranquility or pleasure – one understands what it is. In the same way, to understand the mathematical concept of a group is to be able to recognise what is a group and what is not, is to be able to distinguish it from other mathematical (and non-mathematical) entities, from a monoid, from a field. In either case, it is a wider context of *experience* and understanding which conditions the understanding of an *impression* or a *concept* – generally, of a *sign*. One understands the *sign* $x$ when one knows what it refers to. Yes, but what it refers to is not (primarily)
any positive, precise and determinate 'essence' but the limits of its application, the limits which separate the complex \( x \) from others, which mark where \( x \) begins (and ceases) to be \( x \). Understanding of these limits does not require their explication.

34. To understand something is not to grasp its supposed 'essence' but to know its limits. (This is the same difference as that between the positive contents and the negative limits of distinctions discussed in 1.1.2, in particular, §12.) To understand something explicitly, one has to start with this 'something' which is already recognised. This 'something' is already understood, it is already delimited from a wider context, although such an understanding is hardly precise and conceptual. It is tacit rather than explicit, but it is understanding. Without such an understanding, questions about the possible causes of irritation, ways of avoiding it, etc. would not even be possible. These later questions may certainly contribute to the expanded understanding of irritation. But they do not condition its understanding, only explicate it. The initial moment of understanding is a reflection which isolates this 'something' as an actual object. At first, we may not even know what it is that we are trying to understand — something happened, but for the moment it remains a mere 'something', because we do not know what it was, whence it came nor what it meant. Only an original sign has appeared, which, in spite of, or rather precisely through its vagueness, calls for a closer attention. Then, and only then, the questions like “What is this thing?” “What makes it what it is?” can be asked. They ask for an explication of the involved cut, of the boundaries separating something already recognised from the rest. They ask for a conceptual reflection of a recognised experience.

But explication has no 'given' limit. Although in a given context, say of making a table, it may be natural not to ask questions about the atomic structure of the wood, or about consequences of the act for the world peace or future generations, such or similar questions are always possible and may bring in distinctions which were not at all involved in the original situation. Every distinction and limit thereof which has not been drawn to the ideal limit of a point can be refined which often means: considered in another context. Trying to understand the concept of a group, one does start with its definition, but the process involves necessarily relating it to other concepts, seeing what happens if one drops some axioms, if one adds some, analysing possible examples and non-examples, relating it to a monoid, to a ring, etc. Understanding is relative to the context in which the thing is considered because this context influences the boundaries of the thing. If the only other concept one has is that of a monoid, the understanding of group may be very poor. (Yet, it will be understanding! A group is distinguished from a monoid.) If one is able to relate the group to a large variety of other concepts, the understanding will be respectively deeper — group will be distinguished from more things/concepts with which it otherwise might be confused.

One should notice here something which happens entirely implicitly, namely, that some contexts are completely irrelevant. One won't try to relate the mathematical groups to cows, last weekend's trip, one's mother. Although implicit, this is equally essential aspect of understanding since it, too, tells something about the limits of the thing. A great challenge of teaching, for example, consists in being able to explicitly delimit the object under consideration against the horizon of unrelated issues which, however, typically intrude on the apprehension of the object. Poor understanding will often violate exactly such implicit limits which for a more advanced understanding are not worth mentioning. Laughter provides another good example of the involvement of every thing into implicit contexts from which understanding must delimit it. Many jokes work by violating the
assumptions of such implicit contexts and dissolving the stiff form of habit and rule in
the flow of the possible, even if unexpected, associations. Laughter brings such implicitly
and often dogmatically assumed elements to the front and in this consists its often pow-
erful and destructive function – it abolishes the positive and determinate character of the
‘given’. For, as we observed in §12, the function of positive determinations assigned to
various limits of distinctions is exactly to exclude possibilities which are irrelevant and dis-
turbing. But this working of laughter is negative and threatening only to the stiffened and
‘frozen’ forms, to dogmatic prejudices, for which it is a painful reminder of their relativity,
of the *experienced* flow from which they had emerged. (Inflexibility of character, whether
personal or national, which feels threatened as soon as some rule is violated, is the same as
the lack of wit and humor. Seriousness is the recognition of absolute limits. Grave parody
of seriousness is the absolutisation of the relative ones.)

A difference between concepts and impressions is not that the former mark objective
understanding while the latter only subjective reactions. Both are forms of understanding
and the difference concerns only its character. Concepts make the totality of the involved
aspects precise and explicit. Impressions, gathering this totality into the clear, unifying
signs, make it at most implicitly present. Concepts require precision and rigidity of the
involved distinctions, which may be absent from impressions. But ultimate rigidity of the
limits of distinctions is only ideal and, at best, secondary. Do you understand what a wave
is? Whenever at the seashore, you can recognise waves or else see that there are none. You
know what makes a wave. But, do you? What is it? How high must it be in order to be a
wave? And where does one wave end and another begin? It is impossible to say because
there are no definite, rigid limits. There are only vague cuts which tell “this is a wave
and this is another’. You may be unable to tell exactly where one wave ends and another
begins, but still you are perfectly able to select some area, perhaps, around the peak, and
say that this marks a wave. Common-sense does not have the precise understanding of a
wave because we are unable to specify explicitly its limits. But we know that it is not a
whirlpool, nor a current, nor a building. We are able to delimit it against other things and
these distinctions, whether verbalized or not, make the wave concept sufficiently familiar.\(^{29}\)

Wave is a much more fundamental example than a group or a chair, and understanding
the former illustrates much better the process of understanding which always originates in
what some call “tacit knowledge” and which we call “recognitions of experience”. An object
is a limit of distinctions, of cuts from the background of experience and thus an experience
of something involves obviously its tacit understanding. Explication of this understanding
is but a further reflection which tries to explicate the limits of a thing. Sometimes, such

\(^{29}\)Leibniz would say that we have a clear but confused understanding of a wave. We have earlier
distinguished concrete from precise, I§138. Now we would add that, in a similar fashion, clear
should be distinguished from precise. Neither concrete nor clear relates as closely to precise as to its opposite,
vague. Clear can be conjoned with vague in the way in which Leibniz allows for knowledge which is both
clear and confused. He associates confused with a large number of aspects which make it impossible to
comprehend their totality distinctly, i.e., precisely, in one act. “Our confused feelings are the result of
a variety of perceptions which is indeed infinite – very like the confused murmur a person hears when
approaching the sea-shore, which comes from the putting together of the reverberations of innumerable
waves.” [G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*. 33] He does not use the word “clear” here, but this
is exactly the word we might use. When hearing this murmur, we recognise it very clearly, even if there
is no precise border which separates it from silence nor, on the other end, from a disruptive tumult.
Most impressions are, from the perspective of utmost precision, vague yet clear. And so is most of our
understanding. Concepts strive after reducing this vagueness but, becoming too precise, they often lose
clarity of the initial understanding.
an explication can be carried far towards *conceptual precision* and sometimes it can not.

36. **Essences**

We have devoted quite some space to the equiprimordial epistemic status of *impressions* and *concepts* – both reveal limits, and thus mark understanding of *complexes*. But we have not denied their difference which concerns mainly the explicit character of the *totality* of aspects involved in a *concept* versus its at most implicit presence in a unified *impression*. This difference has marked the philosophical explications which, driven by the ideal of explicitness and *precision*, assigned a much higher status and devoted much more attention to the *precision of concepts* than to the *vagueness* of *impressions*. *Concepts*, in their *dissociated* and impersonal precision, have always seemed to offer a more ‘objective’ grasp of reality than *vague* and ‘subjective’ *impressions*.

We have downplayed this opposition, arising from the *dissociation of subject* and *object*, by emphasizing the objective correlate of *impressions* and by equating *thoughts* and *concepts*. One would, however, like to consider them distinct. Thought seems to be a subjective act of which a concept is the objective correlate. However, as a correlate of an *act*, it retains a subjective aspect. The ‘truly objective’ must lie even behind that. It is that which a concept reveals or captures, is the structure of the *actual object*, its essence.

37. The idea of essence arises almost naturally once being the fact *that it is*, is delegated to the limit of an extensionless and incomprehensible simplicity of a point, §8. The appearing *objects* obviously are not mere points, so there must be also some positive *objective* content, some *distinctions* which could justify *distinguishing* one thing from another. The ideal points reject to cease being multidimensional *complexes*, and this rejection is handled by *dissociating* being from its character, the existential from the intelligible, the mere fact of being, *esse*, from that which makes a being what it is, *quod est*, in short, *that* from ‘what’, being from *essence*.

A pragmatic limit of *distinctions* allows further *distinctions*. An *object* appears in different ways, its identity survives a lot of changes. So unless we identify its ‘what’ with its mere *that*, there must be also some specific contents, some constant ‘what’ hiding behind the varied appearances. “The essence of each thing is what it is said to be *proper se [...]* the essence is precisely what something is.”\(^\text{30}\) The essence captures the ...essential and it does in a unique and *precise* way, it captures the ultimate truth about what it means to be this thing: “Each thing itself, then, and its essence are one and the same.”\(^\text{31}\) We will not spend time on tracing the modulations of the idea of *essence* and its relations to substances, forms, common natures, complete notions and other themes which surrounded it in its long history. We only notice its role. The ‘essential what’, being objective, should be grasped with the same *immediate* certainty as its ultimate *that*, it should be captured in the *immediacy* of a single *act*. “Therefore there is an essence only of those things whose formula is a definition. [...] definition is the formula of the essence, and essence belongs to substances either alone or chiefly and primarily and in the unqualified sense.”\(^\text{32}\) Essences correspond only to the intelligible substances and, eventually, to the intelligibility of substances. (The original Greek *ousia* can be, and in various contexts is, translated as either substance or essence.) Moreover, the “attributes attaching essentially to their subjects attach *necessarily* to them.”\(^\text{33}\) We see here the same equation of the

\(^{30}\)Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. VII:4

\(^{31}\)Ibid. VII:6

\(^{32}\)Ibid. VII:4:5

\(^{33}\)Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*. I:6
1.2. Actuality

epistemological and the ontological dimension, of what a thing is ‘in itself’ and of how it is defined, as in our equation of thought and concept. The difference is only that while our equation indicates the primary unity, which becomes dissociated along with the subjective and objective aspects, the present equation starts with objective essences dissociated from their conceptual reflections and sees their coincidence in the act of a successful definition. It is a difference of order but not of content.

In the order starting with the dissociated subject and object, essences are that which makes the coincidence possible. They make the ideal of necessary truths and precise knowledge, of the immediate access to the precisely given possible. The goal, if not the achievement, of essences is to reduce a complex to something which can be given adequately within the ideal limit of actuality, in pure immediacy. An essence, whether with Aristotle, Descartes or Husserl, is a graspable unit which can be made actual in a single act of intuition, comprehension, perception, understanding, or whatever variation of a reflective act one needed to identify. Essences are to give metaphysical rigidity and precision to the distinctions of experience, are to turn distinctions into precise, rigid distinctions. And precision is but another word for immediate ‘givenness’. An essence is the reflective hope of immediacy.

We might perhaps say that the essence of a thing is the totality of what distinguishes it from other things. Perhaps to grasp the supposed essence is the same as to know the thing’s limits. Perhaps, though then we have changed the traditional sense of the word “essence”. In particular, no such final essences obtain since every distinction allows further distinctions and, moreover, what distinguishes a thing from others depends on what others are taken into account. And the field of references is inexhaustible.

If one had managed to display at least one convincing essence, one might, perhaps, also manage to arrive at some acceptable concept of a concept. No such thing seems to be available but, fortunately, cognitive scientists took over the quarrels. Since terminating the distinctions at some limit is unavoidable, somebody will always think worthwhile to ask what the essence of, say, a chair, might be. Typically it has four legs, but it may have only one, or none but rockers instead. One may try to define it functionally, as “something to sit on”, but then anything one can sit on becomes a chair, for instance a table. One need not deny sincere ingenuity of many attempts to specify the most purposeful ways of defining things. But one should not confuse the normative, whether forensic or only administrative, character of such endeavours with any ontological foundation, not to mention existential relevance.

"The time has arrived to give up the myths of induction and Wesenschau, which are carried over, as some point of honour, from generation to generation. For it is clear that even Husserl himself never gained Wesenschau so that he would not have to re-consider and re-work it again, not to disqualify it but to force it to express something that it originally did not express at all [...]"34 The fact that nobody ever managed to demonstrate unchangeable essence of anything, reflects the secondary character of concepts as compared to the original signs and, above all, the merely auxiliary character of positive, ‘essential’ determinations. It reflects also the accidental character of most totalities – no complex is more fundamental than others and there is no necessity for a complex to be so rather than otherwise – primordially, it is but a cut from experience. The boundaries between things are, more often than not, vague enough to defy precise definition but also clear enough to

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34 M. Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible. Inquiry and intuition p.122
admit understanding.

39. But have we not gone a bit too far? Does not the concept of a group, in its strict mathematical sense, have a well defined essence? It is a well defined concept with an unambiguous definition. What does it show? That if we start with concepts, some primitive and precisely given ones (here, of a binary operation, associativity, inverse, etc.), we can arrive at new ones. This shows, at most, the potential of reflective creativity in concept formation and the precision of its results, provided precision of the starting concepts. This extends far beyond mathematics. Have you never met an intellectual who is not able to relate to the world otherwise than through the exact concepts and definitions he has acquired? His insistence on precision is understandable, but also a bit obsessive. His knowledge may be impressive but still this omniscience is as pitiable as his conceptual omnipotence.

The power of conceptualisation, like of reflection in general, concerns only the actuality of signs. Its domain comprises only precisely defined complexes – things reduced to their intelligible ‘essences’. But although most things and concepts are vague enough to make the inquiry into their more precise definitions possible, it does not mean that they actually hide any ‘essence’ behind their appearances. The concept of a group does not have any essence – it only has a precise definition. ‘Since I have never been able to understand what the ‘essence’ of a concept is, I must be excused from discussing this point any longer.’35

Note, however, that dismissal of essences does nothing to the concepts themselves. We can still give partial, more or less adequate, descriptions of experienced things, classes of things, kinds of things. The cuts in the experience are there as they have been all the time, and so are their conceptual signs with their power to bring such cuts into the horizon of actuality and control.

40. Universals

We were trying to point out the analogies, rather than the differences, between moods and concepts: they have the same temporal scope; addressing complexes, they move in the tension between the unity of a sign and the multiplicity of the aspects and properties of the complex; we have emphasized the communicability of moods, if not an irresolvable association so at least complementarity of concepts and moods, and the fact that not only impressions, but also concepts come in various degrees of precision. Eventually, the difference between the two concerns the tendency and degree: concepts dissociate striving for mathematical precision, while moods keep the complexes in a vague – but clear – unity.

This, however, is hardly the whole difference! Isn’t it so that concepts are (composed of) universals “and by the universal we mean that which is predicable of the individuals,”36 that which “is common, since that is called universal which is such as to belong to more than one thing.”37 Moreover, it is that which can be known about particular, it is “implicit in the clearly known particular.”38 Impressions, on the other hand, are particular and unique, and certainly not known with the precision with which universals constituting concepts can be known.

This isn’t exactly so. An impression, say, of fear, is not the same as a particular fearful experience. It appears in many experiences. One might claim that what reappears in various such experiences is a universal ‘fear’, while an impression of fear is only its

35A. Tarski, The semantical conception of truth. II:18
36Aristotle, Metaphysics. III:4
37Ibid. VII:13
38Aristotle, Posterior Analytics. I:1
particular, always unique and individual, experience. This is then probably only a matter of language. One should not confuse an impression with its actual experience, just like one should not confuse a concept with a particular instance of its application.

The worrying element of such reappearing universals is their sameness. Does one experience the same ‘fear’ in various situations and if so, what makes it the same? With concepts the situation seems easier. We have only one concept of a group, uniquely and well defined. But here one might also worry, as Wittgenstein did, about the legitimacy of claiming that in all particular situations we know that we are applying the same concept. How do we know that? Before addressing this issue, let us first describe the context in which it appears as a problem. The answer will arise from the following discussion of the universals.

The problem arises for reflective dissociation in which world appears as a totality of 41 separate particulars: atomic, substantial entities, each existing on its own. In this context any connection between the dissociated entities is at best secondary and at worst unreal. These two positions with respect to universals – considering them either as secondary abstractions from particulars or as nominal unrealities – seem the only possible, once we assume the ontology of particular substances. In either case, one can agree that “it is impossible to abstract universals from the singular without previous knowledge of the singular.”

Concepts are abstract and universal. Universal, that is, they may have many particular instances, be encountered in different experiences.

Recalling §9, I wouldn’t be so comfortable with the status of particulars but let go. Is ‘Prague’ a universal? When I go around, I see this building and that corner, from the Old Town Square I do not see Vyšehrad and from below of Vyšehrad I do not see Hradčany.

Yes, but still it is a particular thing, only “too big” to be seen all at once.

It is too big and at each of these places I see a part of ‘Prague’. I have a different perspective, a different actual experience of Prague, something which, with enough of bad will, can be called “a particular instance” of ‘Prague’.

No, you see different parts of a big city, you do not see the same universal exemplified in various particular places.

OK, what I see of the ‘horse’ in this horse is exactly the same as what I see of it in another horse. But what I see of ‘this chair’ now is the same as what I saw of it yesterday. And do not tell me that it does not count because ‘this chair’ is a particular.

It counts because you may have several distinct exemplifications of the same universal simultaneously and, furthermore, you may always encounter more. With this chair you cannot do the former – nor the latter if I burn it.

What about ‘all my grannie’s chairs’? It looks more like a universal than like a particular. But they all are here – she has never had more than these four. And, besides, she is dead, so you will never get new ones. If it is “my grannie” who annoys you here, then what about the dinosaurs? We have rather run out of the possible new instances.

Forget new instances; a universal is universal even if no instances exist.

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39 J. Duns Scotus, De Anima. 22:3
II.1. The existential levels

? Have you turned extreme realist in this matter? But tell me first what they are.

! Take "abstract" – a universal is not an independent being, it is always only an aspect abstracted from particulars.

? You have just said that it need no particular instances... So, after all, the 'chair' (or the 'dinosaur') is not universal?

! It is, but it is what is common to many chairs, what can be predicated equally of many particulars.

? By "common" you mean, probably, something like a stereotype, a paradigmatic instance, or just the essence – but we know that these won't quite do. But who are these particulars? And isn't 'Prague' the same at this particular Vyšehrad and at this particular Hradčany?

! It is, but 'Prague' is not predicated about them.

? Really? One does predicate "praski" about this particular Hrad. But even if one didn't. So it would be just a matter of how we use the language? If I say "This city is exactly like Prague while that one is not." will it do?

! No. First you use "Prague" as a name of a particular city; then you use it as a ...

? Predicate? A concept? Then, does it mean that I can pick any particular (reference) and turn it into a (predicable) concept? And what is the difference, except for the purely grammatical one, between "Prague" used in the first and in the second way?

! Predicating 'Prague' of another city, you are really predicating some universal which is implicit in Prague and which you also find in this other city.

? Perhaps, but then one should tell me what universal it is. As far as my experience is concerned, Prague has a very specific character and atmosphere, indistinguishable from its uniqueness, which can hardly be characterised better than "Prague-like" and which can be in various forms or degrees found at other places.

etc., etc., ...

42. Certainly, universals can be abstracted from reflectively dissociated particulars. Reflective thinking happens already within the ontology of dissociated and externalised objects, and equally dissociated points, 'substantive parts' of time. But when reflection encounters something completely new and unexpected, when it 'adds' a new and some old instances, performing the abstraction of, say, 'Prague' or the common nature 'cup', these have already been distinguished as units before and above this reflective act. The reflectively new and unexpected has emerged from some trace in the process which is performed in experience (in one's body, perceptual mechanism, brain, or wherever one wants to look for it) and of which reflection only finds the final results.

What do we encounter the first time we see a cup? 'This cup', 'a cup' or 'cup'? Probably all, for there is as yet no reason to draw any such distinctions. Having all means that we have none, neither particular nor universal, just cup or, better, a special 'this'. Encountering the same cup for the second time, it is not added to the earlier 'cup' – it is subtracted from it (and, sure, it is also subtracted from all the rest, but it emerges through the trace whose last point is this earlier cup.) In this subtraction, the universal 'cup' and the two particular instances, 'this cup' and 'that cup', become dissociated from their prior nexus, the first cup. Every new cup is not added to earlier experience but is distinguished from it. And it is distinguished from the same trace on which the first cup
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has so far marked the final point.\textsuperscript{40} Eventually, everything emerges from the one and the same indistinct, everything is one before it becomes two. A reflective note taken of a new cup and its association with an earlier one is only a conscious or subconscious reflection of the process which has already dissociated the two from the same trace. Of course, once such dissociations have been established and sedimented, new instances of ‘cup’ can be encountered, that is, universals can start appearing as common features. But it is the unity of experience which founds the continuity in the experiences of the particulars as well as the connections between various instances of universals, in short, the very possibility of reflective association and abstraction.

The dissociation of the first cup into a universal ‘cup’ and ‘this cup’ illustrates the general pattern. Encountering a new ‘this’ may be an actual experience. And it may pass without any further consequences, leaving ‘this’ as a mere particular encountered only once. But, often, ‘this’ will acquire a status of a nexus when, for instance as in the cup example, new aspects arise from it. In the same manner, Prague can be an abstract entity, merely the capital of Czech Republic, and remain so for one’s whole life. But it can also become a nexus of unity, from which, on a visit, one dissociates praski Hrad and Vyšehrad and other places and impressions. One can experience the same irritation on different occasions, one can recognise the feeling one is having now as the same one had before. This looks indeed like a kind of ‘private language’. The worrying phrase is, again, “the same”. But it is worrying only if one views this moment of irritation as completely dissociated from any earlier such moment. We are, however, not talking about any essences reappearing as new particulars nor any universals appearing in new instantiations at dissociated points of time. We are talking about cuts from the continuity of experience, eventually, from the indistinct one. The ‘words’ of the ‘private language’ are only vague nexuses, appearing for the first time and, hence, not yet dissociated into precisely identifiable items. A new instance of irritation does not appear ex nihilo to get re-cognised and connected to some old and merely remembered instance. (It can seem so when viewed in the dissociated terms of attentive reflection.) It enters the horizon of actuality through the levels of gradual actualisation: from the indistinct, through chaos to experience and, then, through some nexus to this actual experience. The nexuses on this trace constitute its ‘relatedness’ to the whole field of other experiences. Various actual experiences emerge as instances of the same because they arise from the same nexus and pass through the same traces on their way toward actualisation. Identity behind distinct instances of irritation, just as of ‘cup’, ‘Prague’ and, eventually, of the very sense of experiencing, is constituted before they get actually instantiated in particular moments. This is all we can answer to the question “How can one be certain that it is the same irritation as before?” The two emerge from the same prior nexus and are indistinguishable in their actual appearances. The only difference concerns distinct actualisations at distinct moments or places.

This indistinguishability might be accused of being merely pragmatic, for all merely practical purposes, while, ‘in themselves’, distinct occurrences might be really occurrences of distinct things. But such an accusation assumes that each occurrence is something ‘in itself’, is a dissociated element whose connection to other such elements needs an argument. In short, it starts from the ontology or epistemology of dissociated particulars. In our onto-epistemology of gradual differentiation, identities are only sedimented limits of distinc-

\textsuperscript{40} If one asked whether the fifth cup is distinguished from the first cup, from the fourth one or, perhaps, from the already established universal ‘cup’, we would have to say: from all. Neither the process nor its traces are linear. Even more: the universal ‘cupness’ is influenced by the experiences of new cups which, being distinguished from it, can also modify it. We will elaborate this issue in 2.3.
tions and things which, for all practical purposes, are indistinguishable, remain the same. On the way to the actual appearance, there is a hierarchy of stages, gradual narrowing of distinctions from the indistinct. Universals mark (some of) the distinctions drawn above the actual experiences.

*Universals are the non-actual things of experience, the cuts through the experience exceeding the horizon of actuality.*

As particulars are determined by being graspable fully within the horizon of actuality, universals are non-particulars, “If they are universal, they will not be substances; for everything that is common indicates not a ‘this’ but a ‘such’, but substance is a ‘this’.” 41 Insisting on the exclusive, or at least primary, reality of the particulars, universals appear ontologically suspect. But the relations between actuality and non-actuality are much more intimate than between particular substances and universals. The difference, even the difference in nature between them notwithstanding, there is no sharp, ontological border separating the actual and non-actual contents. Both are distinctions and hence are. Actuality is the terminus of the distinctions originating beyond its horizon, in non-actuality. Non-actual cuts are possible stations of differentiation which allow further distinctions providing, as one says, ‘particular instances’. The primary difference, the difference which counts, is that between the possibility of an experienced completeness, of being given within the horizon of actuality versus the experience of the factual (or even essential) non-actuality. With respect to the horizon of actuality, the whole Prague, Europe, fear, irritation, my life are as much outside of it as the traditional universals. All that can appear within this horizon are their actual signs, dissociated ‘particular instances’.

As we have described in 1.1.2, the status of particular substances is not so obvious as common-sense would like to believe. The problem of universals is not very different. It originates from the assumption that there are some definite particulars, some basic substances – independent, simple and indecomposable – and, moreover, that such particulars are the only genuine objects of experience; in short, from the reduction of experience to the totality of dissociated actualities. This reduction is inseparable from a less plausible one, namely, that of experience into some isolated points, ‘nows’, succeeding each other. Consequently, the problem of the unity of a universal in its dissociated actual instances, is virtually the same as that of the unity of a particular (substance) across dissociated actualities of time. The question: what makes different occurrences of ‘blue’ or ‘chair’ instances of the same universal ‘blue’ or essence ‘chair’, is not really different from the question: what accounts for the fact that the chair I am seeing now is the same as the one I left here yesterday (or what is one in the experiences of Prague.) Actual experiences and particulars captured within the horizon of actuality are interwoven into the continuous texture of experience, are only its actual reflections. Encountering ‘a new instance of a universal’ may be a new actual experience. But this is not ‘added’ to the rest of experience as a new item to a collection. It is rather subtracted, for it has emerged as an actual experience from experience. The ‘sameness’ of two such actual instances is a consequence of their emergence from the same nexus. Only when dissociated while, at the same time, experienced as the same, they seem to call for an explication of what connects them. This reflectively perplexing ‘being experienced as the same’ is what marks their emergence from the same nexus, their origin in a unity which is not yet dissociated, and hence remains reflectively inaccessible.42

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42 Recall from I:§137 that nexus is a term of experiential origin, not of objective explanation. It is
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Once we have drawn a limit around Prague, it has become one entity and we can have thousands of experiences of Prague, all exemplifying this particular city, in the same way as one chair exemplifies ‘chair’ or, perhaps, another chair. Certainly, the one is the sign, the word “Prague”, “chair”. But these are not mere empty words. They refer back to the cuts from experience which, stretching beyond the narrow scope of any particular here-and-now, terminate at some limit beyond the horizon of actuality. The ‘oneness’ may have no accurate verbal definition, nobody can tell precisely where Prague begins and where it ends, what precisely fear or irritation really is. Just like nobody can tell precisely what makes a wave or a chair. Although we can recognise particular instances of all such concepts in actual experiences, we have no ultimately precise grasp of their universality. Simply because in so far as they are non-actual, they transcend the horizon of immediacy which is the only place of precise determinations.

Universals, and non-actual cuts in general, witness thus to the unity of experiences. Perhaps even more significant in the present context is that they found the very experiences of particulars. Trying to get rid of the former, one ends up dissolving also the latter, because both not only mutually condition each other but also emerge at different levels of the same process: as the sedimeted limits of distinctions. Particulars are but the actual limits of distinctions which cut experience far above the horizon of actuality. Hence an actual experience of a particular always involves some non-actual, or universal, layers.

The view considering actual particulars as the primordial substances is conditioned by the prior reflective dissociation. Abstracting activity of concept construction starts naturally from those basic entities which are most precisely grasped by the singular acts of reflection. The conflict between nominalism (denying any reality to universals) and conceptualism (viewing them as conceptual abstractions) is played on the ground of this ontology of particulars. It concerns only the question whether particulars contain any reality beyond their particularity or ‘substantiality’. As such, both these views are opposed to the earlier realism which was willing to assign to the universals independent reality. Our universals come closely to this last view allowing them to exist before and independently from any particular instances. Since to be is to be distinguished, universals are somethings. They are cuts through experience which are not limited to any particular actuality but stretch always beyond its horizon. Furthermore, every cut is unique: what it cuts out is not cut out by any other cut. A cut is just that which it cuts. And thus, every universal is unique. But granting that, we should remember not to dissociate different levels of experience. Once the horizon of actuality is established, no non-actuality exists without and independently from it. This leaves some space for conceptualism, acknowledging the reality of particulars and the possibility of forming new universal characteristics by abstraction. But abstraction accounts neither for their character nor for their ontological status. Nominalism must rest satisfied with the fact that universals, just like all distinctions, do not exist ‘in themselves’ but are relative to the distinguishing existence.

impossible to specify objectively what, possibly, might be a nexus and what not. It is not even possible to specify objectively in every case what aspects are involved in a given nexus. Both nexuses and their aspects are relative to the course of individual experience. It is not this ‘objective cut’ which is a nexus, it is only its first experience. Although in many cases some consensus can be reached, individual background can always lead to idiosyncratic, but often also creative associations which reveal anchoring of given particulars in nexuses which are not common to all. Trivial examples are all situations in which several persons try to agree on precise boundaries of vague notions. There is seldom a final and detailed agreement on what precisely might count as annoying, just, respectable, even if we share a vague and clear understanding of nexuses corresponding to such notions.
1.2.3. Ego, body, action, control

The kind of complexes one is able to relate to, their character and degree of complexity is relative to one's skills to differentiate and connect various aspect of one totality. Unlike bare objects, complexes are not relative to one's mere presence, but to one's shrewdness, intelligence, skills; also to one's capacity of compassion and sympathy, of relating to and understanding other's way of thinking and acting.

What is a complex for one person need not be so for another. Having more or less the same organs of perception and similar capacities for discrimination, we typically agree on the status of single things and objects. But many of these things may not even exist in the world of a bat, whose perception mechanisms will doom irrelevant, i.e., leave unrecognized, many things we distinguish. On the other hand, a dog's smell will differentiate things and situations which, for us, remain indistinct. Different humans have, similarly, different abilities of forming and connecting complexes which differences are only to some extent smoothened by functioning in a linguistic community where words establish much of the inter-subjective agreement on a host of distinctions. This applies for skills at all levels. For a professor of algebra, rings are quite different things from groups. A student may, to begin with, have problems with grasping the differences. An illiterate may not even understand that one is talking about anything meaningful. In short, the complexity of the world one lives and acts in, the complexity of the complexes one relates to is the reflection of the complex of one's features, skills and abilities which we call "ego".

Ego is the aspect of a person which can be reduced to actual expressions and described in actual terms. It reminds of Jung's 'persona' as opposed to 'person', in so far as 'persona' is a totality of externalised properties, one's 'face' as it appears in external comparisons with others. The inquisitive attitude of the guy from the pub who became 'the detective' belongs to his ego. (The trace may, of course, go deeper.) Ego is the first object encountered by the simple, teenager's form of self-reflection. It does not address being or, if it does, it does so only indirectly. It is primarily occupied with the facts that I am so-and-so, "I have too round face", "I have too thin hair", "I won't wear this -- what would others think?" Such worries pass quickly into slightly more fundamental ones, marking the crisis of adolescence, which, nevertheless, still carry the egotic character: "I am not as good as he is", "I am insensitive", "I am stupid".

Such characteristics and self-characteristics, genuine and honest as they may happen to be, consist of objectified attributes which get attached to their noumenal subject as some external properties. Ego, we could say, is oneself viewed from 'outside', with other's eyes. But even when others are not invoked, ego is still 'outside' oneself: every predicate involves, at least implicitly, a comparison. My insensitivity emerges only in comparison with sensitivity of others. This relativity marks externality of ego's qualities. Even if they intend some deeper aspects of oneself, remaining relative and actually identifiable elements of the ego complex, they never reach to the 'innermost being' of one's person.

The not-actuality of a complex is of the same kind as the not-actuality of ego. It is not essential non-actuality but only not-actuality of something which might be actual at some other time. If I appear pleasing and compassionate at the moment, it is only an accident. My ego is insensitive and we only have to wait for a proper occasion to actually see this, Ego is a person filtered through the actualising sieve of reflection, "The ego never appears except on the occasion of a reflective act."...

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43J.-P. Sartre, The Transcendence of the Ego. p.53; Sartre has "I" and not "ego" here.
1.2. Actuality

confused, smart, late, amiable... Ego signifies a complex of properties, features, abilities each of which, taken separately, may be perfectly actual. "The ego is the unity of states and actions - optionally, of qualities."\(^{44}\) It constitutes the subjective pole of actual experiences of complexes.

Besides skills and qualities, the fundamental aspect of ego is body. The original signs of actuality are often relative to the body, "It is nice" does not refer the feeling to a particular organ (even if it emerges there) but to the whole body which "feels nice". On the other hand, it is not relative to the I. Even if one might say "I feel nice", it is only a feeling one has, not something one is. In the same way, everybody has his ego and not is his ego.

Body, although most intimately mine, appears for reflection foreign, as external as all the contents of the ego - mine, yet impersonal. Intense preoccupation with body marks often egotic personality or culture. Such a preoccupation, looking in the body for a most incontrovertible and visible sign of oneself, is never satisfied because body retains this impersonal character. One has body, not is it.

More generally, all the original signs of actuality, remaining at the level of external ego, carry such an impersonal element. 'The detective', although clearly a personal element, does not touch the 'innermost being' of the person. It remains somehow external feature. Moods and impressions can be, most abstractly, referred to an impersonal feeling of vitality, of life. Their variety reflects modifications of this feeling. It is not so much my life, as life in general, even if it is actually my experience. The mood of vigor and vital strength is the feeling of 'my life' rather than of 'my life'. Vital feelings signal flow or ebb, increase or decrease of life energy. This life energy only, so to speak, accidentally happens to be seated and felt in one's body.

Body marks the horizon of actuality. It anchors one in the actuality and, circumscribing its horizon, determines also the horizon of one's action. These two horizons can be taken as the same, Action is the event of actuality. It is not merely an act, an immediate reflex or other minute movement - of body or mind - consummated in a single moment. Action unfolds in the entirety of the horizon of actuality, it addresses several actual elements. From the point of view of attentive reflection one might say that action consists of a series of acts but we would rather say the opposite: an act is an aspect of an action (unless it is an entirely spontaneous, that is mad, outburst unrelated to anything in its vicinity).

A single object is a correlate of an act and so is a sign of a complex. However, a complex itself isn't merely a correlate of a single act. It is correlate of an action, one can manipulate it, act upon it for a specific purpose, one can think and reason about it, assemble or disassemble it, in short, bring it under one's control. Objects are under one's control only to the degree to which they are parts of complexes. Object itself, as a purely immediate given of consciousness, and considered only as such, appears in a somehow impulsive fashion, §14, §17. It emerges for no apparent reason, ex nihilo, and offers consciousness only the immediate alternative: yes-no, take-avoid, accept-reject. Although object serves as a paradigm of the controllable, taken in itself, it is not. It becomes so only in the broader context of visibility when, as a complex, it is underlaid some action.

The active element of actuality has two aspects which are related to its original and reflective sign and mark their, perhaps most significant, difference. Just like sensations, limited to the immediacy, involve the responsive attitude choosing between the bare alternative of pleasant-unpleasant, yes-no, so do impressions and moods involve immediately a

\(^{44}\)Ibid. p.61
response. Their unifying role is not only that they present us with a totality rather than its parts, but that this presentation involves at the same time a reaction. Impressions are not indifferent but mark always some spontaneous valuation. Fear, irritation, satisfaction disclose some value perceived in the actual situation. And they disclose this value even if its carrier remains undisclosed. Fear can be felt before its object is recognised, the source of satisfaction or irritation may remain unknown even when the impressions are felt clearly and intensely. Often, the reaction precedes the apprehension of its reason, the value is announced before the evaluated complex is recognised. To the extent the complexes are also given, the unifying signs of moods and impressions disclose them through the value they represent. “When I use the word ‘feeling’ in contrast to ‘thinking’, I refer to a judgment of value – for instance, agreeable or disagreeable, good or bad, and so on.”

Concepts, unlike impressions, lack this reactive aspect. Emphasizing the complexity of the complexes, they increase their dissociation, their isolation and, consequently, indifference. At the same time, however, the resulting externalisation of distinct aspects offers the possibility of manipulation and control. Concepts involve more precise differentiation of components and their relations than do the impressions. Unambiguous precision – the mark of instantaneous immediacy – dissociating the object, founds the possibility of its control, 1:50. The crudest form of control, brutal physical force, conforms to this claim in that it can only be exercised on the actual objects in the immediate reach.

But control of an immediate object is very limited. A cup is in my complete power but only in that I can simply grasp or smash it. Likewise, lower emotional phenomena like sensual lust or even pain, can be controlled by the will, that is, by reflection, to quite a high degree. Often a mere change of the focus of attention can eliminate them. But if I want to change the painting on the cup or equip it with an additional handle, its mere presence and my primitive power will not suffice. It requires analysis of the involved complex, its dissociation into constituent elements and manipulation of their arrangements. More advanced control is made possible by the dissociating and manipulating potential of reason. This dissociation is exactly the aspect which moods and impressions lack. Thus, control provides finally the dimension along which they can be placed at the opposite end to thoughts and concepts. Eventually, also control of reason over emotions, the attempts to distance oneself from the influence of emotions, amount to approaching a complex through its complexity rather than unity, to dissolve the overpowering unity of an emotion in the interplay of its dissociated elements.

1.2.4. Transcendence

51. A complex, emerging within the horizon of actuality, appears as a particular object and as such is external. But its transcendence is not exhausted by the simple externality. A complex is not merely a unity of an object but also totality of its properties and relations which, although not given actually, can be made actual. An object can suddenly reveal a new side which, as long as one merely focused on its mere being there or on its actually given aspect, remained hidden. One is aware of the difference between the actual sign and its correlate; they do not coincide. Perceiving a house as a complex, one sees its front but also knows that it has a back-side. One knows it, that is, it is a part of the experienced totality. Yet, these two aspects are not present in the same way, and one is aware of this difference: one knows that there is more to the house than what one is actually seeing of

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45C. G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz, eds., Man and His Symbols. I.p.49
it. In the same way, even if one sees the whole room at once, one knows that one does not see all its details equally well. Some are sharper, some dimmer, some are closer, some further away. And the same again with a definition: one grasps the defined concept in its intuitive totality, but one knows that one does not actualise all the details, that its complexity exceeds the horizon of actuality, that it has a potential which can be used or explained only through a lengthy labour. The transcendence of a complex involves something more than what is actually given and which is merely indicated by the actual sign. This more is not anything qualitatively different. The back-side of the house is as actual as its front-side. It only is not given actually. More of a complex involves objects and complexes of other, possible or past, actual experiences.

The more of a complex consists of other complexes.

The difference between the complex and its more concerns only the way of appearance – the former is here-and-now while the latter is not, but could be. The more is not essential non-actuality but only something which happens not to be actual now – it is not-actual. This quantitative more constitutes the horizontal aspect of the transcendence of complexes. It may be more of the same complex which is not actual at the moment, or it may be more complexes to which the actual one refers along some among the infinity of possible relations: as its cause or effect, as its predecessor or successor, as its part or its whole, as its motivation or purpose. No matter how far one follows this dimension of transcendence, one never encounters anything but more complexes or more complex complexes. Eventually, one may reach the first or the second antimony of pure reason, where thinking in terms of complexes and their relations must stop: there is nothing more left and to the extent we assume that there is, it can no longer serve us since its breadth and complexity make it inaccessible to the actuality of reflection, the finitude of reason. In this way, but also only in this way, the more of a complex tends towards its inexhaustibility, appears as the potentiality of an external object to disclose ever new and possibly unlimited number of aspects, sides, relations. This potential inexhaustibility is the ideal limit of more.

The difference between the actual sign and the signified complex, the difference experienced now between the actuality and not-actuality, marks also the experience of time. The more of a complex, the surplus hiding behind its given surface, is hiding in its temporality. All complexes are temporal in the sense that they, emerging as actual objects, are nevertheless not fully present, hide something more beyond the horizon of the actually given. This more is an intended element of the complex but it resides in the past or future actuality of its possible presentation. Complexes are temporally ‘stretched’ and it is not merely one of their features but an indispensable aspect of their appearance as complexes.

The horizontal transcendence of a complex is thus not mere externality but more of not-actual aspects. This more involves also temporality stretching beyond here-and-now.

Actuality constitutes the vertical aspect of the transcendence with respect to the level of immediacy. Complexes give the single objects the context in which the arbitrariness of the mere that it is may find the first form of meaning: a purpose, a reason, a relation to other objects. Now, the complexes, the objectified relations of the level of actuality, reveal an analogous ‘meaninglessness’ indicating the vertical dimension of transcendence.

A popular way of expressing dissatisfaction with the representational form of reflective thinking, with the mere externality of dissociated objects is to refer everything to some context. There are innumerable variants which it would be impossible to review here. On the one hand, it appeals by introducing, although often only by implicature, the sub-
ject, since context is hardly something which can be determined in purely objective terms. Contextualisation carries an element of holism which, in turn, involves (although, again, often only implicitly), the unity of the subject. On the other hand, since it is actually impossible to determine what context might possibly mean and what might possibly constitute a legitimate context for anything, one tends to extend it as far as…everything. All pointers to coherence, totality, ‘the whole’, are ways of contextualisation, along with the more mundane attempts to put everything in the historical context, the social context, the inferential context, the context of usage, etc. Admirable as many of such attempts may be, they suffer from the inaccessibility of the eventual more. Context tries to function as a surrogate for the negative aspect of every recognition and contextualisation, starting with the reflectively dissociated atoms, meets almost immediately the combinatorial barriers, §12. If we have \( n \) atoms and, in principle, any combination thereof might be a context, we get \( 2^n \) contexts. Take half of them, one-tenth – as \( n \) increases, the number of contexts becomes very quickly unmanageable. Although context indeed points toward something endowing the object with a purpose, if not with meaning, it is hard to imagine how taking such (an unmanageable number of) contexts into account is supposed to help understanding a given atom \( x \). The only manageable, if not also the only important, question concerns which context to choose (which is nothing else but the question about drawing the limits of \( x \)).

54. The more objective contexts to investigate, the more the actual object dissolves in them and the less understandable it becomes. The more information available, the more difficult to find any relevant, not to mention valuable, information. The more ambitious professor of the more imprecise subject (psychology, sociology, literature), the more attempts at mathematical precision in his research. The more persons with higher education, the more stupid and less knowledgeable each one of them. This general law – ‘the smarter, the more stupid’ or ‘the more, the less’ – underlies the life and expansion of objectivistic insatiable. “Look only at all the festivities of the intellect: these conceptions! These discoveries! Perspectives! Subtleties! Publications! Congresses! Discussions! Institutes! Universities! And still: stupefying.” As an example: “Precision, richness, depth of the language in all expositions, not only the primary, but also secondary ones, or even those on the edge of mere journalism (like literary criticism) are worthy highest appreciation. But the overflow of richness exhausts the attention, and so the increased precision is accompanied by the increased distraction. The result: instead of increased communication, increased misunderstanding. [...] In the field of all discussions penetrating western episteme, you will never hear a single voice which would start with ‘I do not know exactly…am not familiar with…did not read through…who could remember all that…there is no time to read…I know something, but not quite,…’ Yet, exactly from that one ought to start! But who would dare?”

Instead, proving trifles, we let them parade as the genuine truths until, eventually, they start to seem the same. And then more seriousness can only breed more ridicule, more smartness only more stupidity, more achievements only more despair and more truthfulness only more falsehood. The smarter, the more stupid; the more, the less.

55. More never sums up to any unity and, chastening its ideal limit of inexhaustibility, keeps expanding into more and more comprehensive totality. But, the more comprehensive – the less comprehensible. Inversion reveals a lack. The more intensely one focuses on the actual complexities, the less sense and meaning one finds in them. The more one’s understanding approaches the self-secure enlightenment of scientism, the intellectual self-confidence or the safety of a bourgeois sterility, the greater the chance that one may wake up as Gregor Samsa

\[46\] W. Gombrowicz, The Diaries. 1966: XIX
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in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* – in the known, safe surroundings, in the same orderly house, in one’s own bed, but transformed into a cockroach scared, or rather merely pacified, by the inexplicable event of a meaningless loss of one’s so far obvious and unproblematic identity. At the limit of *more* one encounters oneself, even if often only as one’s own caricature.

The subject is encountered at the limit of the world and, perhaps, only there. “The subject does not belong to the world: rather it is a limit of the world.” But although never actually encountered, it is present in the world from the very beginning. The objectivity of a *complex* consists in its being given as an *object* in actual experience and, moreover, in the fact that its *more* is just more of the actual, objective aspects. However, to the extent that a *complex* is not given immediately in its full complexity, it bears always a mark of subjectivity. This is no longer the subjectivity of an ideal, purely *actual subject*, but a more genuine subjectivity understood as that which brings *non-actuality*, and eventually also *non-actuality*, into actual experience. *Not-actual* aspects can be always considered as *objective*, but their intrusion onto the *actual object* signals a unity stretching beyond the *horizon of actuality*. This unity appears, in terms of the *immediate* given, a highly suspect subjective contribution. The status of *complexes*, carrying the *not-actual more*, as *external* and independent from us is much less evident than in the case of simple *objects* encountered by reflection that it is.

This aspect of subjectivity, the presence of the *ego complex*, becomes manifest, for instance, in the questions like: Can I be sure that it is one and the same object? If I leave and come back, how can I know that it is the same? It is a bit hard to know what “to know” means in such questions, but we sense that the lack of *immediate* certainty is taken as the possibility of error, that is, subjectivity. I – my sight, my memory, my understanding, any of my faculties, in short, my *ego* – can be mistaken. Certainly, in some cases, one can be mistaken. However, in most cases, one experiences this identity with such an infallible certainty that, if one were to doubt it, one could not be certain of anything. As Wittgenstein says: the burden lies here on those asking such questions – the burden of explaining what they would consider as knowing. We will not deny the possibility of error. But the fundamental suspicion, the systematic doubt arises exclusively from the assumption that the only certainty can be obtained in the *immediacy* and that everything which *transcends* its *objective* gives threaten with error, that is, subjectivity. For if all that is real are *immediate objects*, then even the relations between them, especially the relations across time, appear subjective.

*Ego* is the *aspect* of subjectivity within the *horizon of actuality*. But as one asks for *more* and *more*, as the *totality* of *complexes* extends beyond the limits of one’s possibilities and, gradually, begins to dissolve in the flux of experience, *ego’s* status becomes more and more dubious. The ideal limit of *more*, this *world* as the *totality* of *complexes*, is also the place where the *ego complex* begins to dissolve in the experienced chaos. The obsessive rigidity of a systematic organisation, when carried to the extremes, creates eventually mad pandemonium, whether on personal or social scale. The ever renewed and never accomplished project of control encounters *more* in the most dramatic fashion. When driven beyond its proper limits, when attempted not only with respect to particular *complexes* but also their *totality*, it makes one acutely aware of the uncontrollable *more* which lurks in the

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47L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. 5.632 [The statement seems to apply most adequately to *myself*, although Wittgenstein’s “subject” or “philosophical self” is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world – not a part of it.” [Ibid. 5.641] I, unlike *ego*, is its world by being its limit, the horizon within which life unfolds, as we will describe shortly.]
depth of everything one believes to control. The disappointments of the projects of total appropriation and control throw us back onto ourselves – for the limit of the horizontal transcendence is but a shadow of its vertical aspect.

The subject, implicitly present all the time, is encountered by reflection at the limit of objectivity. But the subject encountered thus at the limit of the world is encountered only as its own absence, as the lack of something which should be there but which is not. For it is neither the immediate subject of a reflective act nor the egocentric complex of dissociated properties. It is something personal, something which never becomes precisely visible within the totality of objective determinations and subjective qualia. Insatiability – whether of Hegelian conceptualisations, of positivistic optimism, of sociological eschatologism, of progressive scientism or of those who, bored by the abundance of all past novelties, await impatiently for the next novelty which will finally cure their boredom – all forms of insatiability breed, eventually, dissatisfaction, the feeling of unfulfillment and incompleteness, of broken promise, perhaps nihilism. From these ashes, when the impassable limit of more and more has been left, not behind but below, there emerges a more genuine, Nietzschean or Kierkegaardian, personal subject.

1.3 Mineness

The confrontation with chaos, with the overwhelming richness of experience reveals the limitations of the skills and powers of my ego and engenders the reflection that I am. It does not negate the objective experiences but, so to speak, suspends their, so far, ultimate importance. From their complexity, it husks the subject which does not any longer appear as a mere aspect of the (apprehension of the) objective world but as a being raised above it. It marks a breach in the continuity of being presenting myself in as astonishing a light of dissociated independence as the realisation that it is does with a simple object. Reflection that it is, the mere observation ‘that…’ of object’s immediacy, dissociates it and presents it as being ‘on its own’. Reflection that I am, in so far as it merely notices ‘that…’ of my presence, does the same with myself. In so far as I am considered in the actuality of this act as its object, I appear as isolated from the world, from any origin, I am alone, ‘on my own’. By the same token, it seems, I am free, absolutely, unreservedly. I emerge ex nihilo with the same ungrounded arbitrariness as an object appears for a purely actual subject – it is, but might not be, and there is no apparent reason for its being rather than not being, or for its being so rather than otherwise. On my own – as free as arbitrary, as unconstrained as alienated.

Reflection over myself, self-reflection, is an act which attempts to actualise its intended object, and this attempt amounts to dissociating oneself from the world. But at the same time, this object immediately slips away and remains a mere noumenal site. Self-reflection is (self-)aware of this insufficiency. It recognises that one is much more than what is made actual in any single here-and-now. This recognition gives self-reflection concreteness distinguishing it from a purely formal constatation of simply and merely being here.48

In self-reflection one experiences oneself as transcending the horizon of actuality, but merely as some noumenal site of identity. One knows one’s identity which extends over time

48Such a constatation would amount to the reflection that it is with its object being only accidentally oneself. Its course would be a series of reflections that: this is and that is, everything in the objective world is, but I am also one of the entities in this world, hence I, too, am. It finds in oneself exactly as much as in any other object – the mere being. We might call it an “abstract self-reflection”.

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not because one has managed to re-construction and comprehend it but simply because one knows it. Experience of this identity precedes any particular act of reflection and extends beyond it. It is experienced in the course of one's whole life and does not depend on one's reflecting over it or not. One knows it long before one reflectively thinks about it. If experience transcends the horizon of actuality, then so does the experiencing being. In this form of reflection, one represents oneself as a being whose unity is not, like ego's, a mere totality of actual contents, but extends over time. Yet, this unity is for reflection only experienced. It is not grasped as a comprehensible, reflective concept. Self-reflection posits this noumenal identity as its primary object, but its relations to the ego and its actual contents remains obscure. It appears under the actual signs which are inherently inadequate and incomplete, mere indications, allusions.

These indications and allusions carry all the concreteness of self-reflection. However, retaining the reflective categories of actuality, they appear inherently inadequate and insufficient. This inadequacy is particularly strongly felt with respect to I's temporal unity. Reflection that I am recognises in the immediate self-awareness that it encounters myself, an enigmatic site of continuous self-sameness. The enigma concerns the sameness of the actually reflecting subject and of myself who was yesterday, years ago, and whom I am going to be in all my future. As long as one stays with the categories of actuality alone, this unity poses an ever perplexing problem. For, being unable to deny the experience of sameness, one reverses the order of founding and tries, as Hume and many others did, to derive it from the visible, particular contents. One attempts to reduce oneself to the visibility of the ego, but lower categories yield, at most, some totalities but never unities.

Just like the temporal scope of subject (and object) is pure here-and-now, while of ego (and complexes) some finite and limited time, the I of the reflection that I am is finite but unlimited – it has no experienced beginning nor end. My birth is something I may be told about but not something I have experienced; my death is a perpetual not-yet. I am stretched, or better, I am stretching myself between these two limits, both real and yet ideal, since forever inaccessible.

They appear as actually given only when projected onto the objective time, as particular points on its line. The reflective apprehension of the finitude of my being in its temporal dimension emerges as the result of imposes its ideal end-points onto the infinite line of objective time. The infinity of this line is, of course, not experienced but only thought, and that only in terms of more, that is, as potential infinity. But one can equally well perform the opposite operation of mapping the infinite line onto, for instance, finite but open interval, or on a finite circle (as in figure I§117, p.75). The ideal end-points (which do not belong to an open interval, while on the circle become the same pole) become then the image of the infinity – the point in infinity. This point reflects the beginning, and the end, of the supposedly infinite line. We could say that this folding of the objective line onto a finite circle represents 'relativisation' of the objective time to the temporality of existence. The objectivistic infinity is superimposed on the experiential finitude, and the ideal, temporally dissociated beginning-end on the intuited origin. Temporality, emerging from the separation of an existence, has an origin, but not a beginning nor end. Beginning and end are only objectified images of the origin. This time which has originated but which has neither beginning nor end, the finite yet unlimited time, is the temporal context of the experience that I am.

Although the I of the reflection that I am appears for this reflection as an inaccessible, 60. noumenal limit, its dissociation from the world, similar to any object's, is not accompanied
by the similar *externality*. It is accompanied by the *awareness* of the *I* slipping out of the *actual* grasp or, put differently, of the *concrete* layers underlying the *reflective act*. Although one can never grasp oneself fully in such an act, all the *signs* given in *self-reflection* point to oneself, shallower or deeper appearances of *mineness*. *Self-reflection* may encounter dark and unexpected sides, but they are all intimately one’s own sides, they are not in any way alien, *external*. They signify some characteristics of oneself, not of one’s *ego*. Unlike the *actual* properties of the *ego*, they are not merely *external* possessions but most *concrete* – and vague – *qualities*. They are *mine* in a much deeper sense of something which *I* do not merely possess but something *I* am. They reflect some recurring themes of one’s personality and being, the control over which seems entirely impossible. They are not something one owns but something in which one *participates*. It is *concreteness* of this underlying unity which is intimately in genuine *self-reflection*, making it qualitatively different from the merely abstract one.

### 1.3.1. The signs

The experience *that I am* is an *experience* suspending the unquestioned validity of the *objective world*. The *signs* of *mineness* are no longer relative to specific organs nor even to the whole body. They are no longer sensations nor vital feelings, they are no longer localised, narrowed to the context of *actuality*. The *original signs* of *mineness* are kind of feelings which, unlike mere *moods*, do not reflect merely the *actual* situation, but rather one’s personal apprehension of and attitude towards it. They modify its *actual* perception by immersing it in the *quality* of one’s life or, if one prefers, of one’s *soul*.

#### 1.3.1.i. Original signs

61. The *original signs* at this level are what we will call “*qualities of life*”, or shortly “*qualities*”. Most vaguely, these are just feelings – however, not ones concerning a particular thing or situation, but the feelings concerning some *vague unity*: of one’s life, of the world, of life. They are not *signs* of anything particular, of any things or situations as *impressions* were. They are not specific, situated *moods* but *qualities* of the whole: life, experience, the world. We notice easily such a *quality* with a child, often even before it starts talking. The whole future can be seen – not, of course, any details concerning the development, career and the like, not any specific events of the future but ‘the whole future’, the *quality* of the person, the *quality* of his life. This strong impression we often get from children becomes, with the adults, weakened by the noise of all more specific features, habits and norms but, our claim goes, it remains the same *quality*.

62. A feeling of peace can arise in a particular situation relatively only to this, peaceful, situation. But *qualities* like ‘peaceful’, even if uncovered by *moods* and *impressions*, are not reserved for particular situations within the world. The *same qualities* may appear in a more intimate and deeper fashion as the *qualities of life*. There is a fundamental difference between a feeling of elation situated in a concrete situation and the joy of life which is only *actualised* in a particular situation. What distinguishes them is that the latter lack any *objective* correlates, any *complexes* which might be identified as their proper origin. *Complexes* are here only sites where such feelings are *actualised*, not by which they are caused. A feeling of peace, in the sense of a *quality of life*, as a *sign* of *mineness*, even if experienced in a particular context, is not limited by it, is not experienced as exclusively a quality of this moment but, on the contrary, as something which is merely *actualised* in it
and which is a much more solid, even if vague, quality of deeper significance. A feeling of joy, as a quality of life, is not the vital feeling of elation and vigour which may pass or change into its opposite in the matter of hours or minutes. It is a calm feeling of my life which, through all the variations of vital feelings and moods, through all the variations of situated joys and sorrows, victories and defeats, unveils a theme which underlies and surrounds all of them. The qualities of life constitute a deeper layer of moods and impressions. They are experienced underneath variations of different situations which, in themselves, give rise to very different impressions and moods.

Going far away, to an exotic and unfamiliar corner of the world, is naturally accompanied by an excitement and openness to the encounter with something — as the expectations go — completely new. But after some time (perhaps a week, perhaps a year), when the storm of novelties and initial impressions has calmed down, there arises a specific mood of something familiar in the midst of all this unfamiliarity. One notices that, in spite of all the differences and novelties, one has not traveled that far. Even if the mood of the life ‘out there’ is very different from that at home, the mood of one’s life seems to be only slightly affected by it and, at the bottom, remained the same. Variation of lower moods and impressions uncovers often deeper qualities. The latter are not as visible as the former. They are constant themes which remain un thematic but are experienced in the background of actual situations, as mere modifiers of the particular moods and impressions. Laughter of a happy man is different from the laughter of a desperate man, even if they both are laughing at the same thing. Being the qualities of life, they have no particular object but embrace all objects.

Having no particular objects, they may be clear and recognisable, but are vague and hardly definable. This undefinable vagueness, this lack of any objective correlates gives them a calm character. Even if the actual feelings expressing the quality of life are restless and confused, the quality itself is not so. Because it is experienced as given — not in the sense of actual givenness of an object, but in the sense of givenness of something which is greater than any particular object and situation, which is greater than what can be controlled and influenced at the moment. Even if encountered in a particular situation, it is not limited to this situation, it does not aim at any action or expression — it is given and not taken, but given not as an external datum but as the internal determination. To the extent the quality has a negative character, it is experienced with resignation or wish that it be different. If it has a positive character, the same kind of calmness becomes a thankful acceptance.

Any possible reactions, whether sudden outbursts, protests or satisfaction, are at most actual expressions motivated by such underlying feelings but not their proper signs. Calm reaction can express certainty or resignation, laughter can express acceptance or contempt, almost any actual mood and reaction can be associated with various deeper feelings and, eventually, qualities. And it is only this deeper association, this undefinable rest, which, on the one hand, modifies the actual signs so that one’s laughter is unmistakably distinct from another’s and, on the other hand, gives the actual signs their more profound meaning reaching beyond the horizon of mere actualities.

Most abstractly, the qualities might be divided into feelings of spiritual gratification, peace, on the one hand, and sadness, mourning, on the other. To most people the quality of life makes it worth living, but to some it does not. The immediate, original sign of the former is the simple fact that one does continue living, of the latter — suicide. But such oppositions are abstractions. Every person, every life has its unique quality and it is only

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49The word “soulful” would seem more appropriate here if it did not carry all too emotional connotations.
up to reflection to decide how far it wants to abstract or distinguish, what it wants to consider as analogies and what as differences. Every man carries with him the quality of his life which can be sensed and experienced (even if not contained in a precise concept) by himself and by others. There are people whose life is light or shallow, and whose life is sad or tragic. The quality of life of Ivan Karamazov, sharply independent, confusedly intellectual is something very different from the peacefully submissive, warmly open quality of life of Alosha. Their thirst and search have quite different qualities, even if, perhaps, both thirst eventually for the same. Every person has, besides recognisable and repeatable features, besides some character traits which can be shared with others, above all that which can ever be captured by the actual look, something – je ne sais quoi – which gives all these features a uniquely personal touch.

Unlike vital feelings, qualities of life are not actual expressions of the animated life energy nor of life in general, but of my life. Life in general may have all kinds of alternative qualities; it may be tragic or comic, meaningful or wasted, hard or easy, intense or peaceful. One’s life, too, can have different qualities for which we need different words, but to the extent these signify the quality of one life, they are joined not by ‘or’ but by ‘and’. One’s life can be both tragic and comic, and then this conjunction, as well as the particular ways of its manifestations express this particular and unique quality. The whole concreteness of the quality lies in this ‘and’, in the peculiar way it connects the descriptions which, when applied to the actual objects or impressions, might appear contrary.

1.3.1.ii. Reflective signs

Verbal statements of such qualities involve already a reflective attitude. Roughly, they are preceded by “I am...” rather than “I feel...”. “I feel nice” suggests a situated context in which this feeling arises. We do not say “I am nice” in the same sense. “I feel dissatisfaction” refers, too, implicitly to a dissatisfying situation, “I am dissatisfied” may be said in the same sense, but it may also be said in the broader sense of “My life is dissatisfying”. The statements like “Life is...” are usually made in response to particular circumstances, in a specific context of paternalistic advice to a child or an intimate complain to a close friend. But these are only possible conditions for actually making such statements. The statements themselves are incomplete and imperfect expressions, the general thoughts concerning the experienced quality of one’s life.

We are not concerned with the truth of such statements. They are never true in the strict, objectivistic sense. And yet, they do witness to experiences of a different order than the experiences of complexes, they witness to feelings of different kind than moods and impressions. One can claim that such statements are merely generalisations from a series of experiences and express nothing more than their common features. Yet, if one wants to maintain this empiristic view, one should also explain what the supposed subject of all these predicates is and what constitutes the need for such useless judgments. In fact, the statements are neither meaningless nor useless. Their meaning is grounded in the experience of one’s life and even if they do not express precise content, they can communicate the intended qualities, they can be understood by a sympathy which need not conceptual precision but only clear indications. It is precisely the fact that such verbal expressions are always accompanied by the awareness of their insufficiency and inadequacy, which suggests the unity of the underlying experience. The experience of the insufficiency of words for an adequate expression of the quality of life is also the experience of the unity
of life which simply transceeds any actual expressions.

Qualities of life do not involve any clear split into the world on the one hand and myself on the other. The reflective signs of the experience that I am, the general thoughts, emerging from the standpoint of the reflective dissociation of subject and object, tend to set up a distinction, often an opposition, between myself and the world. In spite of this, expressing the qualities, they tell one as much about the world as about the speaker.

The properties ascribed to the world happen to reflect only the quality of my life and vice versa. Repeating after Plato’s Laws (804B, 644D-E) something like “All the world’s a stage,” and all the men and women merely players,” one seems to characterise the world, but this is only a matter of grammar. One actually states something about the life in the world, about the quality of life. Certainly, one does not state any true fact, even less a fact which could be verified. But one does not make any false statement, either – one expresses general thoughts about the quality of life.

Discussing actual matters – the current political situation, the recent fashion in literary criticism, the choice of furniture, the events at work, … – one can pretend to remain half-anonymous, to keep an objective distance to the matter at hand which is, indeed, impersonal and external. But the more general statements one makes, characterising the totality of the world and the quality of human life, the less possibility to retain the distance and the more one unveils oneself. Making a statement about the world or life in general, one is bound to unveil oneself. He who says ‘life is real, life is earnest’, however much he may speak of the fundamental mysteriousness of things, gives a distinct definition of this mysteriousness by ascribing to it the right to claim from us the particular mood called seriousness – which means willingness to live with energy, though energy bring pain. The same is true of him who says that all is vanity. For indefinable as the predicate ‘vanity’ may be in se, it is clearly something that permits anaesthesia, mere escape from suffering, to be our rule of life.”

The medieval memento mori intends, almost paradoxically, to turn the attention to one’s life. But this turn amounts to nothing more than to understanding of the passing value and vanity of the things of this world. A specific understanding of the world induces a specific understanding of one’s life. The universal doubt recommended by Descartes is so much an expression of a shrewd, suspicious intellect, as of the understanding of the world which – who knows? – might be under a spell of the Evil Spirit. We do not know, but its mere possibility makes the world untrustworthy.

Statements “The world is…” and “My life is…” do not only appear conceptually equally empty (in spite of their existential content). They are also equipotent, they say the same about the same. They can be supported by various arguments and examples, elaborated ad nauseam over a glass of beer or whiskey (and another glass, and another…). Eventually, they tell you nothing about the world or life in general, but only about a possible experience of the world and life, i.e., about the person making this statement and his experience of life. “The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man” and general thoughts are expressions of such different qualities.

1.3.2. This world

The totality of all things of this world is never given in an actual experience. But the

50 W. Shakespeare, As You Like It. II:7 (Jaques)
51 W. James, Essays in Pragmatism. I:p.19
52 L. Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. 6.43
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conclusion that there is no such unity as *this world* follows then only if one has reduced reality to *actual experiences*. If nothing more then, at least, our inability to give up the mode of speaking involving such general judgments about the world or life suggests that there may be some *experienced unity* which transcends the distinctions made within it. We do not look for proofs and merely claim the *presence* of such a *unity*. There are *totalities* which are reducible to their constituents, which are only sums of their parts. *This world*, however, is not such a *totality*.53 If it can be *posed* as one *totality* which does not appear an arbitrary, reflective invention, it is only because it is underlaid by an already *experienced unity*, which only calls for some *actual* expression or, as the case may be, an explanation. Like every *unity* which *transcends* some complex of distinctions, this *unity* which is not reducible to the *totality* of things is more primordial than their *posed totality*. Phenomenologists managed to coin the phrase “phenomenon of the world”. But *the world* is not a phenomenon; it does not appear in the unity of a single *act* of consciousness. What appears in such acts is a vague idea of something close to void of any content, a mere *sign* pointing towards some all-embracing container. True, the *sign* is not entirely void and this is why one may be justified in analysing the assumed ‘phenomenon’. But such an analysis concerns only series of distinct, *actual* phenomena. Their *unity* has no phenomenal content. The divergent analyses of the supposed phenomenon among various phenomenologists illustrate the failure of making *the world* into a correlate of adequate intuition. In our terms, it illustrates the irreducibility of its *transcendent unity* to the *actuality* of features, facts, things and observations. *This world*, emerging as the third hypostasis (I:3), as *chaos* turned into *recognisable experience*, precedes all the things which we later find within it.54

68. Since we do not need adequate intuition nor exhaustive characterisations, we should be allowed to say that *this world* is the givenness of the *visible*, givenness not merely as an *immediate actuality* but as the field of one’s activities, passions, goals, in short, the field of one’s life. It does contain things, tools, situations, concepts but this is just an analytical statement – all these are just the *cuts from experience* circumscribed within the *horizon of actuality*. *This world* is the horizon of *visibility* within which everything *actual* appears. The Husserlian notion of a ‘horizon’ has much intuitive appeal, but it should not be taken as something merely surrounding the *totality* of *visible* things. It is something from which all visible things emerge. We could say, it is the *visibility* itself. If we were to use the language we have given up: it is not an accidental *totality* (*totality* is, in fact, always somewhat accidental) of *dissociated* substances but, on the contrary, it is the ‘substance’ of which all particular things are accidents.

*The world* considered from the present level bears a resemblance to ‘Lebenswelt’ in that it manifests itself phenomenally only as the ideal horizon of the contents appearing

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53 We would not even know what its supposed parts are. The interested ones may follow the interminable discussions trying to decide whether these are things, facts, matters at hand, states of affairs...

54 In general, *unity founds totality* and such a *founding unity transcends* the respective *totality*. In particular, *the world transcends* the multiplicity of things within the world. “That which in any multiplicity is unitary did not flow out of any of its elements, that which is unitary in [common to] all cannot come from one among all but remains characteristic property of that unitary one.” [Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, §21] It is like Cusanus’ universe of ‘all things’ which, however “are not ‘many things’, since plurality does not precede each thing. For this reason, in the order of nature ‘all things’ have, without plurality, preceded each thing.” [Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. II:5[117]] In the words of Heidegger’s: “Neither the ontological depiction of entities within-the-world nor the ontological Interpretation of their Being is such as to reach the phenomenon of the ‘world’. In both of these ways of access to ‘Objective Being’, the ‘world’ has already been ‘presupposed’, and indeed in various ways.” [M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*. I.3.14 [H64]]
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within it and, consequently, as the field of our activity and life. One has a strong tendency to see it only as a totality of things rather than as a unity of its own because reflective experience is unable to grasp this unity in the actuality of a single act: the world is not an object of an experience. But the world manifests itself in any experience, not as its thematic object, but as the constant aspect which connects all actual experiences and is the same, constant field of their unfolding. In every experience, it is mit/geben but only as a kind of noumenal unity, as an indication of the presence of the totality of things of experience; not as the ‘actual horizon’ of related things, but as their background against which the things of actual experience appear. In this sense, the world is indeed in each thing, is reflected in every experience since its unity precedes all these experiences.\footnote{But since the universe is in each [thing] in such a way that each is in it, in each thing the universe is in a contracted way that which this thing is contractedly, and in the universe each thing is in the universe, although the universe is in each thing in one way, and each thing is in universe in a different way. [...] Indeed, in a stone all things are stone; in a vegetative soul all are vegetative soul; in life all are life; in the senses all are senses; in sight all are sight; in hearing all are hearing; in imagination all are imagination; in reason all are reason [...] [Nicholas of Cusa, \textit{On Sacred Ignorance}. II.5[118]]}

1.3.3. I

As we observed in §60, the act of self-reflection, attempting to actualise its intention, 69. is always aware of its insufficiency. On the one hand, it posits the I as its actual and dissociated object. On the other hand, it re-cognises the concreteness of the I which not only slips out of the horizon of actual given but does so essentially. In it I re-cognise myself as something which never can be reduced to the actuality of an object.

“Who am I?” is the question of adolescence which, emerging from the egotic preoccupations, begins to recognise the wider horizon of one’s life. But the question never finds a final answer. One would like to know: I am (going to be) a carpenter, a family man, a dedicated father, a scientist, a politician, a charmer,... Or else: I am intelligent, I am pretty, I am weak, I am too vulnerable,... One would like to get an answer in terms of actual, reflective categories but such an answer would amount to reducing oneself to one’s ego. The only answer is that I am myself, but to understand and accept it one has first to live, transcend one’s egotism. To the reflective thirst for plain visibility it appears empty and disappointing.

The question never finds any final and adequate answer because I is not reducible to its actual characteristics, I has a multiplicity of egos, none of which nor the totality of which exhaust oneself. The relation between oneself and one’s egos can be compared to that between the residual correlate obtained in the process of variation (like eidetic reduction, only varying the whole life) in which the varied elements are egos. There are, for instance, persons with strong skills for social adaptation, perhaps actor-like characters who, behaving differently on different occasions, do not suffer from any identity crises. Or else, ‘rich personalities’ with a wide range of expressions which may easily seem incongruent but which are underlied some higher form of personal coherence and control. Every person has a similar multiplicity of egos, or ‘persona’: one for work, one for home, another for friends at one’s place and another for friends at their place, one for children, another for a party. Strength of a personality is much closer related to the wide span of apparently incongruent egos the person possesses and controls, than to the uniformity of one’s egos across different contexts and situations. Variations of egos across different actual situations
unveil for reflection the underlying unity of oneself.

On the other hand, the multiplicity of egos is also what makes personal disintegration possible. The question which an ideal theory of a substantial, atomic subjectivity must answer in negative is: “Is the disintegration of personal identity, the loss of one’s consistency and continuity possible?” In the immediacy of pure subjectivity such a loss is impossible – there is no time for it. But identification of the subject, of the unity of human being with the subjectivity of immediate consciousness is of little help because, as we well know, such a disintegration is possible. It is possible because I, being stretched in time, can lose the continuity in time – I can be dissociated into a multiplicity of egos.

Dissociative identity disorder, DID, shows that one can possess a multiplicity of egos, each of which is sufficiently integrated to have a relatively stable life of its own and recurrently to take full control of the person’s behavior. Differences between various egos of one person may be astonishing – amnesia of other egos, changed wishes, attitudes, interests, hand writing, even different physiological indices like heart rate, blood pressure, EEG. A person suffering from DID has, as a normal person, a multiplicity of possessions, namely egos. The difference is that, while a healthy person possesses egos keeping them under some degree of control, with a sick person it is egos which gain uncanny autonomy and possess the person. The relation between I and egos gets inverted, I becomes reduced to the level of egos and, unable to organise them, suffers their multiplicity – the higher becomes a mere totality of the lower.

It is easy to misuse such examples to suggest that ‘in reality’ there is no I and only a multiplicity of somethings, e.g., egos. But the fact that we can demolish a building into a heap of bricks proves neither the unreality of the building nor that it is, ‘in reality’, only a heap of bricks. Phenomena like DID represent disintegration which is possible because subject (person, man) is not any ideal and extensionless point, but in its temporal duration possesses complex aspects whose configurations may change. But even such a disintegration can be taken as an extreme form of variation which we mentioned above. It changes certainly the feeling of life and the sense of oneself, but it does not change the fact that even such a person is oneself all the time. Each of the egos has only a “relatively stable life of its own”. While psychologists focus on what constitutes the problem – the dissociation of the sense of identity – one should not forget all the rest – the unity prevailing above the actual multiplicity. For instance, usually there is one dominant personality (who ‘knows’ about others), and one can often change at will from one to another, through a process similar to self-hypnosis (DID patients are highly hypnotisable and susceptible to self-hypnosis). Who is it that does the changing? New egos can be spawned to handle some unbearable emotional problems (child abuse is the recurring theme in the etiology of DID, the first alter ego appears usually between the 4th and 6th year of life). But spawning presupposes a prior nexus. Although pathology of multiple egos dissociates this nexus into ‘unrelated’ actual entities, it remains in its virtual unity which only loses continuity with the actual appearances. It is the person himself who still keeps some degree of continuity.

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56 Milder forms of dissociative or organic amnesia, fugue states (flight from one’s identity, frequent in war victims) can be mentioned here as well, even though some psychologists challenge the reasons for identifying such disorders. Did used to be called the “multiple personality disorder”, which we might term “multiple ego disorder”.

57 D. Lester, Multiple personality: a review

58 In the well-known Julie-Jenny-Jerrie case, Jerrie says: “I wish Julie would stop smoking. I hate the taste of tobacco.” The split is there, but it is obviously maintained by somebody. Jerrie knows about Julie while Jenny, the original ego, knows about both other.
It is the person himself who addresses the therapist. And most importantly, even if the person loses completely the sense of self-identity, it is the person himself who suffers dissociation, who is being treated and, as the case may be, cured. A successful treatment of DID results in an integration of multiple egos, in merging them back into the unity of one person. It is not the multiplicity of egos which got cured – it is the person.

The I revealed to self-reflection is not explicable in the way ego might be. It is not transcendent in the way ego is, merged with the world and its visible, even if unclear affairs. I is something other, something beyond and above the world, something ... noumenal. Reflection dissociates and posits I against a foreign world – as opposed to it, thrown into it, confronted with it. It does not belong there among things and complexes, it does not belong among others who, for the moment, are just foreigners. The pure I of the abstract reflection that I am is, as Camus would repeat after so many others, a stranger. The strangeness is, however, only in the externalised objects and in their posited totality. This is indeed the kind of world in which soul is a stranger, the world viewed by the abstract reflection as a mere totality of things, of dissociated situations, eventually, of irrational and meaningless, even if logically comprehensible, events. Stranger is the subject alienated from such a dissociated world.

Concrete self-reflection, on the other hand, marks the experience of one’s life. We have purposefully not distinguished between the qualities of the world and the qualities of the experience of the world. We do not experience some qualities which then can be identified as properties of life or world, They are the same thing – as all original signs, they involve a valuation, here, quality. They become dissociated only when we insist on applying the subject-object opposition also at the level of I and its objectified correlate, world. But concrete I is not a noumenal subject posited by a reflective act. It is the richness of one’s life. Experience of myself is equiprimordial with the experience of my life. One tends to think the latter as an accident of the former but this is because the former has still deeper roots to which we will return in 14. My life is not something which I of self-reflection has, it is something it is. I do not live my life – I am my life.

To use yet another word, we can say that the richness of one’s life is one’s soul. One can build one’s life on an example of a person one respects, develop one’s soul inspired by another, learn something from another’s life. But one soul, the uniqueness of one life and its quality can not be repeated. There is nothing like ‘a soul’. Soul is always concrete, it is always this particular life, this concrete world. Soul is not alive, it is life. One’s soul, oneself becomes emptied of life to the extent it is posited by reflection as an independent entity, an isolated being only potentially capable of an involvement in an alien world. Such a soul, imprisoned in the body, Dasein fallen within the world, is a gnostic abstraction. Some feelings in the face of dissolving values and depersonalised world and, primarily, the relation between concrete I and the depersonalised totality of external things, could be described this way. Yet, eventually, it is a harmful sign of alienation which finds no values in the world seen exclusively under its impersonal aspect. The quality of life is the quality of the soul and of its world – the three can be dissociated only by reflective abstraction. The world understood as the continuity of experience, as the unity preceding, and hence stretching beyond its differentiation into the dissociated objects, is the same as my life, is intimately my world. “The world and life are one. I am my world.”59 I, being the world of my life, precedes the things emerging within this world just like the world does. Not only the emergence of the world but also the creation of man “is prior to those things which

59 L. Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. 5.621, 5.63
were created with it or in it or below it."\(^{60}\) Consequently, soul can feel stranger among the external things created below it, but not in the world which is but the field of its life.

73. The equipollence of I and my world does not amount to any subjectivism which, at the current level, can be exemplified by the following. "Of course, you may confront me with: 'But are you sure your story is really the true and right one?' But what does it really matter what the reality outside myself is, as long as it has helped me to live, to feel that I am alive, to feel the very nature of the creature that I am."\(^{61}\) In fact, it matters quite a lot, unless one is willing to assume the attitude of a decadent aestheticism which, by its very self-reflection, sets itself apart and above the world; the attitude which opposes the two, which feels forced to claim that "nothing is 'given' as real except our world of desires and passions, that we can rise or sink to no other 'reality' than the reality of our drives."\(^{62}\) The very fact of opposing oneself and the 'reality outside' witnesses to a disturbance, to a breach, a doubt not only about the 'reality outside' but also about oneself. This latter doubt arises from the identification of oneself with the egotistic desires and passions, reduction of oneself to the ego or even subject. In a sense, it is true that "[t]here can be no progress (real, that is, moral) except in the individual and by the individual himself."\(^{63}\) But such a progress is not the matter of one's subjectivity but of one's individuality. It is the matter of oneself as much as of one's world. The two, being the same, change and progress together or not at all, "and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."\(^{64}\)

Wanting to change one's life, not only this or that aspect of it but oneself, one has to change the world. Say, good soul cannot live in an evil world, for no matter to how much evil the world exposes the soul, the good soul will still see – in the world – goodness and reasons to be good. To be good in spite of the evil in the world is to assume an attitude which, at some point, does not reflect one's being. To be good in the world which is evil is to be a rigid moralist, a pharisee or, in a more lofty variant, a resigned Stoic who is only a tiny step from the apathy of a bored intellectual, gnawed by the unreality of his lofty ideas and ideals. To be good is not only being good but also finding goodness, finding the need and reason for it not only in the self-goodness of one's inner life but in the world. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." The treasure of the heart is not any private 'subjectivity' of one's 'inner life'. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."\(^{65}\) The treasure is something found, given to me from above and not something I assume or decide to value. This treasure is that which shapes my heart, my soul, while its lack leaves the soul empty.

Wanting to change one's life, not only this or that aspect of it but oneself, one has to change the world. One's life changes not because one realises something in a momentaneous illumination but as a consequence of a new way of experiencing the world, of finding a new treasure. Certainly, there are pathological cases against which a mere analysis, psychoanalysis or other form of psychotherapy can help. But their value is limited to the lower levels of egotistic disturbances. The faith in their unlimited power can arise only

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\(^{60}\)J. S. Erigena, *Periphyseon*. IV:779ABCD.

\(^{61}\)C. Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*. Windows [my emph.] "Why could the world which is of any concern to us – not be a fiction?" [F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. 34]

\(^{62}\)F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. 36

\(^{63}\)C. Baudelaire, *My Heart Laid Bare*.

\(^{64}\)Mt. VII:2

\(^{65}\)Mt. XII:35/VI:21; Lk. VI:45/XII:34
1.3. Mineness

from the assumption of the genuine dissociation of a person from his world, according to which each can be treated independently from the other. Healing a true suffering of soul amounts to healing the world of this soul for, in deeper respects, one can hardly change understanding of the world without actually experiencing a changed world. Sometimes, a travel to a remote place may be needed to regenerate the soul. An emotional impairment resulting from the lack of love and warmth can hardly be changed by a mere realisation that this was its cause. It may need not only the will to change it but also the very experience of love and warmth. This is what often makes meeting new people worthwhile: they can make things which seemed impossible, even non-existent, to appear obvious and natural. They can show us a different world which cures the lacks of the world in which we used to live. This intimacy of myself and the world has nothing to do with the arbitrariness of subjective images opposed to the objective world.

My life, that is, the world, is the field of my expression. Its unlimited, though finite, scope is no longer a stage of single acts or manipulative actions but of activity in the broadest sense of the word, activity which is not merely a sum of acts and actions, which is not directed towards achievement of some goals, but which expresses the traces of values, the motives which shape the horizon for selecting possible goals. My life is just that – the way I spend my time. A common answer to the question “Who is he?” would simply tell what the person is doing for living. A profession tells something about that: what one does with one’s time, or even better, to what one dedicates one’s time. A (deliberate) choice of profession involves often, besides detailed considerations of specific demands and associated forms of activity, also a hardly expressible feeling of the quality of the character of the profession, which should correspond to one’s values and the sense of what is meaningful. One wants one’s activities to reflect the (passive) feelings of qualities and values. The activities to which one devotes much of one’s time express also the quality of one’s life. And it is no longer talk about simple grasping-avoiding as in the case of objects, nor arranging-preventing as in the case of complexes, but about dedication, about accepting some values transcending the actuality and about dedicating one’s time to their expression.

Not only changing one’s life involves changing the world but also vice versa. If one wants to change the world, not this or that thing but the world, one has to bring to it a changed quality of one’s life. Achievements, deeds, reforms do change the objective world. But it is never certain if they also change the world. In most cases, they do not, and the more violent changes of the objective world make only the remoteness of salvation more clear. “How can an event which, like war, eliminates discussion and opens every possibility by

66 Many examples of the resulting oppositions can be found in the society of Victorian fin de siècle: positivist science and utilitarianism are nervously opposed by the search for the freedom of the will and the calls to cultivate ‘art for art’s sake’; bourgeois norms and industrial routine is equally nervously opposed by the cult of intense experience, hashish, absinthe and Bohemian decadence; neurotic apathy and weary reflection call for passionate and heroic action; the progressing depersonalisation and society turning into masses, if not mob, are met with almost pietistic calls to personal concentration and authenticity. Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Wilde, Freud, Nietzsche, Spencer, Dostoevsky, James ... It is hard to avoid the sense of artificiality – if not of the view of the world and of the involved oppositions, then of the individual attitude attempted in spite of and against the world (or was it in spite of and against oneself?). Much of the XX-th century’s existentialism sailed under the same banner.

67 Using the distinction of Scheler’s, a specific goal corresponds to ‘Zweck’, a motivation to ‘Ziel’, e.g., M. Scheler, Formalism in Ethics. II.3. Motivation is a horizon of values which, on the one hand, functions as the foundation for choosing particular goals and, on the other hand, becomes actualised through their realisation – it comes both before and after the goals, it surrounds them.
II.1. The existential levels

denying every norm, bring salvation to humanity?”

How can it bring salvation even only to its perpetrators? Revolution as a means of abolishing alienation is one of the most tragic human inventions but it is only an extreme case of existential frustration turned into social destruction of which there are many examples. With respect to the personal dimension of existence, social activism more often than not witnesses to alienation which it is unable to cure. It suffers from the insufficiency, if not irrelevancy, for the existential dimension, which insufficiency hovers even over the satisfaction from the actual successes. No doubt, improving social institutions may be a useful activity. But taken as a medicine to cure the world, that is, to change the quality of one’s life it is, at best, a misunderstanding. At worst, it expresses an instinctive resentment, the more dangerous because unchecked in its convictions about its beneficent intentions. It is true that living in a particular world may promote some and not other ways of experiencing and only some, but not other qualities of life. But these are, at best, statistical tendencies. They never have a predictable effect on a particular individual whose world is much more than the objective world of tools and political, economical and social organisation.

1.3.4. Transcendence

76. At the current level, one finds the distinction between the personal and impersonal, but the distinction between the ‘objective’ and the ‘subjective’ loses almost completely its meaning. It is myself, my life which is involved, in a sense, the most ‘subjective’ aspect of experience. On the ‘objective’ side there is, perhaps, the world, in the sense of ‘everything but me’. But this phrase can signify here only the correlate of my life, the field of its unfolding. The world, my life and myself are not synonymous in the common language usage which always reflects the subject-object dissociation. But they are inseparably knitted aspects of the nexus of experience.

To be sure, we do live in the objective world, we do make plans, manage worldly situations, use tools. But all these complexes are correlates of my ego, they are only ‘parts’ of the world and are below me. Viewing the world as their totality is a simple-minded, and always unsuccessful, reduction. Things, complexes, particular situations and singular experiences not only never exhaust the experience of the world – they do not even provide the ground for such experience which is founded upon the unity transcending their totality, transcending the objective world.

77. The tension of the horizontal transcendence at this level does not arise from the more of complexes but from the basic opposition between mine and not-mine. It is immediately present in the reflection that I am which performs a highly artificial operation of dissociating myself from something – from the world, perhaps, from my life, apparently from that which is not-mine but eventually, as a matter of fact, from myself. This dissociation finds an expression in the opposition between the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’, the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’. ‘Inner’ would usually refer to the ‘inner life’, as it did in 1:§54. But here it may be related to anything which is in some way experienced as mine: my feelings, my things, my friends, my family. The ‘outer’ is then everything else, everything excluded from this ‘inner’ circle, everything for which I do not feel a slightest degree of responsibility, everything which perhaps influences me but is not influenced by me, The sign

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68R. Aron, The Opium of the Intellectuals. I: Concerning the political optimism
of the transcendence of that which is not mine may be, for instance, my indifference as opposed to care and responsibility I feel for what is mine. It can likewise emerge as my inability to draw borders between the two, ‘to gather myself’, as when I get lost among the challenges and temptations confronting me in my meeting with the world. In extreme cases, its manifestation can be the sense of being defeated by the complexity of the world. When manifested in actual signs, the horizontal transcendence involves the fundamental feeling of me being only myself, confronted with the rest which, being not-mine, is foreign, disturbing, unwelcome, even threatening and dangerous.

The vertical aspect of transcendence amounts here to the embrace of chaos. It is not merely uncontrollable complexity, but chaos hidding behind it, in the face of which the categories of visibility simply lose their meaning. It is ‘something completely other’, something which can no longer be treated in the familiar ways according to which I organise my world. This chaos may, but need not, mean disorder – it is only lack of objective order, lack of any sufficient reasons and explanations which determine relations within the world, Kierkegaard’s Angst is a well known example of such an embrace. It confronts one with something inexplicable and irreducible to the familiar categories of visibility; something threatening with its unfamiliarity and uncanniness. Suspending the validity of all worldly categories, such an encounter amounts, in fact, to the question about myself. Manifesting irreducible otherness beyond my world, it oppugns the assumed foundations of my life and poses the question about myself. But Angst is only an extreme example. Love which begins to penetrate one’s whole being without referring one to any specific object, which makes the whole world dissolve in a continuity of thankfulness and inspiration can be a good example, too. Love, also personal love, is not anything one chooses and arranges. It is something one meets, something coming from above, something not-mine. And yet, it is not a foreign, accidental event which only happens to me as do the actual experiences. Embracing my whole being, it is thoroughly mine, it involves myself to the very depth of my soul, to the point where I cease to be myself. Just like Angst, so also love, transcending me, is most intimately mine.

Thus, the horizontal transcendence of mineness involves alienation, confrontation with empty and meaningless, perhaps dangerous otherness of not-mine. It is something foreign, but something from which one can relatively easily retreat into one’s privacy, behind the walls of one’s home-castle. In the vertical aspect, on the other hand, the not-mine does not appear as a dissociated pole opposing me, but as a transcendent element present in a way which is, strangely yet clearly, intimately mine. The chaos is present as a most genuine element, as a most immanent aspect of myself. For it is no longer a mere disorder of dissociated objects and complexes but the limit beyond which they lose any significance. One cannot withdraw from it, as one can from the threats of the foreign, not-mine world. Once touched by it, one can only deepen the acquaintance.

This element can become either a source from which one’s activity draws strength and energy, or else an abyss capable of devouring one. The transcendence of mineness, especially under its vertical aspect, has these two basic forms: of dissolution or enrichment, of destruction or creation. Simply because where things are created, they can also be destroyed. Only at the limit of one’s world (life, soul) can one become oneself, but it is also where one can lose oneself. The element of madness observed in every creative genius reflects this simple fact that creation – the secondary creation, that of which humans are capable – amounts to organising the disorganised, to bringing experience out of chaos. It must move on the border where the visible world begins to dissolve in its invisible origins.
Hence, any creative activity involves a deep personal engagement which arises only from a confrontation with chaos where I, meeting the not-I, can no longer draw a precise border between oneself and otherness, between mine and not-mine. Such a confrontation may result in a dedicated love, in a resolute patience, in new works of art or science or in madness. A creative genius organises chaos emerging, like Jonas, after three days from the depths of whale’s belly. A madman is, too, swallowed by the overpowering force of chaos but, unable to wrest himself from it, remains there or else, if he returns, returns empty-handed.

1.4 Invisibles

79. Self-reflection discloses my separation, but it does so under the mark of reflective dissociation – it posits myself as an independent entity which is therefore experienced as alienated, it centers around the category of mineness with its basic mode of my will. It is the level at which I can still choose and control and where all my decisions, actions and activities are referred back to myself as their protagonist. Even when I feel that, as a matter of fact, I am not in control, I still persist in the attempts to realise my will. And as long as I persist in this focusing on mineness, my goals, my wishes, my will, I also keep experiencing separation as alienation. Even if I recognise the world as my world, I do not appropriate it, it does not become fully mine. For my world should conform to my projects, while the world does not.

In self-reflection I re-cognise myself as transcending the horizon of actuality, but merely as some noumenal site of mere self-identity. I know intimately that it is myself I am reflecting over, yet this identity remains ideal, unexperienced. Myself discovered by the reflection that I am is the result of a rather artificial abstraction in which reflection dissociated myself from the world, even from my life, that is, from myself. As much as I know that I am myself, I also know that the reflecting I is not fully myself; the I grasped by the reflective act does not coincide with myself living my life; I am myself and yet I am losing myself, I am close to myself, but also remote – the same and different. Alienation is more than the estrangement from the world; it is first of all the estrangement from myself, the loss of contact with my self.

80. There are situations in which one’s self-identity remains unquestioned but its character and integrity are threatened by alien forces.

On the pathological end, many cases of schizophrenia provide examples of a split which affects not only one’s egos but oneself. The etymology of the term coined by Eugene Bleuler – schizo = split, phreno = mind – does not intend multiple personalities but one split personality. The emotive and cognitive functions are not only disturbed but dissociated from each other and one’s actuality, the reflective subjectivity becomes invaded by some higher, uncontrolled forces. Hallucinations or delusions of grandeur or persecution invade consciousness of a paranoid schizophrenic Attacks of silly and incoherent laughter, grimace, unmotivated giggle are symptoms of disorganised schizophrenia. One hears the complaints that patient’s intestines are congealed, that his brain has been removed or that some device has been implanted into it, that a slightest movement will provoke an enormous catastrophe (catatonic schizophrenia), etc. It is the patient who experiences some alien forces threatening – not his unity but his integrity, himself. One tries, initially, to resist the invading element which gradually takes over the control – of one’s mind, one’s behavior, one’s surroundings. Unlike in the examples of ego disturbances, §§70.ff, here the person
remains **himself** also in his *reflective* consciousness. Only this makes the experienced forces, which threaten *his* autonomy, *alien*.

Within a more normal range, there are also experiences when I am not in control of *myself*, when I am seized by an impulse, an urge to act in a way which, to all *my* consciousness and knowledge, is not *my* way of acting, which does not originate in *my* will. “The primitive phenomenon of *obsession* has not vanished; it is the same as ever. It is only interpreted in a different and more obnoxious way.”\(^70\) An impulsive act, a ‘murder in affect’ may be followed by an outcry “It was not me, it was something strange in me!”

Such impulses and acts, although *mine*, emerge as if from above, as if they were coming from some higher or deeper layers which are not under my control, which, although originating ‘in me’, are not *mine* at all. “A man likes to believe that he is the master of his soul. But as long as he is unable to control his moods and emotions, or to be conscious of the myriad secret ways in which unconscious factors insinuate themselves into his arrangements and decisions, he is certainly not his own master.”\(^71\) “We have intimations and intuitions from unknown sources. Fears, moods, plans, and hopes come to us with no visible causation. These concrete experiences are at the bottom of our feeling that we know ourselves very little; at the bottom, too, of the painful conjecture that we might have surprises in store for ourselves.”\(^72\)

Experiences of this kind, when “one becomes two,”\(^73\) make *present* something which ‘lives in me but is not me’, which is ‘inside myself’ and yet is not *myself*, which exercising often irresistible power over *myself*, stays ‘outside’ *myself*. Then “the greater figure, which one always was but which remained invisible, appears to the lesser personality with the force of a revelation. He who is truly and hopelessly little will always drag the revelation of the greater down to the level of his littleness, and will never understand that the day of judgment for his littleness has dawned. But the man who is inwardly great will know that the long expected friend of his soul, the immortal one, has now really come, “to lead captivity captive” [...]”\(^74\)

The reflection necessary for overcoming *alienation* (once more, *alienation* from the world \(^81\) is only a reflection of the *alienation* from *my self*) is to realise that *I am not the master* – not only of the *world*, but neither of *myself*, of my very being. My decision to achieve a goal may be opposed by external factors or my own inability or laziness. This is trivial at the level of *objects* (which are *external* and given rather than chosen) and of *complexes* (where there is always more which *I* cannot conquer). But *I am not the master* also in the more profound sense of not being the master even of my being, of not possessing even *myself*. My will to be good may never get realised, sometimes due to my obvious weakness or impatience, sometimes due to unclear and hardly *visible* obstacles; where failure can be blamed on my own incapacity as well as on bad luck. I do not decide to fall in love with a given person or not. I may do even if, as far as I can see or as the course of life shows, the person is not the one *I* would like to love. My hope for happiness may never find fulfillment – not only because I constantly find features of *myself* precluding it, but simply because *I* am unhappy. There are sufferings of which *I* can be acutely aware and which *I* can firmly defy but which last for years leaving hardly any hope that they may

\(^{70}\)C. G. Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious*. p.32

\(^{71}\)Ibid. p.72. For the time being, we ignore the difference between subconscious and *invisible* which will be explained in 1.4.2.1.

\(^{72}\)C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. IV:299

\(^{73}\)F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. From High Mountains (the concluding aterosong)

\(^{74}\)C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. III:217
ever terminate. There are states offering no signs, no visible possibilities of redemption. Despair is to yield to this impossibility, is to accept it, but it is not something I choose voluntarily: it happens to me, and I only can not resist it.

And yet, one day, I may find that all that was ceased to be, that I am happy but I know neither when I became so or how that happened. I do not even know what it means – I only know that I am. I may find one day that the insecurity or angst which have been lurking in the depths of my soul disappeared and their place took tranquility and peace. But I know neither when nor how that happened – only that I had wished, that I had prayed for that to happen and that it did, “[T]his hell and this heaven come about a man in such sort, that he knoweth not whence they come; and whether they come to him, or depart from him, he can of himself do nothing towards it.”

1.4.1. The signs

1.4.1.i. Original signs

A ‘murder in affect’ need not be followed by the outcry “It was not me, it was something strange in me!” It can be just committed and simply through that, by being committed, witness to the presence of a power greater than oneself. But this is rather an extreme witness. Acts and actions, involved in the texture of the world, are also involved in the broader context of activities. In this respect, they may be studied as objective, purposeful ways of achieving various goals or as expressions of various needs. But this does not exhaust their significance. Acts and, in particular, the ways in which they are carried out, are not determined exclusively by my will nor their objective context. Every act, in addition to its objective and visible content, involves an undefinable rest, a side which does not pertain to its objective determinations. For instance, “the value ‘good’ [...] is present as if ‘behind’ the acts of will, and this in the essential way; it cannot therefore be intended in these acts.” Intending goodness is sufficient to take it away from the act. An act directed by my will, aimed at a specific objective, has an involuntary aura around itself which indicates something else, often different, than what my intention has put into it.

One distinguishes the ‘what’ from the ‘how’, not only in the sense of knowing what versus knowing how, but also of what an act accomplishes versus how it does it. With Heidegger the ‘how’ of the acts is more important than their objective ‘what’, expressing their genuine, non-objectifiable ontological significance. Acts are not any dissociated, isolated and mutually independent events, they are involved in the context of actions and activities and, eventually, reveal ‘who I am’. Their rest (their ‘how’), dissolves for reflection in a complete vagueness. It seems that nothing is ever the same, nothing is ever fully itself. The search for the ultimate ‘in itself’ always encounters some overlooked rest, which germinates underneath the grasped foundations. No amount of intentional deliberation is able to remove this ‘unintended’ rest from an act, to reduce an act to its visible, actual ‘whats’ and ‘whys’. This rest, experienced though not grasped, is a sign, too. It is the terminus of the particular trace which, stretching through the current situation and moods,

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75 Theologia Germanica. XI.

76 M. Scheler, Formalism in Ethics... 1:1.2.p.48. ‘Der Wert gut’ can be an example of invisible.

77 Our ‘how’, cf. footnote 1:8, tends more in the direction of explicit understanding, towards the objectivity of Heideggerian ‘what’. Thus we may be using this pair in exactly opposite way. But the distinction is the same and here it is used along the Heideggerian line.
1.4. Invisibles

feelings and qualities, anchors the actuality in its ultimate origin.

Being in love finds its expressions in various acts and the ways of performing them. In so far as I act from love, these acts are signs of its presence. The acts unveil this rest, their ‘what’ and ‘how’ indicate, if not prove: this guy is in love. I myself may not know explicitly that I am in love. To begin with, I may only find myself acting in a bit unusual way. The first signs, the rests hiding behind the unusualness of my actions, are original and not reflected. I act this love, I am lead and almost forced to act in accordance with some vague and perfectly clear intuition, according to some invisible command which I do not grasp and certainly do not control. Love is not something one decides to experience but something which one experiences (or not); love, perhaps, toward a person one would never expect oneself to fall in love with, love which, perhaps, one did not even want. It dawns on one and then haunts one.

And it haunts one to the most actual and specific details. Its concreteness lies in its deep, invisible origins, but it penetrates one’s whole being. It is not expressed only in the vague intuition but also in the most specific elements of one’s acts, both the usual and unusual ones. Just like a single moment of the ‘murder in affect’ reveals the underlying conflicts of the person going, perhaps, to the very bottom of his being, so a moment of loving intimacy may reveal and express love completely, though never finally. The expressed conflicts or love transcend the horizon of actuality, they are capable of infinite manifestations reaching far beyond, that is, originating far above their totality. And yet, a single moment can express them completely and adequately. Love finds its expression in every moment and each such moment incarnates the whole ‘essence’ of this love. Love is always more than its incarnations, ‘overflows’ any actual expressions and, at the same time, is fully present in its every sign.

The word “intuition” in its usual sense (not in the sense of grasping the unity of a complex in one act, cf. §26) can be appropriate for the original signs of invisibles. Strong intuitions have namely an inspiring effect, precisely by virtue of being on the one hand vague and, on the other hand, clear and unconditional. It is this duality of vagueness and definiteness which makes it so hard to ignore intuition and let it go. It nags one and, having no precise, objective content, can not be ignored until one follows it and finds out what it is intimating. But, usually, intuitions are only first announcements of something which, in due course, may be unveiled and seen. As Jung says, intuition is perception via the unconscious. One has intuition about or of something. With time and effort, it will give place to specific explanations and actual reasons which reveal their place in the complex from which they arise. It turns out to be a sign of something visible which has only been hiding below the threshold of consciousness. Thus intuition is, in general, relative to particular things or region of Being.

The signs of invisibles, on the other hand, do not lead to any such final actualisations. The first signs of love are vague, like mere hunch or nagging, and can even remain actually imperceptible. Gradually, they become manifest in things one does and in how one does them. But even when they become noticed and transparent, love is not reducible to any actual insight nor to any acts, actions or a totality thereof. It does not reside in acts or activities but, primarily, in their rest. Intuition may be an inspiration to follow its thread and ‘figure out’. Love, too, inspires before it finds an expression in acts. But its inspiration does not end when one realises that one is in love. On the contrary, the inspiration continues and even increases. It affects one’s whole being with an atmosphere of strength and unlimited potential, with the sense of possibility to perform not this particular
act or that, but any act whatsoever.

This sense of the unlimited potential is not, of course, any conviction of the actual omnipotence. It is only an unlimited inspiration. It is sign of openness, of loosening the limits of myself and, opening up onto something not-mine, accepting it as a gift. In this sense, love is not limited to any particular domain of Being, it is not restricted to any particular object or person. Although focused perhaps on a particular person, it is love only to the extent it opens up the limits of oneself and impresses one’s whole being with a thankful quality and command: “love, and do what you wilt” — not a command to do this or that, but a vague (not limited to any particular domain of Being), and yet clear (intense and definite) command to do whatever you want in love. To what precisely it inspires remains undetermined and open, it will be determined by all kinds of details. The command is not a moral imperative to do this rather than that, nor to do things in a prescribed manner. It is only a command to listen to it, to remember its inspiring voice in all actual situations. The inspiration is clear: “Love is infallible; it has no errors, for all errors are the want of love.” But also, since it does not command any specific acts, it is vague: it “does not perform any works; it is too subtle for that and is as far from performing any works as heaven is from earth.” Comming from above, it does not perform any works but commands to perform them. It is a command to fill the distance between its invisible origin and one’s actuality.

The character of a command consists in the complete lack of reactive character. These signs neither are reactions to anything nor cause any specific reaction. Paradoxically as it may look, this is exactly the command — it challenges but does not cause, it calls but does not force. We can say about these signs exactly what Bergson says about the mystics: “They have no need to exhort us. They only have to exist, for their existence is a call.” Immediate signs, like sensations, exemplify the extreme opposite of a command in that there the sign, the signified and the reaction coincide. There is no distance between the sign and reaction to it, no distance which could leave doubt and possibility of reacting otherwise, no distance between the actuality and non-actuality allowing the actual sign to challenge, to inspire a movement towards the non-actual. The commanding or inspiring character of a sign is precisely this distance separating the virtuality of the invisible from its possible actualisations.

The command consists also in that it does not create any particular state like, for instance, feelings do. There is no particular emotional or mental state corresponding to love or holiness or damnation. There are as many variations and combinations of the lower elements coexisting with the signs of invisibles, as there are persons. A command can make itself heard at any time, in any situation, in any mood. Likewise, it can be followed

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78St. Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*. VII:8
79William Law
81We might probably go as far as saying that any distance separating a sign from the signified is a command. In the most trivial case, it is merely the command to interpret the sign, to understand what it signifies, what it means. Here it has almost reactive character. We do not contemplate the commanding character of a road sign or a signpost – we immediately understand it. But the longer the distance separating the two (and it is something entirely different from the arbitrariness of an artificial sign), the more insistent the nagging to relate them.
82H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.
1.4. Invisibles

at any time, in any situation, irrespectively of the actual moods and thoughts.

This independence from the actual situation marks its absolute, non-relative character. A command is absolute in the sense that it is not relative to any particular region of Being, which is the same as saying that it concerns the whole Being. It penetrates to and flows from the very depth of one’s person, the point in infinity, which is but the reflection of the infinity of Being. It does not concern any being in particular and, by this very token, concerns every particular being. But it does so not by enumeration of all beings but by being seated in the very center of the person and spreading thence over all particular beings the person encounters. Such signs either are given absolutely, with unconditional validity, or are not given at all. A person can not be ‘partially holy’, just like one can be ‘partially satisfied’. One can not ‘love a little but not entirely’, for such a thing is not love but something else.

Instead of presenting some recognisable content, instead of providing one with the imperative to do this rather than that, a command merely says “you shall love”. “For commandments from the Lord should not be expected in matters that have an obvious usefulness.”

Lacking any precise, actual content, the commands do not give any reasons either, they do not provide any explanations or justifications. They do not try to convince but merely manifest and leave one free.

This aspect of freedom in the confrontation with a command does not change its commanding character. For it is often announced with an irresistible force. Original signs of invisibles may enter one’s life in the most rare moments of revelation, moments when invisible enters the horizon of actuality with imperative intensity. They say that a dying person may experience his whole life compressed into a single moment. But one need not be dying. There are rare moments which reveal to us something fundamental, inspirations which may turn out to determine our whole future life, or else, which show us the meaning of our past life; moments, whether in dreams or in wake life, when the content and meaning of the whole life seems compressed into a single sign. Such moments have a character of foundation, they insert into our time an experience of meaning and value which exceed all reflective understanding. These are the moments establishing axis mundi, founding the cosmos out of chaos. Although, in our experience, we might have lived quite an orderly life before, confrontation with such moments has, then too, the character of founding something which either gives a new direction, or else lends extra strength of explicit presence to something which has been only vaguely and implicitly intuited before.

And here lies another, deeper aspect of freedom in confrontation with a command. It is not merely freedom of an arbitrary choice but, on the contrary, freedom of following a higher voice which emerges from the center of oneself. Although the command comes from above, this above is not alien and remote but most central and intimate. Indeterminacy of its actual content notwithstanding, it is the most concrete, and therefore meaningful, personal element which calls one from beyond the limits of oneself.

1.4.1.ii. Reflective signs

Inspirations do not reveal any content, do not present anything which might be grasped in actual consciousness. But they may be grasped by reflection precisely as signs. They appear empty since no precise content can be substituted for them. And yet, as signs, they are not empty. Reflective signs of such essential non-actuality which never can be reduced

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83P. Abelard, Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian. I:§123
to an actual phenomenon are symbols. A symbol does not signify in the proper sense— it merely manifests; although it does bring forth something vaguely distinguished, its inspiration derives from the virtual signification, from its pointing beyond the distinctions towards their origin. The symbolic contents can never be sharply dissociated from each other, for one immediately and imperceptibly flows into another. What in the Jungian analyses of subconsciousness is called “contamination” is such a “moonlit landscape. All the contents are blurred and merge into one another, and one never knows exactly what or where anything is, or where one begins and ends.”

The inseparability of distinctions is the main feature distinguishing the non-actuality from actuality, and it only gradually increases as we approach the ultimate origin. We can certainly speak about ‘symbols of God’, ‘symbols of self’, ‘symbols of transformation’, etc., but to the extent these are experienced symbols, they do not emerge as so definitely separated as they may appear when turned into reflective thoughts. Genuine symbols “cannot be exhaustively interpreted, either as signs or as allegories. They are genuine symbols precisely because they are ambiguous, full of half-glimpsed meanings, and in the last resort inexhaustible. [...] The discriminating intellect naturally keeps on trying to establish their singleness of meaning and thus misses the essential point: for what we can above all establish as the one thing consistent with their nature is their manifold meaning, their almost limitless wealth of reference, which makes any unilateral formulation impossible.”

Being signs, that is, to the extent they appear, symbols are embraced within the horizon of actuality, but what they manifest is neither any specific content nor any definite referent; it is immediately recognised as essentially transcending this horizon.

Symbols reflect the original signs, the most individual experience of sacred numinosity, the experience which confronts me not only with myself but with my self. “When we attempt to understand symbols, we are not only confronted with the symbol itself, but we are brought up against the wholeness of the symbol-producing individual.” This individual is not, of course, oneself nor one’s ego, but something greater than the individual himself. Symbols emerge through us but they are not created by us, they are better thought of as “natural and spontaneous products. No genius has ever sat down with a pen or a brush in his hand and said: «Now I am going to invent a symbol.»

Transcending thus one’s personal sphere, symbols have a powerful collective aspect, As Jung’s extensive investigations suggest, humans tend to express the experience of invisibles (which, for the moment, we can identify with his archetypes) by analogous, symbolic forms and ideas. Whether manifested in dreams, in myths, in religious conceptions, or even in philosophical concepts, the invisible sphere revealed by symbols seems to be the deepest layer of human being, the collective (to use Jung’s term) aspect of the psyche, relatively independent from the personally ‘subjective’ context and cultural tradition. The deepest, the most personal is exactly that which, being universally participated does not become a commonality—the absolute, unrepeatable concreteness of incarnation of invisibles. To the extent this becomes expressed and embraced by a collective culture, it can happen only through symbols.

A ‘holy stone’, a ‘holy tree’, a ‘holy brook’ are signs announcing the presence of sacrum, As Eliade aptly illustrates, they are not worshiped ‘in-themselves’, they are not ‘the holiness

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86C. G. Jung, Approaching the Unconscious. p.81  
87Ibid. p.41
1.4. Invisibles

...manifested itself through them. They are hierophanies, the signs of sacrum which infinitely transcend them and yet is concretely present in them. They may serve as simplest examples of symbols, the visible, external objects which inspire – awe, fear, wonder, reverence – and command, not any specific acts, but veneration and rituals which take their particular form from elsewhere, from the myths, from the tradition, from the religious culture.

Transcending one’s private sphere, symbols are nevertheless most concrete and personal because to be a symbol, the actual sign must be accompanied by the original command, must be experienced as a hierophany which announces, if not fully manifests, the invisible presence. Symbols are only externalized and objectified reflections of the original signs. Here lie of course unlimited possibilities of discrepancies and conflicts between the individual ‘feelings’ of the high, deep and reverent and the publicly recognised symbols and accepted forms of their reverence. The distance separating the actuality of the sign from its meaning is, in the case of symbols, virtually infinite. The relation of signification, once the symbol gets dissociated from the original signs, seems completely arbitrary. Almost anything can become a symbol and there is nothing easier than to ask: Why this tree? Why a tree? Why the cross? Why this and not that? Why anything at all? – and then conclude that there is no reasonable answer. Symbols become ‘mere symbols’ for all too intense reflection which notices that mere signs are actually dissociated from any real presence which they should announce with some forcing necessity. But even then symbols can act as reminders of this presence, whose original signs have been forgotten underneath the visible expressions.

Establishing symbols is one of the fundamental needs and activities, as they are the only reflective signs connecting the actual consciousness with the sphere of invisible presence. But signs become symbols only when they actually manifest the invisible, that is, only when they are met and experienced along with the respective original signs. What constitutes a symbol is the double aspect of the invisible flowing in through the visible, of the inspiration arising through the actual sign. The inspirations are not any emotions but, without picking on such details of expression, we could say that the archetypal inspirations “are, at the same time, both images and emotions. One can speak of an archetype only when these two aspects are simultaneous. When there is merely the image, then there is simply a word-picture of little consequence. But by being charged with emotion, the image gains numinosity (or psychic energy); it becomes dynamic, and consequences of some kind must follow from it.”

Reflection devoted exclusively to the petty and all-important matters of its actuality is simply unable to meet a symbolic expression, even if it meets its visible sign. The meaning of a symbol has close to nothing in common with the meanings discernible at the level of actuality, the meanings of precise words, concepts or particular impressions. And in the moment the invisible presence is declared unreal, a symbol degenerates to an empty sign. In the moment a symbol starts signifying something visible, it becomes an allegory,

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88 It can be seen in the seriousness with which children, in their games, are mothers, fathers, policemen or arrange doll houses and build models – without slightest disturbance by the fact, of which they are perfectly aware, that these are only games, toys. Likewise, the pictures from Lascaux are hardly mere traces of boredom or depictions of daily activities. Extensive studies of Eliade and others suggest that the maintenance of the symbolic, and yet concrete, proximity of sacrum to the sphere of profanum is one of the founding aspects of the earliest cultures.

89 C. G. Jung, Approaching the Unconscious. p.87
eventually, a mere sign.

Put differently, a command is meaningful only in so far as it is not dissociated from its origin. It has unconditional validity only for the one who hears it. The living relation to the actual person is its true nature. Stripping symbolic origin of its intrinsically invisible character (that is, externalising it in an objectified form, dissociated from the reality of its manifestation through the living person) leaves only arbitrariness of an artificial sign and the incompressible ‘so it is’. Such symbols may preserve some element of the mystical character, but they lose their commanding force. They may then function as mere messages, signs pointing to another world in an indifferent, anonymous way. This is what happens to symbols, whether in literature, painting or mythology, when they have been dissociated from their invisible meaning. They appear as arbitrary. Empty symbols are the original commands turned by tradition, culture, repetition or personal estrangement into mere indications, pointers towards nothing specifically discernible and therefore devoid of any concrete meaning. Their originally vague meaning and their lack of any identifiable referent turn into lack of meaning and emptiness of denotation. At best, they only try – deficiently and unsuccessfully - to indicate something vague, unknown, which ‘is never precisely defined or fully explained. [And one can not] hope to define or explain it.”90 But symbol never explains what it is saying – it only says it. It is a pure expression, totally open to misinterpretation, which in particular means, to being ignored. At the same time, it is entirely clear to the one who happens to grasp it, because to grasp it means to already know what it expresses – the symbol is only a means of actualising this ‘knowledge’, making it conscious. Hence “to the scientific mind, such phenomena as symbolic ideas are a nuisance because they cannot be formulated in a way that is satisfactory to intellect and logic.”91

1.4.2. The invisibles

There are things which do not belong to this world in the way tools, commodities, situations, daily objects, relations, feelings and thoughts do. There are things which are from another world, world which does not obey our dictates but which is the source of gifts and calamities surpassing our powers. They are from another world but this ‘otherness’ is not absolutely foreign, alien – another world is still the world. Although transcending the sphere of phenomena, of all actual experiences, they manifest their presence in such experiences, they too enter the horizon of one’s experience. But even when encountered in a single moment, in a single act of actual consciousness, one always knows that what is so encountered is only a sign of something that is ‘greater’, something essentially non-actual which only manifests itself without exposing itself.

92 The common feature of the unlimited variety of concrete inspirations and symbolic expressions is that they do not announce anything particular, anything specifically discernible. But they do announce. They manifest something invisible, something more than not only themselves but than any actuality of an experience. A mere sign “is always less than the concept it represents, while a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning.”92 The commanding character of a symbol does not determine any immediate reaction. On the contrary, it only inspires to look for the possible ways of actualising the intimated inspiration, for the actual expressions of the command which, in

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90C. G. Jung, Approaching the Unconscious. p.4
91Ibid. p.80
92Ibid. p.41
1.4. Invisibles

its undetermined open-endedness, remains unitary. It does not announce anything particular but only the distance to whatever it may be announcing. This distance reveals the anchoring of the actuality in ‘Something’ which lies above specificity of actual distinctions. It reveals the presence of some sphere rather than of any particular entities. Reflection searches this sphere for the visibly discernible contents but it is always aware of inadequacy of such attempts. This sphere remains unitary behind the variety of such announcements. Its contents may be vaguely distinguished but, resisting any precise dissociation, remain in the most intimate unity. Invisibles are the first and deepest distinctions, which remain in the closest proximity to the ultimately invisible origin. Their sphere is like “the intellung that remains within its place of origin; it has that source as substratum but becomes a sort of addition to it in that it is an activity of that source perfecting the potentiality there, not by producing anything but as being a completing power to the principle in which it inheres.”

In terms of the figure from §1, p.98, the invisibles are the most dense nuclei on the circle closest to the origin •, reflecting the part of the line to the left of L and right of R which never enters the actual experience. They have no objective, nor even objectifiable correlates, nothing actual can ever fully represent them, no actual sign can ever coincide with them. The invisible contents may vary (say, depending on where, on the line, the circle is), but the universal fact of primary importance is the very presence of this sphere in our being and experience. The structural relation of this sphere to the lower ones remains constant for a given circle and identical for all existences represented abstractly by this figure.

The unitary character of this sphere is also expressed in its absolute objectivity. It is not objectivity opposed to the actual subject, but one raised above it and enfolding it in the element where no such opposition can be postulated. It is absolute in the sense of not being relative to the contents of any actual experiences but being their constant and necessary aspect. To the extent it is experienced, it might be called “internal”, but this ‘interior’ is not opposed to any ‘exterior’. At most, it is opposed to, as raised above, the subjectivity of the actual experiences.

As Jung says about the archetypes, the invisibles are “sheer objectivity, as wide as the world and open to all the world. [In the collective unconscious I am the object of every subject, in complete reversal of my ordinary consciousness, where I am always the subject that has an object. There I am utterly one with the world, so much part of it that I forget all too easily who I am, ‘Lost in oneself’ is a good way of describing this state, But this self is the world, if only consciousness could see it.”

Consciousness of archetypes, even though it remains in the actuality of an act, involves suspension of the reflective dissociation into subject and object. At the level of invisibles such a dissociation simply does not obtain, because they mark the sphere where even the world and experience have not yet emerged. Unlike the qualities, which characterise one’s world and life, invisibles are above them and one can at most live one’s life inspired or, in a sense to be made more concrete in Book III, determined by them. Their presence does not involve any opposition but is unconditional. In particular, they not only do not have any ‘outside’, any objective correlates but exclude their possibility and need. Sainthood has no object, just like genuine love does not have any. They are not opposed to any ‘outside’ but contain the whole world ‘within’. They do not act on any external objects, for actual objects are not their equipollent correlates, are

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93Plutinus, *Enneads* VI.7.40 [MacKenna’s translation]
94C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. I:46
not goals of their actions, but only places of their manifestation. This constant presence of the rest, of clear if undefinable inspiration, and the character of expression rather than of directedness towards any external goals, marks the unitary and self-oriented character of the sphere of invisibles or, to use the old concept, of the intellect, this first hypostasis which “apprehends itself and is object of its own activity.”

In epistemic terms: “[t]he intellect’s thinking is not true because it conforms to or corresponds to the ideas; it is true because it is the ideas, which are its thoughts.” As we saw already at the level of mineness, §66, the distinction between the world and my world, and then between my world and myself or my life is close to impossible to draw in a meaningful, not to mention precise, manner. Here we encounter the true Parmenidean identity of being and knowing. Of course, knowing and being must not be taken in the reflective sense involving the actuality of an act and dissociation of its subject and object. In the spiritual sphere there is as yet no such distinction. The differentiation of invisibles is the condition founding the very possibility of experience and of dissociated experiences. Without these primordial distinctions, no actual objects could ever appear. Consequently, in the spiritual sphere, at the edge of nothingness, being and knowing are synonymous – not because they happened mysteriously to coincide, but because they have not as yet been distinguished, because addressing nothingness there is not, as yet, enough material to distinguish the two. The spirit remains, since the beginning, “above the waters” and its unity is not affected by all the actual distinctions and affairs of this world.

Remaining above the distinctions of this world, invisibles are absolute. They are not relative to any particular region of Being. Their presence precedes any recognisable distinctions, and hence embraces the whole person, before one can act and protest. They cast their shadow (or rather their light), as irrevocable as it is inerasable, as intense as it is indistinct, on all particular beings and actual objects.

They remain thus independent from actual particulars, from any lower feelings and thoughts. They have no unique and well-defined expression because they can enter virtually any particular situation, any constellation of actual things and feelings. They allow almost unlimited variations at the lower levels which do not affect their presence. Love remains love independently from the feelings, moods, sensations one might experience in a particular situation. In fact, these more particular experiences will be affected by the love which inspires their specificity with strength originating above them.

The complete lack of objective correlate is thus here equivalent with embracing all objects. The absolute transcendence beyond any particular region of Being is not remoteness but most intimate presence, immanence. Invisibles can be called inaccessible only if by accessibility one means visibility of precise particulars, accessibility to the subjective grasp. Belonging to the personal center, to the very self above the subject’s alienation and limitations of mineness, invisibles lie beyond beings but only in the sense of not pertaining to any particular among them. They are not exhausted by any particular being because they embrace all of them, the whole sphere of actual, not-actual and non-actual distinctions. A person is not holy ‘over something’ or ‘in relation to something’ – he is holy, nowhere in particular, that is, in his whole being and beyond it. A person is not damned for a particular act; a particular act can only reveal and strengthen the depth of damnation penetrating the person, that is, the whole world. One is not damned temporally, but forever, Invisibles penetrate the whole Being and lend their force and character to every

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95 Proclus, Elements of Theology. §20.

96 E. K. Emilson, Platonus on the object of thought. 2p.29
encounter with beings, to every distinction. They belong to another world but that world is not an inaccessible land separated from this world by an impassable barrier. It pours into this world its constant inspirations, remaining inaccessible only to the claims of plain visibility, of external objectivity and subjective self-confidence.

Lying above this world, invisibles hide the virtuality of ever new manifestations, like the promise of eternal repetition, or better, of the repetition of eternity in time. They do not fall under the temporal dimension of this world – only their manifestations do. A bitter, tragic or trivial end of a love story does not mean the end of love. It is only the end of this manifestation of love, of this experience. Psychological difficulties notwithstanding, one may be equally able to cherish love, to long for its manifestations, to recognise and appreciate it when one meets it again. Psychological difficulties mean only that one tends to lose this ability, not that one cannot retain it.

Independence from time can be seen in all kinds of founding events in which a single manifestation, a single ‘moment of truth’, expressed and remembered in some symbolic form, inspires all future life of a community or a person. From the archaic ways of establishing the centre of the new settlement – whether the placement of the totem, of the altar, of the temple tent – as the axis mundi along which gods intervene into the affairs of people; through the legendary foundation events, like that of Rome at the site where divine help had saved Romulus and Remus; to the laicized custom of commencing a construction by placing the foundation stone – symbolic expressions of the presence of the higher element accompany the events of foundation. This symbolic reference, by establishing continuity with the origin, anchors the actual, temporal event in the eternal element. For manifestations reveal truth which is not affected by the actual course of this world. Even if, at some later time, it loses its actuality and passes into oblivion, it still has left its mark which cannot be denied. It revealed something which remains above time, even if its manifestations and actually discernible consequences may diminish or disappear.

However, although transcending thus time, the invisibles are not timeless in the way of objects’ which appear as if in a ‘frozen time’, on an abstract scene devoid of change and development. They are eternal and time does not contradict eternity but only, as Plato said, is its moving image. Invisibles – manifested through all actuality, at the horizon beyond which it dissolves into nothingness – penetrate also time. They unveil in the sphere of visible the order which remains above it, but which also embraces and enriches everything below. Every such manifestation reveals something absolute, something which is not relative to any particular person or any particular region of Being but which, flowing from its origin, penetrates the whole of it. Every manifestation of invisibles reveals their deepest immanence, their involvement in time, their life.

In terms of our figure from §1, p.98, interpreting the interval between L and R as the range of experiences in the circle’s life span, the changes – as the circle moves around – in the sphere of invisible contents will be only minimal (just like, when travelling, the movement of the remote objects is extremely slow). “Whereas we think in periods of years, the unconscious thinks and lives in terms of millennia.” The invisibles are the most constant aspects of experience: the movements of the circle involve major changes in the

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97Timaeus, VII. Strictly speaking, eternity pertains only to the absolute, the ultimate sphere of invisibility, the confrontation of the nothingness of the one and the nothingness of the self; the absolute contends fact of the presence of the origin. But higher invisibles always reveal the aspect of eternity which has nothing to do with the ‘infinite temporal duration’, but only with the absolute validity which transcends time, space and any other aspect of this world.

98C. G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. VI:499
actual contents (closest to the point where the circle touches the line), while the higher, invisible constellations remain virtually unaffected by the changes of the circle’s position. Unlike changing actual news, invisibles are always present, even if not manifest in actual signs. This is the meaning of presence which is very different from actualisation. The latter involves explicit presence, actuality of the sign or object; it is a matter of the specificity of the moment which is dominated by a particular sign of a visible or invisible content. Presence, on the other hand, does not require any explicit givenness. It is the constant proximity of invisibles, felt or not, as if in the background of, and hence independent from, the actuality of our attentive observation. Manifestations are aspects of such actual experiences in which presence comes forth and becomes strongly experienced, even if it does not become the actual object of these experiences.

96. The ultimately eternal is the ultimately invisible nothingness of the origin. The unitary sphere of invisibles is the first differentiated layer surrounding this origin. Although it marks only a stage on the continuous line leading to the visible contents of actual experiences, it transcends essentially such contents. A mark of this transcendence, of this essential non-actuality, is the same as of the unitary character of this sphere: the impossibility to capture its distinctions in the actual, unambiguous terms of reflective precision.

To be invisible is to be essentially non-actual, is to be a distinction which can never be fully embraced – as a concept or an experience – within the horizon of actuality. “The gentle flame of eye did chance to get//Only a little of the earthen part.”99 Complexity of earthly distinctions escapes our grasp, hidding always more distinctions beyond the horizon of our apprehension. But invisibles do not mark only more distinctions which, in due time, might be perhaps uncovered. They mark distinctions of a different kind, distinctions without anything distinguished, where the fact of distinction and the distinguished content are not distinct. They are appearances without objects, phenomena without the noematic correlates, powers without any identifiable center. They “spring from a deep source that is not made by consciousness and is not under its control. In the mythology of earlier times, these forces were called mana, or spirits, demons, and gods. They are as active today as they ever were.”100

In terms of our figure from §1, the closeness to the origin means the inseparable connections, dense beyond the possibility of dissociate re-cognitions.101 In terms of actual reflection we like to consider the problem of freedom, then of truth, then of meaning, then of love, each for itself. But we very quickly realise that to the degree we succeed in such a dissociation, the treatment and the results become so much more sterile. Any attempt to capture the ‘essence’ of love, sainthood, damnation or the like, to draw a border separting it definitely from other such elements, is immediately accompanied by the awareness of non-ffinality and some degree of arbitrariness. Each invisible “contains all within itself, and at the same time sees all in every other, so that everywhere there is all, and all is all and each all [...]. In our real all is part rising from part and nothing can be more than partial; but there each being is an eternal product of a whole and is at once a whole and an individual manifesting as part but, to the keen vision There, known for the whole it is.”102

Gathered densely in the unitary sphere closest to the origin, they can not be precisely

99Empedocles DK 31B85
100C. G. Jung, Approaching the Unconscious. p.71
101Cf. comments in Book I on figure in §117, especially, §119 and the footnote 98, p.75.
102Plotinus, Enneads. V:8.4 [MacKenna’s translation]
1.4. Invisibles

differentiated from each other. They can, at best, be recognised as commands beyond the symbolic expressions: commands which do not dictate but inspire, overflowing with meanings which all point toward the invisible unity but which never reach any final form. The impossibility of precise division and description is due to this surplus of meaning flowing into an invisible once we attempt to isolate it from its surrounding. They simply can not be meaningfully dissociated from each other, even if some patterns seem to be discernible. “It is a well-nigh hopeless undertaking to tear a single archetype out of the living tissue of the psyche; but despite their interwoven-ness they do form units of meaning that can be apprehended intuitively.”

This ‘intuitive apprehension’ amounts exactly to a discernment which cannot be completed in a dissociation. But the impossibility of drawing reflective dissociations does not mean the lack of any distinctions. Invisibles remain inaccessible to the dissociated categories of reflective thinking for the “diversity within the Authentic depends not upon spatial separation but sheerly upon differentiation; all Being, despite this plurality, is a unity still; «Being neighbours Beings»; all holds together.”

This original unity is no longer one, but involves already some differentiation: too weak to be grasped reflectively, but thoroughly real and effective. The invisibles, “the objects of intelllection – identical in virtue of the self-concentration of the principle which is their common ground – must still be distinct each from another; this distinction constitutes Difference or, perhaps, Différance. And yet, the sphere of invisibles, although differentiated, is also unitary and indivisible. “All are one there and yet are distinct” sounds certainly offending to the reflective axiom of non-contradiction. It does not, however, involve any contradiction but only two levels of experience: the ‘intuitive apprehension’ of differences and the impossibility of drawing reflectively precise borders between them.

The inexpressibility in precise concepts means essential irreducibility of invisibles to actual images. They can be symbolised but, as we have observed, symbolic relation remains empty and arbitrary if it is not accompanied by some inspiration. And inspiration refers exactly to the higher element which, calling for an expression, escapes any reduction. The characteristic of a genuine symbolic relation is, on the one hand, the connection of the image with its source and, on the other hand, the entire lack of reduction, of the identification or even similarity of the higher and the lower, of the non-actual origin and the actual experience. The former inspires the believer as much as the latter annoys the sceptic.

This irreducibly makes the signs of invisibles, when seen from the perspective of actuality, the most empty pointers, apparently arbitrary and unrelated to whatever they are pointing to. It is typical of all kinds of rituals, hymns, Song of the Songs, love poetry, and the vast mystical literature with its invocations, prayers and praising – a sceptic can, perhaps, accept them as inadequate expressions of experiences and attitudes, but not as descriptions of whatever they are praising. As Heidegger might have put it, invisibles ap-

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103 C. G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. IV:302

104 Plotinus, Enneads. VI:4.4 [MacKenna’s translation] In the language of Eriugena, the primordial causes are one, although their manifestations vary, and so one speaks about them in plural. “For there is in them the inexpressible unity and the indivisible and incomposite harmony which go beyond every combination of parts whatever […] before they entered into the plurality of the spiritual essences no created intellect could know of them what they were […] [They] are always invisible and dark.” [J. S. Eriugena, Periphyseon. II:550BC;550D/551A;551B/C] They are comprehended by the intellect, through which they pass to reason before being diversified by the senses: “everything which the intellect by its gnostic view of the primordial causes impresses upon its art, that is, its reason, it distributes through the sense […] All essences are one in the reason; in sense they are divided into different essences.” [Ibid. II:577ABCD/578A]

105 Plotinus, Enneads. V:1.4 [MacKenna’s translation]

106 Plotinus, Enneads. V:9.6 [MacKenna’s translation]
II.1. The existential levels

pear only (as) disappearing, they are present without becoming actual – distinctions which immediately melt into one another and dissolve in the ever present rest of invisibility surrounding all actuality. Their whole and only possible objective, actual determination is to manifest – to point towards an inexhaustible source, ever indeterminate and forever distinct from all distinctions.

The irreducibility to actuality concerns not only a symbolic expression but any actual experience. As long as such experiences serve as the only measure of convincing us about anything, we can at best encounter vague, and hence never sufficient analogues, momentaneous feelings of ‘oneness’, mystical union, coincidentia oppositorum, which can only, and only at best, leave a mark, a vague trace, as they disappear from the horizon of actuality. These are only pale, even if intense, actual reflections of something which remains essentially – and hence forever – invisible. Openness to such experiences is one thing. But “[i]t is not possible to draw near even with the eyes, or to take hold of [it/him] with our hands, which in truth is the best highway of persuasion into the mind of man.”\(^{107}\) A search and constant thirst for such exceptional experiences witness to the confusion of the invisible and visible, the eternal and temporal, which feels entitled to ‘being persuaded’ of the invisible presence by means of the visible signs.

The irreducibility of invisibles to the actual determinations involves thus a series of aspects constituting their vertical transcendence above the actuality: invisibles can not be precisely dissociated from each other; they are vague and hardly identifiable; lacking any final, definite form, they are inexhaustible by the actual phenomena. However, as we have observed several times, the vertical transcendence does not mean any foreign remoteness but, on the contrary, the most concrete presence. Concreteness is the anchoring in the origin, which anchoring happens through the sphere of invisibles, I:§138. Evading precise, conceptual determinations, invisibles are not prone to externalisation, can not be turned into objects which are the more abstract and impersonal the more precise they are. They remain forever ‘internal’.

Their concreteness is, in fact, concreteness of the personal existence which is constituted by two, apparently contradictory, aspects. On the one hand, it is the uniqueness of birth and confrontation which, in the existential order of founding, raises a unique world. On the other hand, this uniqueness is the universal aspect which every existence shares with all others as it emerges from the same one into the same, shared world.

Each person is an unrepeatable, that is, original source of variations, always unique variations over the same theme of existential confrontation which begins (just after the beginning) with the invisibles. Nobody can teach anybody exactly what love means and how to love except, possibly to some extent, by the very example, by offering the experience of love. Nobody can teach anybody exactly what it means to be a mother or father, for even the best (or worst) examples may eventually result in one being quite the opposite when playing the role oneself. Even the destitute children raised without one or both of the parents, know what motherhood and fatherhood means, if not in other ways then simply by living their lack and thirsting for them.

Human existence is a repetition, but a repetition of the unrepeatable. It is a repetition of the necessity to live one’s life, accepting this most personal gift, and to live it from its unique source. Concrete life does not amount to ‘filling in’ the abstract ‘form of human nature’ with the actual ‘matter’, not to mention, the actual sensations. If we were to use such distinctions, we would say that it amounts to actually finding this very form, to

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\(^{107}\)Emпедecles 31B133.
forming it by drawing the borders - new or old - anew. This drawing of the borders is not any ‘matching’ of the particular contents to the pre-existing ‘forms’. It affects equally the visible and the invisible sphere, involving their most intimate reciprocity and concreteness.

We can learn (from others, from the books) to understand many things, some distinctions between hate, love, friendship, indifference..., between hospitality, generosity, magnanimity, benevolence, largesse, lavishness, wastefulness, squander... But to live, it does not suffice to actually know, we must also draw these distinctions ourselves. To draw them amounts to recognising the particular actualities in their terms, as friendly or unfriendly, as an expression of love or not, as an act of hostility or a mere misunderstanding. To live is to recognise actual situations as signs. Was his smile, his remark, an expression of understanding, of sympathy, of irony, of superiority? Answers to such questions (only seldom stated explicitly) are not arbitrary because they arise as the results of recognising the actual events as signs terminating the respective traces, which originate in and lead back to the differentiated but hardly distinguishable sphere of shared invisibles.

So far, one might probably still see here only ‘filling in’ the abstract ‘forms of invisibles’ with particular contents. However, the interesting part only begins here because there is no given and pre-defined way of connecting the two spheres. The answers to such questions are not arbitrary but they are not determined either. The way of classifying the actualities affects also the invisible distinctions - not by making them concrete, because they always are so, but by drawing them at some actual limits, by bringing them down to earth. Invisibles live only through their manifestations and can be dissociated from them only by abstracting reflection. I may have a vague understanding of what friendship means and then, confronted with an act of minor opposition or egoism, conclude: no, if he could do that, he can not possibly be my friend, he can not possibly be a friend. There is, fortunately, no recipe-book for drawing such conclusions, and this is an aspect of concreteness, of repeating the unrepeatable. We do not live among shadowy images but in the middle of the highest realities. Saying “friendship” everybody will understand (or misunderstand) something, even if we disagree whether this particular conclusion, in this particular case was justified. We do not know where the borders go but we must draw them. Drawing the borders in actual situations we as if define, again and again, what friendship - as distinct from all that it is not - is.

We do not know exactly and precisely what friendship is. Yet, without knowing it at all, could we have friends? After some time, the friend who did that and whom I declared not-my-friend, turns out to be the most worthy person whose act followed from the most genuine friendship or, perhaps, from some restraining circumstances or passing problems. Even more, I may not only learn about some earlier unknown circumstances but may realise that the act does not actually contradict friendship after all, that its intension and significance was genuine friendship which only did not fit my (mis)understanding. He turns out to be, and to have been all the time, my true friend, and friendship acquires a new ‘essence’, the border separating it from all the rest becomes re-adjusted.

In this tension between the non-arbitrariness of invisibles and the constant need to find their actual signs lies the whole sphere of concrete freedom. It is not freedom to invent and decide, but to find and recognise; for instance, to recognise friendship and generosity where one could earlier see only enmity and egoism. Such recognitions amount to a true, if secondary, creation, which will be considered in Book III.

The concreteness of invisibles can be thus said to lie in the structure of the existential confrontation making every actuality a terminus of the trace leading to the invisible origin.
But since the invisible distinctions lack any precise borders, this puts also an obligation – existential and not moral one – on the actual subject to recognise the actual situations as the signs of invisibles, to draw actual distinctions as expressions of the invisible ones.

Like Platonic forms, invisibles belong to the other world which transcends this one. But unlike the Platonic forms, they are not for this reason other-worldly entities, existing independently beyond the world of concrete experience. They are fully experienced and exist only through actual manifestations. Their transcendence means only that they neither are objects of actual experiences nor are reducible to such objects. But neither are invisibles abstracted from the actual experiences as their common features or concepts. Actual instances are usually too few and distinct instances may have nothing visible in common. One cannot be damned twice, just like one cannot commit suicide twice. There is no such thing as multiple ‘instances’ of love from which one could abstract any precise concept. There is not even any experience of love (even if grammar and habit allow us to speak this way) – there is only experiencing love, participation in something greater than oneself, which can be complete even if, or rather only if, experienced only once.

This is much more adequate context for the application of Plato’s anamnesis simile then the field of concepts, essences and generalities. Invisibles, the eternal elements of absolute validity, pertain to everybody’s experience. They form the sphere of shared contents which founds the possibility of the genuine communion – with others as much as with the origin and, in particular, of the visible actuality with something of which it reminds. We lack precise concepts of love, sainthood, hatred, but once we encounter them in experience, we do recognise them. And even if specificity and definiteness of such a recognition may intially leave much space for refinements, we recognise them already the first time we meet them. Encountering love, hatred, mystical experience, spiritual strength, we suddenly ‘remember’. We never know for sure, at least not at once: is this love or not, is this sainthood or not. But the very doubt whether this is it, witnesses to the fact of recognition and, above all, to the presence of something which might be so recognised. Even if we never experienced it before, we know (vaguely and imprecisely) what we are meeting now for the first time. The doubt is almost unavoidable because it only reflects the complete lack of any universal and objective characteristics, the thoroughly personal dimension of such experiences and their irreducibility to any actual signs. The doubt reflects only the concreteness of the command which calls us to actually recognise, to find the traces of the invisible presence, known long in advance, in the actual situation.

1.4.2.i. Invisible or unconscious?

100. The juxtaposition of the Neoplatonic remarks on the intellect and the Jungian reflections on the archetypes is, hopefully, self-explaining. One should certainly remember that Jung and Plotinus diverge drastically when it comes to the description of the contents of these spheres. While the collective unconscious contains only the archetypes of the most primordial elements of human experience, Plotinian intellect, although it does not include negativity and evil, suffers overpopulation similar to that of Plato’s ideal world. It contains “qualities, accordant with Nature, and quantities; number and mass; origins and conditions; all actions and experiences not against nature; movement and repose, both the universals and the particulars: but There time is replaced by eternity and space by its intellectual

108 A few remarks on the similarities can be found in H.-R. Schwyzer, The intellect in Plotinus and the archetypes of C. G. Jung.
equivalent, mutual inclusiveness.” And this is only the beginning, because all items listed so far are forms of only sensible things. Yet, the obvious differences of language and concepts should not preclude us from discerning the similarity of the general characteristics which is hardly disputable and hardly accidental. Modern sensibility is certainly closer to the language of Jung than of Neoplatonism. It is easier to recognise fundamental themes in the personal existence than in the eternal essences. But in both concepts of the intellect and the collective unconscious we discern the attempt to capture the idea of the transpersonal and eternal element which founds and penetrates the concreteness of existence, rather than resides in the realm dissociated from the actual experience.

The collective unconscious does not contain any visible contents capable of being grasped within the horizon of actuality, any specific representations, nor any mythological images or motifs. Invisibles, or archetypes, stand for “a tendency to form such representations of a motif – representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their pattern.” This tendency, lived concretely and individually, is common to human existences. It is collective not because it gathers abstract commonalities of a wide range of particular instances. It is collective because all particular experiences participate in one and the same reality which founds, and hence precedes, their actuality. This founding communion of the shared origin involves only original distinctions which “grow up from the dark depths of the mind like a lotus and form a most important part of the subliminal psyche.” Their utmost importance is the consequence of their founding role. They do not, as yet, involve the dissociation into elements which could be opposed to each other and could contradict or falsify each other: they found the possibility of forming such oppositions. Or, put differently, they do not as yet involve the distinction between the original and copy, between the source and the image, which arises only with the distinction of actuality from non-actuality and, then, of one actuality from another. They are all originals. The particular characteristics of the Neoplatonic intellectensions and Jung’s archetypes are distinct. But their very presence and general character corresponds to the character of the sphere of invisibles. Being invisible and transcending every actual ‘what’, they can not be expected to ever yield to a univocal and final description.

With respect to the Jungian archetypes, we should however clarify one important difference which concerns equally the difference between the subconscious (or unconscious) and invisible contents.

There are many known examples of scientists ‘receiving’ solutions to their problems from unconscious. Often these come from dreams, like Kekule’s dream of a snake biting its tail or von Neumann’s dreams of the actual proofs of his theorems. Gauss tells about a theorem which he found “not by painstaking research, but by the Grace of God, so to speak. The riddle solved itself as lightning strikes, and I myself could not tell or show the connection between what I knew before, what I last used to experiment with, and what produced the final result.” Intense engagement in some well-defined problem will often stimulate the mind to carrying further work, apparently at the same level of precision, although not involving active reflection.

Fascinating as such events may be, they are not exactly what we are aiming at here. What emerges in such cases are actual contents expressed precisely in the categories of

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110C. G. Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious*. p.58
111Ibid. p.25
conscious thinking. True, they emerge from the unconscious, but it is only the process which is unconscious – the initial input as well as the results are thoroughly precise contents of reflective thinking. A slightly different aspect may be adumbrated in the apparently quite analogous experiences of artists, Klee: “My hand is entirely the instrument of a more distant sphere. Nor is it my head that functions in my work; it is something else ...” Pollock: “When I am in my painting I am not aware of what I am doing. It is only after a sort of ‘get acquainted’ period that I see what I have been about.” Although the process is equally unconscious, the initial input is probably of a different order than in the case of the scientists. Often, there may be no discernible input whatsoever, not even a hunch, but a mere impulse ‘now I should/can paint’. Although much conscious work may precede and be involved in the process of artistic creation, the consciousness is here concerned with contents of a different order than those of scientific consciousness. What is received by an artist is not a ready-made solution to an actual problem, but a ‘guidance’, as if by a ‘directing force’, during the process ending with the actual expression which so, perhaps after a ‘get acquainted’ period, is seen as a ‘match’, as satisfying actualisation not of any preconceived idea, but of the initial, vague intuition.

102. This should indicate the fundamental difference: the difference not so much between conscious as opposed to unconscious, as between actual as opposed to non-actual. The two distinctions are orthogonal, they cut the horizon of experience along pretty independent lines. One can be

1.a reflectively conscious of the tree one is looking at or
1.b merely aware of it (which would be counted as being subconscious of it, since the fact that one does not stumble into trees, although one does not pay any reflective attention to them, is credited to unconsciousness or subconsciousness).

But one can also be

2.a reflectively aware of the indefinable thirst of one’s soul, of a vague dissatisfaction with je ne sais quoi, or
2.b entirely unconscious (only aware?) of it.

Our distinction actual vs. non-actual is that between 1. and 2., while the distinction conscious-unconscious is, in each case, that between a. and b.

103. Certainly, there is a big difference between being conscious and unconscious of something. But what matters much more is that of which we are conscious (or unconscious), and what we make of the contents of our consciousness.

Freud made unconsciousness pretty much the same as reflection, only unconscious. Its contents where repressed conscious contents. Only for this reason one might postulate (as

114J. Pollock [after A. Jaffé, Symbolism in the Visual Arts. p.308] (By the way, these two quotations illustrate also, in addition to the common aspect which concerns us here, the enormous difference between the intellectual poetry of Klee’s and the uncontrolled expressionism of Pollock’s paintings.)
115We gloss over more detailed differences like, for instance, that with Jung consciousness involves necessarily opposites, while with us only sufficiently precise distinctions, of which opposites are extreme cases. Also, since our consciousness spans everything from awareness to reflection, we have obviously the degrees of consciousness. The extreme of awareness will often be the same as psychoanalysis’ subconsciousness. Perhaps the most significant is that Jung’s consciousness is the totality of contents related to his ‘ego’, which seems to be simply constituted as the subjective pole of this totality. With us, reflection is always only an actual act, and the ‘conscious ego’ is nothing but the actual subject of such an act. The totality of such acts transcends reflection and pertains to oneself but in no way constitutes it.
done constantly by Freud) that ‘id’ should be replaced by ‘I’, that ‘I’ should keep bringing under its control more and more aspects of the unconscious ‘id’, as if the ultimate (even though impossible) goal were to eradicate the latter making all its contents visible. The main complication in this extension of consciousness was a complex of mechanisms working to ‘hide’ the unconscious (though always principally visible) contents. Thus, for instance, for the dream interpretation, one had to invent a ‘censor’, a function of the psyche which twisted and confused all the precise contents of unconscious in order to hide them from consciousness. But the “form that dream takes is natural to the unconscious because the material from which they are produced is retained in the subliminal state in precisely this fashion.”¹¹⁶ It is natural in so far as the non-actual contents are not expressible directly in the precise, reflective form.

Even if to some degree unconsciousness indeed hides only repressed visible contents, there is much more which remains essentially invisible. Jung’s departure from the Freudian psychoanalysis of merely visible but repressed contents, and his study of the collective unconscious, that is, of the transpersonal and not merely private and subjective dimension of the experience, is an admirable spiritual achievement of the XX-th century. The invisible contents which he finds through dream analysis carry this character of anamnesis, of something which, although appearing for the first time for consciousness, does not originate in it and yet can be recognised. “[…] I have found again and again in my professional work that the images and ideas that dreams contain cannot possibly be explained solely in terms of memory. They express new thoughts that have never yet reached the threshold of consciousness,”¹¹⁷

The assumption of psychoanalysis (at least, in its folklore) is that there is nothing which, at least in principle, could not become conscious. The unconscious is most intimately present and we are aware of it, although there may be a long way from this awareness to the full visibility in reflection. The important thing, in so far as such a ‘making conscious’ is concerned, is that contents entering reflection still retain fundamental mutual differences. Becoming (attentively) conscious of the tree ‘I did not see’ is very different from becoming conscious of the vague dissatisfaction I have felt but did not realise. Reflection, whether of a tree or of dissatisfaction, is fully aware of such differences, even if they do not become its objects. They are recognised, so to speak, in the background of the reflective acts, in self-awareness.

The invisibles are essentially non-actual and not essentially unconscious. Yet, the consciousness of invisibles is of a very different kind from the usual consciousness of ‘this or that’. The difference is established by the distance separating the actual sign from the content it signifies. In case of an external object like a tree, the distance is negligible. In case of Prague, it becomes more apparent, even if one sticks to thinking of Prague merely as a complex of actual objects. In case of the invisible unity of the world, of the vague feeling of the dawning love or despair, and then of the clear— and still equally vague— consciousness of love or despair, the distance is obvious and given in the immediate awareness that what one is actually conscious of does not capture that which one is experiencing, ‘the thing itself’. Paradoxically as it may seem, the longer this distance, the more concrete the content, that is, the deeper it reaches into the texture of the personal being. With invisibles, the virtual infinity of this distance is an aspect of the absolute concreteness of the experience overflowing the actuality of conscious signs.

¹¹⁶C. G. Jung, Approaching the Unconscious. p.53
¹¹⁷Ibid. p.26
1.4.3. Transcendence

The **transcendence of invisibles** amounts to their *essential non-actuality*. They not only happen to be, like complexes, sometimes or partially not-actual but are *essentially* outside the *horizon of actuality*. They never appear within this horizon, because by appearing we mean an appearance of something, while here nothing definite becomes given. By thus *transcending* every actual appearance, they are also *above me*. They not only happen to be *not-mine*, while perhaps they belong to somebody else. Unlike *qualities of life*, they do not belong to some but not to others. They are equally above every one of us. But transcending particularity of every life and experience, they form their deepest sphere which envelops the personal center, the *invisible self* confronting directly the *nothingness* of the one.

104. **Transcending this world**, the invisibles **transcend** the sphere of *mineness*. They are neither *subjective* nor *objective*. In their true manifest**ations**, not involving any object, they do not involve any subject either, or rather, they erase the *subject*, «aufheben» it. But likewise, they are also neither mine nor not-mine and they «aufheben» also *myself*. Of course, they manifest themselves through me, through you. But neither you nor I are indispensable for their manifestations. Every one of us is merely their possible site, the place of their possible manifestation. The *manifested invisible* is not changed if it happens to be actually experienced by somebody else.

For an experience of beauty or love, it is not essential that I am their *subject*. In a sense, it is enough that they at all are. The *subjectivity* of an actual consciousness is merely the place of manifestation of their presence. For instance, creation of a beautiful work of art is a very different experience from its appreciation. But the beholder is given the same *gift* of beauty which was given to the artist. The latter was only the one who actually happened to bring it to the expression. Manifestations concern everything and everybody, they give joy to anybody who is able to *recognise* them as a generous gift. Such a recognition, however, is conditioned by the unconditional openness, by suspension of one’s private claims and pretensions and by the acceptance of the non-relative validity of the invisible gift. “If you love a thousand marks which are in your rather than someone else’s possession, than this is not right. […] If you love your father and mother and yourself more than you do someone else, then this too is not right. And if you prefer blessedness in yourself to blessedness in another, that is not right either.”118 Every manifestation of holiness, of love is accessible to everybody. Invisible does not have to manifest itself through me if I am to find the deep peace and satisfaction in it, to experience its quality. They can not be grasped and so they do not have to be grasped. They do not offer any visible distinctions which might suggest attempts at understanding them. It suffices that they are – in fact, even if they do not manifest themselves. One can wish to attain holiness, peace, love and that is about everything one can do about it. Invisibles are not possible goals of any activity, they are not meaningful intentions of one’s will and acts. Intending goodness one turns into a moralist, intending saintliness one turns into a hypocrite. For intending is relative to oneself, to one’s will. Invisibles can not be approximated or acted upon. Any directedness towards them turns them into something particular, a specific motive or an actual goal and thus, violating their transcendence, falsifies their nature. They can be only participated, as implicit inspirations which putting unconditional claims, require that I cease viewing myself as the *axis mundi* and, to the extent that I address

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118 Eckhart, German Sermons 2 Tim. IV:2,5 [M. O. Walshe, ed., Meister Eckhart... 18; J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., Meister Eckhard... 30; O. Davis, ed., Selected Writings 4]
1.4. Invisibles

myself, I do so only forgetting myself.

Either there is an experience, a manifestation of the invisible which also makes me see my subordination to what is above me, or there is no such experience. This is the character of absoluteness which either reveals itself completely or not at all. When revealed, it knows no limits, in particular, no limits between persons who can participate in it, or the forms of such participation. It is an inexhaustible potential for ever new manifestations, a surplus, an untiring force which, fully realised in one situation, never ceases to look for new forms of manifestation, which accessible to one person in one form, does not cease to be accessible to all others in an unlimited number of other forms. Love without any manifestation is hardly love, but in any manifestation and, not least, in any failure, love remains the potential for new manifestations. Therefore it never coincides with its sign because, fully manifested as it is, it also immediately overflows the actuality of this manifestation towards the new ones. An invisible is a virtuality transcending every actuality, potentiality of ever new manifestations. This marriage of immanence and transcendence underlies the crucial feature of invisibles – they, and only they, can be genuinely shared.

Just like indistinct remains unaffected by all the distinctions, just like multiplicity of selves is the primordial communion of the one, univocal event of birth, so invisibles can be shared without diminishing. Actual goods, objects, complexes cannot be so shared, because sharing them requires some kind of division between all parts which involves diminishing them. (Money is the paradigmatic example but this applies to the whole sphere of visibility.) The fact that more people participate in invisible does not, in any way, diminish its quality, intensity and truth. Love can be shared without any restrictions, even if its particular expressions and acts need to be limited to the actual context. But an act of love, in addition to being directed and circumscribed within the horizon of actuality, has the rest which is not addressed to any particular region of Being. If more people witness to it, it does not lose any of the love it manifests; on the contrary, it only radiates the more allowing everybody to participate in it. “All that is begetting in gods, emanates according to the infinity of divine power multiplying itself and traversing all beings, and its inexhaustibility manifests itself in particular in emanations of secondary beings.” An invisible seed has no quantity. Like the five loaves and two fish which are enough to feed five thousand people, so an invisible grain, of the size of a mustard seed, is sufficient for any multitude of people.

This individuality conjoined with sharing reflects the apparent contradiction of uniqueness and repetition which we identified in §98 with the concreteness of invisibles. Their transcendence has the similar appearance of a paradox, in that it is most immanent, most concretely experienced. They offer the ground for all experience and, as such, are themselves experienced. Although this experience can be clothed in various specific garments, so underneath it involves always the primary element of the distance, of a sphere which, only vaguely differentiated, remains above all actual distinctions. Experience of invisibles is the aspect announcing in every actual experience the ultimate transcendence. They lend thus all actual experiences concreteness by anchoring their dissociated actuality in the unity of the existential origin. Their experience coincides with the experience of their transcendence and reflects the elements which, in 1:§131, we ascribed to the one:

• as the contentless indeterminacy, respecting one’s freedom, the invisibles offer the experience of nothingness;

119Proclus, Elements of Theology. §152
• as the unitary sphere endowed only with the inseparable distinctions, they offer the experience of unity;
• as the overflowing surplus and inexhaustible potential for ever new manifestations – the experience of the origin, the source of meaningfulness;
• as the transcendence unaffected by my choices and actions – the experience of eternity;
• likewise, as the transcendence and constant presence – the experience of communion and participation;
• as the inspiration and command – the experience of the absolute power
• ...

1.4.4. Self

107. The empirical studies leading to the identification of some archetypical patterns, did not provide sufficient grounds for Jung to conclude the presence “in the unconscious [of] an order equivalent to that of the ego. It certainly does not look as if we were likely to discover an unconscious ego-personality. […] Personality need not imply consciousness. It can just as easily be dormant or dreaming.”\(^{120}\) Indeed, “consciousness succumbs all too easily to unconscious influences and these are often truer and wiser than our conscious thinking.”\(^{121}\) This unconscious center, or rather, since no center can be discerned there, the hidden source of personality is what Jung calls ‘self’. Its phenomenology in the symbols of ‘wholeness’, in particular mandalas, occupy a significant part of Jung’s investigations which it is certainly not the place to review here. Self is the ultimate, essentially invisible source which remains always above myself without slightest traces of similarity to the ‘ego-personality’ – the archetype of archetypes, the contentless limit separating all relative distinctions from the absolute indistinct.

As Ricour says, self can be apprehended only through ‘text’. If we forget the hermeneutic bias towards the ‘text’ and interpret it liberally as symbolic expressions, also experienced commands, then the intuition seems to be the same: the signs of self, by their very nature, indicate distance to their origin, they manifest without revealing. Self manifests itself but is not reducible to such actual manifestations. Its signs reveal only, so to speak, its consequences, commands, inspirations – not any definable properties of the self. Its manifestation “is a sort of intimate understanding and perception of a self which is careful not to depart from itself by wanting to perceive more.”\(^{122}\) Plotinus refers here to the understanding in the moments of ecstatic union but it applies more generally. No matter what form manifestations of self assume, the attempts to perceive more, to actually see it, will never yield a satisfying result.

108. The self, the trace of birth, is the source from which all my personal aspects emerge and which founds the ontological unity of a person. “The Self can be defined as an inner guiding factor that is different from the conscious personality […], the regulating center that brings about a constant extension and maturing of the personality.”\(^{123}\) The ‘inner guiding factor’, the ‘regulating center’ and the like never obtain any more specific content;

\(^{120}\)C. G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. VI:503/508
\(^{121}\)Ibid. VI:504
\(^{122}\)Plotinus, Enneads. V:8.11.
\(^{123}\)M.-L. von Franz, The Process of Individuation. p.163
any more precise description betrays immediately its inadequacy. Just like the coherence and relative consistency of my ego and my acts are grounded in the unity of my life, so the unity of myself, of my world and my life, is grounded in the invisible and indistinct origin, in the self confronting one. Self is the point in infinity, the nothingness of a point reflecting the nothingness of the one, it “has neither a past nor a future, and it is not something to which anything can be added, for it cannot become larger or smaller.” The self, the center of primordial founding remains above all specific distinctions. “For man does not subsist in these circumstances in which he now appears to be, but in so far as he exists he is contained within the hidden causes of nature after which he was first created and to which he is destined to return.”

This invisible point in infinity, the contentless fact of confrontation facing the bare nothingness, is in fact the origin of the idea of ‘substance’. We have opposed all talk about metaphysical substances with respect to the visible or material things. But Aristotle and his followers always included living beings among the primary substances, and here our characteristics of self may comply with those of a substance. Self is independent in the sense of being completely non-relative; simple and indivisible in the sense of being above all visible distinctions; timeless and unchangeable in the sense of facing only the absolute. “The self is always the same, // Already fulfilled, // Without flaw or choice or striving. // Close at hand, // But boundless.” Such descriptions can also be applied to the one which then appears as the ultimate substance, but we will return to some differences below in 1.4.4.v.

1.4.4.i. Self vs. My Self

Self is initially experienced as merely ‘inborn possibility’; I can recognize the sphere of invisibles centered around the self and manifested through symbols and commands – addressed to me but coming from above. At the same time, I also meet empty symbols, in texts, art, other people’s relations, which I recognize as only possible manifestations of invisibles, as ones which do not appeal to me; symbols which relate some invisible story but a story which is not mine, which does not exercise the same commanding power as the symbols encountered in my personal experience.

One might want to extrapolate the obvious difference between such experiences to a genuine opposition between their origin(s). One may maintain the distinction mine vs. not-mine, constitutive for the level of mineness, also with respect to the invisible things of the other world. Approaching the self, I can experience it as mine, as exclusively mine. The concrete material of the phenomenology of self, its manifestations entering my experience, can be viewed as my self. As opposed to it, self is entirely contentless remaining hidden beyond and above these manifestations. But viewing my self as somewhat opposed to self results only from propagating ‘upwards’ the reflective dissociations. It is grounded in the attachment to the relativity of actual consciousness which insists on the categories

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124Eckhart, German Sermons Mt. V:3 [M. O. Walsh, ed., Meister Eckhart... 87; J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., Meister Eckhart... 52; O. Davis, ed., Selected Writings 22]

125J. S. Eringen, Periphyseon. II:533C/B:332D. The definition: “Man is a certain intellectual concept formed eternally in the Divine Mind” [Ibid. IV:768B] might require some interpretation, so let us only add “And I am afraid of those who define him [man] [...] according to those things which are seen by the intellect to relate to him, saying ‘man is a rational mortal animal capable of sense and discipline’ [...] But the concept of man in the Mind of God is none of these; for there it is simple, and cannot be called by this or that name, for it stands above all definition and all groupings of parts, for it can only be predicated of it that it is, not what it is.” [Ibid. IV:768C]

126The Ashtavakra-Gita. XVIII:5
of mineness and myself dissociated from not-mine. Talking about my self, one tends to assume such a distinction at the level of the invisibles as if my invisible self was only a particular form, a particular case of self which then becomes an abstract generality. This, however, is to confuse myself and my self. It is to apply the categories of actual dissociations and oppositions pertaining to this visible world, to the invisible world which does not offer grounds for such distinctions. Self is separated only from the one – this is its true and only counterpart.

Everything else, every other distinction is below it and thus can be, at least in principle, incorporated into it. The ‘my’ in my self is only my experience of the self. My self is self experienced as mine, that is, in so far as the commands and symbols are received with all their obliging force by myself, or else, in so far as they actually, even if not consciously, exercise their directing force on my being, also while this being is involved in the opposition to not-mine.

My self is my experience of the self.

My self is self seen through the sieve of mineness, even of ego and pure subjectivity. The commands address myself, and thus they turn self into my self, but they do not originate in myself, they do not originate in anything which could be characterized as mine. They emerge from above me, from the ultimate origin and mark the ever present trace of birth – self. This trace, haeceitas, has no principle of individuation beyond the fact of birth. In terms of our figure from §1, p.98, self is the point of birth, the pole above all distinctions which, as the point in infinity, is only reflection of the one. Marking the place of the absolute origin, it is the element of eternity in man, the spark of the soul, as Eckhart would say or, perhaps, the ‘seminal reason’, logos spermatikos which Justin Martyr, having borrowed it from the Stoics, identified with the divine element “implanted in every race of men [as if] part only of the Word [...]”\(^{127}\)

10. Opposing my self to self, based on the attachment to the categories of mineness, involves also opposing my self to other selves. It views my self as if it were an attribute attached to myself, my subjectivity. However, as the trace of birth, the contentless point in infinity, one self is indistinguishable from others. One point in infinity is essentially the same as another – they are only numerically distinct. This contentless difference of selves reflects the fundamental character of birth as the separation of self from the one – it does not involve, as yet, any particular distinctions but only this pure one. Different selves are only traces of different births, of separations which established distinct poles of the same confrontation with the one. Thus one self is not opposed to others. Their numerical difference is a thorough community of sharing the same primordial event of birth and being confronted with the same one.

Self, the point of eternity in man, is present beyond and irrespectively of any experiences, in particular, any experiences of my self, not to mention, of myself. Yet, this point marks only the eternal truth of confrontation, self is just the simple fact of existence. Consequently, it can not be dissociated from the concrete existence, not to mention positing it as any self-subsistent entity. As such, one self is essentially the same as any other – they are only numerically distinct. The difference, if one insists, between one self and another is just the difference between one existence and another, is the difference between one way (of existing) and another, which is eventually the difference between one person and another, between me, you, him. These differences do not in any way contradict the

\(^{127}\)St. Justin Martyr, Second Apology. 8
1.4. Invisibles

genuine community, but this will be discussed more closely in Book III:§§120 ff.

1.4.4.ii. The ‘sense of self’

I am my self, my self is self, atman is Atman, but as we said in 1:6.1.4, being is asymmetric and none of these can be reversed. Self is not my self and my self is not myself. In particular, being self is not dependent on any feeling or ‘sense of self’. The experience of the self is not an experience of any given identity with the self. Self is above me, ‘greater than’ me, it is never given in any actual experience and hence is not reducible to any private sense of being oneself. But at the same time, it is also the source and the ultimate site of my unity, the source of concreteness which makes experience into my experience.

One may ascribe to schizophrenics double personality. And this may be the case, although it implies only the notion of personality allowing for such a multiplicity in one person. It seems, however, that a schizophrenic suffers exactly because he retains the ‘sense of self’, because he notices terrifying elements invading his being, because he becomes afraid about himself and finds a temporal calm in alluding – perhaps in an escapist way – to his self. People suffering from the Korsakoff syndrome seem to have lost the hold over personal memories and the continuity of their being seems reduced to only the most immediate, last minute’s past. However, they also preserve some childhood and adolescent memories which indicate that the reduction is not that total. But even if it were, even if the ‘sense of self’ and continuity disappeared completely, as may happen in geriatric dementia, we are still dealing with the same person. If such a person is our friend or loved one, we try to help him. He is no longer himself as he used to be, perhaps, he no longer has the ‘sense of self’, that is, of the continuity of himself exceeding the actuality of the immediate stimulus and reaction, but he is still the same person, the same self. And when we find out that nothing can be done, we grieve over this person, over our loss of him and over his loss of himself.

Saying “He is not the same person”, we know that he is the same. He only behaves, acts, speaks in a way which is not his usual way. Perhaps, he has even changed completely, he acquired a new personality, due to some mystical experiences, intense work on himself, some personal tragedy. But he is the same person, even if completely different. The same applies to a person who has completely lost his memory, who does not any longer ‘know who he is’, to one with a severe dissociative disorder, to an unconscious person kept alive under a drip. If this person is my loved one, I will care and treat him with all consideration and patience which I owe him – because he is the same person. When we respect the decisions written in the last will of a deceased person, we do it from respect for this very person – this person remains himself, is still identical to himself, even when dead. Hmm...

Thus, not only no two persons are identical, the same person can be vastly different from oneself. Just like it is not any externally observable criteria which constitute the identity of a person, so it is not either any ‘inner sense of self’. If we feel insecure, we may need some criteria to convince ourselves that the person is the one he says he is, that he is not a spy, that my friend who just went out is the same who is now coming back, that my wife today is the same person as yesterday, even, that I am today the same person as I was yesterday. If we feel insecure...or, perhaps, if we suffer from the Capgras syndrome. But what we thus convince ourselves about is something different than the

128Certainly, forensic considerations may call for a more specific notion of a person, or rather of a legal subject, but we are not dealing with such issues.

129Capgras syndrome makes the affected person believe that some close friend or relative has been replaced
mere conformance to any universal criteria. What is it? Where does the idea of it come from, if criteria are only to confirm it? The unity of a person lies beyond any tests and the possible criteria are as numerous as the number of different people.

112. The asymmetry of ‘being’ in general, and of being self in particular, involves a relative independence of the higher from the lower. A loss at a lower level need not mean a similar loss at the higher level. One’s incoherent or inconsistent acts can witness to some disturbances of one’s ego but, unless all too frequent and grave, need not contradict the latter’s integrity. Similarly, suffering an inflation of ego can as easily lead to problems in one’s social interactions as to a realisation of deeper aspects of oneself. One can lose oneself, which we would typically equate with the loss of the ‘sense of oneself’, an existential crises or a personality disorder. But this does not mean that one has lost self, that one ceased to be self, because this is impossible.

Identification of self with the ‘sense of self’ is a sad reductionism, a psychologism of extreme subjectivity. The ‘sense of self’ (which, to avoid all too detailed distinctions and lengthy exposition, we do not distinguish from the ‘sense’ of continuity or of unity) is not something which establishes self. On the contrary, it is possible to have such a ‘sense’ only because there is something of which this is a sense. Eventually, it is the sense of the eternal validity and uniqueness of the fundamental event – confrontation with the one – which establishes haecceitas and whose traces found all the lower modifications of selfhood like personality, ego, subjectivity.

1.4.4.iii. A note on scattered consciousness

113. Self, the personal unity, is constituted at birth as the fundamental ontological and ultimately transcendent fact. Its visible account would amount to the reduction of this unity to the visible categories and can not be expected. What we have seen in this Book is the stratification of personal being into levels which can be taken as various levels of personal unity. Accordingly, I can experience being more or less myself. The self above any particular experiences of my self marks the ultimate unity. If I stay attached to myself, this invisible unity slips out of my attempts to see it and appears as a merely nonmational identity – irreducible to and unaccountable for in the visible terms of mineness and of the ‘sense of self’ but which, nevertheless, remains unquestionable. Engaged exclusively in my ego, I become a confused collection of traits, features, functions and inclinations, And finally, trying to account for myself in terms of immediacy, I become a pure subject, entirely depersonalised act of immediate reactions, as spontaneous as indifferent because external.

114. The more we narrow the temporal scope of attention and the more objective we try to be in inquiring into the nature of the ‘subject’, the less we find of any subject. Humean series of impressions provide an obvious example, and so does Locke’s person who, eventually, seems to become merely a “forensic term” without any ontological significance.

Yet, “we perceive it so plainly and so certainly, that it neither needs nor is capable of any proof.” The awareness of personal unity makes it hard to accept the attempts to dissolve self in a flux of actualities. This ‘sense of continuity’, not to mention any real continuity itself, is as perplexing for more recent variations of empiricism and nominalism

by a deceiver or an alter ego. This conviction persists even though one can still recognise all the usual signs – the face, the body, the behavior, etc. – of the other.

J. Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. IV:9.3
as it was for Hume. His famous argument shows, indeed, that self can not be accounted for in terms of scattered actual perceptions and ideas. No such events reveal self, even if some might manifest its presence – the presence, however, which for ever transcends the horizon of actuality. As “there is no impression constant and invariable”, and so none which could give rise to the idea of self, there are two possibilities: either stick to the method which tells us that only actual impressions and perceptions matter, or look for self somewhere else. According to the former, people “are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions.” But why then, when no unity is there, does one need the words like “bundle” or “collection”? What or where is the boundary separating one such collection from another? For something makes it this ‘collection’ as opposed to another one.

An analogous problem faces nominalism of less empirical flavour. “Guess what: everybody was wrong: there never was such a thing as the self [...]]” Certainly, there never was such a thing. But one still says, for instance, that “self is the center of narrative strategies” or of “narrative gravity.” What center? Why does one find it appropriate to use this inappropriate word? Or, perhaps, “self is nothing more than a nominal handle we stick on the thread of continuity that seems to wind through our lifetime”. No matter how much one would like to dissolve self in nominalistic arbitrariness, one keeps trying to justify the use of the ‘handles’ and to describe on what they ‘get stuck’ with the ‘seeming continuity’.

A variation of the empirical attempts to reduce subject, or consciousness, to the immediacy of atomic givens employs nowadays the complex of the brain with its intricately networked neurons and the binary minuteness of their firings. No I is, of course, to be found there, so one postulates as if a multiplicity of ‘minute Is’, more minute ‘subjects’, one such ‘I’ responsible for every reaction and bunch of such ‘Is’, each working in its own direction, ‘competing’ with each other for creating an overall, unified, conscious experience. Consciousness thus explained seems to say “We react, therefore you are”. Now, one might in principle admit the possibility of such an explanation. But this would not be an explanation of any unity which, on this account, arises at most as some epiphenomenon without any reality. For the account is driven by the following principle for distribution of the labels “real” and “unreal”: to be ‘real’, an x must be determinate, and determinate means that it is decidable whether something is x or not. This is the same principle we have encountered many times earlier which, in the search for the ultimate atoms, declares unreal everything which slips out of the immediacy of the precise determinations and, in particular, which can be dissociated into more elementary particles. In the present context, it certainly squares well with the cases of dissociative personality disorders, some forms of schizophrenia, and the like. Indeed, such disturbances manifest a dissolution of the ‘sense of personal unity’ and a fall to the level of dissociated impressions and sensations. But does the fact that the sense of self can be dissolved mean that self does not (or did not) exist? This not only presupposes reduction of self to the ‘sense of self’. It is also like saying that, since the building could be destroyed, it is not real.

We should be careful here. For our claim is not only that the unity of the self is real, 115. but that it precedes the atomic units of the empiricist reductions. We face here the difference between the objectivistic and existential perspective (which we can recall, e.g.,

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131 D. Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature. I:4.6
132 The precise bivalence of the principle of non-contradiction and of excluded middle serves here as the ultimate criterion of ‘reality’. Since self is underdetermined (or even may seem to possess contradictory characteristics), just like are the characters fabricated in the novels, both are equally fictional – at least, according to D. Dennett, The self as a center of narrative gravity, D. Dennett, Consciousness Explained, and other authors of this trend.
from I:84). For the objectivist explanations, the existential origins are only subjective instances of some objective laws. However, the objectivist perspective is itself a developed mode, an attitude which must be arrived at in an existential development. Its ultimate atoms are limits of distinctions, never finally determined, and exposed always to further refinements and adjustments. Determinacy and decidability of $x$ being $x$ are misleading depersonalisations of the underlying process of distinguishing. We and only we, you and I, are the ones able to determine and decide. Attempts to reduce everything to the ultimate, objective immediacy of the givens, end up in the most intimate, if only confused, associations with the subject, consciousness, ‘mind’. The empiricist is there all the time, experiencing, determining, deciding, and nothing helps getting rid of himself. Usually, he reaches his limit when the ‘atoms’ begin to slip out of his view, when the well from the bottom of which he hopes to dig out the ‘atoms’, begins to seem bottomless. “We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched.” This is only another side of the fact that his ‘atoms’, his ‘reality’ are but a function of his view; not necessarily of any voluntary decisions but of his sensuous, perceptive, reflective, conceptual, in short, differentiating mechanisms which furnish the distinctions necessary for arriving at any ‘atoms’ in the first place.

The empirical and nominalistic bias, nourished by the image of reality reduced to the immediate givens, can not admit any unity beyond actual experiences. From the objectivist perspective of actuality there is no such thing as the unity of a person; there is at most the unity of an act. The empiricist’s creed – whatever can be distinguished must be dissociated, because it is independent – with the accompanying ontology of exclusive ‘reality’ of indivisible atoms can not, if carried consequentially, accept any unity stretching beyond the ideal limit of immediacy as real. Even if it finds the understanding and intuition of unity in its personal experience, its conceptual apparatus can only turn it into a multiplicity of Is, minute, determinable entities, the ultimate (at least, until the next turn of the empirical wheel) atoms. We prefer to see in the inability to see any self not any proof of its non-existence but simply the limitation of the actual ability to see. It does not imply that self does not exist but only that if it does then it is invisible.

1.4.4.iv. Descriptive vs. normative self

116. The scattering of the subject, the reduction of its unity to a conspiracy of cells or some minute movements, like many empirical projects, may probably contribute to increasing the control over particular aspects of environment and life. But as the theories of reality, they effect only its reduction to more and more minutely dissociated elements. Dissolving thus the existential unity, they increase alienation. There is a curious analogy to such a reduction in the spiritual tradition. According to it, all who merely live their lives without any spiritual concentration and effort, do not attain any genuine unity but are only collections of separate and independent ‘Is’, drives and desires, bits of consciousness.

Visions of God, in His terrifying rather than benevolent aspect, involve often demonic manifold of strange, incoherent creatures which appear and act in a dreadful autonomy. "And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. [...] As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four.” The eye, Jung observes, “is a symbol as well as an allegory of consciousness.”

133L. Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. 6.52
134Ezek. I:6,18
135C. G. Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis. II:47
1.4. Invisibles

Quite common motif is not only that of the Eye of God, but also of the multiplicity of eyes, for instance, as fishes’ eyes which “are tiny soul-sparks from which the shining figure of the filius [divine child] is put together.”\textsuperscript{136} Also, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”\textsuperscript{137}

Such examples witness to the old acquaintance with the possibility of single aspects of the whole acquiring autonomy in their functioning. In a harmless form, it may be recognised in daily experience. At one moment, I think or feel this, at another that, and for the most I do not even remember what I did a moment ago. I make a promise today, and in two weeks I forget what I promised, the situation has changed so that I act as if I never promised anything. I go around thinking that I am one person but, on a closer reflection, there is nothing actual which could account for this unity. It is dissolved in the multiplicity of transient moods, thoughts, actions and reactions.

But such harmless flow of experience without any reflectively identifiable center of unity, can also acquire more dramatic forms. As a bushman can ‘lose his soul’, so I can lose contact with my self, I can lose myself, dissolve into a multiplicity of egos, and suffer the associated personal and social problems. (Or, perhaps, it would only be suffering of these egos?) The multiple egos, acquiring the character of independent selves, degenerate into an autonomy of various lower functions. But even if, objectively, the relative autonomy of various lower functions is a fact, it would not help me (that is, them) the least even to lit a cigarette when I am (they are) feeling like having one (which one? what one?). The actual multiplicity of egos and their relative autonomy is a fact which only calls for the stronger active effort in order to maintain concrete personal unity. It would be hard to deny relative autonomy of various lower functions, not to mention cellular or molecular processes in the body. But if we forget the little word “relative”, if such an autonomy is a dissociation of elements unrelated in any unifying whole, it becomes like demons which threaten, as they always did, with the abruptness of their uncoordinated movements, with the disorganised hysteria of a herd of pigs which “rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water.”\textsuperscript{138}

Self is the ontological foundation of the unity of the person which is independent from the autonomy of lower functions or from any sense I myself might have of this unity. Yet, a strong personality will have a strong ‘sense of self’ and it is certainly desirable to have such a sense. This sense, the ‘inborn possibility’ of the experience of such a unity, of the continuous and lasting presence, is something we can recognise as the normative aspect of the self. This normative aspect is but a reflection of the ontological founding, it is the call “Become yourself!” the call to concretely realise the ontological anchoring of myself in self, to live concretely, also in visible terms, the unity founded in the self. For it is from self, from “this central nucleus (as far as we know today), [that] the whole building up of ego consciousness is directed, the ego apparently being a duplicate or structural counterpart of the original center.”\textsuperscript{139} “But this larger, more total aspect of the psyche

\textsuperscript{136}Ibid. II:46
\textsuperscript{137}Prov. XV:3
\textsuperscript{138}Mat. VIII:32. It is tempting to quote several fragments of Empedocles: “Limbs wandered alone./Creatures with rolling gait and innumerable hands./Many creatures were created with a face and breast on both sides; offspring of cattle with fronts of men, and again there arose offspring of men with heads of cattle; and [creatures made of elements] mixed in part from men, in part from female sex, furnished with hairy limbs.” [DK 31B58/60/61] These might, perhaps, be only images of creatures arising from the mixture of elements. “But in Wrath they are all different in form and separate, while in Love they come together and long for one another.” [DK 31B21]
\textsuperscript{139}M.-L. von Franz, \textit{The Process of Individuation}. p.169
appears first as merely an inborn possibility. [...] How far it develops depends on whether or not the ego is willing to listen to the messages of the Self." The unity of the self is felt and experienced only as my self and that only to the extent that symbols are received as inspirations, as manifestations of something which is in constant need of actualisation. There is a long distance separating the 'inborn possibility' from the actual challenge, and the actual challenge from truly and concretely becoming one self.

As far as the experience and reflection focused exclusively on the actual contents are concerned, the self, the ontological unity remains merely an ideal noumen. "The actual process of individuation – the conscious coming-to-terms with one's own inner center (psychic nucleus) or Self – generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it. This initial shock amounts to a 'call', although it is not often recognised as such." Recognising it as a call means to recognise a symbol as a command, a command to myself. The challenge may seem abstract in its vague ness, but it is the most concrete command of becoming one self, of seeking a concrete foundation of the unity of a person, as distinguished from its merely ontological foundation. Unlike the latter, the former is not something simply given by nature – it is a possibility which nature only opens before man. Strength is the ability to live the tension between the non-actual and actual not as a conflict but as a foundation, and this amounts to recognition of the direction involved in the higher command, to actualisation of its vague imperative as a concrete value. The strong 'sense of self' is only a reflection of the success in such a following of the command, its final visible consequence. It has a moral, rather than ontological or epistemological flavour, and is a goal rather than a fact. We leave this normative aspect of self for the time being, and it will return in Book III.

1.4.4.4. My self, self and one

The transcendence of invisibles does not any longer offer grounds for distinguishing its horizontal and vertical dimensions. It can acquire horizontal character when, for instance, viewed only through the reflective, symbolic signs. To the extent symbols are empty, they do leave a space for progress, they do call for being 'completed'. But true symbols, the ones which are experienced along with the commands and inspirations of the original signs, reveal only pure and simple transcendence of essential non-actuality. My self is the field of invisibles and self is, so to speak, its peak. One is beyond even that. We address now these three stages of the ultimate transcendence.

118. My self is self but being is asymmetric and so self is not my self. My self is self to the degree the latter emerges as mine. At first, the contents of experiences of my self tend to be identified with self. But no matter how little or much contents I manage to discern in such experiences, the self is never exhausted by them. I can never grasp it. True, contents can manifest some truth, they can suggest some kind of direction and thus, being directed to me, make self my self. No self, however, appears. Self can never be content of any experience and saying that my self is my experience of self, the "of" must not be taken as indicating the content, not to mention the object of the experience. Self is an invisible aspect of every experience.

We have been speaking about commands and inspirations in the plural form. But the differences between various commands concern only their content. This can, to some
extent, mean ‘what’ they command, but primarily it means only the circumstances under which they occur and the way in which they are received and interpreted. Certainly, *distinctionless Angst* is a different experience from, equally *distinctionless*, mystical union; the sudden feeling that ‘I am not living my life’ is very different in content from the religious experience of God’s *presence*. Yet, they do not command anything particular, and to the extent they do, it is close to impossible to say what. One experiences only *that* something fundamental has happened, some sphere of tremendous significance has penetrated *actuality*, but *what* was it?

*Self* manifested in various experiences of *my self* is not related to contents of such experiences. But it is *present* as their force: irresistible, binding, *absolute*. Contents of experiences can be entirely *vague* because their *objectivity* is nil. It is only the shaking intensity, the tremendous power and significance of such experiences – of revelations, founding events, archetypal dreams – which, clothed in the more definite contents of *my self*, signal the *presence* of the *transcendent* pole beyond any such contents.

This power and intensity, irrespectively of the content, is what makes such experiences the calls, the *commands* to accept the *invisible presence above* all discernible contents. All *commands*, irrespectively of the differences in content are, eventually, one and the same *command*, formulated by the tradition as “Become yourself”, but which we would have to at least parse differently as “Become your self”, and preferably rephrase as “Become self.” The adolescent questions “Who am I? Who am I, really?” are, too, expressions of this call, which does not necessarily come as a particular experience at a particular time. They expect answers, expect to find something which one could *see*, some *actual* ‘what’ which distinguishes *me* from others – and thus dissolve in *egotic* divagations. Such questions do not help answering the call, although they may be a stage towards it. For what is *commanded* is to forget oneself, to stop viewing *my self* as mine in opposition to others, to stop viewing *self* as an attribute of *myself* (which view marks the remaining *attachment* to *visibility* of *mineness*) but, instead, as the *foundation* of *myself*. “Become self” is a call to accept the being I have always been, but which is not and never will be mine. Speaking a bit paradoxically, it is a call to accept what is *above me* as mine without, however, turning it into my property. It is a call to stop *dissociating my self* from *self* without, however, identifying the two. For I am *self* but *self* is greater than *me*. Becoming *self*, accepting this greatness *above* as my *foundation*, amounts to *opening* the limits of *mineness*.

The archetypes (the primordial causes or the *invisibles* of the intellect) form, as we said, a 119. sphere, a *nexus* where different *aspects* may be discernible but are impossible to *dissociate*. Its various points can be, so to speak, activated but this leads immediately to the activation of others. They may be distinguishable, especially in *reflection* or partial experiences, but not in their operation. One archetype leads inevitably to another and this interconnectedness, the unitary character of this sphere, is gathered in the most primordial ‘archetype of all archetypes’, ‘archetype of wholeness’ – *self*. Irrespective of the differences in the experiences of archetypes, of primordial causes, of *invisibles*, what emerges behind them is their *unity*, the *transcendent self*.

Thus *self* might seem the final station, the ultimate point beyond which nothing remains and from which everything arises. And, in a sense, this is the case: beyond *self*, there is *nothing*, no more possible *distinctions*, only the *indistinct*. Phenomenologically, it is therefore impossible to say whether something comes from *self* or from *one* because everything, originating from the latter, comes only through the former. We can neither see nor tell whether *self* and Godhead are distinct and if so, what distinguishes the two. The
self, the archetype of wholeness and of all archetypes, so often and naturally symbolised as a mere point, the point in infinity, marks the invisible origin. It is the point above all possible distinctions, the only point present from the very beginning, the trace of birth.

But although we are unable to distinguish whether the primal movements, the original actions emanate from self or from God, we are far from identifying the two. Individual psyche, the level of mineness with all visible feelings, thoughts and experiences can be conflated with God only by a psychological reductionism. Our scheme will claim even further difference, the difference between self and one, established by birth and constituting self as the God-image: the nothingness of a point reflecting the infinity of the line, of the nothingness of one. And then, the differentiation of life and thought, distinguishing the indistinct, conducts a constant dialogue with the one. Everything is but a reflection of one and thus one is always present (1:6.2.2), it is present only through self, and self is one because it is separated only from one. But one is not self. The separation, birth is exactly what establishes the confrontation of self with the ultimate transcendence, and what precludes their coincidence – precludes, that is, until death, which is the only return to the calm indistinctness. Birth does not establish a being which then, somehow, becomes confronted with transcendence. The separation of birth is nothing more than such a confrontation. There is no substance, no essence, nothing more to this fundamental aspect of being self, than being alive, that is, being confronted with the transcendence, distinguishing the indistinct. If the essence of one is that it is, the essence of self is confrontation with that. This separation, and the eternal primacy of one, is what we can understand by one’s transcendence above self, 1: §§127 ff.

2 Above and below

In Book I we followed the ontological founding of lower levels by the higher ones, the subsequent hypostases through which the original virtuality reaches the level of actualisation. This Book describes the reflection of these levels in the reflective experience which begins and proceeds upwards constructing the concepts from the dissociated units, but which is grounded in the ontological hierarchy. Our being is structured into different levels according to the temporal scope and forms of transcendence, and this structure reflects the ontological hierarchy of regions of Being, the generative order of hypostases. The hierarchy is experienced through different signs and their juxtapositions in any concrete experience, as well as by the rest which surrounds every actuality with the traces of its origin.

This section summarises schematically, in 2.1, the differences between various levels described so far in section 1. In 2.2 and 2.3 we then discuss in more detail the co-presence of all levels in every actual experience, addressing thus in a preliminary fashion the concrete unity of existence which will be treated in Book III.

2.1 The hierarchy of levels

120. We have seen different character of signs pertaining to the (contents of) different levels. The modifications on this trace of signification, with their original and reflective aspects,
2.1. The hierarchy of levels

can be summarized schematically as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>original signs</th>
<th>reflective signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>commands, inspirations</td>
<td>that I am not the master: symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>qualities of life, ‘soulful’ feelings</td>
<td>that I am: general thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>moods, impressions, vital feelings</td>
<td>that it is so-and-so: concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>sensations, instantaneous images</td>
<td>that it is: substances, objects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although one is used to oppose, for instance, concepts to moods, we view them as the limiting cases of the signs at the level of actuality. The same applies to the signs of other levels. In each case now, only some common features are addressed which constitute their belonging to the respective level.

The varying element across the levels is the distance separating the actuality of the sign from its content. This distance is marked strongly by the degree to which the contents of the actual experience are mere reactions. At the lowest level, the sign coincides with the immediate object and gives rise to a merely reactive response relative to a particular organ, a point of the body, a nervous nexus. Sensations are pure reactions, the sign, coinciding with the signified, is simply the elicited reaction. (On the reflective end, the objective substances are the basic "givens", and in that their role is analogous to the mere reactions.) The higher we move in the hierarchy, the more clear becomes the distance separating the sign from the signified and, consequently, the less reactive and determined the possible response. Moods can be viewed as purely reactive, in that they are experienced passively, as invading and embracing one. Yet, they are affected by the presence of not-actuality, for instance, by deliberation, which defers the possible reaction and renders it partially indeterminate. The reactive character of moods, like of the concepts, is their subordination to the corresponding complexes. The qualities of life and general thoughts are not reactions to any specific situations. They announce something which can be only accepted, though what the acceptance means in practice is far removed from the quality itself. No particulars of any actual situation are determined by the general thoughts or qualities. At the level of invisibles, the distance becomes virtually infinite and the symbolic commands, having no actual content, act at most as inspirations for one's freedom to find their actual form.

The non-reactive character of signs is proportional to (can be “measured” by) the extent to which they are influenced by our attention and will. The significance of the lowest signs can be to a high degree determined by it. One can lessen the feeling of pain, virtually removing its relevance, by an effort of will to overcome it, for instance, by turning away one's attention and concentrating on something else. And, of course, one can easily produce painful experiences, just like one can arrange circumstances so as to produce pleasant effects for sight, touch or taste. To some extent, one can also arrange the circumstances so that they will produce agreeable or repulsive impressions. One can have some knowledge about kinds of circumstances which result in particular moods. But the higher we move in the hierarchy of levels, the less power one has over the respective signs, not to mention their correlates. One can try to lead one's life so as to give it a specific quality, but this quality is never entirely under our control. One can crave happiness without ever achieving it, while the regrettable qualities of one's life can be impossible for one to change. (One can, of course, always do something, but the eventual effects of one's acts and actions are not determined by one's intentions.) With respect to the deepest aspects of being like holiness, despair, love, one's will has nothing to say. They are gifts which one can neither refuse nor provoke, one can neither cause their presence nor make them disappear. At
most, one can try to invoke them, when absent, or ignore when present. In both cases,
apparently without any immediate consequences but, in the long run, affecting one in the
deepest way. Their *manifestations*, although not dependent on one’s will, require a kind of *openness*,
submissive acceptance. They are *commands* which call one to *reflect* their
presence, to bring them down on earth. The *open* response is not any focusing of the
will on their content, but merely a humble cooperation with these primordial causes in
forming the *visible* world. We should emphasize here the difference between the *presence*
of *invisibles*, and their *manifestations* in actual signs. Their *presence*, the ontological fact,
is independent of our attention and cooperation. But the experienced form of this *presence*,
the character of their *manifestations*, is conditioned by such *spiritual openness*.¹⁴²

121. The *nexus* of sign splits at all lower levels into two complementary aspects of its ‘objective’
content and the ‘subjective’ counterpart. At the highest level of *invisibles*, this split is just
the point of *original confrontation* of existence, or *self*, with the one,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>in experience</th>
<th>objectified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. : origin</td>
<td>the one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. : the world</td>
<td>universe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. : situation</td>
<td>complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. : the sign</td>
<td>object</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we move higher in the hierarchy of levels, we leave actual determinations. We lose
objective categories, the *distinctions* become less rigid and *precise* and do not present us
with any definite *objects* – they become *vague*. But by the same token, they become more
intimate, they penetrate deeper into our being. The intensity of *signs* increases and so does
the depth of satisfaction found in *experiences* – they become *clearer*.¹⁴³ A momentaneous
elation, a simple joy over some particular event which passes in an instant, can be as
natural and authentic as superficial. It does not last, it does not reach the depth of the
person, it is contextual and localised. A peace of *soul*, a joy of *life*, humility of *sainthood*
are *experienced* without any such localisation, independently even from the context where
they may happen to become *manifest*. Entering the *horizon of actuality*, their signs give a
deep, spiritual satisfaction which, reflecting their breadth, is as *clear* as it is undefinable.

*Vagueness* means also that the *clarity* of the *signs* is merely indicative, alluding, as if
inviting, rather than forcefully demanding, imposing its *objective* presence. It is calm and
spreads calmness. As Plotinus says it: “The Good is gentle and kindly and gracious, and
present to anyone when he wishes.”¹⁴⁴ *Vagueness* of the *signs* and *experience* of the higher
levels is just another side of the lack of definite *objective* correlates, And this means that
they are less relative, they are less restricted to particular regions of Being, are able to
embrace more varied *experiences*. Eventually, the *invisibles* are *absolute* – free from any

¹⁴² The spiritual and mystical writings abound in variations over the theme of inner concentration, focused
attention, presence of mind in the face of spiritual life. “Recueillement” is a technical term of spirituality
denoting the action or fact of concentrating one’s thought on spiritual life in detachment from worldly
preoccupations. In so far as it refers to *acts* or *facts*, it can be concerned only with *manifestations*. Much
of ‘spirituality’, especially its degenerate and more hysterical versions, have never managed to reach beyond
the realm of *actual signs*. Book III considers the *spiritual* dimension of existence in more detail.

¹⁴³ Big parts of this subsection, in particular, this and the following paragraphs, are due to Max Scheler,
in particular, M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics...*, M. Scheler, *Anthropological Writings*. One difference
consists in that Scheler addresses almost exclusively the hierarchy of ethical values. Yet, except for the
aspect of temporality and transcendence, the characterisation of the differences between various levels, as
well as the levels themselves, are very similar. A more significant difference concerns the relation between
different levels which here, unlike with Scheler, is not just that of *founding*, cf. 2.2.1.§126 and 2.3.

¹⁴⁴Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:5.12
2.1. The hierarchy of levels

limits of objectivity, not relative to any particular region of Being.

The lack of objective determinations, in turn, means that the higher levels of experience are more constant, remaining unchanged underneath the variations of lower levels. A particular mood can allow a variety of sensations which do not change the mood. A quality of life will remain the same irrespectively of the variation of particular moods and impressions. Conformance to the absolute command will remain unaffected by any variation in particular moods, thoughts and may incarnate into very different qualities of life. And even a failure in conformance leaves the validity of the command unaffected.

Time acquires quite different character depending on the level addressed by reflection. The further down we move in the hierarchy, the more we approach ideal immediacy. In terms of objective time, it means simply shorter time. But objective time offers only an analogy of limited value. It would require to say that the level of invisibles corresponds to infinity of time, which is a rather poor picture. The further down we move, the more we approach the actual experience of objective time, while the further up, the closer we are to the origin of time. The level of invisibles lies above time in the sense that its distinctions are not prone to objectification and hence are not involved into the temporality which is but an aspect of objectivity. It is the level involving only essentially non-actual distinctions, that is, distinctions whose value and structure, if not the content, is not affected by the temporality of experience. As lying above time, they may be called eternal, while the lower levels are only a "moving image of eternity."¹⁴⁵

Trying to understand the world in terms of pure immediacy alone, positing the pure here-and-now as the only reality, would imply that there is no time but only a point-like pure 'now'. Perceiving the world in objective terms of complexes and their relations yields the objective time, succession of ideally dissociated time-points. Perceiving it in terms of mineness or, more generally, in terms of a unity of a living being, yields the ‘time of life’ and, in fact, the ‘lived time’. Bergson’s durée is an excellent and most thoroughly worked out example of this perspective. Less inspiring examples are provided by some phenomenologically grounded existentialistic theories of time as unity of past, now and future centered around the ecstatic actuality of lived experience. Finally, reflection focused exclusively on the level of invisibles leads to denying the reality of time. Unlike in the first case, however, it does not posit the exclusive reality of pure immediacy but, instead, some form of supra-temporal eternity, of which here-and-now is but a manifestation,

| 1. : ‘shortest experienced time’ – ideal now |
| 2. : time of things – finite and limited |
| 3. : time of my life – finite and unlimited |
| 4. : above time – infinite |
| experienced – objectified time |

Although we tend to refer the vague intuition of eternity to the permanence of some ideal limit of atemporal ‘objectivity’, it is only in the actual passage of time that we concretely experience permanence. The sense of permanence is only another side of the sense of change and passage of time and it is naturally acquired and recognised in the experience of getting old. Mundus senescit, “The world has aged”, is not any experience of childhood. That this world ages – and aging, withers – is only a reflection of the fact that so does its experience. This withering of the intensity of the experience, which one tends to ascribe to old people, is but a modification of the level from which old people experience their life. Old age simply experiences time (and the world) differently than the young one. The

¹⁴⁵Timaeus VII
approaching death, the knowledge that most things one was to experience have already happened, make one think of one’s life as a whole, if not quite completed, than in any case as not consisting merely of petty actualities. The significant time span is no longer a mere moment, a brief actuality but years, perhaps, decades. The details wither but they give place to a new quality of experience, which with time becomes itself an experience and which younger people will simply find irrelevant, if they find it at all.\footnote{We are not concerned with the tasteless caricatures trying to the last moment pretend that they are experiencing the world with youthful intensity. Attachment and despair will be addressed in Book III.}

Above all, the changes of the surrounding world notwithstanding, one sees that nothing has really changed, that something fundamental, even if undefinable, remained the same since the earliest days of one’s childhood. One may recognise the same curiosity or indifference, the same feelings of wonder or disenchantment, the same vague motivations and fascinations. The difference is only that one has already seen all that before, that one knows that some things need time and thus single moments, enchanting and gratifying as they may be, are no longer of the highest importance. Shall we also mention the quite so frequent turn towards various forms of religiosity? It is not, however, as one often wants to interpret it, a mere fear of facing the death, or else a mere disillusionment and dissatisfaction with one’s life (possible as these are). On the contrary, it is rather the sign of reaching the level of experience at which one realises the limits of this world, its insufficiency, if not vanity. The 'objectified' permanence gives place to the sense of eternity, not any infinity of time, but a lived eternity, the constant presence of invisibles, perhaps even of the ultimate nothingness, which has been strangely known all one’s life. It is neither necessary to get old to meet such experiences, nor does getting old necessarily imply that one will meet them. But you have seen their signs in old people more than once and more often than in the young ones.

123. The experience of distance involved in the signs of all levels is a reflection of the form of transcendence of its contents with respect to the actuality of reflection. Transcendence is the presence of non-actuality and its traces. At each level below the invisibles it has two aspects: the vertical one, relating directly to the higher level, and the horizontal one which is a reflection of the vertical aspect in terms and categories of the given level. For instance, the more at the level of actuality is but a quantitative ‘more’ of complexes of which reflection ‘knows’, even if only implicitly or potentially. But this more is only a reflection of the horizon of the world and my life, which are as if projected into the objective context where all that is are complexes. The more, rendered as the flux of experience, throws reflection back onto itself and establishes meaning of complexes in relation to one’s life. Similarly, the horizontal aspect at the level of mineness comprises that which is not-mine. This, however, is still a determination in terms of mineness and it merely reflects the vertical transcendence, the presence of invisibles. Schematically:

4. invisible: origin the one

3. mineness: my life not-mine

2. actuality: complex more

1. immediacy: object externality

The horizontal aspect has always a negative character: it is that which is not here-and-now,
not actual, not mine. Using it is the criterion of progress might easily lead into a Hegelian kind of dialectics. But this negative, horizontal aspect reflects only the vertical aspect which is known and experienced not as a mere lack, limit and negation but positively. It penetrates the quality of the experiences at the given level, placing them on the traces which reach to the deeper, that is higher, sources. It is this higher level, the level less dominated by the actuality, which is the source of the mode of transcendence experienced at the lower level. The horizontal aspect reflects the vertical aspect in the multiplicity differentiated according to the categories of the lower level. It refers thus always to the higher, founding element—but only indirectly. Its negative—or quantitative—character signifies, in terms of reflective development, encountering a limit—a limit beyond which the categories applied so far seem to lose their meaning, beyond which there is nothing left except, perhaps, a routine repetition stiffening the soul; a limit showing worthlessness of the things and categories which so far have been experienced as the ultimate. Encounter with the vertical aspect, on the other hand, is an experience of something fundamentally new, something which, at first, appears only as a vague promise, but which with time discloses a deeper meaning, a new way of seeing also earlier experiences. This encounter is a true anamnesis, a re-cognition of something which has been known for a long time, but only dimly and indistinctly, as a vague intuition, an indefinable rest.¹⁴⁷

2.2 As above, so below

We have divided experience into levels and talked as if our life was composed of them, being but a …complex, a totality? But every life is an unrepeatable unity which is not constituted by various parts and elements. We are not four separate souls, but one, for it is not “a diversity of parts—if we have to assert that it has parts—which is distinguished in the soul, but a variety of functions and movements.”¹⁴⁸ All such functions and movements are actual expressions of deeper aspects and, eventually, of the personal unity. Every immanent unity is founded in the transcendence, every actuality draws its vital juices from the non-actual roots. The concrete unity of existence will be discussed in Book III. Now, we will review only the more formal aspects of this unity, namely, the co-presence of all levels and, in particular, the presence of invisibles in actual experiences.

2.2.1. Presence and co-presence

It is common to distinguish various aspects of an act like, for instance, the intentional correlate, the pragmatic aspect, the ethical import. The immediate correlate of an act is its object. But being involved in the context of some action, the act has always also some goal, it has a pragmatic aspect. Whether the goal is immediate or remote does not change its character as the actual objective intended by the act. We have then distinguished between the objective goals and their motivations which, encircling the horizon of possible

¹⁴⁷The vertical aspects of transcendence endow the lower elements with meaning by anchoring them in the higher level. This could be described as what Paul Tillich called “forms of meaning”. If one includes in this term “1. all particularities of individual meanings and 2. of all separate connections of meaning and even 3. the universal connection of meaning, then in relation to the universal connection of meaning 4. the unconditioned meaning may be designated as the import of meaning.” [P. Tillich, What is religion?. I:1.1.a [my numbering] And the “import of meaning is the ground of reality presupposed in all forms of meaning, upon whose constant presence the ultimate meaningfulness, the significance, and the essentiality of every act of meaning rests.” [Ibid. I:Introduction.c.ii].

¹⁴⁸J. S. Erugena, Periphyseon. IV:787B
actions, are themselves counterparts of activities, expressing the lived and, preferably, also the declared values, §74, p. 147. This level is much broader and comprises much more than merely ethical issues but, being the level of mineness, and hence of the relation to not-mine, it certainly embraces also the ethical element. Finally, every act is surrounded by the rest, expressing the present but invisible aspects which do not become thematically actualised, 1.4.1.i. Thus, every immediacy of an act expresses all the levels, carrying their unity in its structure.

125. The higher levels of experience remain more constant and allow a large variation at the lower levels. The increased constancy (in the upward movement) is an experiential counterpart of the co-presence of all levels.

If I am in a good mood, I can accept a lot of small, insignificant annoyances which do not bring me out of this mood. In fact, the mood I am in will influence the way I handle these small situations, it will remain present in all these actual situations. Similarly, a person may remain generally dissatisfied with his life through all his particular experiences; no positive event seems to be able to change this general quality of his life. And again, this quality makes itself felt and efficient, present, in various ways in all concrete situations. Perhaps, by finding negative aspects in any, even most positive experiences, perhaps, by awaiting always the inevitable end of such experiences, that is, awaiting always for a bitter and unwelcome continuation. It would be too strong to say that this quality determines the character of all concrete experiences. But it casts its shadow over them, it moulds them in a specific way so that they seem to conform to the general scheme of things which pollutes all actual experiences.

But one should be careful with the criterion of constancy when applied to the highest level. For instance, the quality of life of St. Francis, his amiability and goodness seem to have accompanied him from the very childhood all his life, while with respect to his sainthood, the dream on the way to the Fourth Crusade marks a break and begins a new chapter. St. Paul, before and after the vision on the way to Damascus, was the same person and many qualities (zeal, dedication, resentment, je ne sais quoi) where present in his life before as much as after the conversion. The constancy of invisibles is different from the possible constancy (and transience) of their manifestations. It is not relative to one's life but consists in transcending the temporal dimension and the categories of mineness. There is nothing like 'my sainthood' or 'your sainthood', and sainthood remains sainthood whether it is manifested or not, or whether it is manifested in one person or in another. And yet, the invisibles are present in any experience as its deepest aspects, the invisible personal traits, the source which does not create the specific details of actual situation but merely lends it an aura and puts a personal signature underneath. Manifestations are only particularly intense and visible signs of this presence. The constancy of invisibles is independent from any personal and actual manifestations – it is their eternal validity.

126. Now, higher levels do not create the specific contents of the lower ones nor vice versa. Each level, determined by its specific tension between actuality and non-actuality, has its own characteristic contents and ways of their presentation. The invisibles do not determine one's life. The quality of one's life does not determine the actual situations one gets involved in. The actual moods and impressions do not determine any particular sensations. The full range of lower phenomena can be experienced along with any configuration of the higher aspects. In short, the higher aspects of experience do not found the contents of the lower ones, in the technical sense of phenomenological founding (i.e., as necessary conditions).

But the higher aspects influence crucially the lower ones, they sink in and penetrate
whatever qualities may emerge at the lower levels. An annoyance is an annoyance but it changes its character when encountered in a good or in a bad mood. A joy or sadness of a pessimist is different from the respective feelings of an optimist. The drive and energy of a saint are different from the similar qualities of a person nourished by negation, hatred or bitterness. A joyful feeling of a person who is generally dissatisfied with life will still be joyful. Yet, this joy will be limited to the level of actuality. It will be, so to speak, ‘blocked’ if it ‘tries’ to penetrate deeper into the personal being; ‘blocked’ by a remainder of its transiency, by painful memories, or simply by the general dissatisfaction with life. It won’t be able to spread over the totality of the personal being, but will remain localised. You might have, for instance, heard the difference between a short, nervous, almost involuntary laughter which seems to be disturbed by the immediate bad conscience, as if there was no real reason to laugh and one did it only because one could not resist it, and, on the other hand, a cordial, warm, full-blooded laughter which seems to flow from the very bottom of the heart, in which the laughing face is but an expression of the soul which embraces the whole world with its hearty laughter. In the former case, the actual level is not in conformance with the higher level of one’s being and the inability for a hearty laughter modifies the actual one. It is still laughter, over the same funny thing, but it testifies to another personal involvement than the latter.

This penetration of lower levels by the higher ones in an actual experience reminds a bit of the founding relation. But it is not founding, in any case not founding of the actual contents, because the actuality of a given lower content, of laughter or joy, is not conditioned by the presence of any particular higher aspect - the former is only modified by the latter. This modification, this rest and aura which the higher elements extend to the lower, witness to the unity of an experience involving all levels.

An immediate experience is obviously involved in the context of the actual situation. As phenomenologists show, especially with respect to perceptions, the actual contents are surrounded by other, as they say, mitgegeben (co-present) aspects which do not fall within the focus of consciousness but which, nevertheless, are present. Focusing the sight on the entry door of a house, one still sees, albeit only subconsciously, only in the corner of one’s eye, the windows immediately to the left and right of the door. Furthermore, although one sees only the front of the house, its sides are also included, mitgegeben, in the actual phenomenon. The question now is where to stop such inclusions. One knows that behind the house there is a park. It does not seem to be given, but is it mitgegeben too, or not? And in the park, there is a lake, behind which there is...It seems implausible to assume that all this is mitgegeben, for then all things ever experienced, an unlimited if not infinite number of them, would belong to every phenomenon. There is the horizon of actuality, which seems to circumscribe the scope of Mitgegebenheit. In I:4.3.1, §§64 ff, we had the problem with the phenomenology of time, which did not account for the continuity across the limit of actuality towards the remote past. Likewise, here we encounter similar phenomenological break in which what is mitgegeben dissolves in the emptiness surrounding the horizon of actuality. And as in the case of time, so also here, there is a distinction but no sharp border because we have to do with a continuity of experience.

Mitgegebenheit of the objective (or, if one prefers, noematic) contents has its limit which is the limit of the horizon of actuality. Somewhere, at the end of the front wall, behind the house, behind the lake, behind the park, objects and complexes cease to be mitgegeben, there are no more objects and complexes which gradually disappear behind the limits of the actual phenomenon. Of course, it is enough to redirect one’s attention to bring in other,
new or expected objects and connect them to the ones actual at the moment, but we are now considering an abstract, isolated actuality of an experience, so let us not stroll, not move sight around. What is mitgegeben behind this line are no more objects but moods, impressions, feelings, intuitions, qualities. Mitgegebenheit becomes eventually presence of invisibles. Moods, feelings, qualities, etc. are the concrete forms under which the potential infinity (of things, of experiences, of Lebenswelt) is present in every experience. If we were to use the objectivistic way of speaking, we might say: they do not bring in any objects but only unified signs which comprise the overwhelming number of possible distinctions within the limits of the horizon of actuality; although they do not make any more objects actual, they make them present, by providing actual signs which are just multiplicities of objects comprised in unified impressions, feelings, intuitions, qualities. But the objectivistic way of speaking loses its adequacy as behind the line of moods and qualities, behind the line where even the actual feelings become blurred and indistinct, there are still invisibles, the inspirations which oversee the whole actual situation. We can illustrate it on our figure from §1, p.98. The not-actual points on the circle (above the line of actuality) are all reflections of the ‘objective’ points from the line. They belong to the actual experience but only in the form of the signs on the circle. And the closer to the sphere of invisibles and the pole of the circle, the denser condensation of these images, with the pole reflecting the infinity of the line. This density of the images, the density of the increasing multitude of remote points of the line comprised into decreasing segments of the circle, corresponds thus not only to the inseparability of invisibles but also to the unobjectifiable content of the signs of the higher levels present in the actual experience.

128. The concrete, invisible presence seems to underlie the intensity with which Merleau-Ponty investigates the structure of sensibility. Although we might disagree with the almost exclusive focus on sensibility, in his case it reflects only the intuition of presence of the whole hierarchy of Being in every immediate experience. Let us quote a longer passage which describes this involvement of immediacy in the deeper and eventually invisible texture of experience. “Visible actuality is not in time and space nor, of course, beyond them, for there is nothing in front of it, after it nor around it, which might compete with its visibility. And yet it is not alone, it is not everything. Precisely: it occludes a further view, that is, both time and space extend around it and are behind it, hiding, in depth. In this way visible can fill or embrace me only because I who see it, do not see it from the depth of nothingness, but from its own interior, and seeing it I am also seen. Weight, density, content of every colour, every sound, every tangible tissue, of actuality and of the very world come from that that the one who receives them feels as if he emerged from them through a kind of spiral or splitting movement, being originary homogeneous with them, from that he is a self-directed sensibility which, in turn, is in his eyes as if doubling and unfolding of his bodily tissue. Space and time of things are splinters of his own, of his spatiality and temporality, and not any multiplicity of units separated synchronically and diachronically; it is a relief combined from that which is simultaneous and that which follows after itself, spatial and temporal mash in which, on the way of differentiation, units emerge. Things are now not in themselves, on their place and time, here, there, now, sometime; they exist only on the border of this spatial and temporal radiation emanating mysteriously from my sensibility. Their content is not the content of a pure object observed by the mind from a distance; I experience it from inside, as I am among the things, and they communicate through me as a feeling thing. Actuality, visibility – as the veil of memories for the psychoanalysts – has for me an absolute valor only because of its hidden, unlimited content of past, future,
and that which is beyond it and which it announces but also hides."\textsuperscript{149}

Just like we have equated transcendence with the non-actuality, we can equate immanence with pure actuality. Immanence, the actuality of the given content, arises at the limit of the process of differentiation, as the final stage of encircling the 'hidden, unlimited content' within the horizon of actuality. Although this allows reflection to oppose it to the transcendence, the latter does not disappear in the process of actualisation. It penetrates the actuality with all the levels lying above it. Presence is an expression of this insoluble involvement of immanence into transcendence.

The eventual transcendence, the origin, is never accessible to the categories of immanence, is neither this nor that, is never visible and yet, is always most deeply present. Self is, after all, its trace, the trace of birth, and the eventual terminus of this trace is the actual subject. All levels are present in every actual experience, and the invisibility of the origin is what remains the same across all experiences and their temporality. Using the categories of reflective oppositions, the actual is the opposite to, and hence incommensurable with the non-actual. But, in fact, the most transcendent, the ultimately invisible is that which penetrates all visibility, which is most intimately, even if not visibly, present, and which therefore is the most immanent. The original rest remains present throughout the life, in every actual situation, but only as the rest. It cannot be grasped, but it gives taste – the taste of a gift – to every actual appearance.

The father said: "Place this salt in water, and come to me tomorrow morning."

The son did as he was told.

Next morning the father said, "Bring me the salt which you put in the water."

The son looked for it, but could not find it; for the salt, of course, had dissolved.

The father said, "Taste some water from the surface of the vessel. How is it?"

"Salty."

"Taste some from the middle. How is it?"

"Salty."

"Taste some from the bottom. How is it?"

"Salty."

\textbf{2.2.2. Traces}

We have distinguished invisible presence from its actual manifestations. In the most general, but also most concrete sense, every actuality is a manifestation of the origin, "everything that is understood and sensed is nothing else but the apparition of what is not apparent, the manifestation of the hidden, [...] the materialisation of the spiritual, the visibility of the invisible,"\textsuperscript{151} the distinction of the indistinct. The invisibles might be thought as simply 'being there', in some sphere raised above this world and merely accompanying it as a higher double, unconnected to and unaffected by it. But this would be only an abstract, conceptual construction. The invisibles not only are but are present and their presence is thoroughly concrete. They not only sway somewhere in perfect independence and self-sufficiency, but penetrate the whole reality from its highest to its lowest level. The dissociation of higher nexus into more actual elements proceeds only gradually and every actual distinction carries the character of the nexus from which it arose, as the actual

\textsuperscript{149}M. Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Visible and Invisible}. Inquiry and intuition. p.120-121

\textsuperscript{150}Chandogya Upanishad [after A. Huxley, \textit{The Perennial Philosophy}. p.4]

\textsuperscript{151}J. S. Eringena, \textit{Periphanes}. III:633A, 678C
sign terminating a continuous trace. Such traces connect not only the adjacent levels but traverse their whole hierarchy. We have, for instance, seen in Book I how the immediate objectivity arises on the trace passing through actuality, signification and, eventually, the event of confrontation. Or else, how the objective time and space arise from the nexus of spatio-temporality which leads back to (that is, emerges from) the chaotic simultaneity of distinctions following the original separation, etc. In the first part of this Book, we have seen the traces of subject, object, sign and transcendence. Every actuality is a sign – primarily, not of another actuality but of the nexus from which it arose. Following such nexuses – from any actual thing or property all the way back to its ultimate origin – marks the trace of its existential history and of its meaning. Although such a backtracking can, in principle, stop anywhere, to grasp the entire meaning of any actuality, its trace should be followed all the way to the origin where it meets traces of all other actualities. We give now two more examples of traces for notions of identity and truth.

2.2.2.i. Identity

We have seen the variations of the identity notion through the preceding sections: in the idealization of immediacy as the residual, self-identical substances, in constitution of things as limits of distinctions, in the posited totalities of the world and myself, in the unity of self. These variations reflect different aspects encountered on the trace of identity, different resting-places on a continuous line passing through all the levels.

Leaving and then returning to a room, I re-cognise the cup on the table as the same which was there a while ago. The cup here-and-now points to the one there-and-then. True, it points in a very specific way making the identification of the two immediate, but it does point nevertheless, that is, it is now a sign as a sign, a sign whose non-identity with – as the possible difference from – the signified is given along with the identity of the two. The difference is the difference of the actuality here-and-now and the actuality there-and-then. Identity connects the two, stretching across the time interval which separates them. An experience of identity arises as an instance of a repetition which, in turn, seems to presuppose memory. So we will start with a few remarks on that. Then, still in a preliminary fashion, we will comment briefly on the role of language in establishing identities. After this introduction, we will discuss various forms of identity.

Memory

We forget many things. But what does it mean? Do they simply disappear, as if never happened? Hardly. What we usually mean by memory concerns particular facts and actual events which can be fetched with a satisfactory exactitude of detail. This ability varies greatly for it happens often that the precise things and pictures get dissolved in subconscsousness and fetching them back requires a laborious process, as it may happen in psychoanalysis. But not even Freudians would assume the possibility of a total recall of everything that ever happened. Some things just get lost, not in the subconsciousness from which they might be restored in an apparently unchanged form, but in a complete virtuality. They are not kept ‘the way they were experienced’ but get compressed, mingled with other contents losing their rigidity and precision – losing their identity.

What happens to the things which disappeared from the actual consciousness? Having once learned the Pythagorean theorem, one can be able to reconstruct its formulation, perhaps even the proof, and use it when the need arises, even after significant time. And even if one
forgot many details, it is much easier to reenact them anew than it was to organize them when learning the theorem for the first time. They did not disappear completely, they only as if waned away, but are still – somewhere, somewhat – around. In spite of the difference, the two processes, of learning and recollecting, or of thinking and remembering, share a fundamental characteristic. Learning the theorem, one can work intensely setting its various elements explicitly before one’s eyes, trying to connect them, deduce consequences. This is the most active, attentive thinking. When, after several trials, one gets stuck unable to reach the desired solution, the best thing to do can be to forget the whole problem for a while. To literally forget it, erase it from the horizon of conscious attention. It happens almost typically that the solution, or a new creative suggestion, will just appear, as if by its own force, after some time (cf. 1.4.2.i). ‘Thinking’ is obviously going on in the background while one is not thinking actively and deliberately. What we call “a thought” is, more often than not, only an actual result of such a hidden process, a precise, visible formulation.\footnote{Just like ‘nows’ mark only particular peaks of intensity in the flow of time, I:4.3.1§68, so ‘thoughts’ are like visible ‘substantive parts’ marking the rest-places between the ‘transitive parts’ of the continuous – subconscious rather than conscious – stream of ‘thinking’.
} It should not be all too daring to propose that such a subconscious ‘thinking’ works not only with materials which one could, if one wanted to, bring to actual attention but also with contents similar to those which started to wane away but did not quite disappear from the memory. In fact, the creative solution one obtains in this way involves often exactly such elements which were not available to immediate introspection. We might say, ‘thinking’ reaches here into deeper layers of memory than does the active, attentively controlled thinking.

To suggest the character of this deeper layer, we can borrow some observations from Wittgenstein. “The image [Vorstellung] of pain is not a picture [Bild] and this image is not replaceable in the language-game by anything we should call a picture. [...] An image is not a picture, but a picture may correspond to it.”\footnote{L. Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical Investigations}. I:300-301.} What do you remember remembering, say, Eiffel Tower? Wittgenstein would ask: try to describe it! Try to describe what you see (with your closed eyes) recollecting Eiffel Tower. You end up describing what you would draw if you were asked to, you end up describing a ‘picture’. But you do not see this ‘picture’. With your eyes closed, trying to recall Eiffel Tower, you are trying to actualise it as a ‘picture’. But what are you trying to actualise? What is ‘there’ to be actualised? While ‘picture’ is what can be given as an immediate object, what can be re-produced and re-presented, so ‘image’ corresponds to a more virtual element which simply does not have any unique representation, it only has many different actualisations. Recalling Eiffel Tower you can draw it in various ways, you can describe it with various words and pictures. “The image must be more like its object than any picture. [...] it is essential to the image that it is the image of this and nothing else.” Thus one might come to regard the image as a super-likeness.”\footnote{Ibid. I:389. Let us also point out the close connection between ‘image’ and ‘aspect’: “The concept of an aspect is akin to the concept of an image. In other words: the concept ‘I am now seeing it as...’ is akin to ‘I am now having this image’.” [Ibid. II:x] Different as these concepts may be in Wittgenstein, both are closely related to our nexus and aspect. Discerning, eventually, ‘words of thought’ as only a germ in our mind, Wittgenstein concludes: “If God had looked into our minds he would not have been able to see there whom we were speaking of.” [Ibid. II:x] What is there ‘in our minds’ seems more like virtual nexuses than like any visible, precise pictures.
} Suggesting that ‘image’ is virtuality of a ‘picture’ (of many ‘pictures’) we have stretched its meaning a bit further.\footnote{Primarily, in that Wittgenstein seems to see it only in the context of (sentences describing) actual
different from understanding/knowing pain: we have some (yes, a bit mysterious) 'image' which can only be actualised in various 'pictures'. To recognise pain of a burning moth or wriggling fly, you have to see them as actual 'pictures' of a vague 'image': pain. Just like to recognise a particular drawing you have to see it as an actualisation of the 'image' of Eiffel Tower, and like to use a theorem in the actual situation you have to find the 'way it applies', you have to subsume the situation under the generality of the theorem. Even if the last case is simply a subsumption of a particular instance under a general rule, it can be seen as related to the other cases where a particular 'picture' illustrates or actualises an 'image'. This 'image' is no longer any actual representation but a more vague nexus. It no longer has a dissociated existence of an actual object, but is rooted in the deeper layers of virtuality. The difficulty with remembering is to reproduce an actual 'picture' from this virtual nexus, is to recall anew various aspects of the understood theorem. 'The difficulty is not that I doubt whether I really imagined [Eiffel Tower, pain or] anything red. But it is this: that we should be able, just like that, to point out or describe the colour that we have imagined, that the projection of the image into reality presents no difficulty at all.'

Bringing things back into actual recollection, we dissociate them from the element where they are not networked as distinct entities but are enmeshed in virtual nexuses. We actualise them, give them their identity anew, convert a vague 'image' into a definite 'picture'. This process is not different from attentive thinking which brings a vague intuition into the actuality of a precise thought.

Strong connections of memory and intelligence were emphasized by many following Piaget's claim that 'the development of memory with age is the history of gradual organisations closely dependent on the structuring activities of intelligence.' But it is not only one way dependence of memory on intelligence. Understanding organises the world integrating particular elements into appropriate contexts; integrating, that is, making them available in appropriate situations for particular purposes. Likewise memory organises the world including ('images' of the) remembered things into deeper, more virtual layers of our being, from which they can be fetched as actual 'pictures'. The 'image'-like character of a remembered thing is just like the 'image'-like character of an understood theorem. It marks the involvement in a more virtual nexus. An effect of this involvement, of an element becoming an integral part of a whole, is a partial dissolution of its identity - no longer a precise 'picture', an actual statement, but a vague 'image', a nexus. This dissolution is but an aspect of the integration. The deeper, more virtual nexus, the less dissociation of its aspects and the wider the scope of its possible actualisations. In the same way, the deeper, more integrated understanding, the wider the scope of its possible applications and connections with apparently unrelated elements.

Most people would probably object that memory is a mere recording machine. It involves a successive and constant re-organisation, "active and selective structuring." It imagining, so that "[s]eeing an aspect and imagining are subject to the will." Even if it (always) were so, it still would not imply that also forming the 'aspects' and 'images' is voluntary activity. The relation of subsumption under a general rule, of instantiation is no less mysterious than that of exemplification or actualisation. "This schematism [...] is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us discover." [I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. The schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding: A141/B181]


We can recall the increasing 'density' of the images close to the pole, as the projected points of the line lie further and further away from the circle - I.6.1.§117.

J. Piaget, Memory and Intelligence. p.378. By the way, this fundamental point of active, that is,
is not such a machine because (perhaps with the exception of photographic memory) it actively organises the material. But few would probably agree that this active organisation is of a very similar character to that effected by understanding. The more one is forced to remember, the greater the need for formation of, eventually, only subconscious structures, nexuses organising the material into more and more vague units. All our adult "memories, no matter how trivial, isolable, or individualised, involve a host of spatial, temporal, causal, and other relations, and a whole hierarchy of planes of reality." The crucial phrase here is "other relations", for they are not only of the visible kind as those listed explicitly. They are also deeper and more intimate, dissolving the 'images' in the more virtual nexuses. This makes explication of the precise structure of memory such a precarious task.

Redressing Freud's analysis of the Wolf-man dream in terms of Piaget's theory, Casey arrives at the following schema:

\[
\cdots \left( (M_0 \nsuccsim M_1) \nsuccsim M_2 \nsuccsim M_3 \nsuccsim \ldots \right) \nsuccsim M_r
\]

\(M_0\) is the original event and the following \(M_r\)'s the successive memories (or other influencing experiences) of it until the present recollection \(M_r\). The arrows \(\nsuccsim\) at each stage represent the interaction and mutual influence of the involved elements. You can not remove your past – you can only change it.\textsuperscript{161}

Our central point is that an analogous picture can be applied also to events and things which we do not remember. They get surrounded and modified by other events and experiences, conscious or not, remembered or not, and gradually lose their identity retreating further and further into the sphere of virtuality. "As the time-object withdraws into the past, it shrinks and therewith becomes dim."\textsuperscript{162} This dimness is exactly dissolution of its identity in the virtual unity. At the present moment, \(M_r\) is confronted with the whole past which is not given as a collection of bits and pieces glued together, but as a virtual unity of the past. It involves things we remember, and can actualise, as well as those we do not, and which we can not. Some might have been lost forever for actual recollection, yet they remain present, albeit transformed beyond possible recognition, dissolved and de-identified. The

autonomous and unconditioned structuring by memory, is consistently ignored by all pedagogy which, assuming its artificial dissociation from thinking, tries to convince pupils about purposefulness of every single step and to develop 'understanding' before, or even instead of 'memory', by releasing them from the boring memorization drill. Memorization develops deeper, more virtual and concrete, structures of organising experience than mere smartness (if one prefers, intelligence) developed by puzzle-solving and tested in IQ questionaries.

\textsuperscript{160}\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{161}}ibid. p.131

\textsuperscript{161}E. S. Casey, Piaget and Freud on Childhood Memory. This picture is to some extent consistent with the memory built as a retentional continuum in which the current retention of the previous phase retains also the retention of this previous phase, which itself contains retention of its predecessor, and so on. The crucial difference (besides the fact that we are not concerned exclusively with consciousness) is that here it is not a mere accumulation of the past phases, but that each stage may influence both its successor and its predecessor. Also this observation goes back at least to the phenomenologists around Husserl. For instance: "every experience of our past remains unready with respect to value and undetermined with respect to meaning, as long as not all of its inherent effectualities have been released. Only in the totality of the whole life, when we have died, the experience will become an unchangeable fact with ready meaning, like the past natural events are from the very start." [M. Scheler, Repentance and Rebirth. p.34]

\textsuperscript{162}E. Husserl, Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time. A:1.2 §9.
picture is not exactly like the one above but rather something like:

\[ (\ldots (\left( \bullet \Rightarrow M_1 \right) \Rightarrow M_2) \Rightarrow M_3) \Rightarrow \ldots ) \Rightarrow M_r \]

This picture is but another form of our figure from I.§117, p.75. It represents the general relation between the actual situation, \( M_r \), and the deeper layers of our being. Consequently, it represents also aspects common to all processes mentioned above: of understanding, of learning, of remembering and of forgetting. (Some differences between them will be addressed in §135.)

134. Well known examples – of integration of the actual facts and observations into the totality of our experience – concern learning almost anything, in particular, some skills like riding a bicycle. The scattered pieces of advice from the instructor, the failed attempts to master one particular movement at a time, the intense consciousness trying to organise all the bits in proper sequences and alliances of movements – all that continues until one ‘gets it’. And although we tend to focus on the exact moment when we ‘get it’ for the first time, it is not the moment which is important but the fact that all the labourious details, all the minute successes and failures recede into the background of almost unconscious automatism. The emerging consistency of the totality is a qualitative change in relation to the tiny details which led to this emergence. The moment of ‘getting it’ represents the formation of a new virtual unit, which ‘falls in place’, gets integrated with the totality of other elements. The examples are not, of course, limited to acquiring motoric skills. Learning to solve differential equations has exactly the same structure of painful details receding gradually into the background of the acquired skill.

These examples illustrate only cases where one is still able to voluntarily actualise the acquired skill. But transition into deeper virtuality, beyond the horizon of will and actuality, happens in the same process which only proceeds further.

As we described in the opening sections of Book I, the lack of memories from the earliest days of our existence is not due to the lack of memory but of anything specific to remember. In the beginning we do not collect memories of any actual things or events, but only some virtual distinctions whose traces only later get differentiated into more precise forms. These primal distinctions, the primordial causes, may, too, be called “memories”, albeit only in our generous sense of the word. For we know that experiences, influencing later life, accumulate from the very birth, although we never know what precisely is being experienced nor how exactly it will influence the future.

A more specific example may be that of imperfect memories, memories which lost not only some of the original details but all of them. Proust describes the cases when some actual element triggers the search for its past counterpart which search, however, fails. “[...] I sensed the smell of the cherries on the table and nothing else. [...] I could not, however, choose anything from the confused, known and forgotten impressions; eventually, after a short while, I ceased seeing anything and my memory for ever immersed itself in sleep.”\(^\text{163}\) One might say: the smell triggers a recollection which either became completely unrecognisable, or at least is so in the current moment; (an event of) memory without anything remembered.\(^\text{164}\)

\(^{163}\)M. Proust, Against Sainte-Beuve. Introduction
\(^{164}\)A similar, common example: “I know this person, I am sure I know him but ... who is he? Where did I
2.2. As above, so below

In many situations, what remains are not any specific details but only vague feelings of the atmosphere, of the character of the situation, of the general impression which was actual then or, perhaps, which is so only now and in some way becomes ‘connected’ to the original experience. Particular things may, as with Proust, play a role but only auxiliary one, of a trigger. Memories, according to Proust, do not live in things, they are only imprisoned there. Memories, “every hour of our life, once it has passed into the past, incarnates into some material object and remains hidden there, imprisoned until we meet it on our way.”

This ‘imprisonment’ should be taken as a metaphor of the potential to trigger a recollection: the actual things are needed only to awake the memories from their sleep, to awake the mind from its sleep in mere actuality devoid the enlivening presence of memories. Particular things, and their remembrance, are only expressions of the true life of memories; “voluntary memory, the memory of intelligence and eyes reproduces the past only as an imperfect picture, which resembles the original as much as the pictures of bad painters resemble spring.”

“Compared to this past which is an intimate part of ourselves, the truths of intelligence seem little real.”

Such ‘emotional memory’, which is an intimate part of ourselves, is more frequent than we commonly admit. For in actual terms what counts is the ‘voluntary memory’, are the precise details which we are able to recount and recollect in the actual context, not any ‘subjective’ feelings. Yet, much of the childhood memories consist often of exactly such moods and impressions. Reading a book for the second time after 10 years, only some details will re-emerge from memory as you encounter them again. Many of them you simply do not remember. Yet, you will quickly re-recognise the general impression the book made on you, you will recognise the ‘image’ by means of a few ‘pictures’. Only some accidental actual element is needed: to hear the sound of a dropped tea-spoon to recall Combray and the childhood home, to stumble over the uneven pavement in front of the palace of the Guermantes to recall the walk in Venice. The recollections need not come back in all details but only with the details sufficient to establish the connection between the actual sign (‘picture’) and the virtual ‘image’, the atmosphere and mood without which the memories would remain dissociated and lifeless chips.

According to §133, the passage of actual experiences into memory is the same process as forgetting these experiences. This may seem to draw the analogy a bit too far, so we should clarify some differences.

What makes these processes similar is well visible in the last examples of ‘emotional memory’. It is the contribution of all actualities to the formation of nexuses which form the deeper, more concrete layers of one’s being. Such a contribution finds place even if they are actually forgotten or remembered only imperfectly. ‘Voluntary memory’, the memory of intelligence, is only the lowest layer of memory, enabling one to recollect the past events with the precision of reflective objectivity. It is this layer which one typically means by “memory”. Its specificity is just the character of the expected memories, their precise, objective form.

“A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe his master will come

meets him?” Recognition of the remembered ‘image’ precedes here the actual, conscious remembering. The person emerges from the surrounding (virtual background) already marked with the sign of his identity (the ‘image’ is like a super-likeness of its object), even though consciousness still needs to decipher the tokens of this identity, to fetch the detailed ‘pictures’.

165Ibid.
166M. Proust in a letter to René Blum.
167M. Proust, Against Sainte-Beuve. Introduction
the day after tomorrow? – And what can he not do here? – How do I do it? – How am I supposed to answer this?//Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of a language. That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life.”168 Recall two kinds of time (consciousness) from I:3.1.i.§§4.ff: the phenomenal time of actual now, with its retentions and pretentions vs. the objective time of ‘inauthentic consciousness of time, of remote past’. Expecting somebody’s arrival the day after tomorrow (or next year) presupposes consciousness of objective time, simply because having at all the idea of ‘next year’ requires such consciousness. We could say: if dog does not expect his master to arrive next week, this happens for the same reasons for which he does not wonder how the ball he is playing with feels in the hand of his master nor, for that matter, where this very ball was made.169 We do not imagine dogs to relate to the possible difference between this very ball and another though indistinguishable one, that is, to have consciousness of objectivity. But a dog can await and expect its master’s arrival, and long for him the more, the longer is his absence. For dogs, too, live in the temporality with its past and future. They live in the same time as we do and are aware of it – only this awareness does not reach the crispness of objective dissociations.

Reflective signs as signs, constituting the foundation of language, enter likewise into the nexus of objectivity. Serving as important tools of ‘freezing’ some (limits of) distinctions (I:5:1), they serve likewise as tools of ‘voluntary memory’ or, as we also could say, objective memory. We may have vivid ‘emotional’ recollections of some particularly significant events from our remote past. But for the most, what happened to us five years ago is not remembered ‘in flesh’ but merely as abstract descriptions. One can say: “Five years ago I was in Prague, I walked past Malostranské náměstí almost every day, I ate dinner several times at this place,” etc., but all these events are recalled as merely objective facts which would feel and could be described the same way if one were relating events from a movie or sketching an imaginary story one planned to write. Of course, one is relating one’s own past and it is still some virtual ‘image’ which underlies these recollective descriptions. So, in principle, one might manage that also without objective time? But the role of objective time, and words, is quite crucial. Objective time allows us to refer to such a remote event which has been ‘emotionally’ forgotten, just like single objects or situations trigger, according to Proust, vivid ‘emotional’ memories. One asks: “What did you do in the summer for five years ago?” Without objective time such a question would not make any sense. Events in our life do not carry any inherent time stamp on them. One can remember meeting somebody and have no idea if it was two, three or five years ago. One can remember two distinct events and be unable to say which happened before which. One only knows that they happened some time in the past. Experiences become mutually

168L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. II:i
169Promising is another good example of this crossing point, of actuality lying at the point where the foundation in the deeper unity across time meets the ‘frozen’ objectivity. It is will, determination, patience which are capable of stretching the influences of actuality to remote future. They all presuppose objective time but also they, so to speak, domesticate it, make it existentially relevant. Opposing the autonomous man with independent will to a mere moralistic follower of custom, Nietzsche observes how the unity in the objective time is internalised and existentially grounded in the former and only externally accepted by the latter: “the sovereign individual who resembles nothing except himself and who again is freed from the morality of custom […] is] the man possessed of a personal, independent, and long-lasting will and who is competent to make promises.” [F. Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals. II:3] The competence to make promises, unlike the mere customary ability to make them, is an expression of the lived unity, of the lived understanding that I am one person, immersed in but also independent from the flow of objective time. Evading promises one had made amounts to estranging oneself from one’s past which, eventually, means alienating oneself from oneself.
related and precisely organised along the line of *objective* time. Without it they would only interlock in a *virtual* mesh, losing their identities and hence disappearing for future, *objective* recollections. Even if we could, in some unclear and unspecified sense, remember our whole life while living at some pre-*reflective* and pre-*objective* level, we would have no means to fetch these ‘memories’ and *actualise* them. And what is a memory which can not be recalled? The events would simply keep dissolving in the *virtuality* of our past, forming us, as experiences form also the character of a dog. But the whole process would remain unreflected and hidden in the same *virtuality* which *found* it. It would remain *invisible*.

Just like *actuality* of *reflection* is *found* in the hierarchy of higher *aspects*, so also the *reflective*, ‘voluntary’ memory has its deeper presuppositions. The first is that it is needed at all. And it is because life and world are not a whole given in the unity of one *act* but are split into diversity of separate *actualities*. The need for the *objective* memory arises with the *dissociating* activity of *reflection* and is the stronger, the more *precisely* *dissociated* become the contents of our attention. (It is not unusual that extraordinary intelligence is accompanied by the excellent memory, even if this excellence is often limited exclusively to the memory of the things occupying the intelligence.)

The second presupposition is that it is what actually takes place, that one *actually remembers the same*. This repetition as recurrence requires the possibility of *re-cogising* identity of the same across time. As we suggested discussing time in I:§§70 ff, and as we will elaborate below, this is possible because new things and *experiences* are not ‘added’ to any given collection but, like everything else, emerge as results of differentiation from the *indistinct origin*. More specifically, such repetitions express the *recognitions* which are not necessarily limited to pure *horizon of actuality*. They arise from *virtual nexuses* whose *unity* precedes *dissociation* of *actualities*. Memory, as *reflective re-cognition*, is an *experience of a recognition* transcending the *horizon of actuality*.

And thus we arrive at the most fundamental, even if entirely trivial, presupposition: memory can only appertain to a being whose unity stretches across time, whose unity is not an *immediate* self-identity limited to pure *immediacy* but *transcends* its horizon. “All beings confessedly continue the same, during the whole time of their existence. [...] All these successive actions, enjoyments, and sufferings, are actions, enjoyments and sufferings, of the same living being. And they are so, prior to all consideration of its remembering and forgetting [...]”\(^{170}\) Memory does not establish identity nor is it constitutive for personal unity – at most, it can help establishing the sense, the feeling of it. Losing memory, one does not necessarily lose oneself, and even without remembering anything of one’s past one can still know *that* one had a past. It does not establish any identity but, on the contrary, presupposes it. It is not, for this reason, a mere ontic accident or an epistemological device. It is one of the fundamental aspects disclosing in *actual experiences* the *foundation* of this *actuality* in the temporal continuity and, in the last instance, in the trans-phenomenal *unity of existence*.

**Language**

Language provides the collection of common, solidified *distinctions*, whose usefulness and *practicability* is not based exclusively on their *precision* but often, on the contrary, on their roughness. If I cut off the branches, what is left is a ‘trunk’ and no longer a ‘tree’; if I cut the whole ‘trunk’, what is left is only a ‘stump’. But, of course, there is no *precise* measure of

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how low the stump must be to be a ‘stump’ and not a ‘trunk’. Growing up into a language which has only one word for, say, both “pain” and “suffering”, one would tend to consider the two as identical and, in any case, reflective establishment of the distinction would probably take much longer time and might even appear as a deep discovery. If eighteen or so Hebrew words for different shades of purity get translated by the same Greek word “katharos”, then the meaning of the Old Testament must undergo some, hopefully only slight, changes.

The linguistic relativity of identities and their systems can be illustrated by some differences between languages.

Slavic languages provide almost unlimited possibilities for modifying the nouns by means of suffixes — not only to form chains of diminutives, but also to indicate features and impressions of things, as if stretching and comprising the stem, which in many other languages would require unbearable series of adjectives. Most nouns can be turned, or dissolved, by such means into adjectives. The ontology, the collection of identities, seems to dissolve in a landscape of grades, variations and qualities without any definite and final substances. In Germanic languages, the opposite operation is much more frequent and standardised: one forms nouns from adjectives (the suffix -ness in English, -heit in German). This suggests a more substance-oriented ontology. Moreover, a language like German, where the etymological connections between words are still very tight, but variations less flexible, where the formation of compound words (in particular, of nouns, practically absent in Slavic languages) seems to reflect the structure of entities, will suggest ontology of structured hierarchies and systematic relations of basic entities, and by the same token, emphasize the division between the natural and the rational, between the given and the constructed. A language like English, an enormous collection of words from multilingual sources, which provide great flexibility, but even when expressing very closely related phenomena remain etymologically and morphologically unrelated, will suggest ontology of minute, mutually independent elements. The identities are instinctively established here in terms of dissociated atoms, as unrelated as the respective words.

More specifically consider, for example, the word for ‘reality’. For the first, its very presence in a language indicates a distinction (underlying every word) between that which falls within its designation and that which does not. Its lack in a language would suggest a fundamentally different approach to the things which do not fall into two distinct categories of real and unreal. Given its presence, we are asking about its folk-etymology, that is, associations which subconsciously accompany its usage. We are not asking for any genuine etymology. It is the superficial, pseudo-etymological or even merely phonetic associations, rather than the true etymology, which may influence a child long before it might start studying linguistics.

English “reality” gives hardly any immediate associations. Sure, one can think of some Latin origins from “res” but these are too advanced considerations for us. It is but another word, as unrelated to “house” as to “thing” or “activity”. The conceptual correlate, something like the definition of reality in Merriam-Webster dictionary: “something that is neither derivative nor dependent but exists necessarily”, reflects some philosophical view but not any deeper linguistic connections.

German “Wirklichkeit” is an entirely different matter. It is bound to be associated, unconsciously and often consciously, with “Wirkung”, “wirken”, etc. “Wirklichkeit” is some-

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171 In Polish, for instance, “ptak” is a bird, “ptaszek” a small bird, “ptaszyn” an even smaller one, “ptasior” is a rather large and ugly, possibly dangerous bird, “ptaszydl” is a particularly repulsive “ptasior”, etc.
thing that acts, works, is efficacious, it is a power rather than a thing or a state. "The world of the real is a world in which this acts on that, changes it and again experiences reactions itself and is changed by them. [...] What value could there be for us in the eternally unchangeable which could neither undergo effects nor have effects on us? Something entirely and in every respect inactive would be unreal and non-existent for us."172 Spoken by a true philosopher of language.

Polish "rзeczywistoзc" brings immediately associations with "rзeczy" - "things". The suffix "-istoзc" has no inherent meaning (it is used to form many other words), but it may easily lead a layman to something like "istoзc"/"istnienie" - "being"/"existence". Thus, 'reality' seems to be the state or order of things, something given rather than acting, and acting only in the way 'being' acts - by simply being.

Could we not dare to look here for some grounds of the differences not only between the national characters but also between the philosophical schools dominating the spheres of different language groups? Just as it was argued that Aristotle's ontology, if not whole metaphysics, was firmly grounded in the structure of the Greek language, so English suggests empirical atomism, German - the tension between the given and the constructed, French - equal precision of the material and the spiritual, Polish - the dissolution of the ontological in the existential.173 Each language has its mood and quality, not to say metaphysics, which, to some extent, can be traced to its grammar, morphology and etymology. Vague and abstract distinctions will be usually drawn across different, though hardly disjoint, semantic fields. Some languages are richer than some others, providing more flexible, varied or succinct forms of expression. But in spite of all such differences (reflected also in the indeterminacy of translation), different human languages have approximately the same differentiating and unifying power. In general, the distinctions expressible in one language can be reflected (even if sometimes only clumsily) in another. After all, and in spite of indeterminacy, translation is possible, and so is communication between persons with vastly different lingual backgrounds.

The claim that language contributes to the ways in which we experience the world can hardly be denied. But claiming that it determines all our experience would be like claiming that the lack of names for many colours and their shades makes also experiencing their actual differences impossible. The identities and distinctions sedimented in language express roughly the average relevance and the cultural background. They are passed as pragmatic guidelines, but they never determine the range of the possible experiences of identity and difference. Although language provides means of solidifying distinctions, contributing thus implicit assumptions to culture and even philosophy, its contribution is only statistical and determines at most the average common-sense. "Language [...] represents the mass mind."174 It is founded in the distinctions and identities which are established prior to

172G. Frege, The thought: a logical inquiry. p.103/104. Emphasizing relativity of every distinction to the distinguishing existence, and claiming that to be is to be distinguished, we come very close to the idea of this last sentence. Every distinction makes a difference. However, the difference need not imply any activity and even less any effects of physical kind, which can be naturally associated with "Wirklichkeit". Besides the Scandinavian languages, similar associations appear also in Russian (where "deystvitelnost", although including the aspect of an almost passive happening, is also related to being efficient and active, "deystvenny'.")

173Curiously enough, structures of the Hopi language described by Whorf represent striking analogies, one could say, linguistic equivalents of some central aspects of our philosophy; see B. L. Whorf, Language, Thought and Reality, in particular, B. L. Whorf, An American Indian model of the universe.

174B. L. Whorf, The relationship of habitual thought and behavior to language. 11: Historical implications.
their linguistic sedimentation, which are more fundamental and wider than all signs, not only the linguistic ones. So we will leave language to the linguists and the fascination with its mystical (or, perhaps, post-analytical) influences on the mind to those who have nothing better to influence their minds, and start discussing identity.

140. **1. Immediate self-identity:** \( x = x \)

The original repetition is a reflective ‘doubling’ of the same, extraction of something from the background and positing it as an independent, because dissociated object, I:§40, p. 21. The doubling brings forth the self-identity which is just the expression of the fact that doubling did not change the original phenomenon. The thing remains itself, it only gets doubled in the perspective of the reflective representation. “A thing is identical with itself.” There is no finer example of a useless proposition, which yet is connected with a certain play of imagination. It is as if in imagination we put a thing into its own shape and saw that it fitted. //We might also say: “Every thing fits into itself.”\(^{175}\) Every object, dissociated in the reflective ‘doubling’, remains itself, remains the same as the ‘doubled’ object of experience.

Self-identity is the obviousness of the immediacy, of the fact that, within a timeless ‘now’, nothing can change and everything is itself. Everything, that is, which can be grasped in the unity of a single act and, preferably, in the limit of immediacy. The disappearing point... Self-identity (to be completely distinguished from any identity of the self), the empty formula \( x = x \), becomes the paradigm, the governing norm of all further considerations of identity. The problems of these considerations concern ‘fitting a thing into itself’, namely, determining the criteria of identity. They reflect only metaphysical arbitrariness of what, among all temporal objects, could count as the ultimate ‘substances’. The problems of the criteria of identity are the problems of classifying several actual appearances as the same, of fitting them into the limit of immediate, substantial self-identity.

141. **2. Actual equality:** \( a = b \)

The original repetition is the reflective ‘doubling’ of the same. In most abstract terms, this is what also repetition as recurrence is – the same thing seen from two, or more, different perspectives. But now, these perspectives are perspectives in a more intuitive sense of the word, they are ‘snapshots’, different actualities. Equality arises as a relation of sameness across distinct actualities, where a point \( a \) in (the context, situation, actuality) \( A \) turns out to be the same as \( b \) in (actuality) \( B \). As Frege observed, the difference between \( a = a \) and \( a = b \) concerns the form of presentation. Just like the statement \( a = a \) does not say anything, the statement \( a = b \) says quite a lot – their Erkenntniswert is very different. The former states merely the immediate self-identity, it “is valid a priori and, following Kant, is called analytic.”\(^{176}\) The latter, on the other hand, says that \( a \) and \( b \) are two different perspectives, two different snapshots of something. This something, this ever transcendent \( x \), arises precisely as the equality of \( a \) (i.e., \( x \) viewed as, or in the context of,

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\(^{175}\)L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:216

\(^{176}\)G. Frege, *On Meaning and Denotation*. 

It should be clear from what we said about only relatively creative power of words in I:4.1.2, that we are not maintaining Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (mis)interpreted as linguistic determinism. There is plenty of evidence that this is not the case. (For instance, there is nothing which prevents the concept of the active ‘Germanic’ Wirklichkeit from appearing in the Latin of 50 BC.: “what’s or exists, as of itself.’//Must either act or suffer action on it.” [T. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*. I:4]) We only acknowledge the deep and hidden import of language, its possible influence, which is the more determining, the fewer languages a person knows and the less reflective he is.
A) and of \( \bar{b} \) (i.e., \( x \) viewed as, or in the context of, \( B \)).\footnote{Frege says that \( a \) and \( b \) are simply different signs and that identity is an epistemic relation between signs, which obtains when both have the same denotation, *Bedeutung*. (Essentially the same idea of identity being not a ‘real’ relation ‘in’ the object, but arising only as a consequence of different perspectives under which mind views the object was proposed by Duns Scotus, according to whom it “can not be anything but a relation of reason, because it is not between things distinct except by reason only.” [J. Duns Scotus, *Questions on the Metaphysics*. IX.1-2] After A. Santogrossi, *Duns Scotus on potency opposed to act*...{[Although the quoted phrase concerns potency, identity is given as an obvious example of the same kind of relation of mere reason, namely, one which not only is mind-dependent but also caused by the mind))). This is what it becomes, eventually, in the *actual world* with its ready-made objects. Our point here will be, primarily, that this relation is *founded* in the prior *dissociation* of various actualities, which it then tries to ‘reconnect’. The ambiguity can be discerned in the naming. “Identity” refers to the fact, while “equality” to a relation between \( a \) and \( b \). We will use both terms at the present level.} Leaving and then returning to a room, I re-cognise the cup on the table as the same which was there a while ago. The cup here-and-now, \( a \), points to the one there-and-then, \( b \). True, it points in a very specific way making the identification of the two immediate, but it does point nevertheless. It is a *sign as a sign*, a *sign* whose non-identity with the signified is now given along with it. As such a sign, this here-and-now, the actuality \( a \) of this cup, has been *dissociated* from its actuality \( b \), and their connection, although experienced as their equality, is not actually given in the same way as \( a \) is. The cup is one and the same and, at the same time, different from itself.

Under self-reflective look, the very identity of I who am *reflecting* becomes only a mysterious quality for which *reflection* can not account in terms of pure *actuality*. How can I know, *actually* know and be sure, that I *reflecting* in this very moment am the same as I a while ago? There is no logical impossibility in assuming that the two are different and that everything is re-created anew in every instant, with the amazing precision creating merely an illusion that it is the same. At a deeper level of *experience* I obviously know, i.e., *experience* the cup here-and-now and the one there-and-then as the same thing, and I know myself to be the same person today as I was yesterday. But where is the proof, where is the unshakeable certainty of the two being the same?

There is none. For *reflection*, burdened with the *dissociation* of all actual experiences, this identity is problematic, to say the least. Given two things separated into different actualities, their identity can not arise in (yet another) actuality otherwise than as some ideal, because not actual, \( x \) which binds them across and in spite of the gap in time. Such an \( x \) is never actually given. Since Plato, one has been more than willing to say Alas! An ideal entity. The cup here and the one before are just instances of the same. And what is this ‘the same’?... A universal or, perhaps, an ideal form, ‘cupness’, an \( x \) existing beyond the horizon of actuality and binding together the cup here-and-now with the cup there-and-then.\footnote{One would be cautious to distinguish a trivial repetition of the same (thing) twice from instances of a universal but the meaning and the pattern are exactly the same. As argued in 1.2.2, universals are but special cases of distinctions transcending the horizon of actuality. A single repetition, an appearance of the same only twice, presents already all the problems of indeterminately long series of repetitions, of ideal entities or universals.} To account for the identity across different actualities – from the perspective of actuality – *reflection* ends up postulating ideal entities. Identity is a *trace* of that *dissociation*, and so is the noumenal \( x \) which keeps forever receding beyond the horizon of all distinctions.

What makes it so mysterious that the two appear the same? It is the assumption that the true givenness happens only within the horizon of actuality. Whatever exceeds this horizon becomes suspicious, prone to deceiving us, uncertain. The paradigm of cer-
tainty is the \textit{immediacy}, presence within \textit{horizon of actuality} – this horizon, eventually the evanescent point of \textit{immediacy}, is implicitly taken as the only point of contact with reality. Taking thus units of \textit{reflective experiences} as the atoms of reality, one is, indeed, in dear need to invent ideal entities to keep the scattered \textit{actualities} together. Ideal entities are \textit{reflective} tools useful for organising \textit{reflective experiences} – but the problem of their (ontological or other) status is based on the implicit conviction that the real is only the \textit{actual} and that everything else requires a justification in terms of \textit{actuality} and preferably of \textit{immediacy}.

142. If we, instead, start from the \textit{unity} of \textit{experience}, eventually of our being, which only subsequently gets diversified and split into \textit{actualities}, then repetition is only an \textit{experience} of the same from different perspectives, from different points of \textit{actuality}. Actual recognition of $X$ as the same as another \textit{actual} (but not actual now) $Y$ is a recognition, that is, an \textit{experience} of $XY$ which has manifested itself in two distinct \textit{actualities}. It is not one, \textit{actual} I perceiving $X$ who somewhat has to establish a relation to another I who perceived $Y$. The moment of perceiving $X$ is but an \textit{actuality} emerging from the background of \textit{experience} where $X$ is but the \textit{actual} aspect of $XY$. Its definite separation is only the result of \textit{reflective dissociation}.

Does it mean that every $X$ which is \textit{experienced} as (a repetition of) $Y$, is actually the same as $Y$? Can’t one be mistaken in taking $X$ for $Y$? Well, no and yes.

One can’t be mistaken because any such \textit{experience} of repetition has a reason, there is always something which – in one’s \textit{experience} – founds the re-\textit{cognition} of $X$ as the same as $Y$. It is a cut through \textit{experience} which, \textit{distinguishing} $XY$, precedes the dissociation of the \textit{actual} $X$ from the \textit{actual} (though not now) $Y$. One may not know what it is, one may even in principle be unable to account \textit{reflectively} for this $XY$, and yet the very fact of repetition could not take place without such an $XY$. Eventually, every equality can be justified, if only vaguely and trivially, by the fact that everything is only a manifestation of the one.

But, on the other hand, one can certainly be mistaken. There may be thousands of reasons and further \textit{distinctions} which, if taken into account, could force one to consider $X$ and $Y$ as different entities. In the extreme forms of empiricism, one is always mistaken because the mere fact of appearing in two different \textit{actualities} can be taken as the justification of a difference.

143. At some point the \textit{distinctions} are suspended establishing the identity of the \textit{actual} thing. If I take at first moment the person entering the room to be my friend Yngve, then this is the current limit of \textit{distinctions}. In the next moment I realise that it is not Yngve but Xavier, but to see this, I have to bring in more \textit{distinctions} – I have to see his face more \textit{precisely}, see some of his movements which are totally un-Yngve-like, etc. Yet, even then, the \textit{experience} of the same, the first impression which confused the two (that is, which did not distinguish XavierYngve), remains valid, it has revealed something which it was possible not to \textit{distinguish}.

\footnote{As usual, we are not talking about the \textit{attentively reflective activity} which starts with the ready \textit{dissociated objects} and inquires only into the relations between or possible abstractions from them. Such an activity, in a pure form, is itself an abstraction which never obtains without being involved in more fundamental processes which we are describing. It is, by the way, a good example of the \textit{dissociative result} of \textit{reflection}. In the moment I realise that it was Xavier, Xavier becomes the \textit{object} of \textit{reflection} and thus also the \textit{objective} aspect of the prior XavierYngve situation. It becomes opposed to the \textit{subjective} impression of this having \textit{only seemed} to be Yngve. Although XavierYngve remains and merely withdraws behind the curtain, it seems to disappear completely as it gives place to the two \textit{aspects} of \textit{reflective}...}
Identity is the actual limit of distinctions.

It is the point beyond which, or rather the boundary within which no more distinctions are made. At which moment does the Theseus’ ship cease to be itself and becomes a new ship? At none, because it has never been ‘itself’, it has never been any metaphysical (or ontological) ‘substance’ with intrinsic, self-identical ‘essence’. It was the limit of distinctions which it was purposeful to terminate at this point, at the point at which we said “This is a ship”, or perhaps even “This is this ship”. Replacing the planks, we begin introducing further distinctions which suspend the validity of the previous final boundary of distinguishing. Its supposed ‘essence’ was nothing but such a boundary. But assuming that it is something positive, something which constitutes thing’s identical ‘being in itself’, we can not avoid being perplexed by this ingenious puzzle.

An aspect of the crystallization of object’s independent subsistence and identity is time, which involves experiences of change. This might seem to contradict the claim that identity is but a limit of distinctions since change implies additional distinctions which should differentiate the object before and after the change. It does not, however, contradict the claim but only shows the (metaphysical) arbitrariness of where the boundaries are drawn, of what counts as identity. For all practical purposes a river is a river, one and the same. And it remains one also after the observation that “[o]n those who enter the same rivers, ever different waters flow” pushes the limit of distinctions beyond that used for the ordinary purposes. In principle, every issue can be dissolved (one might be tempted to say today: deconstructed) into interminable series of aspects, views, perspectives and possibilities, every object can be divided and gradually dissolved into finer and finer distinctions. But this is so only in principle, that is, in abstract terms of ultimate dissociations. In practice, it is not quite so. The fact that a house can be deconstructed does not prove its unreality. And even if later generation will build different houses in very different ways from ours, does not prove that we are building unreal houses. Even if actual truths change over time, at each particular time they are given in quite a stable fashion, in fact, sufficiently stable for people of similar interests and intelligence to be constrained in their formulations in approximately the same ways. Objects, issues and situations arise relatively to those who participate in them and, in particular, relatively to their ability to terminate distinctions at some specific points. But this relativity means neither subjectivity nor lack of any objective counterpart.

Identity is established as some actual – not absolute – limit of distinctions. Beyond this limit, more distinctions may be possible and actually take place. In many cases, these further distinctions will be considered mere ‘accidents’ of the identical ‘substance’, but in the extreme cases they may lead to the puzzles like that of Theseus’ ship. I cut a branch from a tree; then I cut another; then yet another; when I am finished with all the branches, I begin to cut, piece by piece, the trunk, from the top to the bottom. I end up with a heap of wood, but at what point does the tree cease to exist? This is relative, that is, dependent on the circumstances. If I left a part of the trunk standing, even if dead, one might say that this is the same tree which stood here yesterday – only dead and without branches. And since what is relevant here might be the fact of something standing at this particular place, we may ignore the change which occurred. If, however, the tree was the favorite one on which children used to climb and play, then this tree has actually ceased to exist – it is

dissociation: the objective fact of Xavier entering the room and the merely subjective impression of him being Yngve.

\textsuperscript{180}Heracleitus DK 22B12
no more, and what is left is not the same.

Does it mean that, to begin with, there were two trees and one survived cutting off the branches while the other did not. Certainly, there were different trees for people who considered it only as something standing there and for the kids climbing it. But this question of Chrysippus concerns the ‘objective’ state of affairs: are there, ‘out there’, two trees or not? And if there are two which one survives? Since we do not subscribe to any ‘objective substances’ existing ‘out there’ no matter what or who is around, we should be allowed to claim that it still depends on who is looking at the matter. If somebody must reach some absolute compromise, let him say that there is a sense in which there is only one tree which survived the process, namely, the tree identified as the limit of distinctions remaining at the end. He should not, however, try to convince the kids about it. Another problem with such a compromise is that one can remove something more from this rest and ask the question again. One won’t find any substance but will end up postulating a residual point of self-identity. In our view, it is not only uninteresting but directly inadmissible. Any answer to the question about Theseus’ ship — at what point does it cease to be the old and becomes a new? — has an aura of arbitrariness which has always threatened ‘substantialism’. For it represents an antinomy arising from the insistence on the yes-no answer to a question which does not have one, an antinomy of applying the immediate category of self-identity at the level of actuality, of attempting to view a temporal object as if it were timeless, precisely delineated, self-identical substance.

Before refining this point and the thesis from §143, let us comment a couple related issues.

**Indiscernibility and relativity**

Identity of a thing is always only relative to the drawn distinctions — consciously or not, intentionally or not, actually or not... It is thus relative to the involved existences. Does this mean, as also the claim in §143 might suggest, that we are simply stating identity of indiscernibles? Not exactly, but the difference may be rather subtle.

145. First, the principle itself is an ingenious and more precise variant of the dictum: “plurality must not be posited without necessity.”

Its objective is to attune our understanding of identities to their metaphysical realm, to bring epistemological distinctions into agreement with the ontological ‘facts’. Viewed (perhaps with some degree of bad will) as such a project, the principle is quite different from our view according to which identity is not recovered but constituted as the limit of distinctions. Identity is not any metaphysical, supra-human quality of things. It is a purely pragmatic (albeit not voluntary) fixing of the limits of distinctions at relevant points. What makes it relevant is not given by any laws, but by the context. Identity of indiscernibles is indeed a good rough expression — do not distinguish what need not be distinguished. But since we do not have any ‘substances’, any ‘essential’ nor ‘accidental’ properties, a process which has been thus terminated at some point, at some identity, can always, at least in principle, be carried further, for it never reaches any ‘metaphysical identity’. Returning home every day one does not wonder if

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141 E.g. W. Ockham, Quodlibeta V.q.1p.97, Ordinatio sive Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum I:Prologue 1.3 [after R. Heinzmann, ed., The Medieval Philosophy, p.242]. Earlier variants of the razor figure, for instance, in Plato, Parmenides; Aristotle, Physics I:187b.10; J. Duns Scotus, A Treatise on God as First Principle.

142 The current discussion of actual identity, and these remarks in particular, do not apply to existences which, being limits of distinguishability, are also the sites of ultimate unity.
the sofa standing there now is really the same as the one from yesterday, and if one does
one should visit some specialist. It is the same because there is not the slightest reason
to distinguish the two. It is only the assumption of some ‘substances in themselves’, an
extension of the metaphysics of immediate self-identity to temporal duration, which could
make one wonder how to prove that nobody in the meantime entered the flat and exchanged
the sofa for another but ‘identical’ one.\footnote{The two are indiscernible not only because one can not discern any difference although one might
suspect some to be there. ‘The two are identical, I cannot possibly distinguish them but they still might be
distinct!’ – such a suspicion is already a discrimination dissociating the two actualities from each other.

A more extreme exposition of the principle might be given which also might seem
to make it identical to the claim from §143. Its variant often plays a crucial role when
one tries to attune knowledge to ‘facts’ by actually getting rid of all transcendence and
pretending that one is in the possession of a complete logical language, fitting perfectly
the external world. It underlies equally the attempts to reduce to the mere language all
truth (“Whatever we cannot speak about, we should keep silent about”), or even all reality
(“Reality is the names we give to it”). It amounts to reducing identity to the actually
discernible criteria of identity.

The problem with this variant is, just as above, to determine the ways and limits of its
application, what to admit as the criteria. What counts as the properties to be considered
when deciding indiscernibility? One will use actual observations but, of course, not exactly,
because no two observations, made at different points of time, are exactly the same. If
we include even time, then we are left with pure immediacies, as dissociated from each
other as the atomic monads. If we allow difference in time, then the question arises: how
do we determine that the two appearances have the same – that is, identical – value of
all the relevant properties? In particular, among all properties there is the property of
‘being equal to a’ and so such a definition is circular.\footnote{Recently, B. Brody, Identity and Essence, argued that it is only impredicative and not viciously
} circular, but we leave it to the concept analysts to decide if such fine distinctions do us much service.
It is the trace of the prior unity which, once the object becomes dissociated from the subject, remains only as their relation although it is more primordial than either. Distinctions comprise much more than any actual differences, whether of linguistic, mental, physical character. Although relative, they are not necessarily subjective. Most distinctions, even though relative to me, or rather to a form of existence, are not made by me (nor you) but are encountered. And so are most of their limits, that is, most of actual objects. The relative, yet transcendent character of many distinctions sets us apart from any understanding of the principle which usually appeals to empiricism by reducing the discernibility to the actually observable differences. We do not postulate objective, in the sense of non-relative, identities. But we do not make them subjective either, because the limits are, typically, set above the level of the actual subjectivity.

Consequently, there is no designated set of actual distinctions providing necessary and sufficient criteria of identity. In one context color, material, cause... may count, in another none of these may be relevant. Two identical ships can be legitimately considered the same by a captain who needs only one for the travel and views both equally fit for it. (For him, the situation is entirely the same as it would be with only one ship available.) Claiming, on the other hand, that every possible distinction is relevant makes at once the two distinct. Relativity of identities, like of what counts as particular substances, means the lack of such metaphysical, universally valid criteria. There is no meta-level for the distinctions which could provide such criteria. There are only sub-levels of more and more specific classes of distinctions and actual things are their limits.

Furthermore, saying “relative to existence”, we often (and in the current context almost constantly) mean relativities to a form of existence. Most identities are not decided voluntarily by a subjective fiat and what appears equal will typically appear so to most (if not all) existences of the same form. We will all agree on the identity of this table here, or that tree over there. Just as there are pragmatic, and this involves also natural, reasons for drawing some distinctions, there are similar reasons for terminating them. The sensuous apparatus of humans will, under normal circumstances, deem some things identical almost irrespectively of who actually is involved in the situation. But as the concerned contents become more vague, less prone to the narrow look of actuality, the differences can become more significant. Is the feeling of joy I have now, the same as the one I had yesterday? Is the love I experience the same as that experienced by the one I love? Is the city in which I live the same city in which my neighbour lives? Wait! Here it is obviously the same city. Well, yes, but what constitutes its identity? Where does it end and where does it begin? I always counted this particular suburb as a part of the city, while for my neighbour it was already outside. The city does not have any ‘essence’, any sharp boundary, although it seems to have some kernel, something which makes it this city. All people may agree on the presence of such a kernel, on suspending the distinctions around it, without agreeing on the precise boundaries – they all may terminate the distinctions at slightly different points. “There are no sharp divisions of reality.”

147. As there is no meta-level for the determination of such limits, this suggests quite fundamental and primitive, that is preceding any criteria, character of identity. There are two aspects of identity which tend to determine two opposite camps (perhaps, of Fregeans and Quineans, respectively): either identity is a primitive notion, irreducible to others, or else it is in fact reducible to some criteria. Variations of the latter reflect variations over identity of indiscernibles. We have agreed with it in so far as identity is a limit of distinctions. A

185S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life. VI:4
thing is, after all, just the other side of the totality of everything it excludes, it is, so to speak, the ‘complement of its outside’, 1.1.2. An actual thing, its identity, is the border drawn between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ and there are no metaphysical standards for where it must be drawn. However, the very fact of it being drawn at all, of establishing a limit of distinctions is a primitive event (usually, not an act) not reducible to merely drawing the distinctions. In this sense, and in spite of its pragmatic and relative element we have been emphasizing, identity is not merely a conceptual device for simplifying thought, as Avenarius or Mach would have it. It is an a priori condition of thought, which extracts from the continuity of experience ‘substantive parts’ and locks them within the limits of actuality. It is not a mere device of reflective thought but its very presupposition, an inseparable accomplice of actuality. To understand a thing is to circumscribe it, is to grasp it as a limit of distinctions. Although what exactly is identified may vary and be relative to the actual persons and situations, the identification itself, the circumscription is an indispensable condition of every actual thought and intensional act.

The pragmatic relativity of identity is about as far as the possible analogy with the relative identity theory, as well as with Locke and empiricism in general, goes. For we have no atoms, no logical objects, no basic ideas, perceptions, impressions, nor substances. We do not share the dream to differentiate everything which can possibly be differentiated and, having thus obtained the ultimate atoms, to reconstruct the reality from them. We only acknowledge the necessity of suspending the possible distinctions at some limits, which necessity is an a priori condition not only of thought, but of objects and any actual appearances.

Ireno Funes from a short story by Borges about perfect memory and insomnia would be a dream-hero of empiricism, nominalism and their associate identity theories. “Not only was it difficult for him to see that the generic symbol ‘dog’ took in all the dissimilar individuals of all shapes and sizes, it irritated him that the ‘dog’ of three-fourteen in the afternoon, seen in profile, should be indicated by the same noun as the dog of three-fifteen, seen frontally. […] He was the solitary, lucid spectator of a multiform, momentaneous, and almost unbearably precise world.”\footnote{J. L. Borges, \emph{Funes, his Memory}.} The perfect precision of minute distinctions does not disclose any eventual atoms but, on the contrary, dissolves all identities. The search for such atoms can always be carried on further. It stops, from the point of view of metaphysics of principles and sufficient reasons, at a completely arbitrary point; it stops at some point only because for one reason or another, typically unconscious, sometimes confused, but usually a good reason of avoiding unbearable precision, we stop to distinguish. “My life consists in my being content to accept many things.”\footnote{L. Wittgenstein, \emph{On Certainty}. 344. A more existential expression of the search for the ultimate foundation and despair over its invisibility is decadent boredom trying to entertain itself with merely aesthetic variations and refined distinctions which only deepen the sense of emptiness. The pompous distinctions of the advertisement industry and ever new fashions, artificial needs craving only for more novelties, reflect on the social scale the despair over the lack of substance, that is, of genuine unity, mistakenly identified with the ‘objective substances’.} Just like the ability to handle a wide variety of distinctions tells us something about one’s intelligence, the points at which one stops distinctions and rests satisfied tell us something about what kind of person one is. “What people accept as a justification [and as identities] – shews how they think and live.”\footnote{L. Wittgenstein, \emph{Philosophical Investigations}. I.325.}

* * *
Returning to the thesis from §143, identity presents a problem for reflection only as far as time is concerned. One may wonder “How do I know that this sofa today and the one yesterday are the same?”, not “How do I know that this sofa here is the same?” nor “How do I know that this sofa here and the one over there are (not) the same?” Since time and space are equipollent aspects of spatio-temporality, a brief comment might be in place.

149. Seeing a building so high that one can not simultaneously see both its top and its bottom, one does not wonder. Perhaps one should? If one can never see it in its totality (say, it is surrounded by other buildings which make it impossible to see it whole from a distance), if one can not perceive it in a unity of one act, isn’t the problem the same as with the same sofa today and yesterday? Recalling one of the multiple senses of unity listed by Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, V:6, one will point to the possibility of a continuous perception of the whole building from top to bottom; the continuity which does not obtain with the sofa yesterday and today. Let us first refine the claim §143:

Identity is a limit of distinctions represented by a sign, that is, contrived to the actuality of a single act.

This sign will be often an abstract sign, not merely an aspect of the thing but, for instance, a word or an x which can be made fully actual even though the thing itself can not. It is not the sign which establishes identity - it only represents and solidifies it. It represents the limit of distinctions within the horizon of actuality. This horizon sets the limit on the possible experiences of identity - identity is always an experience consummated fully within this horizon where the not-actual aspects of the identical appear through the sign. The continuous perception of the building, even if not circumscribed within one actuality, is important because it does not create any ‘gaps’ in time. For the actual reflection this continuity amounts to the unbroken presence of the sign and (aspects of) its perceptual correlate. One sees the different stories of the building but the sign, this building, is kept continuously (even if not reflectively) as the sight moves along the walls. The sign, like a name, does not establish the identity but reflects the relevance of solidifying the distinctions at this boundary - it ‘freezes’ their limit.

The identity of things seen only in their spatial, simultaneous dimension is unproblematic - it is the self-identity of immediately given distinctions and their limits. The ‘gaps’ in space are the distinctions we recognise as separating different things. The ‘gaps’ in time have another import - they reflect the dissociation of experience into separate actualities. As long as we can maintain the continuity across time, the identity of a given object might remain as unproblematic as in its spatial immediacy. (Although it is unproblematic only because one implicitly assumes identity of the I which conditions the very idea of continuous experience.) The problem for reflection is that such a continuity does not, in general, obtain for things which it would like to consider the same. The continuity between the sofa yesterday and today is broken. And vice versa, whenever such an ontic continuity is broken, it involves time. Trivially: time is the dimension along which things may cease to be the same. And a bit less trivially: identities are the reflective means of keeping them the same across dissociated actualities. The question whether my sofa today is really the same as the one yesterday is asking about the reasons I might find to conclude they are not. “The reasons I might have” means simply the distinctions it might be possible to draw between the two. There are none (none of relevance, at least), and the sofa here-and-now remains continuous with (the same as) the sofa which has receded into the past actuality.
of yesterday — this ‘gap’ in time has been covered up.

Thus, identity is a truly transcendent relation when viewed exclusively from the perspective of actuality. It represents a noumenal \( x \) which lies beyond every actual appearance. Some such \( x \)'s can arise as results of reflective constructions. But most common and natural ones precede it and are solidified as limits of distinctions prior to conscious, let alone attentive efforts. In either case, the experience dissociated into separate actualities, temporality split into a succession of ‘nows’, call for an account of the experienced continuity.

Identity is a reflection — a representation — of the experienced continuity; it is the trace which, ‘filling the gaps’ of objective time, makes up for its broken continuity which is no longer actually experienced through the dissociated nows.

Actual identity, the repetition as recurrence, the (relation of) equality of \( a \) and \( b \), is an aspect of conscious experience which lives time through actualities. But it becomes a problem for reflection which, accepting only the obviousness of immediacy, tries to account by its means for the unity which transcends every actuality. For such a reflection the identity of things and ideas is a very fragile aspect of their experience. For just like analysis can dissolve every issue, it can dissolve every identity, presenting it as ‘unreal’ because not given immediately, objectively. And from the threat of ‘unreality’ there emerge ghosts of ‘ideal’ entities — ideal \( x \) of which \( a \) and \( b \) are only different appearances and whose recurring appearances could be, in principle, repeated ad infinitum. We have earlier seen universals which could be viewed from exactly the same angle: accounting for the recurring repetitions of the same. Their ‘unreality’ is the same as the ‘unreality’ of identity and results from the dissolution of everything which stretches beyond the limits of ever narrower immediacy. It is thus the ultimate expression of the objectivistic illusion, of the thirst for the ‘givens’ whose precision, requiring immediacy, makes them temporally ‘unreal’.

3. **Totality of visibles:** \( a_1 + a_2 + a_3 + \ldots = x \)

Consideration of equality, of identity at the level of actuality, took some space because it is where it belongs. Equality binds dissociated actualities together. It appears as a transcendent relation, stretching beyond the actualities scattered across different points of time and bringing them together. But it can do it only because our being is not exhausted by the dissociated actualities but has itself unity which transcends every actuality.

Identity may be an object of an experience, as happens every time one realises that \( a \) is the same as \( b \). This, inadvertently, requires both \( a \) and \( b \) to be themselves actual, or in any case thought as such. Thus, every statement of equality requires, or as the case may be reduces, its object to be at the level of actuality. There are however cases when such a reduction is hard, if at all possible to imagine. What about the infatuation which I felt a week ago and I am still feeling? Is it the same or not? It is the same, it concerns the same person, it has some continuity. But a week ago it had a slightly different flavour, I did not then see this person to have something of vanity in herself, while I see it now. But it is still the same because...Because I re-cognise the feeling and give it a name? The tendency to consider it the same is stronger than that, but only as long as it retains enough of the similarity. With time it may simply — and continuously — change, perhaps even into disgust, pity, repulsion. Then one may find as many reasons to call it the same as to call it different. It is the same infatuation turned into repulsion, the same fascination turned into boredom. Or was it, perhaps, from the start repulsion disguised as infatuation, boredom disguised as fascination? We may have difficulties with describing it precisely and unambiguously. But even if the actual impressions and feelings change drastically,
we retain the sense of continuity and some unity. For all these varied impressions and feelings arise from some unitary, virtual nexus and are only its distinct actual expressions, actualisations of its distinct aspects. We may, to some extent, characterise it by listing the totality of such various expressions. But this totality never establishes any unity which lies above it as a condition for the very attempts to form one totality.

152. The limiting case of non-actual unities which seem to appear only as totalities of actual manifestations is that of the world and the I. They were discussed in 1.3.2 and 1.3.3, so here we only comment briefly on the reflective attempts to endow a totality with unity.

Saying “external world” one identifies it with the externality of objects. How do we think, what do we mean by “the external world”? Easy, look at this table in front of you – obviously, it is objective, external. The external world is just the totality of such external things. This is how much we are able to make out of the world’s externality. But, recalling the objectivist illusion from 1.5.2.2, one should at once ask: What totality? There is no totality of all things, there are just external objects, plenty of them, but that’s it. And certainly, the totality of all things is inaccessible. It is never experienced, never given, nothing like that ever confronts us in any actual experience; there is no totality of things, for they do not sum up to anything, least of all to any world. At best, this world appears as an ideal, that is, impossible and inaccessible limit.

Trying to account for the unity of a totality, one looks for a unifying principle. But although such a principle can often be found for the actual complexes, making it obvious what makes a car a car and a house a house, the situation with totalities exceeding essentially the horizon of actuality is more precarious. For, unlike complexes, they are never given in an actual experience against which the principle might be verified. Pierce, for instance, says that “unity is nothing but consistency.”\textsuperscript{189} We certainly won’t attempt to improve this criterion trying to determine in what it possibly might consist. We won’t because the possibilities may be innumerable and one might propose other principles like common function, cause, goal, etc.. In either case, the unity is only ideal, because not actually given, and the principle serves only to give the actually discernible direction for the construction of the ideal limit approximated by the actual experiences. As Kant has observed, the analogy to convergence of infinite series in mathematics is not applicable, and the fact that our actual thinking may be governed by some regulative ideas pointing in the direction of imagined limits, does not in any way constitute these limits. We can choose to utilize such principles for the purposes of practical investigations, but they do not reveal any truth about the investigated totality. In particular, they do not reveal that it is one totality, unless one turns things up side down and defines the totality as that which conforms to the principle.

Totalities are not any unities but only “illuminations of combinations”\textsuperscript{190} or, to put it directly, just heaps of stones. This is as much as actual thinking is capable of making out of the world, or personal identity – the sum total, the totality of its visible elements. For as long as the distinct objects are taken as the only building blocks from which the world is constructed, their unity can be thought only as yet another element of this same kind, possibly, a relation between these elements. The meaning of asymmetry of Being, I:6.1.4, is that lower things never sum up to give something higher – higher level is inaccessible in the categories of the lower ones. Above the totality of objects there is the unity, we might

\textsuperscript{189}C. S. Pierce, Some consequences of four incapacities. p.71. We give the word “unity” a different meaning, but for the moment let us keep it this way.

\textsuperscript{190}Proclus, Elements of Theology. §64
say, of the world, or perhaps, of the horizon of experience, which precedes experiences of individual objects. The posited totality is but an imperfect sign of this unity. Bracketing this unity and then trying to account for the externality of the world, one ends up accounting for the externality of an object, while trying to account for ‘the world’, one ends up accounting for nothing but only positing the ideal limit, the totality of things.

By its very nature, it is impossible to have an experience of the world – as a totality, it always extends beyond any actual experience. So, perhaps, every experience is only a partial experience of the world? Perhaps, but a partial experience of x is not an experience of x but of its part, and if one insists on it being a part of x, then x must come from elsewhere. Every actual experience is an experience of its object or situation, but not of the world. And yet, the world stays constantly in the background, the one unified world haunts every actuality and is experienced underneath every particular experience.

Invisible unity: •

The unity of the world is not constituted in terms of actualities. We feel compelled to accept it as a totality (and this always means, one totality) because, lack of any unifying principle notwithstanding, its unity is experienced as another pole of the unity of oneself. We would not get the idea of any totality (of the whole world, of ourselves, nor even of a composite substance), if no unity were experienced prior to it. “Every whole composed of parts participates in a unity preceding these parts.”

Every whole participates in the unity which founds its ‘wholeness’.

But we have not seen any unity. So far, it might rather seem like there is nothing really identical, nothing possessing absolute unity. Immediate self-identity of a dissociated object, equality across distinct actual appearances, the mere totalities of things – all result only from the suspension of distinctions at some limits relative to us. Is all that remains only such ‘a permanently tentative look’?

Indeed, every visible determination of anything invisible is by its very nature only tentative and approximate. So, is life a story in a search – and that implicitly means, constantly failed search – of a narrator?

But “you wouldn’t seek, if you hadn’t found.”

As we have remarked in passing, our considerations so far do not apply to existences. We definitely distinguish the question about the identity of the dog Oscar before and after the loss of one hair or, for that matter, about the identity of my friend Paul before and after the accident which made him lame and, on the other hand, the ship of Theseus being the same before and after exchange of all the planks. Knowing particulars amounts indeed to making distinctions and setting their limits. Knowing one cup is exactly the same as knowing another, though indiscernible, one. The situation is entirely different with human beings. Knowing Paul is something infinitely more than knowing his ‘human essence’, than knowing him as being a man simpliciter. Knowing Paul is as different from knowing

191Proclus, Elements of Theology. §69 “If something is many, there must be a one before the many.” [Plotinus, Enneads. V:6:3] We should, however, be careful with embracing all variants of Neoplatonic units too enthusiastically. The ‘wholes’ and ‘unities’ have much more conceptual flavor, and are not distinguished from the immediate identity. The contentless self-identity of the most immediate object is taken, here as elsewhere, as an epitome of unity. The following formulation is more illustrative of our understanding: “Every genuine irreducible sphere of being is an ecstatic unity which is given as a background before positing the reality [Realsetzung] of any unity which is possible within it and, consequently, it does not form a mere sum of all accidental facts.” [M. Scheler, The Nature of Sympathy. C:II]

192M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception. 346-7

193P. Ricoeur, Life: a story in search of a narrator

194B. Pascal, Pensées. VII:553 [modified]
Peter, as Paul is different from Peter, and they are infinitely different (even though they
are twins). We know individuals (that is, existing individuals, not merely particulars)
not because they are only limits of distinctions which always can be refined further, but
because they never can be. To know a person amounts to a recognition, beyond the
character traits and psychological features, of the unrepeatable uniqueness of this person –
not as an abstract property but as the most concrete fact. In short, we distinguish between
the unity of existence and a mere identity of actual things.

154. The unity of self is the uniqueness of the event of confrontation established with every
birth.195 At first it is only a virtual kernel from which the individual will develop in all
actual manifestations. But this naked simplicity of nothingness confronting the pure vir-
tuality of self is all that is needed to make the latter’s uniqueness absolute. It does not
contain any ‘complete notion’, it does not contain all the future and past ‘contingencies’
which this individual may encounter in life, and which might be needed if the unity of a
substance were constituted by its concept or properties. Irrespectively of the conceptual
indistinguishability from any other birth, it is the absolute beginning founding the onto-
logical and not only conceptual uniqueness. It establishes an ineradicable, numerical unity,
haeceitas of this individual, which is his origin, the point not relative to any thought and
experience, where he touches nothingness.196 No visible criteria account for this unity. “If
we take wholly away all Consciousness of our Actions and Sensations, especially Pleasure
and Pain, and the concernment that accompanies it, it will be hard to know wherein to
place personal Identity.”197 It is not easy to imagine what ‘taking wholly away’ might
mean, but allowing that, it would be exactly the place where to look for ‘personal Identity’.
“[If] we had nothing distinct in our perceptions, nothing heightened, or of a stronger
flavour, so to speak, we would be in a permanent stupor. And this is the condition of the
completely naked monad.”198

Self is confronted only with the one and its unity is not relative to any lower con-
cepts or properties but reflects the absolute unity of the one. In actual terms, one’s unity
might require viewing it as an identity of discernibles, as the incomprehensible coinciden-
tia oppositorum. But we do not need such a coincidentia, because actuality is not our
beginning. The one is that which precedes all possible discrimination, something always
assumed, never deduced. Its unity is not reducible to actual observations, for it founds
their very possibility just as it founds the unity of each level. The one is the unity of the
chaos, chaos is the unity of experience and experience is the unity of experiences. Or more
specifically, virtual signification is the unity of recognition which, in turn, founds the unity
of aspects involved in representation; or simultaneity is the unity of spatio-temporality
and of awareness which found, respectively, the unity of space, of time and of reflective
consciousness. But these founded differences do not change their founding unity. They
leave it untouched above. “If many participate in one, they are unified in their relation to
the one” even though “they are different from each other to the degree, in which they are

195“Unique” and “unity” originate in the same Latin “ unus” – one.
196Thus we must finally admit the misuse of Scotist haeceitas. According to Duns Scotus, every particular
thing has such an individuating entity which, so to speak, follows after and in addition to the being of its
essence, esse essentia, endowing it with the actual and individual existence, esse existentia. We do not
worry so much about the identities of actual things, and we do not see so much difference between human
existence and its ‘essence’ – the unique individuality constituted by the confrontation with the one can
be equally identified with both, and our haeceitas does not refer to any entity but to this property of
existence, this triple identification.
197J. Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. II.11.
198G. W. Leibniz, The Monadology. §24
The highest unity does not dissolve the differentiation of the lower levels, does not mingle distinct elements in a flat uniformity. On the contrary, it lets them remain differentiated, even opposed to each other, for all such lower oppositions and conflicts do not contradict the genuine unity. The indistinct one is the absolute unity as the ultimate limit of all distinctions and of the very possibility of distinguishing, remaining forever beyond their horizon.

Actual repetitions and recurrences are not mere accidents. They reflect in the abstract, that is actual and often precise way the character of all our being – experiencing the repetitions of the one, recognising one through Many, experiencing it always in new ways, in new actualities, from new perspectives. The one is not an object of any actual experience, but its unity is experienced in all such experiences. All distinctions are but manifestations of the one, always under different forms, in different actual clothes. The one is experienced but only through, or under, these variations – it is one and the same, and yet, actually always different, as one actual experience is different from another. The one is experienced only through all the distinctions and thus it is the ultimate violation of indiscernibility of identicals. In actual experiences it is thoroughly different, it is never given, and hence never given as the same, and yet it is always itself, always identical.

Our being – and our understanding, in particular – is stretched between these two limiting poles: on the one hand, the idealistic, Platonic intuition of everything being but a manifestation of one and the same and, on the other hand, the Aristotelean analysis, the incontestable fact of reflective experience that everything is a separate entity related intricately to everything else. It might be tempting to construct a contradiction but the two do not contradict each other. They are only the extreme and complementary aspects of existence which experiences one only through many. The deepest thirst and the only challenge of reflection starting from the dissociated experiences is to re-construct (parts of) this variety as manifestations of the same: star movements and falling apples as gravitational force; matter and work as energy; addition and multiplication as monoidal structure; God of the New Testament and God of the Old Testament as the same God, perhaps, even as the God of Muslims and the non-god of Buddhists; the yesterday’s pleasure and today’s conflict as aspects of the same loving relationship.

And so, it is no accident that insights of the unity of differences are among the greatest intellectual pleasures. “What a shock of recognition it was (as it actually happened to me) while studying with wonder the plate of Corot engraving – to see it suddenly as a delicious episode from ‘Parsifal’.”

\[
\text{Wer rechnet wserer Ertrag? Wer trennt}
\text{uns von den alten, den vergangenen Jahren?}
\text{Was haben wir seit Anbeginn erfahren,}
\text{als dass sich eins im anderen erkennt?}
\]

The absolute unity is the unity of the one. It underlies – that is, in the order of ontological founding, precedes – all the distinctions. It finds its concrete place, its imago, in the existence separated directly from, and hence confronted directly with the one. Self, the virtual center of existence, founded in the one, is the absolute unity of the person. The lower form of this imago is the fact of myself being a repetition, a repetition of the unique

\footnote{Proclus, Elements of Theology, §66}
\footnote{P. Valéry, About Corot. p.143}
\footnote{R. M. Rilke, Es winkt zu Fühlung...}
event of birth, and then of my self, of the ‘inborn possibility’. My uniqueness is not constituted by anything more particular, but is given to me. Every existence is unique and as such but a repetition of any other existence: to the extent they “participate in one, they are one in the relation to the one.” I am unique and you are unique and in this uniqueness we are both the same. There is no paradox here – only the primitive, ontological character of the unity of existence (if one likes, of the numerical difference of indiscernibles) which is not reducible to any lower, conceptual distinctions. At the level of actuality, this unity is in turn reflected in the repetitions as recurrence of the same, in the temporal identity of actual things, as well as in me, seen as the merely actual ego, being the same now as I was yesterday. Finally, in the immediacy of a single act, the unity finds its reflection as the self-identity of the immediately given object and as the unproblematic self-identity of the subject, of the immediate act of cogito. In all cases, these lower identities are only borrowed, are only founded manifestations of the primordial unity which transcends them all and, hence, remains unaffected by their differentiated multitude.

2.2.2.ii. Truth

As another example of a trace which, however, will turn out to be closely related to the previous one, we consider the notion of truth.

What can be true

157. “Please, close the door!” Can this be true? No, of course, it is a command, not a statement expressing a proposition. But then, suppose you close the door and he says: “No, I did not mean it, I was only joking”. The command was not true or...? The command was not meant as a command or even better, the sentence, the sign which usually means a command in this particular situation did not mean it. It was a joke, not a true command. One would probably wish that we get rid of this “true”, but we will not. The word “true” used about a command, a work of art, a feeling or almost anything is “put in front of another word in order to show that this word is to be understood in its proper, unadulterated sense.”

Thus a true command is a command, and not a joke. But if a sign expressing a command can be a joke, is it not fully natural and legitimate to speak also about “true command” and distinguish it from, well, “untrue” ones? This is not much different from distinguishing a command from a non-command, but the crucial issue is that we have a sign, a sentence, which although usually is one may also be the other. Just like Tarski formed the biconditionals for propositions

\[
\text{The sentence “X” is true if and only if X. (i)}
\]

one can form a biconditional for almost every word and a thing \( x \)

\[
\text{“x” is a true “P” if and only if } x \text{ is } P. \quad (ii)
\]

The meaning of “true friend” might thus seem no different from the meaning of “friend” and this is probably what one would make out of it, if one were to construct any formal theory. But we are not after reducing anything to anything, and this schema is not fully

\[202\text{G. Frege, The thought: a logical inquiry. p.86}
\][203\text{The schema (ii) is, more or less, the same as the basic case of the inductive definition of the satisfaction relation in, e.g., first-order logic.}
satisfying. "True friend" can easily mean the opposite of what "friend" happens to mean in a given situation, and then it can mean at least as many different things as "friend" can. We do not believe in any genuine, primary, 'true' meaning of a word, of which others would only be derivative or adulterated versions. The genuine and inherent vagueness of signs was discussed in I:4.1.§§44 ff. One recognises, of course, the difference of accent and emphasis. As prosententialism, or variants of deflationism might claim, "true" functions at best as a means of emphasis or indirect reference. However, the emphasis can amount to new distinctions: the increased need to emphasize that things are truly what they are, that "\( x \) is a true friend", that "\( y \) is truly useful", etc. signals certain linguistic degeneration, one might say, deflation of the meaning of the words where, like in the Orwellian world, "friend" no longer means what it truly means.

On the other hand, even if "true friend" tends to mean the same as "friend", so "false friend" does not simply mean a non-friend. A friend is false when, contrary to all appearances, contrary to all signs indicating and usually meaning friendship, he turns out not to be one.

Signs are actual points terminating the traces of transcendence, actual expressions of the not-actual and, eventually, invisible distinctions. Signs which we usually do not consider to carry truth-value (because they do not express propositions? or even worse, because they are not declarative sentences?) can be considered true in the generous sense of drawing the distinctions in accordance with the rest of relevant distinctions, whether actual or only present. "Please, close the door!" may be true – with respect to the actual wishes of the one who pronounces it. Similarly, a question normally suggests that the person asking it does not know, and can be true with respect to this. Rhetorical question is exactly an untrue question, a non-question, which only appears as a question. In short, there is hardly any linguistic sign which could not be endowed with the element of the truth-value (which does not mean, that it must be its primary element). But truth is not restricted to linguistic signs. "If you were in a place where you knew that there were both healthy and poisonous herbs, though you did not know how to distinguish between them, but there was someone else there whom you did not doubt knew how to distinguish them, and when you asked him he told you which were the healthy and which poisonous, and he told you that some were healthy yet he himself ate others, which would you believe, his word or his deed?"204

His deed tells the truth which his words tried to hide.

This could be easily misinterpreted as follows: what we consider as possibly true need not have the appearance of a proposition, but must be expressible as a proposition. If a question can be true, it is because it expresses also some proposition. "It is easy to think of a language in which there is not a form for questions, or commands, but questions and commands are expressed in the form of statements, e.g., in forms corresponding to our 'I should like to know if...' and 'My wish is that..."205 So a command could be a joke or else a true command but then there is a corresponding proposition which is false, respectively true. If one insisted obsessively on this point, we might even let it pass but the problem is with the status of propositions, not to mention their actual content. There is a much deeper sense – than a mere rewriting of its meaning as a declarative sentence – in which a command, and every act or action, can be true or untrue. It can be true in the sense of being a good command, a command which agrees with the human nature, a command the following of which will help one to realise one's true goal, a command which commands to

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204St. Anselm of Canterbury, On Truth. 9

205L. Wittgenstein, Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics. Appendix III:1
do what should be done, in short, by agreeing not only with the actually given facts and observations but also with the deeper distinctions drawn across the field of whole life. One can certainly deny the very existence of such things, but such a denial will be rather only an expression of the uncertainty (or the lack of consensus) as to which particular commands are good and how they can possibly be distinguished from the bad (false?) ones. On the other hand, one might object that this is an illegitimate stretching of the meaning of the word “true”. But such an accusation starts from the assumption that only propositions, if not merely declarative sentences, can be true (or false) and this is exactly the assumption which we do not share. In a deeper sense (to which we will return later) the truth-bearer is actuality. Every actual sign, every appearance (whether a friendly attitude, a command, a statement) makes a difference and hence carries an element of truth-value – namely, of its relation to a broader horizon of distinctions.

159. Excluded Middle

All actuality is a sign, and signs are truth-bearers. In a sense, one could therefore say that, since every actuality is surrounded by the horizon of presence and hence can agree or disagree with it, every sign is true or false and the scope of the tertium non datur is unlimited. But we would prefer to view truth as an explicit norm which arises only against the possible falsehood. As long as such possibility does not arise, there is no need for truth or, as one could also say, truth is implicitly granted. The fundamental claim is that truth is secondary in relation to meaning, that sign is a sign in so far as it means something, as it makes a difference by drawing a distinction, but it need not be true or false for that.206 We traced an aspect of truth even in commands and questions but typically the meaning of such signs overshadows the truth-aspect completely. Better examples are given by the traditional paradoxes.

(L) This sentence is false.

The impossibility of assigning any truth-value to (L) has been declared a paradox. But this appears so only for the bivalent logic requiring all statements to have one of the only two truth-values. The additional identification of meaning with truth-conditions forces then one to declare the statement meaningless. But one can not meaningfully claim that it is meaningless, since one arrives at this conclusion by analysing its truth-value as a function of its meaning.207

We do not see any paradox here nor, for that matter, in Tarski’s general formulation of such phenomena, the undefinability theorem, stating that a semantically closed language can not obey the rules of classical logic.208 The proof shows that such a language contains sentences which, like (L), do not have any well defined truth-value. Why should it cause any worries? Why should it be so that every statement must have exactly one of two possible truth values? We know, in fact, that it is not so – besides (L) and other paradoxes, there are other dubious cases like “the sea-battle tomorrow”, “the current king of France who is

206 “What a picture represents it represents independently of its truth or falsity, by means of its pictorial form.” [L. Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. 2.22]
207 If (L) is true, then what it says holds, but it says that . . . One might object that it is only the meaning of the components of (L) which is known, while the whole statement fails to have one. But this looks like splitting the hair. We do not combine arbitrarily the meanings of “false”, “statement”, “is”, “this” but do it exactly according to the rule specified by this statement. It is only this compound meaning of the whole statement which causes the trouble with assigning to it any definite truth-value.
208 To avoid technicalities, let us think of a semantically closed language simply as one containing its own truth predicate and the self-referential capacities. ‘Classical logic’ means here primarily two truth-values.
bald”, etc. Various ways may be designed to endow such statements with a truth-value, but they tend to over-interpret the intuitive meaning. All the theorem says is that the truth-value of (L) can not be determined in the world of boolean functions working (according to the classical rules) on the two standard truth-values.

It is only the assumption that the world is a given and fixed totality of things or facts ‘in themselves’ which leads to the conviction that every sign (at least, proposition) is either true or false, and that with the absolute – that is unchangeable – finality. The lack of such a finality does not mean relativism in the sense of subjective arbitrariness; it only means that any particular truth can happen to be extended/adjusted/modified, and that the absolute truth does not belong to such particulars but only to the absolute.

The absence of precise bivalence and the limitations of the principle of excluded middle go even further: truth, and hence also falsehood, is a matter of degree. Saying that “x is blue” about an x which is pink is trivially false. Is saying that “x is blue” about an x which is dark blue true? Yes, if darkness does not matter. And no if it does. But when it is not true, is it false? Perhaps, perhaps only to a degree. A half-truth is often a falsehood but, then, it is also a half-truth. Proliferation of various theories of fuzzy sets and fuzzy truth, of vague and probabilistic variants of the notions treated traditionally as rigid distinctions, witnesses to the changing understanding of these notions. Truth, admitting of degrees, is not simply opposed to falsehood which, too, is a matter of degrees. They are opposite but the opposition is not a pure, univocal bivalence. Just like most acts are neither good nor evil, so most actual signs are neither true nor false. There is a large grey zone between the two extremes, and signs falling in this zone may often be declared true and false or, as the case may be, as neither.

Truth

Truth is a possible property of actuality and, consequently, also of the actual signs and their linguistic expressions. It is a relation between two (sets of) distinctions: the truth-bearing actual signs and the truth-giving (actual or not) distinctions. Denoting the former by S and the latter by D, “S is true” means “S is true with respect to D”. Frege’s objection (actually, to the correspondence theory, which here can be extended to D), that truth cannot consist in a relation for this “is contradicted by the use of the word “true”, which is not a relation-word and contains no reference to anything else to which something must correspond”209 is a funny example of the strange assumption that language, and in fact already its common usage, contains all and only truth.210 D is hardly ever mentioned explicitly because it is determined by the shared background of communication, by the context of discourse. We mentioned the possible disagreement between the represented and given actuality. The distance between the two can be seen as the difference between S and D, when not only the former but also the latter involves (primarily) only actual distinctions. Saying “It is sunny”, we do not specify “at present, at the place where we are talking, with respect to the actually observed weather conditions, etc.” – all such indexicals are implicitly given. Saying “Life is a disappointment”, we do not specify that we do not mean ‘at present, at the place where we are talking, etc.’ In practice, D is usually fully


210There are few traces of the relative motion in ordinary language use, so that claiming that trees along the alley actually move as I am walking would be not only unnatural but actually contradicted by the usage of the word “move”.
transparent, given implicitly along with the meaning of $S$ and the situation. Thus, not only context disambiguates the meaning but also vice versa, meaning narrows the context of interpretation – the two are aspects of one nexus.

The meaning of $S$ is some set of distinctions which itself constitutes a part of the world and hence this meaning is by its very nature woven into the texture of the world, into the rest of distinctions. The statement “It is sunny” draws some distinctions in the actual situation and these are related to other distinctions, for instance, to those which we can drawn by looking around or by (not) feeling raindrops on the head. The meaning of “Life is a disappointment” draws some distinctions in the actual situation: perhaps, it is a general statement about life, perhaps, only an expression of the depressive period in one’s life, perhaps, only a sarcastic comment on the train of somebody else’s complains. The vagueness of the statement amounts to indeterminacy of meaning which, in extreme cases, can make search for its truth futile. But even without any clearer indications, one will recognise in such a statement an expression of some quality which may seem more or less in agreement with one’s own understanding of life. The distinctions (D) implied by the meaning of the statement are completely different from the previous case, but the truth of both has the same general form of agreement between the respective sets of distinctions.

162. The question about the nature of truth reduces almost to the question about meaning; it “depends on just two things: what the words as spoken mean, and how the world is arranged.” The crucial issue concerns, of course, this last phrase. In our case, ‘the way the world is arranged’ corresponds, in every particular situation, to some more distinctions, or else to some distinctions made by other means than the (linguistic) signs whose truth is under the question. Very schematically, we can express the required relation between $S$ and D as follows:

$$S \text{ is true with respect to D iff } m(S) \subseteq D$$

(iii) 

i.e., a sign (a collection thereof, an actuality) $S$ is true with respect to D if it means/makes only distinctions made in D.

163. The relativity to D certainly will not lead us to any relativism or scepticism. But it is not only apparent. Truth of a sign depends on the object it addresses; truths about relative beings are, by this very fact, relative, while absolute truth can only concern the absolute. The stick lying at the bottom of a river is more like a snake, bending, swinging and swaying, drawn half-way out of the water it is bent, and drawn completely out it is straight. Descartes concludes that our sense-perceptions delude us (at least in the first two cases) and can not be trusted. It remains unclear why they delude us in the two former cases but not in the last one, and the particularly suspicious minds keep playing the games of total illusion, brains in the vats, and the like. It rather seems that our senses are equally truthful in all three cases: in the first two what we see is true with respect to the visual distinctions (to put it blatantly: what we see is what we see, and there is no falsity about it); in the third case, what we see is true also with respect to other distinctions, say, those

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211 This meaning involves what Austin calls the “demonstrative conventions” [J. L. Austin, Truth.] correlating the words with the actual, historic situation in the world. But likewise, it involves also indications that some words are not to be so correlated. All such relations and correlations are aspects of meaning in our generous sense of all the drawn distinctions.

212 D. Davidson, A coherence theory of truth and knowledge. p.139

213 As a curio: this can be reformulated so that every truth comes out as an identity, for instance, using the equivalent formulation of the subset relation: $m(S) \cup D = D$. Of course, we use this pseudo-formalism merely as a symbolic abbreviation. It may be helpful, but $\subseteq$ may equally well be replaced by some other form of ‘fitting’ or ‘conformity’. We do not intend any formally precise theory of anything.
made by the sense of touch and, for that matter, our knowledge that the stick remains unaffected by the way any particular person might see it.\[^{214}\]

The relativity to D is the common feature of truth theories which differ primarily with respect to what they consider to be the relevant D. The schema (iii) contains the abstracted elements involved in most discussions of truth and thus allows us also to see some of the differences between various approaches. For instance:

- Truth-conditionalism uses the same formula but to define \(m(\_\_)\) and not truth. Instead of assuming given \(m(\_\_)\), it takes as fixed D (the world, totality of facts, or the like) and the understanding of the left hand side. The truth-condition, corresponding to the subset inclusion, amounts then to a definition of the meaning function \(m(\_\_)\).
- Correspondence theories take D (and hence also the target of \(m(\_\_)\)) to be the external world. (How this is to be understood is another matter.)
- Deflationists take D to be the whole universe (i.e., make any inclusion in D trivial, which amounts to removing D), and let \(m(\_\_)\) simply remove the quotation marks around S.
- Coherence theories also fix D but take it to be some set of accepted beliefs.
- Pragmatists would like D to be some ideal, eventual conditions to be judged as desirable (or, perhaps, just that which will remain ‘there in the end’ (let us not ask where ‘there’ is and when ‘the end’ might be)), with \(m(\_\_)\) assigning to its argument the outcome of actions done in accordance with it.

It is impossible to dissociate the discussion of truth from ontology. The differences above concern the understanding of the reference frame D. With the latter theories (coherentism, pragmatism) it is not, perhaps, ontology in the usual sense, yet it acquires the fundamental meaning for the theory because it functions as the measure of truth, as the element of a transcendent character, if not as the transcendence itself. A critique of some theory of truth amounts usually to a critique of this frame, of the presupposed (or implied) ontology. In the following, we will distinguish the kinds of truth depending on D, on the addressed level of distinctions. But first one final remark.

Truth is a trace of transcendence surrounding the immanence of the actual signs and the reference frame D can vary according to the possible variations in the scope of transcendence. Something can be considered true with respect to: the actual situation, some given set of observations and experiments, the life experience, the (un)imaginable totality of all distinctions. Consequently, truth admits of degrees and a statement true about the factual appearances can be false with respect to other dimensions. But although D may vary as much as S, it is the same schema (iii) from §162 which governs the relation at every particular level. Only having fixed D, one can possibly speak about the truth.

In a particular situation, it is often much more important and difficult to agree on which aspects to consider relevant, than on the content of each aspect, it is more difficult to agree

\[^{214}\]The point expressed traditionally by saying that truth is not the matter of perception but of judgment, e.g., “truth or falsity seems to me to be in opinion rather than in the senses. For if the inner sense is deceived, the exterior does not lie to it. [...] This is the case when someone similar to someone else is thought to be him, or when hearing something other than human voice we think it to be a human voice. But it is the interior sense that does this. [...] So it happens that interior sense imputes its mistake to the exterior sense.” [St. Anselm of Canterbury, On Truth. 6] “It is therefore correct to say that the senses do not err – not because they always judge rightly but because they do not judge at all.” [I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, E2nd Division Introduction.1;A293/B350] Judgment was supposed to relate to the ultimate sphere against which all particular cases were to be judged, while we have replaced this sphere with D.
on D than on m and S. This is a local reflection of the more general fact, namely, that even the most stubborn realists have not managed to come up with a convincing model of the world, of the ultimate D which could serve as the invariable measure of truth. The world we live in is the world of distinctions which we are able and forced to recognize. Now, the more distinctions D, the more truths but also the more falsehoods. There is some limit beyond which more differentiation, needed as it may seem in the search for further knowledge, breeds only more confusion and idle dispute and where, in the words of Goethe, “every solution to a problem is a new problem,” where every new step, multiplying the truths, or rather only probabilities and possibilities of truths, removes us from the truth. Saying too much (thirst for precision shares at least that much with its frequent companion – the fear of triviality) is more often than not a violation of the truth. “And it is no easie matter, being in the midst of the cariere of a discourse, to stop cunningly, to make sudden period, and to cut it off. And there is nothing whereby the cleane strenght of a horse is more knowne, than to make a readie and cleane stop.” As La Rochefoucauld remarked, the problem of thoroughness is not that it does not reach the end but that it goes beyond it.

As D varies, and various sceptics, relativists or post-modernists misuse the fact, one might want to imagine it being fixed once and for all, as some ideal totality of all facts, the ultimate reference frame where truth of all possible truth-bearers is to be evaluated. ‘The one world’ would waive the degrees of truth and the unpleasant suggestions of relativity, if only one were able to determine what it is. We have dispensed with such ideal totalities but this issue, as well as the question about the absolute truth, will return towards the end of the discussion of the levels of truth.

The levels of truth

Truth-bearer is actuality or, in a bit more specific sense, the actual signs. Truth is a trace of transcendence reflecting the anchoring of these in the wider reality. What is taken as this ‘wider reality’ determines the understanding, if not a detailed theory, of truth. The level, or depth, of a truth reflects only the level addressed by the signs, which corresponds to D in the schema §162.(iii).

1. The immediate truth

Sensation, if not also perception, can always be taken as true with respect to itself, and this is the way of immanent truth taken by sensationalism or phenomenalism, whether of empirical or idealistic flavour. Every sensation is true with respect to the fact of its occurrence. In fact, every sign is true if taken only with respect to the trivial distinction of its mere being given: it makes a difference whether “qukkda” is given here or not. It is, however, such a trivial and irrelevant difference that one will hardly ever take it into account. We are, after all, not interested in mere immediacy but in what it means.

The rationalistic variant of this level of truth takes into account not only the trivial coincidence of the immediate signs and their meanings but the possible distance between meanings of abstract signs and the addressed reality. It appeals to immediate ideas which appear as self-evident, that is, unconditionally true. We will not repeat here the remarks on idealized immediacy from 1.1.2 (in particular, §§7 ff), but only notice again that, all the differences notwithstanding, phenomenalism and rationalism join the ranks in so far as the infallibility of the truth they are searching for is found in the immediacy, whether


\(^{215}\text{M. E. Montaigne, Of Lyons.}\)
of sensations or self-evidence. In either case, the reduction to immediacy means reduction to pure subjectivity. This conclusion was not necessarily drawn by the proponents of the respective ideas, but as the understanding of truth it amounts to solipsism: the whole truth is the pure immediacy, that is, pure subjectivity.

But truth, being a trace of transcendence, refuses to be dissolved in any subjectivistic reductions. It can hardly be dissociated from ontology. Cartesian ultimate certainty, Cogito ergo sum, places itself in the immediate subjectivity: the point of self-evidence which, however, unless helped by God, would leave one in the perfect self-satisfaction (or shall we rather say, despair?) of a solipsist. Exactly the same threat appears to Philonous who, having reduced the existence (and truth) to being immediately perceived, has to invoke higher consciousness to ensure any real existence and truth.\textsuperscript{216}

To avoid solipsism one has to give up the limitation to the irrebutability of the immediate signs and admit some distance. As we have seen, the objective aspect of this level, its ontology, is a disappearing point, an immediate, external object. Supported by all the common-sense one can invoke, truth becomes thus correspondence of the immediate, subjective sign and the equally immediate but external object. This conception has been dominating since Aristotle’s famous: “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true.”\textsuperscript{217}

We won’t analyse it in detail but want to show its association with the principle declared by much of the tradition to be the fundamental law of thought and being.

“[It is impossible for anything at the same time to be and not to be.]”\textsuperscript{218} Indeed, the objects, the self-identical, indivisible ‘substances’, solidified complete notions whose reality is consummated in the immediate limit of actuality make the principle of non-contradiction most natural and obvious. The condition ‘at the same time’ is decisive and it is this condition which narrows the horizon of attention to pure immediacy, the ideality of extensionless ‘now’. Within so narrow limit, an object can not both be and not-be, and as it is assumed to possess only equally immediate properties, it can not both be-so and not-be-so.

Let’s also notice that, although the principle is stated few lines earlier in a more epistemological terms, “it is impossible for the same man at the same time to believe the same thing to be and not to be”, it is immediately turned into an ontological principle. In search for infallible and visible certainty, not only understanding and reflective knowledge, but also being get reduced to the pure immediacy.

But what is this, apparently so obvious, ‘at the same time’? An x can not be simultaneously black and not black. OK, but the whole issue is this ‘simultaneity’. It is not even some imagined ‘least possible passage of time’, but a residual and timeless point of immediacy. If I see an object having and not having a property (or being and not being), I ‘know’ that some passage of time must have been involved. (An alternative way of dissolving the contradiction would be to postulate different objects.) We do not deal here with a fundamental principle – of non-contradiction – but with a nexus of which this principle is only an aspect. Simultaneity, taken for granted in the quoted formulations, is needed to obtain the principle but, equally well, the principle itself can serve as the definition of simultaneity – as the limit of differentiation, as the limit excluding any possible contradiction. Such a temporal limit coincides with the imagined space point; each is only the posited residuum of the respective dimension. This spatio-temporal residuum is, in turn,

\textsuperscript{216}G. Berkeley, Three Dialogues..., II

\textsuperscript{217}Aristotle, Metaphysics. IV:7

\textsuperscript{218}Ibid. IV:4
an image of the absolutely self-identical object, the ideal substance. Thus to this ideal limit of reflection addressed in 1.1.2 – the nexus of immediacy, space-time point, substantiality – we can now add also the principle of non-contradiction.

The associated law of excluded middle expresses then the completeness of the notion, of a ‘substance’ which is precise and definite. In the narrow scope of immediacy it must either be or not-be, and for any equally immediate property, it must either be-so or not-be-so. This also expresses the absolute character of negation, as the reflection that it is isolates its object excluding everything else from the horizon of attention. Indeed, in the immediacy of an act, an object has only two possibilities of either being here or not being here. This narrowing of being to the ideal point constitutes the bivalent precision of ‘yes’ vs. ‘no’, ‘being’ vs. ‘not-being’, and underlies the bivalence of truth and falsehood posited as an equally precise opposition.

168. 2. The actual truth

The above correspondence theory, arising from the subject-object dissociation, applies equally at the level of actuality. An actual complex underlies the idea of the ‘fact’ or ‘state of affairs’, as these arise in variants of the correspondence theory. This is the scope within which all indisputable trivialities of the kind “Snow is white”, “The cat is on the mat”, etc. have their locus – both expression and confirmation. Consequently, it is from this sphere that correspondence theorists fetch all their incontestable examples.

Although emerging directly from the assumed ontology of objects, the truth becomes a bit more multifaceted than the contradiction of ‘yes’ and ‘no’. Negation does not any longer have the absolute and determinate character. It is no longer the mere binary ‘yes’ or ‘no’, but a multifaceted complex of contraries. A thing can be blue or green or red or... Various predicates do not stand to each other in relation of contradiction, yet they may exclude each other. For a property P, the absolute negation not-P becomes less informative – it can be now taken only as an abbreviation for an extensive, perhaps even infinite, alternative of all its contrary properties.

169. The horizontal transcendence of this level is more of complexes, and the search for truth, for the conformance to or even domestication of transcendence, keeps multiplying the analysed phenomena and truths about them. Truth of a theory is the issue of this level. As has been observed, it is not reducible to the truth of its empirical consequences and the correspondence begins to stumble for what, possibly, might be the entity corresponding to a theory? The problems begin even earlier for all the ‘entities’ like negations, disjunctions, implications seem to reside only ‘in the mind’. They seem to have no visible correlates in the ‘reality outside’, the correspondence to which would constitute their truth.\(^{29}\)

The question of the degree of truth, or comparison of two theories, becomes of interest. Various approaches, even if severely distinct in conceptual constructions, seem nevertheless

\(^{29}\)One would say that true statement corresponds to a fact, or a state of affairs, or something that actually obtains in reality. The problem is to clarify the understanding of such entities – what exactly is a fact? (We won’t follow the lengthy debates whether ‘facts’ are something ‘in the world’ at all. It often seems that attempts to distance oneself from philosophy end in bad philosophy rather than outside it.) If the cat on the mat is a fact, then is it also the fact that ‘there is no cat on the mat?’ What kind of (objective/external) fact is that? There seems to be no satisfying answer from the proponents of the ontology of facts. We would not, however, take it as a final falsification of the correspondence theory which may retain its validity within a limited scope. If ‘mental’ vs. ‘outside reality’ has any significant meaning, and any meaning for the theory of truth, then what with the statements like "I love her.”? One may attempt behavioristic reductions but most would probably agree that if it is true then the fact, if any, to which it corresponds is pretty ‘mental’ and not external.
to be always variations over the concept of truth as an approximation to an ideal limit. For we have seen better – more true? – theories replacing the worse ones. As Newton superseded Aristotle, as Einstein superseded Newton, so progress seems to belong to the notion of (such a) truth. But like every declaration of progress – either it is only a reflection of a prior ideal goal or else posits immediately the question about such a goal. Unless one feels satisfied with sociological accounts of the mere fact of acceptance of one theory instead of another, one should somewhat account for the primacy of some theories over others. The changeable nature of most formulations and theories accepted as true, combined with the image of absolute and unchangeable truth, lead to the truth as only an ideal goal.²²⁰

Pierce: “experience shows that the calm and careful consideration of the same distinctly conceived premises (including prejudices) will insure the pronouncement of the same judgment by all men.”²²¹ It is very, very uncertain if experience really shows anything of this kind. But even if it did, of what concern could it be to me or to you, to any concrete human being? Everything “which will be thought to exist in the final opinion is real, and nothing else.”²²² How long shall we wait to see what is real? The essential questions concerning when such a common pronouncement can be obtained and how could we possibly know that it has been obtained (and won’t be challenged any more) are not only open but also impossible to close. As all forms of eschatology, such calls to the infinite waiting for the end of historical times, forget almost everything. I am sitting now in the sunshine eating a tasty ice-cream. It is extremely real, as real as the heat of the sun, but I doubt anybody will ever, ultimately, on the day of settling the accounts, care to devote any thoughts to this fact. Whether anybody would or not, its reality hic et nunc is completely independent from what such a committee of minds might eventually decide.

The horizontal transcendence of actuality is more of objects and actualities. Correspondence theories manage to some extent to account for the truth of simple propositions in terms of the actual complexes to which they correspond. The dissatisfaction with them arises from their inability to specify the ultimate external entity embracing more and more specific truths into the whole truth of everything. Perhaps, there is no such external entity and one should rather dispense with it? This brings us gradually outside the sphere of pure actuality, but some variants of this turn can be still considered at the present level.

First come some simple questions. Where is the precise distinction between sign and signified, between meaning and what is meant? Nobody ever gave a rigid, precise definition of it, and some feel justified to conclude that there is therefore no distinction.

But there is also a mightier argument with which Berkeley might seem to have discredited any attempts to maintain correspondence. For “so long men thought [...] that their knowledge was only so far forth real as it was conformable to real things, it follows they could not be certain they had any real knowledge at all.”²²³ “How given that we ‘cannot get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence’ we nevertheless can have knowledge of, and talk about, an objective public world which is

²²⁰This is, in fact, inherent in the very questions “How?!” and “Why?!” asking for an explanation. They are possible only on the prior assumption that things are not what they appear, that every encounter has some hidden essence (whether cause, goal or structure). This (we could say, transcendental assumption) turns the discovered solution of one problem into a new problem because it, too, is only an appearance in need of a new explanation. The postulated infinity of the process of explanation is only a reflection of turning this dissociation of things from their meaning into the image of absolute, eventually-to-be-reached truth.

²²¹C. S. Pierce, Some consequences of four incapacities.

²²²C. S. Pierce, Critical Review of Berkeley’s idealism. p.82

²²³G. Berkeley, A Treatise.... §86 [my emph.]
not of our making. Since we indeed “cannot compare belief with non-belief to see if they match,” then let us better reduce truth to some form of its corroboration which, at least in principle, should be possible inside ‘the world of our making’. One seems forced to replace truth with the corroboration of truth. The more radical representatives claim that the criteria they arrive at actually constitute the concept of truth, while the more sober ones admit that establishing acceptable criteria of truth need not necessarily require or imply the grasp of the concept of truth itself.

But such a critique (motivating idealistic coherentism or, most generally, immanentism) seems to rest on some all too strong, if not directly wrong, assumption. The assumption amounts to absolutisation of the dualism: the ‘objective public world’ is ‘out there’ and we are trying to reach it from some ‘closed inside’ – not just a duality, presence of two distinct aspects, but an absolute dualism. The world and the mind (or language) are posited as totally incommensurable entities which, by the all underlying assumption, are not and cannot come into contact with each other: “we cannot compare belief with non-belief.” As this makes the conflict indissoluble, the only thing which remains is to get rid of one of the elements. Mind (or language) must stay, as it is doing all the consideration, so the only element which can go away is the extra-mental, or extra-linguistic reality. This form of idealism has been the background for the coherentism from its beginnings with Bradley and Joachim.

171. Of course, you cannot both lock the box and have it open. But who has said that the box is locked, that language does not refer to anything extra-linguistic, that mind is able to relate only to itself? This, as we said, is motivated by the wish to account for everything in the visible categories and, in the present context of truth, to reduce it to the visible criteria of its verification.

The reduction of the ‘outside’ (reality) to the ‘inside’ (mind, or language) amounts to the observation that saying that truth is a relation of language to the ‘outside world’, we remain ‘within’ the language. But do we really? Hearing that

(iv) “There is a funny guy on the square.”

one convinces oneself about the truth of this statement by looking out the window – not very linguistic act and certainly not one keeping me ‘inside’ the actuality of my solipsistic ‘mind’. We have – we do have – the relation between the linguistic expressions and the world (or between S and D, or between the abstract signs and the distinctions possibly transcending the horizon of actuality), represented pictorially as:

(v) “There is a funny guy on the square.”

Now, applying (i) from §157 and saying that

(vi) “To check if “There is a funny guy on the square” is true one looks for a funny guy on the square.”

is indeed a linguistic expression which, in a sense, has turned ‘is true’ into a higher-order predicate, has ‘internalised’ the r from (v). Just like the universal possibility of

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224D. Davidson, A coherence theory of truth and knowledge. p.141
225R. Rorty, Pragmatism, Davidson, and truth. p.334
226If not with Berkeley. Statements like, e.g., “It is a hard thing to suppose that right deductions from true principles should ever end in consequences which cannot be maintained or made consistent.” [G. Berkeley, A Treatise... Introduction §3] may not announce a full-fledged coherence theory of truth, but they signal the presence of its essential elements.
2.2. As above, so below

objectifying anything leads to the objectivist illusion, so the universal possibility of such an ‘internalisation’, the mere fact of the relation (v) being expressed linguistically as (vi), can be misused for reducing everything to a mere linguistic expression. But just like the objectivist illusion mistakes the possibility of turning everything into an object for the reality of everything being an object, so this reduction mistakes the possibility of linguistic expression for the only reality and takes the fact that communicable thoughts are expressed only in language for the lack of any reality beyond the linguistic one. All such reductions forget the very first fact, the original relation (v), and dwell exclusively at its reflection (vi), the mere signs over which they do have some power. And since all that can be said, can be said in language which has become the exclusive focus of attention, one may safely keep writing and speaking as if the box were locked and nothing connected it to the outside.227

In our view, language is connected to the much wider field of distinctions which, in turn, remain embraced by the ultimate transcendence of the indistinct. Only trying to explicate everything in purely actual terms alone, one may be forced to negate any outside connections of the system of signs. But language remains connected to the whole world of life and “to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.”228 This form of life, the distinctions drawn by an existence in experience, condition the character of the language itself, constitute both its origin and its limit.

“The limit of language is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which corresponds to (is the translation of) a sentence, without simply repeating the sentence.”229 There may be as many relations r in (v) as there are linguistic expressions, for each draws the distinctions in another way, and words do nothing more (nor less) than that. Consequently, trying to specify it, we have to start every time anew, for every utterance, drawing the distinctions in its unique way, gives a new relation. (Recall, for instance, the differences between the German “Wirklichkeit” and English “reality”. The relation between “blue” and blueness is as different from the relation between “hate” and hate, as blueness is different from hate.) Now, there is no doubt that what “hate” means is conditioned by what “antipathy”, “repulsion”, “love” and many other words mean. But this inter-dependence of words’ meanings is not an immanent linguistic phenomenon. To some degree, it is certainly conditioned by the richness of the language. But it reflects primarily the ways distinctions are drawn in the world. A person not experiencing any difference between antipathy and repulsion will easily confuse the use of these words just like, being reminded that the two words mean distinct things, may lead to drawing the respective distinction in experience.

This intimacy between language and reality does not mean their identity. There may be little sense in trying to prove the limitation of the language using the language, especially since this limitation is language’s very presupposition. (Besides, since it is not linguistic, attempts to define it might be compared to the attempts to define exactly, using only language, the difference between two shades of blue.) But even if it can not be precisely specified within the language, its presence can still be shown, clearly indicated. This is one of the fundamental, even if usually ignored, functions of language – allowing us to speak about something we cannot say, to point towards something we cannot define precisely.

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227 This philosophical linguisticism has a powerful counterpart in the mathematical theory of formal, that is uninterpreted, languages and mathematical logic underlying the design of computers (which are just tools for manipulation of uninterpreted symbols). Both express one of the central aspects of the intellectual Zeitgeist of the XXth century.

228 L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. I.19

229 L. Wittgenstein, Culture and Value. Or else, extending the schema §157. (ii): the meaning of “W” is W, as observed, e.g., in M. Dummett, What is a theory of meaning?, p.108
This openness is the whole strength and flexibility of natural language. Unlike a formal language (or any language when raised to the status of the exclusive object of study), natural language is not an isolated and dissociated entity existing exclusively according to its own definition and norms. On the contrary, it is only an aspect of existence involved into its world. The limitation of the language is that one can hardly explain the meaning of any word or phrase to one who does not understand it, that one cannot explain what “blue”, “taste” or “hate” mean using the language alone. The limitation of the language is that new words emerge almost exclusively because of the insufficiency of the language in dealing with new distinctions arising in experience. The limitation of the language is that it cannot exist alone and this limitation is what underlies its whole meaning. Language lives only through the relation which words and sentences carry by being (used as) what they are: abstract signs reflecting (and also drawing) distinctions in the matter of experience, epiphanies capable of forgetting their origin but incapable of functioning without it.

173. This discussion of meaning is relevant here because truth is only meaning’s adventure and the attempts to reduce truth to mere coherence involve a similar reduction of meaning. If the meaning of linguistic expressions does not reside in the language alone but involves some transcendent element, then neither can truth amount to merely immanent coherence.

Let us remind that what we mean by transcendence is not any inaccessible reality ‘in itself’. The square transcends the immediacy of the expression “the square”. But the square, too, is a limit of distinctions, even an actual object and, as such, remains immanent. Hate transcends any expression “hate” in a much more dramatic way but one might still claim that, being relative to our experience, it is immanent. Since all we have are distinctions relative to the distinguishing existence, we might seem to remain in the sphere of immanence and our objections to the coherence theories of truth and linguistic immaneitism of meaning may seem to affect our own position.

To address this, which we will do in the remaining part of the considerations of actual truth, let us consider perhaps the most dramatic variant of immaneitism which says: “Nothing beyond the text.” Text is absolutised as the only carrier and container of meaning and, consequently, if it is still a legitimate idea at all, of truth. Imagine two reading scenarios. 1) I have a book, B, which I know was written by an author (whom I may know or not, does not matter). I read it and find a lot of interesting stuff, meaning, even truth, in it. 2) In the other scenario, I have exactly the same book B only I know that it was written by an ‘intelligent’ machine. Will the meaning, and consequently the truth, of the book be the same in both readings?

The champions of pure textuality would like us to either abstract away the difference or pretend that no difference obtains. However, even if in 2) one were able to understand exactly the same from B as in 1) (except, perhaps, how the heck did a machine manage to write this?), one would still not be able to attach to it equal value, and hence neither equal meaning, as in 1). It does not matter if one knows who exactly the author was, how much one possibly knows about him and his time, although these things certainly may influence the reading and understanding of the text. But what matters is that one knows that the text was written by a human. This, in and by itself, makes the text a possible revelation of truth which can be trivial or deep, simple or involved but, in any case, possibly relevant and touching reader’s humanity. Reading is a form of communication with other humans, and hence also with one’s own humanity, even if the author remains unknown. The fact

230Like every genuine strength, it is not owned by the one to whom it is given and can sometimes even appear as weakness.
that the text can involve much more than the author ever intended is as uninteresting as
the fact that an accidental slip of a tongue can mean something much more than the one
to whom it happened is conscious of. We are still dealing with humans and this is the
universal horizon, the eventual reference frame encircling every text.

And finally, if one got the same book B without knowing who, or what, wrote it, but
knowing that it might have been written by a human or by a machine, its reading would
be different from both 1) and 2). Yet, reading it and gradually discovering (in the text
only) some understandable, human meaning, one would form the image of the possible
author in terms of 1), in terms of a human who possibly might have written such a text.
One would think, good author, he says a lot of interesting things, while in the moments
where things get a bit dubious one would, as usual, try to ignore them but, perhaps
eventually, use them to construct a more refined understanding of the message; perhaps,
by augmenting the dubious parts with what one has understood, perhaps, by ascribing
them to the idiosyncrasy of the author. The point is only to repeat, after hermeneutics,
that we do treat a text as a possible message worth deciphering. It is such a message
only because it was sent by another human. If it were sent by an ant or an extracelestial
intelligence, we would be deciphering a different thing.

In short, many texts of accidental, merely informative or purely entertaining value
might be written by anybody, even machine. But in the moment one assumes, expects, or
discovers, some deeper meaning in the text, the text itself becomes a medium of human
communication – this is, eventually, the universal context of every text.231 We are not
assigning any particular importance to the actual authorship of a text. But we are assigning
the highest, even if always obvious, importance to the fact that there was a human author.
This personal presence and the character of a text as a message from another human is
the first aspect going against any reduction of its meaning to the textual immanence of
actual signs.

“Nothing beyond the text” does not limit the attention to any single text but to the 174.
textuality as such’. A single text, a book is but a piece of ‘interminable text’, where
other texts are the only reference frame for any given one. It is supposed to mean that
there is no ground for assuming “anything beyond the signs, anything whose sameness
and existence would not be conditioned by the process of naming.”232 Given our objections
to the metaphysical substances and absolute identities, this sounds almost acceptable –
disquietingly so... Let us ignore the tendency (of ones who seem to do nothing but reading
and writing) to call everything which involves signs “text”.233 Still, a sign which is not a

231 The individuality of the particular person who happened to write the text may, but need not, be of
significance. “[A] book is created by another I than that which appears in our habits, in company, in
weaknesses. If we want to understand this I, we must try to recreate it in our own depth [...] Man who
lives in the same body with a great genius has little to do with the latter, but he is the only person known
to his acquaintances; consequently, it is absurd to evaluate a great poet, as Sainte-Beuve does, according
to what kind of person he is or what his friends tell about him.” [M. Proust, Against Sainte-Beuve. The
method of Sainte-Beuve’s] Unlike those who, dissatisfied with the petty ego of personal folk-psychoLOGY,
claim subject’s total superficiality, here dispensing with the former serves only the purpose of emphasizing
text’s origin in the deeper layers of self, of genuine human subject(ivity).

232 B. Allen, Truth in Philosophy. p.106 [after A. Szahaj, Irony and Love. p.77]
233 We take notice of the remarks that “text” does not mean text but some unspecified totality of dis-
tinctions, the totality of meanings or, perhaps, meaning-carriers, a web of beliefs, a kind of network of
interconnected – or rather a matrix of free floating and hardly identifiable – units; eventually, a panthe-
istic substance overriding identity of its parts. The arguments of idealistic flavour, which point to the
impossibility of a contact between two dissociated substances, yield one substance which, as also in our
sign of something else is not a sign! It is, perhaps, a thing, a ‘that’, but what makes it a sign? Only the distance between it and its meaning. A more drastic change of language seems to be needed, but what is the point in changing the meaning of the word “sign” to such an extent that it ceases to denote ‘sign’? Baudrillard’s “simulacrum”, a copy without any original, tries to take care of that, of reducing the sign to its purely actual dimension and dispensing with anything signified, anything lying beyond its abstract actuality.

Most things exist and function completely independently from the process of naming but, indeed, they emerge only in the process of distinguishing. The difference might seem to concern only the wording, but it is quite fundamental, as fundamental as that between actual signs and the general distinctions or else, as that between actuality and presence. Certainly, distinctions arise only gradually and at every stage form a whole system – there is no such thing as a single distinction existing ‘in itself’ independently from others. Similarly, what is meant by “love” is related to, perhaps even dependent on, what is meant by “sympathy”, “affection”, “hate”, etc. So, in principle, we can agree that meanings of all words are woven into a total web of the language. But this inter-dependence is only a reflection of the distinctions drawn in the matter of experience, between things, feelings, understandings. The plasticity of the web of language at best reflects only the plasticity of the experience, like the actual signs reflect only distinctions drawn also beyond the horizon of actuality. But it does not mean that every single, actual element of this web has a meaning only by its relation to the rest and is conditioned exclusively by such a relation. On the contrary, unlike a scientific theory (which, according to Quine, is a vast theoretical super-structure only at its outer boundary touching the world of experience and experiments), natural language meets experience at every point. The fact that meaning of a particular statement can depend on meanings of other words and statements does not in any way cut this particular statement off from its relation to the extra-linguistic aspect of experience, from the extra-linguistic distinctions which it draws and addresses.

‘Text’, any system of signs, or language is indeed, as Merleau-Ponty says, “life itself, our and thing’s life. [But] not that language conquers and appropriates them, for what would be left for saying, if there existed only things said? It is a mistake of semantic philosophies to close language as if it spoke only about itself, because it lives [by] silence; everything we throw to others grew up in this great, mute country which will never leave us.”

Expanding a bit this statement, we would add that the ‘mute country’ can itself be organised by distinctions and even signs which themselves need not have linguistic character, but even these are signs only by the force of their meaning (eventually, non-actuality) which they bring into the horizon of our attention. Sign is the paradigm of actuality, and dissociated sign as a sign the paradigm of immediacy. The insistence on pure textuality and absence of anything beyond the signs, in its attempts to escape from simplified correspondence to actualities, falls straight back into the midst of ‘metaphysics of actuality’ which, de-mitologised by the removal of the last element of transcendence, becomes pure immediacy of a mere sign, or else the totality of such signs. The simulacrum of transcendence, the ‘interminable text’, appears as the ultimate form of subjectivistic illusion which sees nothing beyond the horizon of actuality but other actualities, now not even objects but only signs. Perhaps, it is only an accident, perhaps, an intellectual sickness. Thirsting for a visible unity, it keeps removing the transcendence, narrowing the

\footnote{M. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible*. Inquiry and intuition:p.131}
2.2. As above, so below

attention to what, being immediately given, deludes reflection with the promises of unity. But the unity which leaves the essential, even if conceptually in graspable, element outside, is never satisfying. The attempts to remove transcendence are, at bottom, the attempts to appropriate it. But the multitude of signs and simulacra, their free and uncontrolled play, do not fill the emptiness of the soul which, trying to appropriate the world, loses the truth of its own being. “For everything seeks not another, but itself, and the journey to the exterior is foolish or compulsory.”

If we were willing to see in the ‘text’ a totality of meanings, a plastic totality of fluid elements with always unsharp boundaries, we might see in it an analogy to our chaos. But beyond chaos, there is nothingness. The moment in which this transcendent origin of all distinctions is ignored marks the beginning of immanence. There is something beyond the ‘text’, something that may seem infinitesimal and insignificantly small, but which, exactly by lying beyond all differences, weights more than their whole web. It is a moment of silence, of silence which is tranquil and not intense, grateful and not awaiting anything. A moment of silence which neither grasps nor reaches for anything but makes all the things and meanings light, weightless, which suspends all meanings and thus, almost paradoxically, endows their totality with the deepest meaning – the touch of eternity above in which all meanings and differences disappear, this ‘transcendental signified’ which halts the regress of potentially infinite re-interpretations of signs by signs, of one actuality by another. It is only from such moments, from such a mute country, that the ‘intertextual’ web arises. Just like everybody enters this web from there, so in the moment of genuine silence one also leaves this web and touches eternity above it. Although such moments may be very rare, they do occur and, easy to ignore as they are, they testify to the tremendous difference between the interminable search for the truth in the totality of visible signs, which can rest only in the ideal limits of eschatological phantasies, and the truth above the actual facts which is present in the life one is living.

3. Truth of totality

The objectivistic illusion, underlying versions of correspondence theories, is manifest as the subjectivistic illusion in coherentism: first, in the fact that the whole becomes a mere ‘text’, a collection of mere actualities, signs; and then, in the usual multiplication of facts and truths (here, signs) as one tries to embrace the whole which refuses to appear as anything more than a totality. The main problem we have with truth as mere coherence is, besides its immanence, the fact that the whole is only a totality. Extending beyond any reasonable limits of inquiry, the postulated coherence is only an ideal goal and so the truth must be postponed until indefinite future. As all ideal limits, it betrays the attempt to capture something higher in terms of a totality of lower elements. Totality is a project of mineness and so coherentism belongs to this level, although it often tries to account for the actual truths. Now, the horizontal transcendence of this level, the not-mine, has the particularly significant modification: the others. Focusing on this aspect of transcendence leads to replacing the more or less conceptual coherence with the social consensus.

Coherentism may touch some deeper, than mere actual, aspect of truth. However, with respect to the actual issues, it seems insufficient, if not pretty arbitrary. Starting with a given set (totality) of opinions, T, a new opinion O may happen to cohere with it just as well as its opposite. If a choice has to be made, I may end up with T and O while you with T and not-O. There are many coherent totalities and the choice between them seems to be arbitrary. But nobody wants to be swallowed up by the arbitrariness of subjectivity.

235 Plotinus, Enneads. VI.6.1
Beyond *me* there are others, the whole community, tradition. The sociological aspect appears (albeit in as yet limited and not aggressive form) already with Pierce since, for some reason, the eventual usefulness of an opinion cannot be judged by its own standards, it requires an eschatological consensus. "And the catholic consent which constitutes the truth is by no means to be limited to men in this earthly life or to the human race, but extends to the whole communion of minds to which we belong, including some probably whose senses are very different from ours, so that in that consent no predication of a sensible quality can enter, except as an admission that so certain sorts of senses are affected."  

One seems thus to pay the due respect to the *transcendent* character of truth not only removing it to the indefinite fullness of times but also overcoming solipsism by assigning the constitutive role to a community.

But taking thus care of the *transcendence* of *not-mine* by replacing objectivity by inter-subjectivity, typical for the sociological invasion of philosophy, amounts really to its removal. As we observed in I:§159, if none of two persons were able to relate to the objective truth of his views, together they might establish consensus which might even strengthen the common views but not introduce any new quality of their objectivity. Inter-subjectivity may cure solipsism but not subjectivity. It only raises it to the higher level. And as no *transcendence* enters the horizon, one obtains only a community of immanent interactions, of writing and speaking, a community of ‘narratives’. Then there seems to be only one goal: let’s interact, talk and “keep conversation going”. Strangely enough, one drags in all kind of extra-conversational, extra-textual things like ethics, solidarity, tolerance... So, after all, does not conversation suffice? It seems it does not. For pragmatical mind, conversation is only means of action, and a good conversation brings in powerful narratives, effective metaphors. But appeals to descriptions and metaphors which simply work, which are effective, which serve the purpose seem rather empty if keeping the conversation going is *the* goal. (Sure, it is not *the* goal because there is no such thing as *the* goal. One is only pressed by ‘wrong language game’ to say what *the* point possibly might be.) But even the strictest codes of a court etiquette, enabling one to spend time conversing without saying anything, had always left an opening for actually saying something. Reducing everything to a game of *simulacra* one would still like to escape the resulting arbitrariness, that is, to retain the possibility of saying something. And so one needs something – tolerance, solidarity, respect... – which sounds sufficiently convincing *in itself*. But is it convincing? Sure, because ‘decent fellows like us’ do accept such values. But what if I am not one of the conversational club, if I am not a decent guy and do not accept such values? I guess, I am not part of the game, I am not admitted to the conversation. But then, since one talks about solidarity and tolerance, of constant extension of the horizon of ‘we’, so please, extend it, perhaps even to the guys who bomb your home town. This, after all, is only an expression of a yet another, powerful narrative metaphor.

177. Replacing truth by inter-subjectivity, consensus theory reduces possible truth to that about which all might reach an *actual* consensus, and that is close to nothing. Failing to escape *my* subjectivity in the sphere of social subjectivity, one invents the ideal of consensus allowing everybody run his own business, the ideal of plurality and non-conformism. This is only a slight variation on the pragmatic ethics in a ‘pluralistic universe’ taken over by the recent masters of manifold and variety. Having lost, in the plurality of disparate opinions and ‘discourses’, any means of saying that something is more important, more valuable, higher, deeper or more true than something else, and thus of saying what possibly

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236C. S. Pierce, *Critical Review of Berkeley’s idealism*. p.83
might be a meaningful goal for which things should ‘work’, the only possibility left is to embrace everything. One even imagines systems (political, cultural) allowing for non-conformism. (Positive, as the intentions behind such, as behind most other utopias, can be, the result reflects only the origin: the absolutisation of atomism on the social scale, only claimed to have positive value.) However, just like a sign which does not signify is not a sign, so a system open for everything is not any system but a lack thereof. Also, non-conformism which is allowed as an option, as if calculated into the system, is not any longer non-conformism. A system allowing non-conformism, by this very token, abolishes its possibility. One could, perhaps, keep conversation going. But everyone should know the situations where this becomes a mere gesture of unbearable politeness, because what the other is saying, no matter how intelligent and well-argued, is either completely uninteresting or nonsense. Universal pluralism and tolerance would have one main consequence – total de-individualisation and indolence, uniformity, the exact opposite of the intended variety. Discourse in such a setting would, too, cease to have meaning, because where everything is allowed, where all goals are equally good, where everything is acceptable, there is no need to argue (not to say fight) for anything. When everybody is entitled to be heard, eventually, nobody bothers to listen. Sure, these are only idealizations, regulative ideas since no such thing can ever happen. But a regulative idea directing one towards a goal which, in itself, is not desirable seems very dubious. Besides, there are some who speak as if they wanted them to happen.

Certainly, admitting every possible variety of narrative metaphors, not to mention behaviours, is a bit too generous. But saying what should be excluded, by the very fact of excluding something some members of the all-embracing community might defend, points always beyond the limits of possible consensus. If one does not want to place everything in the hands of the eschatological community of minds as the ideal goal, consensus theory must turn ethnocentric by choosing some more specific community, consensus with which would constitute truth. However, having only more narratives without any inherent and mutual values, such a choice is entirely arbitrary. And if anything at all might possibly be meant by “truth” it can not stand all too much arbitrariness. The convenient words one tries to invoke – “solidarity”, “universality”, “communicability”, “tolerance” – point towards something which one believes would cure this arbitrariness, something fundamentally human. Ethics seem to replace truth; not in the Kantian way, though, as complementing the project of knowledge of appearances, but simply replacing it. Ethics, moreover, devoid of any truth, that is, an arbitrary ‘ought’ of mere worship of manifold, plurality, growth, increase. The popular medical term for that is “cancer”. As a cure against the uncontrolled growth and diversification, one praises the powerful metaphors, the powerful narratives, namely, the ones which gather communities providing an axis of consensus. But what makes a metaphor, a narration powerful? What is it that makes some language “strike also the next generation as inevitable”237? Communism was once a powerful narrative, many next generations were struck by it as inevitable. And its prolific, powerful consequences... Yet its power was not very different from – in fact, was founded in – its falsehood. Is it so that people somewhat intuit that this and not that narrative can be made effective, used to change things? Change to the better, perhaps? These are, of course, ‘wrong questions’, which assume that there is some ‘what’ behind the actual event of a narrative simply happening to be powerful. Consensus, being the measure of truth, should stay the primitive notion. It just happens, and so does truth. So let it happen in most prolific ways, with no interference or

237 R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. I:2:p.29
persecution of its possible happenings. Why such a proliferation is to be any better than unification is not clear – after all, consensus seems closer to the latter than to the former but, we might guess, one wants to be politically correct.

179. We might seem to be confusing two distinct issues: consensus theories of truth and the politically motivated views promoting free unfolding and multiplicity of views. It is not, however, our choice because the two, arising from the same perspective putting the social aspect in front of any other, typically go together. The problem of non-conforming groups and individuals is equally annoying to the consensus theories as to those preaching unrestricted proliferation of narratives. The latter have to exclude deviant individuals and dangerous narratives, while the former, in addition, also admit for those who announce some truths before the times are ripe for a general consensus about them. Somehow, they must take non-conformism into account and, trying to do so, step beyond the purity of their basic claim. Freedom of unfolding, as well as consensus, must be qualified by some additional element – of respecting the limits, of being reasonable, of not coercing others. But if we need to exclude persecution to upgrade a mere consensus, the power of narratives or a pluralistic non-conformism to the level of truth, why not dispense with all such upgraded concepts and only say that it is enough not to persecute? “Truth is non-persecution.” Well, it does not sound bad, does it? Why not? Because it again touches something which one wants to recognise as humanly correct, not to say true. The servility of praising something that ‘strikes also the next generation as inevitable’ is as astonishing as the depersonalisation and de-individualisation implied by the unrestricted pluralism. It is an invitation (the less intended, the worse) to following the mob psychology, like that which made many victims of Marxism (in all its variants) follow voluntarily the development proclaimed inevitable for all future generations. If some element of ethical value is added, one may, perhaps, avoid the arbitrariness of mere consensus. But thus it ceases to be a pure consensus \textit{simpliciter}.

180. The absolutised sociologism of consensus theories reflects the mentality of a stock market and agents of public relations, or else the wishes of the ministries of propaganda. No doubt, there are sociological dimensions and situations in which mob’s convictions are sufficient for action or, as is usually the case, mass hysteria. But have we not heard enough lies which, consented to and repeated sufficiently many times, refused to become truths? Inter-subjectivity, no matter how total or totalitarian, is still a \textit{subjectivity} which cannot constitute any truth but only, and only at best, reflect it.

There may be an element of virtue in the consensus theories. Consensus, just like coherence, need not exclude truth and it is often important to achieve an agreement with others which means, to accept the same truths with respect to the same horizon of \textit{distinctions}. But one must always watch for the fear of all \textit{distinctions} of relevance becoming \textit{only} those agreed upon by the community. Petty-bourgeois conformism, not to mention horrific submission to the powerful narratives of Stalinism or Hitlerism, are certainly not intended by the proponents of the view, but they can be avoided only by introducing elements which have nothing to do with the sociological consensus.

The element of truth hiding behind the consensus theories concerns the vague intuition of truth’s transpersonal \textit{aspect}. Unfortunately, in the search for \textit{visible} criteria, this aspect gets conflated with the opinion of plurality. (Thirst for \textit{visible} criteria ends typically with conflating the criteria with the things they were only supposed to be criteria of.) Truth, however, is not transpersonal because it resides only in some communal consensus but, on the contrary, because, being \textit{present} in every human, it \textit{transcends his reflection} and the
subjectivity of his mere representations. It is the aspect of the non-actual foundation in the layer transcending one’s subjectivity not, however, merely in the horizontal dimension of others and not-mine, but in the vertical dimension reaching towards the deeper level of one’s humanity.

4. The absolute truth

"Truth in its essential nature is that systematic coherence which is the character of a significant whole. A ‘significant whole’ is an organised individual experience, self-fulfilling and self-fulfilled.” Translating it into our language, the ‘significant whole’ is the existence and the ‘systematic coherence’ its unity. But this unity is not consistency; it is the original fact of existence founding the possibility of any actually consistent whole and unity.

Recalling again our figure (I§117, p.75), as we move up the circle (above its horizontal diameter), there are not more distinctions, in fact, there are less, or if there are more, they become dense beyond recognition. It is the sphere where the clue is not to include more heterogeneous facts into a unifying theory but rather to understand that less is more, that the same eternal things penetrate all variety of actualities. The truth of invisibles is contained in simple words of wisdom rather than in complexity of smart arguments.

Truth, like every trace, reaches eventually to the unity which is its absolute aspect, the unchangeable one, common to all who know it and to those who do not. But “though the truth is common, the many live as if they had a wisdom of their own.” Manifestations of unity need not and do not conform to the visible rules of agreement between the particulars which, usually, only unknowingly and involuntarily happen to manifest the same eternal truth. The absolute truth does not embrace all the lower, visible ones – it abolishes them. The distance separating the actual signs from their meaning is here so remote, that no visible rules can govern the expressions of truth. And only the exclusive reliance on the visible rules and criteria can confuse their lack with arbitrariness and the absence of truth.

The unity of one being certainly admits contradictions. Viewing this unity in its temporal aspect, there is nothing contradictory in being, at one time P and, at another time, not-P. But much more can be said. I can, at the same time, both like and dislike a person. And it is not of much use to say that then I like and dislike distinct properties of the person, because persons are not complexes of properties but individual beings. Sure, I can like the person for ‘being x’ and dislike for ‘being y’. But I can also, simultaneously, both love and not-love the person, the whole person. “I hate her and I love her. Why I do so I don’t know.” It’s just the way I feel, that’s all, and it’s tearing me in two.” I can have a vague feeling about something which, when attempting to specify it, results in saying that it is both pleasing and displeasing. This can be blamed merely on the inadequacy of the language to express the actual feelings. But blaming it for such an inadequacy, one has already assumed that the feelings must be prone to a precise description in terms of immediacy, that is, non-contradiction. Higher things seldom are prone to such descriptions and, indeed, their descriptions can often be most adequate by using contradictory predicates. Coming to terms with such higher aspects of one’s life, it is necessary to realise that simple yes-no questions can have no answers. One sitting there and trying desperately to figure out “Do I love her or not? Do I or do I not?” is probably still in his adolescence, trying to capture the accumulated tension of vagueness and clarity in the categories of recently developed precision and reflective visibility. When, eventually, some action must

238 H. H. Joachin, The Nature of Truth, §26 [after S. Blackburn and K. Simmons, eds., Truth, p.50]
239 Heraclitus DK 22B2 [Instead of “truth”, the fragment has “logos”.]
240 Catullus Odì e Amò, 60
be undertaken, one may have to bring everything down to the actual choice between yes and no: “Shall I invite her for a dinner or not?” This is now a question about the actual course of action where, indeed, contradictions can be intolerable.\(^{241}\)

182. The eventual transcendence is nothingness, the lack or the empty set of distinctions, so the only signs true with respect to it are those which mean nothing, \(m(S) = \emptyset\), “nothingness”, “one” or just . . . silence. Let us notice in passing that a sign meaning nothingness is very different from a sign meaning nothing, or from the lack of sign. Silence meaning nothingness, \textit{Stille und Ewigkeit}, is different from silence which does not mean anything or, as the case may be, which is only tensely expecting its own termination waiting for somebody to say something.\(^{242}\) Also, as intentions belong to meanings, there is a fundamental difference between a sign which both intends and means nothingness, and one which, intending something, means nothing, between a \textit{k\öan} and an overlooked contradiction.

The absolute truth is \textit{that}: \textit{that} there is, or else, \textit{that} there is truth. And what is \textit{that}? Nothing, \textit{that} which makes it impossible for any person or any community to arbitrarily decide what is true. At the same time, \textit{that} makes it possible to oppose any particular ‘truth’ which \textit{actual}ity might attempt to posit as the truth, as the absolute truth. Falsehood with respect to the nothingness is not its plain negation, something; it is not anything specifically distinguished as such, because no particular thing, no \textit{distinction} opposes the absoluteness of indistinct. Indistinct remains untouched above the whole world, \textit{above} all \textit{distinctions} and falsehood with respect to \textit{that} amounts to projecting some \textit{distinctions} into the indistinct. Absolute falsehood is something particular \textit{only when} predicated about the \textit{absolute} or, what amounts to the same, absoluteness predicated about anything relative – in short, an \textit{idol}.

183. \textit{Idolatry} divides because, \textit{posing} something relative as \textit{absolute}, it \textit{alienates} from \textit{that} which is \textit{one}; trying to make it \textit{visible}, it not only veils but also falsifies it. Relativity means limited scope and validity, and \textit{posing} it as \textit{absolute} sets one against all that contradicts this absoluteness, namely, all that falls outside its scope. And so, he that tries to unify under some \textit{visible} slogans, ends up dividing, “he that gathereth not [in truth] scattereth abroad.”\(^{243}\) The scattered pieces, the pieces left outside the scope of the \textit{actual} unity remain, however, as the seeds of constant restlessness, disquieting reminders of the refusal and exclusion. And “[t]he stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”\(^{244}\) The new building, to last, must not be just a rearrangement of the old pieces including, in addition, a few pieces previously excluded. It lasts only accepting the relativity of the relative and ceasing to search for the \textit{absolute} among the \textit{visible} pieces.

Truth is the way of – and, as a \textit{trace} of transcendence, a norm, a call to – \textit{unity}, keeping

\(^{241}\)Nicholas of Cusa could be quoted extensively to illustrate the disappearing role of \textit{actual} contradictions in the spiritual sphere and the true \textit{equipoise} of opposites in the \textit{origin}. His \textit{coincidentia oppositorum} concerns “the Unifying Beginning, [where] we see opposites prior to duality, i.e., before they are two contradictories. [It is] as if we were to see the smallest of contraries coincide (e.g., minimal heat and minimal cold; minimal slowness and minimal fastness, etc.) […] Hence, just as an angle that is minimally acute and minimally obtuse is a simple right angle, in which the smallest of contrary angles coincide, before acute angle and obtuse angle are two angles, so too is the situation regarding the Unifying Beginning, in which the smallest of contraries altogether coincide” [Nicholas of Cusa, \textit{De Beryllo}. §41.p.810] or, perhaps, have not been \textit{dissociated} yet.

\(^{242}\)Thus, on the one hand, “Silence alone is Thy praise.” [Ps. LXV:2; St. Jerome’s translation] But not all silence is praise, for there is also silence of emptiness, of lack turned into disappointment: “Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.” [Ps. XCIV:17]

\(^{243}\)Mt. XII:30/Lk.XI:23

\(^{244}\)Ps. CXVIII:22
heaven and earth together. It is the transcendent unity and as such a contra-distinction to the falsehood of the actuality taken as absolute. It is the element of transcending – beyond actuality – which establishes it primarily as the call to unity, as the norm of preserving the unity. Following this norm unites, but not necessarily in any trivial sense of a conceptual agreement – it unites primarily in a complete disagreement, above and in spite of all actual conflicts. It is not a trivial acceptance, which often means just absolutisation, of all the differences. It is rather an admittance that these differences are only of relative value, are manifestations of something which, remaining invisible, unities. The image of truth as the absolute either-or, not admitting any degrees and compelling everybody to unconditional acceptance, as both absolute and visible, is a fallen angel reminding of the lost paradise. “The urge to possess absolutely only certainties is a residual religious drive, and nothing more.” It is the trace of the absolute truth which, however, concerns only the invisible absolute. Among the relativity of actual facts, truth can hardly conform to such standards. Any demand for it to actually and visibly unify and gather only reduces its meaning and power. For absolute truth is not relative to any particular aspects of our actual world and life, but exercises its power above, as the ultimate norm, ever reminding us about the only relative significance of whatever we manage to capture under our actual look and grasp. Reducing it to any visible norms and criteria falsifies its character of being exactly the absolute norm which remains valid when all actual criteria have failed or been violated.

Every actuality is a sign which may be true or not with respect to the absolute. In the deepest sense life, viewed as a constant confrontation of actuality with transcendence, can be true. To live in truth is to live in conformance to the origin, in the unity above visible dispersion. To use Luria’s inventive imagery, to gather the dispersed pieces; in the constant process of restoration, «tikkun», to keep repairing the divine vessels broken in the earlier stage of dispersion, «sheviruth ha-kelims». Successful «tikkun» concerns the whole hierarchy of Being, unifies all its levels around the highest truth; not in any coherent theory but in the full recognition of the relative differences, even incommensurability, of lower distinctions, whose possible consistency and compatibility never sums up to the ultimate unity. The signs can be true in different degree, depending on the level they address. An idol is seldom a complete lie. It can be promoted to the special status precisely because it harbours some truth. But the status of the absolute is undeserved because it is only relative truth. I saw once a professor (of philosophy!) conducting a proof in first-order logic for the statement that God who is both omnipotent and good cannot possibly exist. Formally, the proof was correct and His Professorship seemed very pleased with himself – he almost seemed to believe that he actually proved anything of interest. But correctness and truth with respect to the mathematical precision need not reflect any truth with respect to the deeper aspects of life. One can be both right and wrong at the same time. Truth of most statements terminates at the level which they address, and in this very fact there hides an

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245What opposes unites, and the finest attunement stems from things bearing in opposite directions, and all things come about by strife. – Graspings: things whole and not whole, what is drawn together and what is drawn asunder, the harmonious and the discordant. The one is made up of all things, and all things issue from the one.” [Heraclitus DK 22B8-B10.] We are, of course, very far from any pantheistic interpretations of the slightly unlucky phrase opening the last sentence.

246F. Nietzsche, The Wanderer and His Shadow. 16

247The same intuitions seem to underlie the Orphic myth of Zagreus-Dionysus’ rebirth – return to the original unity – from the pieces scattered in the souls of all people.

248In a particular case, it can be hard to say if rigidity is an expression of pride, of insecurity, or of both, but it is easy to notice that one can be both intelligent and stupid. Such observations might be taken only as a preliminary to the observation ‘the smarter, the more stupid’ from §54.
additional aspect of truth, of knowing and respecting the limits. But there are also other
modes of speaking. The similes, invoked in wisdom literature and various Biblical stories,
are true at several levels - not because they can be interpreted in various ways but because
their plain meaning extends to and merges with the senses at deeper and deeper levels.
This is the rare unity of wisdom which is able to embrace the truth of whole human being
in the actuality of one image, in a few simple signs.

In the deepest sense, a life can be true, a life which is lived in conformance to the origin.
This does not in any way assume any ‘essence of human nature’, but it does suggest that
there are some fundamental aspects of the existential situation which, deserving respect and
recognition, can be ignored and forgotten. (We will address them in Book III.) Truth in the
strictest sense of an access to the unchangeable reality applies only to the deepest sphere
of life. Simply because this ultimate invisible foundation is the only unchangeable reality,
and its relations to the sphere of visibility the only constant aspect of human experience
and history. “Our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly
remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience
of all subsequent times.” But the fact that they have been able to preserve themselves
is not an accident of the historical development prone to pragmatic verification. They
were able to preserve themselves only because they reflect the deepest aspects of human
situation. The lower aspects and, eventually, concepts, ideas and theories are certainly
prone to steady re-evaluation. But this in no way affects the truth concerning the ultimate
reality of our being. This truth needs no arguments and demonstrations, it is above all
truths, unaffected by their passage and indefeasible by their pretensions, waiting in its
eternal silence until the skirmishes which future times fight against the past fall silent too.
“We have incapacity of proof, insurmountable by all dogmatism. We have an idea of truth,
invincible to all scepticism.” This truth is what it always has been and every human
being can only attempt to live it concretely or, as the case may be, fail to do so. To
dissolve the absolute in the relativity of visible truths is to falsify it, for “it is absurd to
make the fact that the things of this earth are observed to change and never to remain
in the same state, the basis of our judgment about the truth.” An unmistakable sign
of such an absurd is ascription of absoluteness to some relative truth. This is the only
absolute untruth the human history has ever seen.

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185. Let us summarise briefly. The particular ways in which particular judgments or theo-
ries are checked vary tremendously leaving hardly any universal criteria to stick to. This,
however, does not mean that I can judge as I please, and all theories of truth try, in one
way or another, to account for the absence of such arbitrariness. Arbitrariness is the pure
immediacy, the pure subjectivity of mere hic et nunc which, dissociated from all the rest,
seems to offer its contents in a wild spontaneity. Arbitrariness is pure immanence, dis-
sociation of immediacy from its context, surroundings and, eventually, origin. To account
for non-arbitrariness of truth one does, willingly or not, point to some form of transcen-
dence: correspondence to externality, coherence to the more of the context, consensus to

250 B. Pascal, Pensées. VI:395
251 Aristotle, Metaphysics. XI:6. We will not, of course, follow this observation with the conclusion that,
since only heavenly bodies are “always in the same state and suffer no change”, they have anything more
to do with the absolute truth, for this is already reducing the absolute to the visible, if only remotely so.
the non-mineness of other humans or culture, and the last one (which does not have any established name nor any strictly philosophical tradition) to the revelation of invisibles and silence of the origin.

The tradition correcting the views which bring truth all too closely to subjectivity observes that denying any sphere of transcendence, one denies also the meaning of the word “truth”. Such a denial indeed solves all the problems in one stroke: there is nothing to talk about. There may be some dose of positive intentions behind such claims. But the word itself refuses irresponsibly to die and, moreover, it refuses even to be reduced to any other word. Perhaps, we are playing our ‘language game’ a bit wrongly? A bit too ecstatically? A bit too immanently?

Yet, this tradition (of correspondence theories, or realism) encounters the problem of dualistic ontology which it can neither ignore nor solve. To some extent, we follow the opposing tradition (of immanence, or idealism), namely, to the extent that every ‘what’ is relative to (our) distinguishing. In the world of distinctions, there is no strict dualism: the meanings of our signs and the distinctions with respect to which their truth is constituted are essentially of the same kind: they are both distinctions in the same indistinct. Almost as Frege demanded of a correspondence that it “can only be perfect if the corresponding things coincide and are, therefore, not distinct things at all.”

There is, however, a difference between the two in that the actual distinctions of mere signs can merge into the non-actual ones. Our ‘immanence’ of relativity goes along with the fundamental importance of transcendence, of non-actuality serving as the measure and corrective of the immanent signs. We disagree with any forms of verificationism, pragmatism or utilitarianism trying to reduce the whole truth to some, preferably observable if not measurable elements of experience. If one wants to insist that “only what serves life is true”, then one must also add that “only truth serves life”, if “truth is what it is expedient to believe in” then also “what is really true it is good to believe and evil to reject.”

Thus, although pragmatism, if only understood very generously, captures an aspect of truth, it has nothing to say about the absolute truth nor, leaving everything relative to the possible aims, about what might be expedient to believe.

We get closer to the correspondence theories observing that if truth gets reduced to any criterion then we have really dispensed with the very idea of truth which is exactly the last norm remaining when all other criteria have been violated. In particular, along with all criteriology, there disappears also what for it appears as a big problem: the truths which might remain forever unknown. Taking D (in our ‘definition’ §161.(iii)) to be ‘the

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252G. Frege, *The thought: a logical inquiry*. p.86. Or, as Plotinus observed, albeit with a profound reference to human reality, only with respect to the intellectual realm: “the contemplation must be the same as the contemplated, and the intellect the same as the intelligible; for, if not the same, there will be no truth.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V.3.5]

253Pragmatic truth has both aspects of verificationism “Truth ante rem means only verifiability [...]” [W. James, *Pragmatism’s conception of truth*. p.61] and utilitarianism, according to which truth “is distinguished from falsehood simply by this, that if acted on it should, on full consideration, carry us to the point we aim at and not astray.” [C. S. Pierce, *The fixation of belief*. 5] Unfortunately, as Russell pointed out, it is not only highly problematic to specify the ‘point we aim at’; the criterion of eventual bitterness or usefulness is often useless for determining truth. It is much easier to ascertain that “snow is white” than to figure out what might be the use of such a truth. Likewise, the later Wittgenstein’s practice for which “The proposition is either true or false” only means that it must be possible to decide for or against it,” [L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. §198, §200] falls within this category, even if he does not attempt a closer specification of the acceptable decision procedures.

254C. S. Pierce, *Critical Review of Berkeley’s idealism*. [my emph., p.87]

255Certainly, our ontology of relativity to existence, makes also all truths, except the one, disappear when
number of brontosaurus that ever lived’, then we may meaningfully say that the sentence “The number of brontosauruses that ever lived is precisely 75,278” is true (or false) with respect to $D$, although we will never know which one it is.

We follow the correspondence theory in that truth expresses an agreement: between the immanence of a sign and the transcendence where its meaning resides. But this agreement is not between two incommensurable elements. Truth is a trace of transcendence, of the fact that, eventually, I am not the master. But this ultimate confrontation is lived as the unity of actual and non-actual, of the distinctions which reside on both sides of the boundary of actuality. We do not live in two incommensurable worlds of mental and external affairs – we live in one and the same world emerging through the distinctions relative to our existence, which we draw and recognise in the indistinct. Truth is the correspondence between a limited number of such distinctions and their rest, the agreement between the way in which such a limited number, S, structures the world, and the way in which the rest, D, does it.

186. The limited scope of applicability of each of these two views reflects the general fact that truth depends on the level addressed by the signs. The relevant aspect of transcendence is, except for the highest level, the horizontal transcendence corresponding to the level of things addressed by the statements (theories, views) which one wants to judge with respect to their truth or untruth. And so, even if we grant some plausibility at the level at which the respective theories operate, they hardly retain it with respect to the lower, or higher levels. The kind of theory of truth one is able to propose depends primarily on the kind of things addressed, because things of different levels are involved in different forms of transcendence.

Thus truth borrows its specific character from the things addressed but it is all the time a trace of the original confrontation. As the horizontal transcendence of every level is but a reflection of the vertical transcendence, the norm of truth keeps always reminding one that the particular truths one might have obtained are not self-sufficient and must conform also to the higher levels of experience and, eventually, to the absolute truth. “Thus veritable truth is not according with an external; it is self-accordance; it affirms and is nothing other than itself and is nothing other; it is at once existence and self-affirmation.” From this original foundation every truth borrows the expectations of addressing something – and hence itself being – unchangeable, one and shared by all. But as long as it is concerned with relative beings, it can only be relative. Only what concerns the absolute can be absolutely true. Relativity of truth means only relativity of all possible ‘whats’, of the addressed distinctions. But given the addressed subject-matter or situation, the truth with respect to this relative context can be definite and ‘absolute’ – the actual signs can conform fully to the addressed distinctions, the relation between S and D may be a matter of degree but not of any relativity. Above all relative ‘whats’, the absolute truth is only the ultimate that, the reminder that there is (truth) which can be expressed and manifested but never

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256 It is hot” is confronted merely with the immediacy of the sensation; “There is a cat on the mat” will be confronted with the actual facts (as will be “There is no cat on the mat”); an elaborate theory will be confronted with observations of its predictable consequences, with the requirements of internal consistency and, perhaps, of conformance or commensurability with other accepted theories, etc.; the general ideas, like “Man is what he leaves behind him”, will be confronted with other, similarly general ideas, with the personality of one who pronounces them, with the pronouncements of others and, eventually, with the personal intuitions and convictions.

257 Plotinus, Enneads. V:5.2 [MacKenna’s translation]
captured and exhausted by any *actuality*. Truths of the lower levels need not conform to such absolute standards. The lower need not mimic the higher, need not attempt any similarity, for this is impossible. But it must not forget the higher either, for then correct observations can turn into false ideas, true propositions can turn into false theories, correct arguments into wrong causes and series of right decisions into disastrous mystifications. Truth, let us say, is a *concrete participation* in the *traces* of *transcendence*, and as there are different forms and levels of *transcendence*, so truth of a lower level may turn out to be a falsehood of a higher one. Truths which stop short of the *absolute* remain relative, and this is a common lot. But if they forget it, if they forget the *absolute*, they start imperceptibly to claim absoluteness for themselves and thus turn into falsehoods. “Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.”

2.3 As below, so above

The impression might have accumulated that relations between the levels concern only *founding* of the lower by the higher ones. Such ontological *founding* is, indeed, the fundamental relation as described in Book I. But it concerns primarily only the *foundation* of the structure of the subsequent levels. *Distinctions* emerging at a lower level are not necessarily any reflections of the higher ones. In general, the lower *distinctions* arise as dissociations of various *aspects* of higher *nexus*, that is, they are new elements specific for the lower level not determined by the elements of the higher one. In part 1 of the current Book, as well as in 2.2.2 we have followed the *traces* of various elements encountered at the lowest level of experience in the bottom-up direction. This bottom-up flow is not only the matter of exposition but also of life. Lower *distinctions* are involved in the *unity* of existence, contributing to the formation of higher, more *virtual* *nexus*. We encountered examples of this process towards the end of §§8 discussing the concrete *nexus* of *invisibles*, and then discussing memory in §§131 ff. We give now a few more examples and general characteristics of this influence of lower levels on the higher ones.

*Acts* are limited to the *horizon of actuality* in that the unity of a single *act* is consummated within this horizon, with the *equipollent aspects* of the *actual object* and *actual subject*. But, of course, we do not *act* in a completely spontaneous, that is, *dissociated* and meaningless way. Every *act* has a *rest*, is anchored in a wider context. The unity of a complex of *acts*, of an *action* or even *activity* is constituted not by their *objects* (they may vary and change) but by their objectives, *motivations* and, eventually, *inspirations*. An *object* of an *act* follows (in the sense of being chosen from a sphere circumscribed by) the purpose of the *action*; the purpose of the *action* follows the motive of the *activity*; and *motives*, often life-long *motivations* and traits, are in turn expressions of the *inspirations*.

This following is not, however, uniquely determined by the higher *aspects*. They only circumscribe some, usually vague, sphere of possible choices. In particular, at the lowest level, there remains the choice (not always voluntary) of a specific *object*, direction and character of the *act*. This choice, as an intentional *act*, concerns exclusively the actual contents but it influences higher element which can not be its intentional *object*. To the extent one tries to make it such, it withdraws and changes its character. If one thinks “I have to learn swimming. I have to learn swimming...” while trying to follow the

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258Lk. XI.34-35/Mt. VI.22-23
instructor’s advice, one will have very hard time. The best one can do is to concentrate on following the actual instructions. If the intention of one’s act is ‘to be good’, one may happen to do a fine thing, but the invisible aspect of the act has then withdrawn beyond the horizon of this intention and made present something more than what was intended (namely, what motivated one in the first place to try to be good.) It is not that one is not conscious of what hides behind one’s acts – it is only that one can not possibly intend it reflectively. This rest of every act is the witness, on the one hand, of its anchoring in the wider sphere of one’s being and, on the other, of the act’s possibility to influence it.

188. An example can be formation of more and more advanced concepts. One starts with a rough and simplified understanding of something, but by prolonged study one’s concepts get refined. One tends to confirm it only by observing an increased ability to solve actual problems, to relate specific elements and provide more sophisticated actual descriptions. But more knowledge does not simply accumulate as a collection of separate items in a big sack. It gets organised. How exactly it gets organised is not easy to say, but we know that education forms the minds. Selection of topics and problems for a prolonged study, as well as of the ways to approach them, determines to some extent the resulting formation of the mind, the scope of its interests, the ways of addressing new issues. (This is what happens whenever an extraordinary mind gathers a group of pupils who, their intellectual differences notwithstanding, form a school.)

We have observed the same process in connection with memory. With the possible exception of photographic memory, a person forced to memorise more will also form more or less explicit structures for arranging the increasing amount of material. More or less explicit! The less explicit ones may not be accessible to observation or introspection but, the claim is, they are formed nevertheless. Studying mathematics, one will identify more central results and theorems which allow one to derive secondary results. But this is only a plain visible illustration because the arrangements will vary between individuals and, as also may happen, make some of them come with new creative ideas reflecting the virtual connections established above the level of conscious control. We do not inquire into specific ways of such an organisation because we do not believe in any such specific, yet universal, schemata. We recognise here only one general structure of ‘compressing’ a manifold of actualities into a more unified nexus which, to some extent, can be compared to gathering them under the unifying sign of a concept.

As noticed earlier, this general structure does not concern only memorisation and learning. The ‘compressed’ actualities can, in fact, slip out of memory. But they contribute to the formation of something which we might identify with a virtual center. In the case of conceptual constructions, this can manifest itself as the acquired ability to ‘intuit’ a large number of related problems in one act (called often an “act of intuition”, but what matters to us is only that it is one act). Prolonged and dedicated study of an area leads to a development of intuition, to the state where a person is able to grasp, in one act, a variety of aspects and to know that, even if not exactly how, these aspects are related and might be actualised. “The successful practice of intuition requires previous study and assimilation of a multitude of facts and laws. We may take it that great intuitions arise out of matrix of rationality.”

The same happens when learning some skills, like swimming. At first, every movement has to be consciously attended and actively controlled. It is only through  

\footnote{S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life. V.1. Although intuition as described above concerns only unity of visible complexes, the mechanism of the great and deep intuitions, which are the primary concern of Radhakrishnan, seems to be of the same kind.}
repetition and exercise that one, or rather one's body, 'gets it', that all the movements, their sequences and mutual relations converge into an intrinsic and organised unity.

Such processes happen not only when we try to learn something but also when we do not. The level to which the involved actualities can be brought may vary, but the idea is the same - they get organised, or disorganised, they get stored for an easy access in long term memory, or they get forgotten. As they 'move upwards', they enter various (and hardly recognisable) complexes and, eventually, disappear in virtuality. But although they may thus disappear in their actual form, they are retained in the invisible centers to the formation of which they have contributed.

In such a process, invisible centers can be formed, from which it may be hard or even impossible to extract the original parts as, for instance, in the subconscious formation of complexes (in the Jungian sense of the word). Saying that time heals all wounds we refer to the same process of 'covering up' or, perhaps, 'suppressing' some experiences by a long series of actualities. The original experience and its memory seldom will disappear, but they can gradually dissolve, lose the possibly violent or damaging potential, in an aura of works and days surrounding the violent experience and dissolving it in the calmness of routine activities.

As the process forms more virtual nexuses, that is, penetrates to the deeper layers of existence, it is thoroughly individual. "Sow an action, and you reap a habit; sow a habit, and you reap a character; sow a character, and you reap a destiny." True, but which action will lead to what habit, which habit to what character, etc., are things which can be stated only as vague and general approximations. "When a man dwells on the pleasures of sense, attraction for them arises in him. From attraction arises desire, the lust of possession, and this leads to passion, to anger. From passion comes confusion of mind, then loss of remembrance, the forgetting of duty..." Plausibility of such observations depends always on more specific and personal aspects and traits which determine concretely what is and what is not "dwelling", "lust", etc. Apocryphal stories describing childhood of a saint or a hero reflect often such a rough and general understanding of the ways lower events and actual experiences accumulate into higher traits of character and personality. But as the process itself is invisible, they are usually expressed in the only terms in which its results appear for the actual observations, namely, as a predetermined destiny, as being marked by the gods.

Dependency on the concrete personal traits is reflected by the fact that each step upwards requires, of course, time. A single event or act has seldom deep consequences, and repetition of prescribed acts may even have consequences quite opposite to the intended ones. For between any two controlled acts, many things happen, and even when we do not act, we still experience. Very few are lucky enough to have a wise tutor who is able to give a constant, personal advice. For the most, we learn and acquire our habits and character through roughly accidental interaction with parents, family and immediate surroundings. Which, for the most, means, we do not acquire much character and even less destiny. The less advice, control and guidance in upbringing, the less strength and character, that is, unity of the personal being. For loose and free confrontation with the indefinite, perhaps only freely chosen, objectives, as many a pedagogue would say nowadays: "promotion of independence and individual creativity," by avoiding obstacles and high demands, breed perhaps individualism but hardly individuality. Tedious work, perhaps boring work is,
more often than not, a blessing which teaches a young person more than free unfolding and superficial overstimulation, though here, as elsewhere, the crucial issue is the combination of the personality of the pupil with how much and how tedious. We always get what we sow, but we do not always know what we are sowing. Wisdom, which is also knowledge of the future consequences, is a rare exception. It requires, above all, the understanding not only of the seeds but also of the soil into which they are sown.

To some extent, pupils may need some motivating answers to the questions "Why and what for?". But such answers concern only psychological actuality. A much deeper need is that of a wise guidance and instruction: wise, in the sense of transcending pupil’s ability to comprehend the eventual motives and effects. A wise teacher knows how to proceed and what to teach, knows it and follows the course even if none of the pupils understands ‘why’ and ‘what for’ at every single step. Similarly, an adult may be in a need of a good advice. A good advice may be something one just did not realise but recognises once it is given. But more profoundly, a good advice tells one to do something which one does not understand and is not able to understand. Surely, a lot of trust is needed to follow such an advice. But if it was a wise advice, one will learn once one arrives, because acting in the recommended way (and if heavens so wish) will lead to a new unity, most probably, not to the place one had imagined and wished, but to a better one. Wisdom is able to give a good advice which, like a teacher’s knowledge and instruction knowing deeper effects of the accumulated activity over time, may transcend the horizon of the one who is in need of it. It is the ability to recognise traces connecting the actual appearances with the deeper layers of being, the virtual germs of the future, and to utilise these traces in guidance to the truth.

191. Summarising these examples, we can only repeat what has been said at their beginning. The ontological founding of lower levels by the higher ones concerns specific contents only as far as the lower distinctions arise from the aspects of higher nexuses (which specific distinctions actually arise is already relative to the lower level). Primarily, this founding concerns the general structure and character of the lower level. The influence of the lower levels on the higher ones, on the other hand, concerns specific contents, simply because the lower distinctions are more specific than the higher ones. Again, which particular nexuses they will contribute to form is not entirely determined at the lower level. But the range of the particular lower contents and their frequency (the kind of actual experiences) has some significance on what virtual nexuses can be formed or strengthened. We will consider such a more specific relation between the contents of various levels in the following Book. But before that, we conclude the current one by venturing on a small excursion.

3 The origin of mathematics

This part is a digression because we are interested in a unified picture of existence, not in philosophy of any particular region of Being, let alone of (any particular) science. The current Book does not present epistemology as any ‘theory of knowledge’ guaranteeing any certainties or — what appearing more modest is even more presumptuous — offering a method for resolving doubts which might possibly arise. Our epistemology (if epistemology it is) addresses only the general ways of meeting transcendence and its actual reflections. The search for truth and the ineradicable conviction that it not only means something but also is better than falsehood, is only one special form of this fundamental thirst founded in the awareness of the insufficiency of visibility. Curiosity or fascination,
confusion or boredom, bafflement and even despair, are others and all can occur in various combinations with each other. Our epistemology (if epistemology it is) presents only some reflections reinforcing the continuity in the tension between the actual contents and their transcendent origins; the tension without which dissociated actuality turns into emptiness devoid of the sense of meaning and reality. Scientific activity can be an expression of such a confusion or curiosity, but questions about the actual scientific contents, the actual results of objectivistc reductions, fall entirely outside our considerations.

Yet, this digression has its reason. Mathematics has always held a particular place among the sciences. Indeed, to such an extent that most other sciences try desperately to approach mathematical standards (sometimes for better, usually, for worse). Good reasons for the prominence of mathematics can be discerned at the level of abstraction at which we are moving. One shouldn’t probably go as far as to say that the beauty and purity of mathematics have, in themselves, existential import. But they are reflections of the spiritual dimension of existence in the degree unmatched by any other science. The a priori character of mathematical objects and constructions makes one suspect, if not clearly recognise, the ultimately transcendent origin of mathematical truths.

In every science one finds the hard seed of pre-scientific reality and beautiful flowers of scientific imagination. The former, the origin, is rooted in our intuition and experience. As the virtual origin it neither contains all possible details of future results nor determines the ways in which science can develop. It only precedes any such development, lies beyond and before it, and lends its basic notions some intuitive content which can be appealing even to the uninitiated laymen.

Origin is not a foundation. In fact, laying down a foundation marks a definitive break with the origin. It amounts to internalising the original intuitions in terms of a language which from now on will develop according to its own standards. We do not want to review the arguments between formalists, Platonists, intuitionists, etc. We do not even want to see the differences between classical and non-classical mathematics, between geometry, arithmetics, algebra, topology, etc. Such distinctions involve one into mathematical arguments. The question about origin is, on the contrary, the question about what makes all these branches into branches of one and the same mathematics, what makes the results of Pythagoras, Fibonacci, Viete, Riemann, Cantor, Tarski equally mathematical.

Quine’s statement that a (mathematical) theory commits one to the ontology determined by the range of bound variables, is certainly very clear and convincing. Indeed, the entities a theory describes are those which can witness to the truth of the existential statements – “there exists an x such that...” Any particular, not only mathematical, theory has to specify such entities. But our point is very different. As we will argue, any mathematical theory addresses, eventually, only one kind of entities. But we will say even more: various branches of mathematics address, eventually, only one kind of entities. Differences between, say, algebra and topology might suggest that they not only address different mathematical properties but also different kinds of objects. But as one arrives at algebraic topology and topological algebras, it turns out that these very different fields not only can smoothly interact with each other but can be related in the description of the same mathematical structures. (Algebra and topology are, of course, only an example. This possibility of interaction between any fields of mathematics is the general phenomenon.)

Quine’s ontology – the range of bound variables – is still entirely objectivistc. The theory represents here an epistemological apparatus which deals with particular entities, that is, a particular ontology which is different for algebra and for topology. One is concerned
exclusively with the objects explicitly treated by the actual theory. But these are objects defined already within a mathematical world. As such, one does not at all address the issue of origin but at most of foundation and, in fact, a much more specific issue of differences between the local ontologies of various theories or formalisms. One mathematical theory can postulate complex mathematical objects vastly different from those postulated by another such theory. But to the extent they are both mathematical they address, eventually, basic mathematical objects and therefore, can be smoothly related to each other.

Asking about the origin of mathematics we are not asking what objects can be addressed by algebra and what by topology but what makes them all equally mathematical objects. We are not asking what objects can possibly be constructed mathematically but, on the contrary, what primary objects give rise to the mathematical constructions. The origin of such objects will be found at the very first stages of differentiation, in the sphere where ontology has not as yet got dissociated from epistemology.

3.1 What is a point?

193. "A point is that which has no part."\textsuperscript{262} It is the residual unity "beyond which there cannot be anything less."\textsuperscript{263} Intuition of a point is the same as the intuition of a ‘substance’, of a purely immediate object, the residual site of its self-identity. It is like the least something which still is, the least something from which nothing can be removed without removing the thing (that is, the point) itself. The evanescent site of ultimate immediacy...

Now, it might seem that to come from actually given objects to mathematical points there is a need for abstraction, since an actual object is always a particular thing with all its properties, while point is only the residual site with no properties whatsoever. It might seem that a point results from a process of abstraction in which "we obtain from each object a more and more bloodless phantom. Finally we thus obtain from each object a something wholly deprived of content; But the something obtained from one object is different from the something obtained from another object – though it is not easy to say how..."\textsuperscript{264} It might indeed seem so, but only when we assume that actual objects are the only original given. Then, indeed, anything lacking any actual content seems to arise from the actual given only by abstraction.

194. But objects are not the original given. On the contrary, objects are abstractions from the concreteness of experience, results of an interplay of distinctions within the horizon of actuality. Consequently, the process of founding does not proceed from objects towards their "bloodless phantoms", for these phantoms are there, are given along with the objects themselves. An appearance of an object is equivalent with the narrowing of the horizon of actuality to immediacy which dissociates some distinctions from their background. The apparent independence of objects, not only from the subject but also from each other, the fact that "something obtained from one object is different from the something obtained from another object," is the result of this isolation.

What precedes, in the order of founding, appearance not only of objects but of anything is distinction. And as in any experience, its whole structure, that is, its whole foundation is also experienced in the immediate self-consciousness: distinguishing particular contents we also experience (though not thematically) the very fact of distinguishing.

\textsuperscript{262}Euclid, \textit{The Elements}. I, Def.1

\textsuperscript{263}Nicholas of Cusa, \textit{On Sacred Ignorance}. I:5\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{264}G. Frege, \textit{Review of Husserl's Philosophie der Arithmetik}. 
3.1. What is a point?

Furthermore, even if there are no rigid distinctions, that is, no sharp boundaries distinguishing precisely and univocally one content from another, the fact of their distinctness is given sharply and precisely. Just as one can be uncertain where one stripe of a rainbow ends and another begins, so one is certain that they are different stripes, that each has, if not a sharp boundary, then some kernel which is distinct from the kernel of another stripe. This fundamental fact of distinguishing, with the immediate awareness of distinctness, is pure distinction, §15. It has the same character as the precision of givenness of an object, its mere 'being there', in the immediacy of reflection that it is.

Intuition of a point is the same as the intuition of a pure distinction. 265

Consequently, no abstraction is needed to arrive at a point, "we have a direct awareness of mathematical form as an archetypal structure." 266 This structure present in apprehension of any object, is an aspect of every actual experience and as such is itself experienced. True, abstraction may be needed to posit a point as an actual object, to reflectively isolate this aspect of an experience. But this does not change the fact that it is an aspect of every experience and emerges from there only as a result of reflective isolation – it is not a mere construction, an empty, or conceptual abstraction. Taking a point in this way, as an object of reflection, we can specialise the above thesis:

A point is a representation of the fact of distinguishing, of pure distinction.

Pure distinctness can be characterised as the fact that points are mutually indistinguishable yet distinct, they are distinctions without content, differences without reasons: like the posited ultimate 'substances' or, more concretely, as the absolute beginnings, identical in so far as the mere fact of beginning is concerned, yet distinct by virtue of the absoluteness of true beginning. Pure distinctions are the fundamental objects of mathematics, the objects which are not results of any mathematical foundation but which mathematics inherits from experience –

Mathematics is the science of pure distinctions.

265 Intuition here is not be taken in a thetic sense as an 'intuition of . . .' positing some object. It is an aspect of an immediate experience, a non-reflective, non-positional self-consciousness of the structure of the actual experience. Such an intuition, a 'point-awareness' is the same as the awareness of pure distinction.

This identification can seem to go counter our differing images of the two: point is a mere dot, while distinction a line | splitting the space in two. But these are only pictures. We could bring them closer, for instance, if we imagined distinction as a circle o (still splitting the space in two, cf. I§10). Since no distinction is rigid, the exact circumference of the circle is blurred. But this does not make the fact of it being made less clear – the fact which we could imagine as the point at the center of the circle. So understood, pure distinction corresponds to the Neoplatonic monad responsible (albeit always in an unclear way) for the generation of actual numbers. "In the case of numbers, the unit remains intact while something else produces, and this number arises in dependence on the unit: [...] there is, primarily or secondarily, some form or idea from the monad in each of the successive numbers – the latter still participating, though unequally, in the unit [...]" [Plotinus, Enneads. V.5.5 [MacKenna’s translation]] "The cause is in it [monad], and they [numbers] are causally in it because it subsists as the beginning of all numbers. [...] intelligible numbers are so poured out from the monad that in some way they become clear in the mind; next flowing out from mind to reason [...]" [J. S. Eríügena, Peripheos. III;p.172] Distinction between monad generating the numbers and The One is maintained but never entirely clear. (Eríügena calls even Creator a Monad: "Monad which is sole Cause and Creator of all things visible and invisible [vs. created monad in which all numbers always subsist causally, uniformly, and according to their reasons, and from which they emerge in many forms." [Ibid. III;p.172-3]) Very close conceptual associations between the two are handled by intricate hierarchies of (degrees of) units, like The One, monad, henad, henads, etc., into which we will not inquire.

266 G. Spencer-Brown, Laws of Form. Introduction; p.xxiv
3.2 Numbers – multiplicity of distinctions

196. Introducing us to the notions of number and counting the teacher started to put apples – one after another – on the table. “We have one apple. What happens if I put another apple? Well, now we have two apples. And if I put yet another one? Well,...” Did not your teacher do a similar thing?

What should happen if he run out of apples? What should happen if he suddenly pulled out a pear and put it on the table after a series of apples? Can you imagine the confusion? An apple, yet another apple, more apples, a pattern begins to emerge and, suddenly, a pear!! Not that the kids would for ever lose the chance to acquire the concept of number but how much extra work for the teacher! How would he proceed to explain now that the fact that a pear is not an apple does not matter at all? How to explain that a pear is simply yet another object – a fruit, perhaps – distinct from all previous ones? An apple is so much an apple that the sixth apple put on the table is the same as the fifth one – except that it is the sixth. A pear after the fifth apple would not be the sixth – it is too different from the apples. It would be the first pear rather than the sixth fruit. The difference of content would intrude on the explanation of the pure distinction of number.

We do usually count apples separately from pears. And if we count both we say we are counting fruits. Thus Frege says that “number is the extension of a concept”267 because as soon as we count quite different objects together we seem to subsume them under some common, more general concept. “In fact, we do not ask ‘How many are Caesar and Pompey and London and Edinburgh?’”268 In fact, we do not – but we could! And counting cities is no different from counting cities and persons, counting fruits is no different from counting fruits and houses and the nasty persons one met last week. Do we then subsume them under a more general concept? What concept? Insisting on the positive answer, we would eventually have to say: the concept of a ‘mere something’, a point, a pure distinction.

Number does not express a property of any concept, but rather the unlimited ability to ignore any properties, any conceptual differences of content. It precedes all concepts.269 Eventually, we count somethings, pure distinctions, points. Frege’s “bloodless phantom” is point – the residual site of the self-identity of the thing he started with.270

If one wanted to object that apples on the table are not meant as an analogy of pure distinction because they have different positions, appear on the table at different times, and

267G. Frege, The concept of number. §68. Literally: “the number which applies to the concept F is the extension of the concept sequinumerous with the concept F’s.”
268The idea is, of course, old and renowned. “For reason counts different things together with things of the same kind, so that clearly persons are counted with persons, qualities with qualities, and so forth with other things.” [Clarenbach of Arras, The Gloss on Boethius’ De Trinitate”. I.§46] Ockham refers to those who similarly, though with a much stronger empirical bias, “[c]oncerning discrete quantity […] maintain that number is nothing but the actual numbered things themselves.” [W. Ockham, Summa totius logicæ. I.c.xliv]
269We could hardly disagree more with any empirical reductions of mathematics like those suggested in the previous footnote. On the contrary, “[w]ise men, indeed, do not say that the numbers of animals, shrubs, grasses and other bodies or things are related to the knowledge of the arithmetical art; but they assign to arithmetic only the intellectual, invisible, incorporeal numbers established in knowledge alone and not placed substantially in any other subject.” [J. S. Erigena, Periphyseon. III.p.163]
270This fundamental importance of distinction is well illustrated in the logicist’s attempts to define numbers. E.g., R. Carnap, The logicist foundation of mathematics, follows the procedure suggested by Frege: for number 2, one begins by stating that at least two objects fall under a concept f : 2n(f) \iff \exists \exists y : x \neq y \land f(x) \land f(y). Then, number 2 is said to apply to a concept f iff: 2n(f) \land \neg 3n(f). Identity (or rather its negation, distinctness) needed in the first formula is the undefinable primitive relation of the logical language.
so on, that is, because they fall within the extension of a concept where other differences are needed to distinguish between the objects, then we would only repeat the question: why do the teachers not count fruits but only apples? The objection does not change their procedure which is: make the difference as small as physically possible, make the objects so similar that removing this last amount of difference would erase the distinction itself. If one feels a need for it, one might define the empirical analogue of a pure distinction as such a smallest possible difference (whatever that might mean). ‘Numerical difference’ is the notion corresponding to pure distinction as distinct from ‘difference of content’.

But we still have some road to travel before we arrive at numbers. For the present, we only have the ‘numerical difference’. Now, no distinction occurs alone, there is nothing like the first distinction, only a transition from the undifferentiated one to the gradually increasing manifold of distinctions, I.§14. The horizon of actuality, which is like a ‘snapshot’ of experience, contains always a multiplicity of distinctions. Viewing these as pure distinctions, that is, focusing only on this aspect of an actual experience which determines the mere distinctness of actual contents, yields the intuition of a proper multiplicity, that is, multiplicity of pure distinctions. Each actual experience is also an experience of such a multiplicity. This is well reflected in the most primitive, unary notation for numbers, which merely marks the distinctions: I, II, III,... or even better •, ••, •••,...

Multiplicity as mere distinctness of the actual contents, as the immediate self-consciousness of pure distinctions, is the experiential origin of a set. It is not yet a number which brings us already closer to a possible foundation. What makes a number into a number is not any mystical quality but its relations to other numbers and an elaboration of such relations is already a matter of mathematical reflection. Let us only sketch the most elementary beginning which follows from the origin, from the experience of pure distinctions and their multiplicities.

A primitive shepherd who not only cannot count but does not even have a slightest idea of a number, had probably proceeded something like that. To check if all his many sheep return in the evening from the pasture, he let them out in the morning one by one, marking each leaving sheep as a cut on a stick. In the evening, he let them in one by one, marking each entering sheep on the same stick, with another mark next to, or across, one of the marks made in the morning. If every morning mark is matched by one evening mark, everything is fine. If, however, some morning marks remain unmatched by any evening mark, some sheep are missing.

The shepherd performs the most natural, in fact, the only possible operation one can perform on two actual multiplicities – he relates them by associating points in one with those in the other. He does it in a particular way serving his particular purpose: he matches each evening mark with only one, but always distinct, morning mark – he establishes an injective relation (indeed, a function) from evening marks to morning marks. If this happens to be also surjective (every morning mark gets matched by one evening mark), then the conclusion is that the multiplicities of sheep in the morning and in the evening are equal – there is the same number of sheep. If the function is not surjective (some morning marks remain unmatched), the number of returning sheep is less than the number of sheep which left in the morning. This is the well-known set-theoretical definition of ordering of cardinal numbers.

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271P. Benacerraf, What numbers could not be

272A set $A$ has cardinality less than or equal to the cardinality of a set $B$, if and only if there exists an injective function from $A$ to $B$. They have the same cardinality if there exists a function which is not only injective but also surjective (bijective). G. Frege, The concept of number, §63, quotes Hume: “If two
II.3. The origin of mathematics

Such an operation is performed not so much on the actual objects (sheep, marks), as on their collections viewed as mere multiplicities of pure distinctions. Indeed, to pose the problem in the first place, to have the possibility of even asking the question about all sheep returning, the shepherd had to recognise that the relevant aspect is the multiplicity of distinct sheep. But any multiplicity is proper — even if one uses some particular, objective tokens, it is always multiplicity of pure distinctions.

The set-theoretical construction of cardinal numbers (as representatives of classes of equinumerous sets) is already more than their reflective experience. The number 2 does not emerge exclusively as an abstraction from different collections containing exactly 2 elements. What would be the basis for such a generalisation? It would have to be the notion of 'the same number of elements' in different collections, as set-theory says, of a bijective correspondence. But such a correspondence presupposes that one has already abstracted away all differences of content, that all such differences already are ignored. The shepherd could not form the idea of representing the sheep by the marks on his stick, if he did not already have the notion of the proper multiplicity of sheep. The marks on the stick represent something — this something are not sheep but their multiplicity.273

It shouldn't be necessary to go any further, since we already have the basis for a number system: multiplicities of pure distinctions (various 'numbers') and the basics of an ordering relation between them. The rest is left for the creative imagination of the mathematicians. Thus, we would limit even the famous saying of Kronecker's: “God created the natural numbers, the rest is the work of man.”274 Already a number system consisting of three numbers only: 1, 2, 'many', contains all essential — “God created” — features.275 The mathematics one can do with such a system is extremely poor but it is mathematics, a

numbers are so combined that the one always has a unit which corresponds to each unit of the other, then we claim they are equal.”

273 This should suggest our attitude towards accounts like The origin of geometry in E. Husserl, The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology [Appendix 1; also II:9], which is not phenomenology of mathematics but of socio-historical emergence of geometry. One could be tempted to apply a kind of ontological argument (as that quoted in footnote 269) against such and similar approaches which all repeat, in one form or another, the idea from Herodotus, The Histories, II:109, that the art of geometry had its origin in the challenge presented by the Nile to the Egyptians, and only later became an abstract science. But although origin, and the original foundation of mathematics in particular, exists only through the actual manifestations (and, one might want to add, its empirical history), it is in no way dependent on, let alone reducible to, such manifestations. If pure distinctions were not given originally (and originally) in intuition, if relations of pure distinctions were not available to us a priori, we would never be able to form an idea, to encounter a phenomenon of, say, a circle. “No [sensuous] image could ever be adequate to our conception of a [circle] in general.” [I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. The schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding;A141/B180] A circle, an ideal circle is determined and given only by a center, a point, and a radius, that is, equinumerous multiplicities separating each point of the circumference from the center. It could never arise as an abstraction from experiences, or as a repeatable correlate of acts, in short, as a perfected Limesgestalt of imperfect circles, no matter how often encountered in nature. (What would determine the direction of such a generalisation, of such a ‘conceivable perfecting ‘again and again’...’? Husserlian repeatability may be taken as a characteristic of ideality, but it is founded upon this ideality and not other way around.) We could, perhaps, by accident come across and use flat objects which rotate and roll, but we would never invent a wheel. Because wheel is not a generalisation of round objects. It is a circle, an ideal circle (even if in practice it is not) which could not be even thought without the relations of number and equality of multiplicities.

274 Even accepting this remark, we would never draw from it Kronecker's conclusion, anticipating the early XX-th century's focus on finitary methods (whether of logical axiomatizations, constructivism or computability theory), that only explicitly constructible objects are legitimate mathematical entities.

275P. Gordon, Numerical Cognition without Words..., studying the Pirahã tribe of Brazil, concludes that this limit concerns not only their language but also their number system.
3.3. Infinity

Thus point is a reflection of pure distinction, the pure immediacy, while number, initially as mere multiplicity, is the corresponding representation of simultaneity in terms of pure distinctions. Comparison of multiplicites, not to mention the total ordering relation, are more advanced constructions which bring us already close to a possible foundation. Just like a point marks the limit of immediacy, this intuition of a number, of multiplicity, is consummated fully within the horizon of actuality. Even if sheep enter the farm over some period of time, no time is involved in the fact of having a given multiplicity of them.

Now, just like distinctions do not come alone, so the numbers do not appear separately. There is no recognition of a single number without all other numbers being given around it. Just like distinctions emerge in the midst of chaos, so numbers emerge in the midst of infinity and its intuition is given within the horizon of actuality.

Just like transcendence is an aspect accompanying every actuality, so infinity is an equipollent aspect of multiplicity itself. It is not some late and advanced addition to the simple intuition of finite number. For instance, it is not only a consequence of, say, positional number notation, where generation of ever greater numbers is a matter of a mechanical principle. In the Pirahâ system with three numbers: 1, 2, ‘many’, the last one does play the role of infinitely large number, comprising everything which is ‘more than 2’. In the Roman number system, instead of “two” one had “thousand” and names for numbers greater than thousand were compound expressions of which the highest component was “thousand”. Roman notation made it hard, or rather simply impossible, to write arbitrarily large numbers. But it would not be plausible to infer that Romans did not have the idea of an infinity of numbers, although the precision of this idea might leave much to be desired. The problem was observed already, for instance, in M. Capella, Arithmetica, where the ambitions of arithmetics are expressly limited to low numbers, preferably below 9000. But this limitation concerned only the correctness of calculation, not the universe of numbers. The question “Is there the biggest number?” is almost as natural as “Is there any limit to the possible distinctions?” or, perhaps, “Is the world infinite?”.

It may seem that the basic intuition of infinity comes in the form of potentiality, with perhaps the most obvious experiential counterpart being more of complexes. There is always something more than what, at any time, one can see and comprehend. “[Y]et there be those who imagine they have positive ideas of infinite duration and space. It would, I think, be enough to destroy any such positive idea of infinite, to ask him that has it,—whether he could add to it or no; which would easily show the mistake of such a positive idea.”

Although there is no limit, yet one actuality can always become next one; one

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276 So did the Greek notation, from which the Roman one developed. One can certainly see here the possible impediment in developing more advanced number theory or algebra, which the Greeks learnt mostly from the Babylonians whose positional notation, as well as number theory, was vastly superior. Even the primitive concept of a number, which with the Greeks included only positive integers and rationals – while with the Babylonians it included irrational numbers (if treated only by means of linear approximations) and, at least from the Seleucid period, also zero – might be referred to the notational insufficiencies. But these are already considerations of the foundations, not of the origin.

277 J. Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. II:17.13. We have to ignore here that Locke is speaking about infinity of time and space – the same argument was used against any idea of actual infinity.
can always add 1 to whatever is there already. We never arrive at anything, but as usual in such cases, we obtain (or rather posit) a shadowy ideal limit, or only a regulative idea, the possibility of indefinite progression, which in this case amounts to potential infinity.

Various forms of rationalism used to be less reductionistic than empiricism and showed in general more liking for actual infinity. The following might be almost a direct answer to Locke: “if an infinite line be measured out in foot lengths, it will consist of an infinite number of such parts; it would equally consist of an infinite number of parts, if each part measured only an inch: therefore, one infinity would be twelve times as great as the other. – [...] all these absurdities (if absurdities they be, which I am not now discussing), from which it is sought to extract the conclusion that extended substance is finite, do not at all follow from the notion of an infinite quantity, but merely from the notion that an infinite quantity is measurable, and composed of finite parts; therefore, the only fair conclusion to be drawn is that infinite quantity is not measurable, and cannot be composed of finite parts. [...]” Measurement’ seems to have to do with composition of finite (and discrete) parts, with successive progression. The conclusion is then that such a progression does not lead to any infinity for infinity turns out to be incompatible with ‘measure’. It is present a priori or it is never reached in any way.

201. Now, we do not intend to review the history of the conflict of actual vs. potential infinity, because most of the involved arguments can be easily dismissed once we have the precise concepts of infinity and cardinality. Indeed, philosophers seem to be less occupied with infinity since mathematicians got the control over the concept. We know that infinity is irreducible to progress (actual infinity irreducible to potential one), and those who do not like it may simply refuse to deal with infinity but not claim any reduction. Technically, this irreducibility is reflected by the need for axioms of infinity — in set theory, the axiom “There exists an infinite set”, but also in Euclid, the axiom “Any line can be prolonged indefinitely.” In the case of continuum, any use of progression is known as, at best, a way of approximating the actual results.

But we do not intend any review. The crucial point is that although the concepts and understanding of infinity have reached a very sophisticated stage, they have been discussed for millennia – perhaps, in a confused manner, but on the purely intuitive basis. No matter the concepts, one has always been aware of one or another form of infinity. Even the mere unboundedness of indefinite progression is already the idea of actual infinity in disguise — it is infinity reduced by the epistemological scepticism to actuality. The fact that from a finite set of observations we nevertheless make the spring to the potentially infinite indicates, in a manner of the ontological proof, that the infinite is there already. All the emphasis one has to put on “potentially” (while, so to speak, the unfortunate word “infinite” sneaks in through the back-door), like all too insistent a need to deny something, suggests the presence which only one’s bias tends to label “unreal”.

278B. Spinoza, Ethics. Note to Prop.XV
279Dedekind’s definition (a set is infinite iff it is equinumerous with its proper subset) makes Locke’s argument above obsolete, or rather simply wrong; while Cantor’s calculus of cardinalities shows that the intuitive about number of elements in finite collections often do not generalise to infinite sets (already for the least infinite cardinal ℵ₀, we have ℵ₀ + ℵ₀ = ℵ₀; so, for instance, 12 ⋅ ℵ₀ = ℵ₀). One can admire Spinoza’s foresight that such apparent absurdities, perhaps, are not absurdities. He nevertheless uses them as such to dismiss the idea of measuring the infinite. As often happens, an acceptable argument can serve to support a wrong conclusion.
280One can obtain some sub-branches of mathematics, but these are only sub-branches. Intuitionism is a good example, but likewise Hilbert’s programme of finitariness, and then also the computability theory are expressions of this potent idea of the early XX-th century’s Zeitgeist of finitude and discretisation.
3.3. Infinity

Potential infinity is only a conceptual reduction of actual infinity to the epistemic horizon of actuality. But infinity, the actual infinity itself, is founded in the chaos above experience and in the eventual transcendence of nothingness. This experience, or rather, this aspect of any experience, the chaos viewed as chaos of pure distinctions, is what founds the immediate intuition of the ‘largest possible’ multiplicity, of the ‘totality of everything’, “maximum beyond which there can be nothing greater.”

The experiential foundation knows nexuses but not necessarily all the distinctions which are so dear to later reflection. The Greek apeiron can be and is translated either as ‘infinite’ or as ‘indefinite’ or as ‘unlimited’, and we mean all these when speaking about foundation of the idea of infinity. And, of course, meaning all, we must mean none, for all these distinctions are later than their common origin. Infinity, in particular discrete, countable infinity is the final actualisation, an actual expression of the transcendence which has become a mere totality of actualities. It is the horizontal projection of the unlimited/ubounded/infinite which are so many ways of representing the indistinct, ‘everything’. Potential infinity arises as a still further reflection which insists on the primacy, perhaps even the only reality, of the limited actualities.

A reflection of the original apeiron, as the chaos which underlies every experience, will be present in one way or another in every original mathematical intuition. Its mathematical counterpart will vary depending on the level of sophistication of the mathematical apparatus. It may be ‘3’, or ‘more than 3’, ‘many’ or ‘infinity’. The most recent version seems to be the ‘totality of all mathematical objects’. Having tamed infinities, Cantor retained the intuition that the universe of all such objects cannot possibly be a mathematical object, which was a premonition of future problems. The paradoxes of the ‘set of all sets’ can now be rendered mathematically manageable (e.g., by restricting the axiom of comprehension or as in various axiomatisations of classes), but the trick is always to exclude the ‘totality of everything’ from the consideration. Whether represented within or expelled from the formal system, the totality keeps always pointing to the same intuition of the eventual transcendence, of the indistinct limit of distinctions, and reminding that the limit of the world does not belong to the world.

The ineradicable presence of infinity can be better seen on the example of geometry. We started with the intuition of a point which was equated with the (intuition, respectively representation of) pure distinction. But points do not appear alone. Even if point’s counterpart is residual objectivity, the ‘mere being’ in the immediacy of the reflection that it is, such a reflection is also immediately aware of the transcendent horizon surrounding its actuality – positing a point, it posits an actual multiplicity of points. Sure, we can reflectively dissociate an act of imagining a point, from an act imagining a multiplicity of points. But this is only reflective dissociation. A point appears always ‘surrounded’ by a background, even if this be only a black, undifferentiated something – shall we say, space? – against which the point is imagined. They emerge only against this undifferentiated background, and here “undifferentiated” means continuous. Points represent thus

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281 Nicholas of Cusa, On Sacred Ignorance. I:2[5]
282 “Earth’s] part beneath goes down to infinity.” [Xenophanes DK 21B28] “The unlimited is the original material of existing things [...] It is immortal and indestructible.” [Anaximander DK 12B1/3] Etc., etc. One might be tempted to admit also the translation as ‘unfinished’ suggesting, as Greeks would certainly like, incompleteness and some unreadyness of the infinite.
283 Here, space may be understood not only as spatiality – simultaneity of distinctions (I:2.3), but rather as the background from which the distinctions emerge. It does remind about Kantian space as the a priori form of intuition.
a discretisation of continuity transcending the points of *distinctions*, that is, of an actually infinite continuity. But while the primordial infinity of this continuous background is actual infinity, so the multiplicity of points gives rise to potential infinity: no matter how many points are (imagined, posited, thought to be) there, there is always a possibility of 'extracting' more points from the undifferentiated background. Once we have a point, we have not only a multiplicity, but an infinity of points. For an actual point (whether imagined or drawn) is only a sign of a 'point which already was there', it merely marks the focus of our attention. Imagining a space, say, a plane, and 'putting' a point on (or rather, 'extracting' a point from) it, the important thing is not where we 'put' it but that it can be 'put' anywhere. This is, in one, actual infinity and continuity (of course, not in the technical sense), the pure heterogeneity of *chaos* arising from the *indistinct one*.

Geometry, which with its points and planes gives the primordial intuition of continuity, is also the first stage where the duality of discrete-continuous arises. The duality forms, as Brouwer put it, 'two-oneness'. After the *distinctions* have occurred it becomes perplexing to decide whether continuum consists of parts or not, whether things are infinitely divisible or not, whether infinite series can sum up to finite magnitudes and whether Achilles will ever catch up with the tortoise — whether one is a chaotic totality of many or else whether chaotic many is really one.

204. The differences between geometry (starting with infinity of *pure distinctions*, discrete points on a continuous background and the axiom of actual infinity) and arithmetics (starting with multiplicites of *pure distinctions*, for which potential infinity is a theorem, and which only after long labour arrives at the continuum of real numbers), interesting as they might be, are not essential for us, because they involve us already into a consideration of foundations, if not of mathematics itself. Like the distinctions of actual vs. potential infinity, infinity vs. unboundedness, infinite time vs. infinite space, etc., it only witnesses to the multiplicity of possible ways of reflecting the origin, possible ways of actually relating *pure distinctions* to each other and to the *indistinct* background from which they emerge.

### 3.4 A note on foundations

What makes mathematics is not its mere origin and the mere *pure distinctions*, but a structure and relations built on the top of these basic intuitions. The ordering or, at first, only the two-term relations 'less than', 'equal to', 'more than', arise from a particular way of relating the multiplicites of various *actualities*. Structures proper to mathematics are founded on *actual reflections* of such relations. These *representations* can proceed in different directions and lead to different foundations, not to mention different branches of mathematics. It is not our objective to review the historical schools of foundations but we will give a few short examples and remarks illustrating how the origin from *pure distinctions* is reflected when forming various foundations.

205. “[A] universe comes into being when a space is severed or taken apart. The skin of a living organism cuts off an outside from an inside. So does the circumference of a circle in a plane. [...] The act [of original severance] is itself already remembered, even if unconsciously, as our first attempt to distinguish different things in a world where, in the first place, the boundaries can be drawn anywhere we please.” This quotation from the introductory Note on *The Mathematical Approach* in G. Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form*, should be self-explanatory at the present point. Starting with the space, , in which a distinction is (to be) made, [], and postulating two laws, that i) drawing the same distinction twice makes
no more distinction than drawing it only once, \[\overline{\overline{\text{i}}} = \overline{\text{i}}\], and that ii) crossing a boundary of a distinction and then crossing it back amounts to no distinction, \[\overline{\overline{\text{i}}} = \text{i}\], and applying these equations as rewrite rules to various combinations of distinctions, the basic laws of arithmetics, algebra and propositional logic are derived which, although do not develop the full mathematics, make the possibility of such a development at least plausible. The texts on foundation of mathematics and, of course, “mathematical texts generally begin the story somewhere in the middle, leaving the reader to pick up the thread as best he can. Here the story is traced from the beginning.”

One can, of course, discuss the laws and the details of the development, but the presentation is the most accurate expression of the idea of actually founding mathematics on \textit{pure distinction} alone. The reader is referred to this book which, if it can appear a bit esoteric and idiosyncratic, so only because it has been undeservedly and unjustly ignored.

A much more successful story, at least from the point of view of scientific development and fashion, can be told about category theory. Its initial motivations, as well as the subsequent focus and power, lie in the ability to capture structural aspects at a high level of abstraction (often referred to, by other mathematicians, as “general abstract nonsense”). Category theory assumes, as it were, given multiplicities and studies their relations. In fact, it does not even assume multiplicities but just arbitrary objects whose properties are determined exclusively by their mutual relations (morphisms between the objects, required to satisfy only a few simple postulates). It is only morphisms, and not any internal structure of the objects, which account for all the differences between the objects. In this way, if we allow the interpretation of morphisms as observations (or just ‘source of distinctions’), category theory exemplifies the observational approach (which, as discussed in §§143 ff., p. 206 in connection with identity of indiscernibles, is a variant of distinguishability). Indeed, objects obtained by all categorical constructions are determined only up to ‘indistinguishability’, that is, up to isomorphism. The theory by far exceeds in mathematical generality and sophistication intuitionism which reduced the notion of observability, or intuition, to finite constructibility. (Incidentally, the ghost of ‘category of all categories’ haunts the theory just as the ‘set of all sets’ haunts early set theory. As the definition of a category starts with two \textit{collections} – of objects and morphisms – the foundational problems seem to lead back to those familiar from the set theory.)

The best known and most thoroughly developed foundation of mathematics is set theory. Its fundamental primitive concept of a set connects it to the origin. For Frege a set seemed to be an extension of a concept, but this is a highly logicist position influenced, as it seems, by the search for empirical foundations. To begin with, it was much simpler: “a set is a many which can be thought as a one.” Notice how the word “many” suggests the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{284}}\text{G. Spencer-Brown,} \textit{Laws of Form.} \text{p.xxix}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{285}}\text{A very simple introduction, accessible even to a person with only basic knowledge of set-theory, is W. F. Lawvere, S. H. Schanuel,} \textit{Conceptual Mathematics}. \text{The origins go back to 1940-ties, and S. MacLane,} \textit{Category Theory for the Working Mathematician} \text{is the standard reference.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{286}}\text{Various strict versions are studied but they represent only special cases. Identity still plays the important role but only when applied to morphisms, that is, observations.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{287}}\text{G. Cantor,} \textit{Gesammelte Abhandlungen.} \text{p.204. Or in an earlier formulation: “In refusing to allow the manifold to remain manifold, the mind makes the truth clearer; it draws a separate many into one, either supplying unity not present or keen to perceive the unity brought about by the ordering of the parts.”}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{288}}\text{[Plotinus,} \textit{Enneads.} \text{VI.6.13 [MacKenna’s translation]] Introducing, as Cantor did, actually infinite sets amounts to following this intuition of the possibility of ‘being thought as one’ all the way through, and has the obvious relation to the Neoplatonic creed of unity preceding multiplicity, invoked in G. Cantor,} \textit{Foundations of a General Theory of Aggregates}, \text{e.g., Plotinus,} \textit{Enneads} \text{V.6.3;VI.6.11, Proclus,} \textit{Elements}\]
irrelevance of any actual contents for the considered multiplicity, which is to be given in the simultaneous immediacy, is to "be thought as a one". Cantor attempted alternative formulations - "by a set we are to understand any collection into a whole of definite and separate objects of our intuition or of our thought"\textsuperscript{288} - and one can certainly recognise here the importance of having 'sharp and separate' objects as members. But the basic intuition remains unchanged, namely, the intuition of a multiplicity, of a collection of precisely distinguished somethings, in general objects or mathematical objects but, eventually, only of pure distinctions which are posited simultaneously as an actual unity.\textsuperscript{289}

Unlike category theory which studies properties of objects only to the extent they are reflected in the relations between the objects, much of the foundational effort in set theory went on actually constructing the universe of sets. Even in such a construction, which does not presuppose any given multiplicities, we can find pure distinction as the fundamental building block. The construction starts with nothing, emptiness, that is, with the empty set. But is not there a difference between nothingness and a set which contains nothing? The former is, perhaps: , while the latter: \{ \} (written usually \emptyset). This, one could say, is only the matter of notation, of the need to indicate emptiness. But it is much more. There is a difference between nothingness and nothingness captured, between emptiness and emptiness confined, between nothingness and a set containing nothing. The pair of parentheses \{ \} applied at this very beginning reflects the pure distinction, the fact of difference which has been extracted from nothingness; we could almost say, an act of actually addressing nothingness as distinct from the unaddressed nothingness itself. This actuality brings at once also the intuition of multiplicity, of a simultaneous givenness of pure distinctions. For once the pair - the act - \{ \} is there, it can be applied to everything (even to nothing) and thus the rest follows. The only set we can obtain at the next stage from \emptyset is \{\emptyset\} - the set containing one element, the empty set \emptyset. Of course, \emptyset \neq \{\emptyset\} - the set \emptyset has no elements, while \{\emptyset\} has one. We can then continue adding the parentheses, obtaining new, mutually distinct sets \emptyset \neq \{\emptyset\} \neq \{\{\emptyset\}\}... This looks boringly similar to unary numbers and, moreover, produces different sets only in so far that they all contain different elements - but they all (except \emptyset) contain exactly one element. This does not open up for internalising mathematics, in particular arithmetics, within the set theory, so one has to show more ingenuity (as is done in von Neumann's construction of ordinals). But the main point has already been made - enough distinctions are available and they are obtained from the original \{ \} which represents both pure distinctions and their simultaneity. The rest - possible axiomatisations, postulated constructions, resolution of appearing paradoxes - is a matter of mathematical ingenuity in elaboration of this foundation.

208. One final remark before leaving the subject of foundation. Sameness is complement of distinctness so, instead of saying that mathematics is the science of pure distinctions we might, perhaps, say that it is the science of equality (or even identity). It might be an exaggeration to claim that identity is the only form of mathematical theorems, but it is certainly the basic form of mathematical statements.

Equality arises as a special case of relation between multiplicities, namely, when we find a function which is bijective. Equipotence of \(A\) and \(B\) is the first moment when equality
3.5 Summarising

enters the stage of explicit representation. But implicitly it has been there earlier. The very fact of relating some point \( a \) of \( A \) with a point \( b \) of \( B \) means, in a sense, identification. If \( r \) relates \( a \) with \( b \), especially if the relation \( r \) is functional, it amounts to saying that the image of \( a \) under \( r \) is, i.e., is equal to \( b \), \( r(a) = b \). It depends, of course, on what \( r \) is. Our shepherd did not identify sheep with marks on the stick. But establishing a(n injective) function amounts to identifying the points of the source with their images. Equality emerges as a relation, that is, it presupposes and is based on distinction. Nobody would bother saying \( a = a \) if the threat of \( a \neq a \) was not there. This possibility is the primordial reality: immediate things, viewed only from the point of their immediacy, are different before they become the same.

Of course, this ‘becoming the same’ has only epistemic aspect because proving that \( a = b \) one only discovers the fact, an \( x \), hiding behind the actual representations \( a \) and \( b \), and which has always made \( a = x = b \). As we observed in 2.2.2.i, especially §§141 ff, equality across dissociated actualities is a transcendent fact, a trace of earlier unity. This fact cannot be accounted for within the mere actuality and identity remains, on the one hand, a hardly questionable (ontological) intuition and, on the other hand, an (epistemic) ideality which ‘has to be constructed’. Likewise in mathematics, this relation remains forever as fundamental as undefinable. On the one hand, equality is not axiomatisable – any set of axioms valid for the identity relation will also be valid for other relations (congruences, i.e., indistinguishabilities). As Frege says “Since every definition is an identity, identity itself can not be defined.” But, axiomatisable or not, one works with equality and knows its meaning. Equality is a semantic notion: it has to be introduced into the mathematical foundation as a primitive, as if ‘from outside’. This is yet another reflection of the purity of the addressed distinctions which are given, always and only, in the sphere of timeless immediacy. In this sphere, everything is dissociated to the extreme, everything is but an immediate point purely and absolutely distinct from all the others. Equality of two such distinctions enters the sphere as a transcendent event, connecting the immediacy of \( a \) with the immediacy of \( b \) which connection, ideally, should be equally immediate. But, strangely, \( b \), appearing as distinct from \( a \), must reside in some other place, and their equality is what connects these two places. Once the equality is established, the two become one, immediate \( x (= a = b \) which becomes likewise the mere, immediate self-identity \( x = x \)). But the very event of this ‘becoming one’ happens elsewhere, in the sphere transcending their immediacy. Whether one want to call this sphere “the mind of the working mathematician”, “the mathematical activity” or else “the eternal world of ideas”, we leave to everybody’s discretion. In either case it transcends the sphere immediacy where the equated objects of mathematics have their locus.

3.5 Summarising

Pure distinction is the most immediate, because entirely contentless, event amenable to a grasp by a single act as the univocal distinction of ‘yes’-’no’, ‘being’-’not-being’. But

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²⁹⁰This applies to first-order logic. In a sense, but only in a sense, second-order logic allows one to define identity, i.e., force a relational symbol to be interpreted as such. The reservation concerns the need for additional semantic assumptions, in particular, that one works only with the standard model (all subsets of the domain) and not the general models (admitting various choices of the collection of subsets). Then, the definition of identity of individuals amounts to requiring them to be members of exactly the same sets, in particular, the same sets with only one element. Even if technically possible, it seems to leave too many holes (e.g., sameness of all, also one-element sets is presupposed) for a philosopher to agree that identity has thus been defined.
II.3. The origin of mathematics

it is also the primary event of the ontological founding which, therefore, accompanies all other events. This primacy makes pure distinction the a priori of all experience. Never occurring alone, it makes possible and accompanies all distinctions. Mathematical objects have thus this double aspect: of the immediate precision and contentless univocity and, on the other hand, of the representations of the primary event of mere distinguishing.

209. A priori

The given account can remind of Kantian a priori forms providing conditions of possibility of experience. Distinction is an event of any experience and, with it, pure distinction its a priori condition. This, however, is only an analogy of form, in that pure distinctions play similar role to a priori forms which are not thematical contents of experience but necessary aspects underlying any experience. Unlike Kantian forms, pure distinctions do not provide any more specific form of experience, in particular, they do not arise from the temporal and spatial dimensions which are much later aspects. Furthermore, and this is perhaps the main difference (concerning the concept of experience), they are not only present in every experience but are themselves experienced in the immediacy of self-awareness.

Even if mathematical concepts have developed, evolved and proliferated, there is something which makes Phytagorean and modern mathematics equally mathematics. This primal ground, reflecting its origin, has proved immutable unlike in any other science. Learning physics we never hear about the Ionic philosophy (misconstrued, as is typically done, as the philosophy of mere nature), or of Aristotelean principles. But learning mathematics we still go through the theorems of Thales, Phytagoras, Euclid which were also much earlier known to the Babylonians or Egyptians. Even when we go as far back as Egyptian engineering, Chaldean astrology or Babylonian accounting, we find sound mathematical, not pre-mathematical calculations. As the contributions to the mathematical knowledge they are as valid, relevant and mathematical as the theorems of Gauss, Banach or Skolem. Unlike other sciences which have either gone through the processes of essential changes before reaching their modern form or else appeared only very recently, the character of the fundamental mathematical objects and the validity of even earliest results have remained unchanged since the very beginning. Various socio-cultural factors might condition development of distinct branches of mathematics, and mathematics of other intelligent beings might be very different from ours. But to the extent it is mathematics, it must rest on the same, a priori origin and, as such, can not contain theorems contradicting the theorems of our mathematics.

210. Abstraction

All other sciences emerge as a consequence of extracting from the whole human experience some restricted domain – of specific objects or problems. The notions of such a domain may then undergo a gradual abstraction which eventually yields quite abstract entities with which most advanced sciences are occupied. The abstract character of a science is always the end result, never the beginning. But this schema obviously does not work for mathematics. If we try to elucidate the basic notions of point, number and the like by a reference to the process of abstraction we would have to explain what made our remote ancestors so astonishingly able to carry out just this extreme abstraction and made them ignore more or less all others. Why did Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks carry out this abstraction to its very extreme while in all other areas stop at a very elementary level? Perhaps, simply because nobody had to abstract himself toward the notion of a multiplicity by disregarding more and more properties of actual objects. If the experience of pure distinction lies both in the background of our being and at the origin of mathematics, then
there is no need to make our ancestors so mystically different from us, because there is no need for abstraction at all.

"[Number] may well be the most primitive element of order in the human mind [...] Hence it is not such an audacious conclusion after all if we define number psychologically as an archetype of order which has become conscious. [...] It is generally believed that numbers were intuited or thought out by man, [...] but it is equally possible that numbers were found or discovered. In that case they are not only concepts but something more—autonomous entities which somehow contain more than just quantities. [...] then on account of their mythological nature they belong to the realm of 'godlike' human and animal figures and are just as archetypal as they [...]"291 In short, "we have a direct awareness of mathematical form as an archetypal structure."266

Abstraction lies only in postulating the original intuition of pure distinction as an object of study, in turning this intuition into an explicit representation, turning from the origin towards a foundation. Thematic study of mathematics may be difficult and abstract. But it does not mean that its fundamental, original object is an abstraction which has nothing to do with experience.

**Synthetic and universal**

Mathematics is not only a priori but also synthetic—it applies to experience, in fact, to any experience, simply because it addresses elements present in any experience. Distinction, chaos and actuality are constant aspects of all our experience, knowledge and activity. All experience is self-aware and so with any distinction there is associated the awareness of the fact of distinctness, the pure distinction. Similarly, with the actuality of an experience there is given multiplicity, or multiplicites of pure distinctions and with chaos—their infinity. These intuitions, even if not represented explicitly in mathematical or other concepts, accompany all our experience.

But this universal applicability amounts also to a reduction. Mathematics is applicable to an experience only to the extent we view it through the glasses of pure distinctions. Mathematics applied to engineering, to sociology, even to psychology is always the same mathematics and it says equally much (or little) about each area—it says only that much as can be expressed in terms of pure distinctions. Counting houses is no different from counting sheep, nor from counting sheep and apples and friends, because counting is always only counting of multiplicites, of points, of pure distinctions. We can apply mathematics to any experience only to the extent we are willing to disregard all possible differences of content and consider only differences of number. The synthetic character of mathematical enterprise is really the same as its a priori character—the fact that experience is an experience only to the extent it is differentiated. Mathematics is synthetic and truly universal: not because it can say something about the content of any experience but because it does not say anything about such a content—only that each content must be distinguished. As usual, the price for generality is the loss of concreteness.

**Necessary vs. universal**

It might seem that universality accounts also for necessity, that, as Kant meant, "the two are inseparable". But they are not only separable but very different.

Universality will say "something is always valid", necessity "something can not be otherwise". The former is quite a natural concept. If it is empirical, then it is exactly what makes it natural. To some extent everybody makes generalisations and arrives at some universal formulations. Now, one may say "all ashtrays in this room are green" but we

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291C. G. Jung, *Synchronicity*... The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, §870ff
II.3. The origin of mathematics

should not confuse the syntactic form (the mere presence of the universal quantifier) with universality. Universality involves generality and is concerned with the totality of the world. That we always distinguish, that so it is, is a universal statement. But such “so it is” is not sufficient for necessity because necessity is concerned not only with the actual world but with all possible worlds. It cannot merely say what is always the case in the world, it also has to exclude its opposite from all possible worlds. Only by confusing the universal quantification over the objects within the world with the universal quantification over the possible worlds, can one confuse universality with necessity.

Since universality is concerned with the actual world and necessity with all possibilities, the former does not imply the latter. Necessity, on the other hand, might seem to imply universality. But this is only a superficial, formal implication. Universality involves not only “for all x” but also a kind of generality, wide and common applicability. Necessity does not require anything of the sort. “In the experiment which started at the Ridiculous Labs, CA, USA, on the 26th February, at 14:03:52:18”, the generated positron had to turn left, the electron had to make a U-turn and, colliding, they had to annihilate.” Without making any claims to the physical plausibility of this statement – it says that something was necessary. It says that no matter what, given the above conditions things could not have happened otherwise. But we would resist calling it a universal statement. Replacing “the generated positron” with “any positron satisfying the conditions of this one” would give it a syntactic appearance of universality but hardly any generality.

We arrive at the laws which we consider necessary only by designating more and more specific conditions, by isolating a situation or an object and excluding the possibility of interference from the unpredictable surroundings. If the result above is claimed to hold with necessity only because there is a general law saying that any positron and any electron will necessarily annihilate under given conditions, then it is just another level of the same – isolating and narrowing conditions to specify sufficient reasons for some effect. The “any” may give an impression of generality but it is only an impression. This apparent generality merely hides the specific definitions of electron, positron and the ‘given conditions’, the ‘other things being equal’ which underlies every claim to necessity.

213. Thus the way to necessity goes via increased precision and specialisation, i.e., in the opposite direction than the way to universality. The more content, the less necessity. The richer the perception of a situation, the more possibilities it unveils, the less tractable and the more difficult to control it becomes. And hence the attempts to design a grand theory of everything, to subsume the whole world under the rule of necessary laws impoverish the world. Certainly, some parts of the world can be reduced to simple entities which are prone to the descriptions in terms of the necessary. (Such descriptions seem always to conjure the possibility of control.) But the dangerous impoverishment occurs when the drive is uninhibited, when it is the drive to defeat everything escaping control. Only disappearance of content makes perfect necessity possible.

Necessity is thought, at least by the common sense, de re – it is a property of objects, relations and states of affairs. Saying “this statement is necessary” we mean “what it claims holds with necessity”. It is the behaviour of objects or some state of affairs which is characterised as necessary. As the paradigmatic example one has always posited the causal relation which holds necessarily between x and y if an occurrence of x is a sufficient reason for the occurrence of y. After Hume’s criticism it seemed impossible to maintain this idea of necessity which was first relegated to the categories of pure reason and then to
the sphere of linguistic phenomena. In this tradition, it is the analyticity of judgments which is supposed to account for all possible necessity – of judgments, of course. If such judgments existed they would be necessary by being void of all real content, by being true for purely linguistic reasons of mere meaning of the involved terms.

We could agree that necessity implies removal of content but not that it is a purely linguistic phenomenon. It is related to our understanding in that necessity of \( x \), in the common-sense, is simply inadmissibility of any contrary of \( x \). Such an inadmissibility is relative to the range of alternatives one is able to consider. (As all our notions, it is relative to the existence or, we might also say, it has a strong epistemic component.) The fewer alternatives one is able to consider, the greater chance to encounter unavoidable – necessary – connections. Such a common-sense necessity can be criticized by a higher intelligence for limitation of the perspective. But the necessity of the most advanced science is of the same kind. It only considered the possible alternatives in such a detail and precision, that even it can not see any possibility of the contrary. This detailed precision can be applied to most actual objects, provided that these are reduced to the ideal immediacy, eventually, to the contentless pure distinctions.

The efforts to arrive at necessary judgments are accompanied by the attempts to remove all content. Tautologies and contradictions were suggested but then one should, perhaps, include also meaningless statements having no content. Besides, even the non-contradiction principle is not necessary unless one assumes appropriate reduction of the domain of discourse, §167. This reduction goes in the direction of immediacy and ends with mathematics. The alternative (to the analytical necessity of empty statements) is to remove all content from the considered objects, leaving only the ultimately precise alternatives: ‘yes’ or ‘no’, a pure distinction. Necessity amounts to removing possibilities and the limit of this process is when only one possibility remains. But to be able to exclude possibilities with full obviousness and precision, these must be first precisely given. Necessity of mathematical results is only another side of their ultimate precision and is based exclusively on the character of the fundamental objects – the most immediate, entirely contentless pure distinctions, devoid of any interfering context, in the pure isolation of ‘all other things being equal’. Mathematical propositions are not empty tautologies. They tell the story of the objects they describe. Their necessity follows not from their emptiness but from the emptiness of this object. Its source is the pure bivalence, the ultimate tertium non datur, the absolute character of negation which, within pure immediacy, allows two and only two alternatives, ‘being’ or ‘not-being’, ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

Bivalent logic with non-contradiction principle was associated with the level of immediacy in §167. Now we encounter necessity as yet another aspect of this level. It carries the same character of abstract ideality as its other aspects, springing from the absolute and exclusive ‘either or’ residing in the point of ideal ‘now’, where there is only what there is, dissociated from the surroundings and hence appearing as unavoidable and necessary as arbitrary and spontaneous. An appearance viewed within the limit of immediacy has no immediate reason but also no immediate alternative. Necessity reflects the latter, just like the apparently absolute freedom of complete indeterminacy reflects the former. Both

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292 This whole development, reflecting the atomistic ontology and leading to nominalism, is present already in Ockham. Following the assumption of exclusive reality of dissociated particulars, he argues for purely mental character of causality (as of any other universal relation), W. Ockham, QuodlibetaII:9,IV:1,VI:12, and arrives at the impossibility of demonstrating any causal relations, W. Ockham, SentencesII:4-5.i [after E. Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy... p.497, footnote 27].

293 The two are accomplices, psychologically opposite but culturally correlated, for instance, as metaphys-
are as ideal as the ideal *immediacy* and extending either beyond its narrow horizon can not but fail. Consequently, both appear equally ‘unnatural’, almost inhuman, not only for the common-sense but for any reflection which, unwilling to aim exclusively at the ultimate *precision* and necessity, stays *concrete* above the limits of *immediacy*.

216. There are degrees of approximation to pure *immediacy*, that is, degrees of abstraction from the *concrete* content, and hence degrees of necessity. The increase of the *concrete* content in passing from mathematics to physics, then to biology, from natural sciences to the social ones, then from history and sociology to literature, etc., is accompanied by the decreasing degree of necessary determinations or, if one allows, by the increase of freedom. And if one wanted to complain that the later areas in this chain are only becoming less *precise*, one should observe that this is a simple consequence of the less determinate character of their objects. The search for the infallible laws leads sciences to construe their objects in a more and more simple and elementary fashion (increasing, by this very token, the complexity of descriptions) which alone makes formulation of sufficient reasons possible. But this sufficiency – necessity – requires *precision*, that is, approximation to *immediacy*, reduction of the *concrete* content.

In the limit, we encounter Hugo Steinhaus’ statement that “mathematics is the science of objects which do not exist”.294 Indeed, in the limit of *immediacy* objects cease to be objects and become mere points whose existence seems highly questionable. Applying mathematics to anything demands that we look at the thing as a mere pure difference, a mere point of distinctness. In spite of attempts to reduce various sciences to a mathematical dimension, we do not really think that it is entirely meaningful to transfer the necessity and certitude of mathematics to other domains of *experience* and knowledge. Attempting such a reduction, we immediately realise that it is just that: a reduction.

Although only in rare cases, like Bacon or doctor Faustus, control is the explicit motive of the search for knowledge, it is always its accompanying theme. For knowledge involves an element of necessity – in form of sufficient reasons, efficient causes, binding explanations, inviolable laws... Knowledge as justified belief involves necessity since justification amounts exactly to the exclusion of alternatives. And so, knowledge, whether taken as the conqueror of nature or as the search for truth, chases the ideal of ultimate *precision*. Not only natural sciences but also economy, sociology, even psychology display the symptoms of the mathematical disease. The mathematical point, the vanishing (or rather the barely appearing) indication of something-being-there, the shadow of the perfect atom is the regulative ideal of the knights of necessity.

217. Mathematics captures and elaborates the fundamental aspect of *experience*, the fact of *distinguishing*. This may find many applications whenever the addressed objects happen to be reducible to the mathematical dimension. But even with respect to this deepest event of the *original distinction*, mathematics does not elaborate it in its *concreteness* but only in its own language of the univocity of *pure distinctions*. The ‘emptiness’ of mathematical objects will always remain on the border of mysticism and resonate deeply underneath the possible suspicions about tautological emptiness of mathematical results. The emptiness
of objective content, the *purity of distinctions*, lifts it *above* all *experience* and makes it almost as empty as its closest neighbour, *nothingness* itself. But the origin does not contain the end, the *original virtuality* does not determine *actual* ity. It is not so that “[b]y number, a way is had, to the searching out and understanding of every thyng, hable to be known.”295 Trying to ‘Pythagorise and philosophise by mathematics’ alone ends, if not in the labyrinths of numerology, then at a philosophical desert, as great as it is empty. With respect to the *concreteness* of *experience* and, in particular, its deepest *aspects*, the mathematical images, built atop contentless *objects*, can provide only, and only at best, useful analogies and powerful similes.

295G. P. della Mirandola, *Conclusions or 900 Theses*. Mathematical Conclusions:11 (*Conclusiones de mathematicis secundum opinionem propriam, numero LXXXV*), as quoted in J. Dee, *The Mathematicall Praeface to the Elements*...
II.3. The origin of mathematics
"Because the soul has the potentiality of knowing all things, it never rests until it comes to the first image where all things are one. There it rests, there in God." Eckhart

Book III (of relevance)

Visible and Invisible

We live among things which we control and use for our purposes, among things and institutions built to perform definite functions. But we live surrounded by things which are ‘greater than us’, things which are not totalities and cannot be caught in a network of precise concepts. These ‘things’, slipping out of our grasp and control are not, however, outside our reach, they are not inaccessible infinities ‘in themselves’. They too are distinctions which have been made after we were born and are part of our experience. They are announced by various signs and by all the traces which permeate every actuality. They are present, albeit never as entirely actual, precise and fully exhausted objects of reflection.

“Know that the knowable things are of two kinds. Some can be described by means of definitions, while others can not be defined.” In the mundane sense, the invisibles are what “can not be defined”, what can not be encircled within the horizon of actuality. Speaking of love as the paramount example of such an undefinable experience, Ibn’Arabi continues “It is known by him in whom it lives and whose object it becomes, while the person is unable to understand its nature nor negate its reality.” Inability to grasp ‘what’ does not exclude perfect awareness of that. In the eventual limit, invisibles dissolve in the mere that of the origin, leaving all what’s to the finitude of understanding. Even if consciousness notices some invisibles, it has completely different character from the thematic consciousness of a visible content. Invisibles present themselves always as essentially transcending the actual consciousness, as inexhaustible by it. They are experienced, so to speak, at the limit of visibility, at the edge of eternity.

Man is a borderline between the visible and invisible. His soul has “two eyes. The one is the power of seeing into eternity, the other of seeing into time and the creatures, of perceiving how they differ from each other […], of giving life and needful things to the body, and ordering and governing it for the best.” Being such a borderline between the

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2M. Ibn’Arabi, The Treatise on Love. III.§25
3Theologia Germanica. VII. There are multiple examples of apparently similar duality, as e.g.: “I am a member of two orders: the one purely spiritual, in which I rule by my will alone; the other sensuous, in which I operate by my deed.” [J. G. Fichte, The Vocation of Man. III;p.140] In our terms, these two orders are both within the sphere of visibility. Similarly, Hugh of St. Victor distinguished the ‘eye of the flesh’, by which we perceive external world and the ‘eye of the reason’, by which we attain knowledge of ourselves. But with him both were, in turn, distinct from the ‘eye of contemplation’, which allows us to achieve knowledge of things above us.
visible and invisible is the existential situation. It is irrevocable and does not depend on anything particular, on the level of one’s understanding, on the scope of one’s knowledge, on one’s character or life experience. Yet it is not, for this reason, formal, it is not related to the concrete qualities of different lives as form is (supposed to relate) to matter. It is, in fact, experienced through and through, encircling the horizon within which life unfolds. The invisibles present in every actuality are what give it its full, lived concreteness. All concrete experiences are woven into the interplay of the visible and invisible. No matter to which level one directs reflection, no matter what are the predominant feelings and inspirations of one’s life, this life’s fundamental character is determined by the experience and attitude toward the sphere of invisible and visible, by the way in which one experiences and moulds the borderline between them.

This is the existential situation. The invisible is not something which is merely “not known”. Knowledge, especially in the philosophical tradition, might have functioned as an image of this situation, where reason was placed between the ‘known’ and ‘unknown’. But it is a poor analogy. The distinction ‘known’-‘unknown’ places us at the level of actuality, it carries the character of contradiction, of an absolute opposition and, moreover, of objectivistic attitude – the ‘unknown’ is either irrelevant emptiness or a determinate ‘knowable’. For a knowledge oriented person, it seems important what he knows and, possibly, what he does not know but would like to know. Such concern veils completely (though not necessarily) the crucial fact: that no matter how much and what one knows, it is always limited by the immovable horizon of the ‘unknown’. This fact, trivial as it is, has a fundamental existential import. Noticing one’s attitude toward things one knows and reactions to things one does not know can give us some insight into one’s psychological constitution. But the existential dimension is lifted above all such particular ‘what’s and concerns at most one’s attitude to the fact, trivial as it is, that one does not know.

Being a borderline is a concrete expression of existential confrontation. It is not merely formal but thoroughly concrete because man, transcending himself, lives only his own limits. The confrontation itself is never actually experienced, is never ‘given’ as an object of adequate understanding. It manifests itself as the constant presence of something above, witnessed to by occasional signs and constant traces connecting what is actually visible to its invisible origins. Being a borderline is a concrete expression of existence as participation – perhaps not yet a concrete participation, which consists in actually being on the trace, but at first only a simple participation of mere intimation of the trace, mere intimation of being surrounded by invisibles which remain dissociated from their signs, remote and not present concretely. This remoteness, this distance is reflected as thirst – and when pushed to the extreme dissociation, even as despair – of the soul. Man knows always more than he knows and is more than he is. “Man infinitely transcends man”⁴, not because his possibilities seem to have no visible limit but because no matter how far he has reached, he remains thirsting, because “the desire for the bliss, which [he] had lost, remained with [him] even after the fall.”⁵

1 Thirst

3. Young people look hopefully into the future which is like a huge promise of the whole world – and thirst for its coming. Adults keep putting the last brick on the construction they

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⁴B. Pascal, Pensées. VII:434
⁵J. S. Eriugena, Periphyseon. IV:777C-D
have been rising all the time, the last detail needed to complete the perfect totality – and having put it, find another one which needs to be put, but only one, the last one... Or else, they throw dim looks far away, to the places at the other end of the earth, to the remote, half real places they can hardly imagine, like the magical atmosphere of the childhood, Old people thirst only for the thirst of their youth; or, perhaps, for the tranquility of withdrawal from the actuality. The poor thirst for the easiness of affluence and the rich for the resistance of the world without which, so it seems, the reality dissolves in decadence. As Goethe says, “man thirsts constantly for what he is not.” We are never entirely satisfied with our achievements, and we are never entirely satisfied with whatever we obtain from gratuitous generosity. And if one rests satisfied, when one stops thirsting, it is said that he has lost the taste for life,

“We are as if we were not.”6 There is something which enters our experience only as thirst; it is not longing for anything specific, even if in most situations one will fill the objectless character of this thirst with something grasped, will give it a name, and hence a goal. But it is not longing for... not a thirst for... it is simply thirst, without any object, without any goal. True goals remain hidden until they are reached.

Thirst does not show anything visible; if we were to talk about its correlate, its noematic intention, it could only be nothingness; nothing appearing through the entirely negative noesis, the experience of lack, perhaps even a loss. Yet, this seemingly negative noesis, this apparent nothingness, has a thoroughly positive character. For thirst announces something which – by the very fact of being thirsted for – represents some good, and – by being thirsted for indefinitely and undefinably, incessantly and indelibly – perhaps something absolutely good. It might seem that what is so announced remains ‘absent’ and that the whole announcement amounts to nothing but announcing its ‘absence’. “The proverb bears witness to them: «Present yet absent.»”7 For all that appears negative and inadequate only when we expect things, objects, ‘substances’, visible images, in short, actualities. For only then we consider non-actuality to be an ‘absence’, a lack. This ‘absence’, however, is a thoroughly positive presence, and thirst, this sense of incompleteness, is the genuine bridge over the borderline separating this and another world. “And the soul’s innate love makes clear that the Good is there, and this is why Eros is coupled with Psyches in pictures and stories. For since the soul is other than God but comes from him it is necessarily in love with him.”8 And thus ‘remembering’, one keeps looking. “Sometimes I feel as if I were approaching happiness and I stand before a flower that blossoms through an old stone wall and I am unable to draw nearer. I am left with the feeling of always waiting for happiness, and everything is suddenly diminished by the melancholy of having once being able to achieve that joy.”9 This remembrance of apparent loss, this thirst, ‘natural love’ and desire of ‘Something’, is the first form of invisible presence in actual experience. Before elaborating this point, a few impressions.

The moods of silence

“Silence is a fence around wisdom”10 says Maimonides. Nowhere, nowhere and never happens more than in a moment of silence – for silence is the voice of God. “I am the taste

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6Heracleitus DK 22B49a
7Heracleitus DK 22B34
8Plotinus, Enneads. VI:9.9
9L. Salomé, You Alone are Real to Me. Rilke’s letter from 16.03.1914, p.66
10M. Maimonides, Laws Concerning Character Traits.
of living waters and the light of the sun and the moon [...], sound in silence [...] / I am the silence of hidden mysteries; and I am the knowledge of those who know.”

But used to the voices, one cannot hear silence, and thus searching for visible signs one keeps thirsting for what transcends them.

Then Theotormon broke his silence, and he answered:

“Tell me what is the night or day to one o’erflow with woe?
Tell me what is a thought? & of what substance is it made?
Tell me what is a joy? & in what gardens do joys grow?
And in what rivers swim the sorrows? and upon what mountains
Wave shadows of discontent? and in what houses dwell the wretched
Drunk with woe, forgotten, and shut up from cold despair?

Tell me where dwell the thoughts, forgotten till thou call them forth?
Tell me where dwell the joys of old! & where the ancient loves?
And when will they renew again & the night of oblivion past?

That I might traverse times & spaces far remote and bring
Comforts into a present sorrow and a night of pain.
Where goest thou, O thought? to what remote land is thy flight?
If thou returnest to the present moment of affliction
Wilt thou bring comforts on thy wings and dews and honey and balm,
Or poison from the desert wilds, from the eyes of the envier?”

5. Have you ever felt the constancy of a pain, vague and indefinite or, perhaps, clean-cut and if not with a known source, then at least with a clearly recognisable target, pain which did not leave any space for hope, whose intensity was spread over the soul or rooted in the body so that no point was adequate to begin recovery in which you could trust? Have you? Pain which might have lasted for years so that, eventually, it became a companion, almost a friend, on whom you could rely, who you could be sure will visit you again, but whom you never wished to meet directly, whom you always tried to avoid, pretending that you are not at home, whenever the doorbell rang.

6. Have you ever met a dark moment of dark thoughts, in the middle of a restless night of despair? The emptiness of crowded streets, unreal cities, wastelands? Have you ever been at the outermost cliffs, far from Dover, not peaceful coast of sunny Californian Pacific, but remote and desolate, stony beaches of Faroe Islands, empty, like mathematical line curved in the frozen magma of an Icelandic mountain, in the steepness of a Norwegian fiord, stone under ice, blown with the wind, and waves, not singing, chanting perhaps, but not enchanting, dividing the waves, those which stay, and those which return... unceasingly, without purpose...

7. Have you ever felt the emptiness of infinite longing, the emptiness which filled the whole world, the whole life, eventually, the whole universe with the unbearable beauty of its silence. Have you? The emptiness which does not negate the things of this world but which presses its presence between them, which surrounds them with full respect and recognition, and yet... makes them all appear insignificant, that is, disappear. The emptiness which is not void, which is not absence but, on the contrary, the fact, the feeling, the presence which

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11 The Bhagavad-Gita. VII.8/X.38
12 W. Blake, Visions of the Daughters of Albion. In Blake’s poetry, Theotormon represents thirst, desire which, when suppressed and restrained, turns into envy or greed.
meets the longing at the horizon where the ineffable dawns, and thus, where it languishes in calm. The emptiness which is all and only correlate of this longing, because you know that you are not having a yen for this or that, for a better house, nor for a nicer company, for more success, nor for more happiness. Such things, real and satisfying as they might be, would not suffice. You are not longing for anything, and yet you are longing... This is not a longing for the impossible, rather, an impossible longing, often, aroused by a minor thing, an inspiringly resigned tune of Celtic quietude, Irish flute, by a stormy breeze on an empty beach boulevard among the faded tables and withered benches, by the light of the moon diminishing in the dark waters of an evening lake, by a passing woman reminding you of the impossibility of Love. But these are only signs, impressions, psychological reminders.

And all the good dreams, understood or not, dreams of foreign lands, of remote islands, of shiny future, believed and unbelievable. Day-dreams of the ultimate fulfillments, hardly admitted and only vaguely felt, with unrecognisable contents though recurring moods, arising in a morning from the ashes left by the nightmares of their failures. All the good, beautiful dreams, the more precise the less possible, never matched by reality and yet constant and unshaken, impossible to retain, impossible to forget.

Dreamer, dreamer, what do you dream of?

Have you ever felt the restlessness of soul which, although apparently should be happy and has no reasons for dissatisfaction, does not find calm and rest in any of its achievements, in any of the joys and pleasures it has encountered? Have you? Have you ever felt that everything is in perfect order, so that it hardly could be better or neater, that you have everything you wanted and yet, something is missing, that you have nothing to complain about and yet...

And if you felt it, haven’t you then tried either to find something which actually was missing to fill the gap, or else decided to do something which could occupy your mind and your hands, which could at least serve some useful, even if tiny, purpose?

Under all the attempts to think that the meaning is more specific, that there was a goal, that all is about something more definite, there hides unquenchable thirst. Awaiting new things, important events, the most significant solutions, we flirt with time, yearning for eternity. And the deeper we yearn, the more intensely we flirt. It seems that a “mere trifle consoles us, for a mere trifle distresses us.” But any moment devoid of the hope of eternity becomes a desperate expectation of the next moment. The thirst is not for this or that, and so it can not be quenched by anything, least of all, by more of anything. It may turn into incessant and restless search, into constant attempts to acquire more or experience something new, but “avarice is serving the idols”. The more ends up in a stupefying perplexity, like the oversensitivity of an autist leads to a shutdown. The more, the less... Any attempt to quiet thirst with this or that will only make its presence more intense. The multitude of distractions may help to survive a day, a week, a year, but it only breeds more thirst. In fact, thirst becomes the stronger, the weaker any feeling of its presence, the less visible signs announcing it. All its signs tend to get hidden under more and more goals, activities, experiences. But hidding the signs does not help against thirst which now starts emanating from that which intended, and initially even managed, to obscure it. “More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul, less than All cannot satisfy Man.”

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13B. Pascal, Pensées. II:136
14W. Blake, There is no natural religion. II
1.1 The hermeneutics of thirst

"To despair is to lose the eternal"
S. Kierkegaard

1.1.1. Search

The soul “never rests until it comes to the first image...” say Eckhart16, and this lack of rest may easily become a search – not any longer a search for this or that, but a search for ... God? Yet “there is truly no searching for God, for there is nothing where one could find him.”17 The search is but recognition of the lack, only the indefinite and clear thirst. Young, adult or old, successful or damned, nobody lives without this thirst and nobody can live without it. But real is exactly that without which one can not live.

Thirst is already a search, but it does not know for what. Of course, we “all desire happiness with one will,”18 we are looking for vita beata, for the ‘highest good’, for ‘paradise’... But what does all that mean? – specifically, concretely, precisely? Indeed, nothing in particular, “You play and work and meditate./But still your mind desires//That which is beyond everything,//Where all desires vanish.”19 So yearning for eternity we flirt with time, unable to find invisibles we keep looking for this or that, and end up with mere signs, for only what is visible can be searched for, found and possessed. We replace thirst with thirst for Being, then thirst for Being with thirst for truth, thirst for truth with thirst for understanding, thirst for understanding with thirst for recognition; we want to think that some form of paradise on earth is possible, and end up constructing totalitarian monstrosities; we recognize the ever present, ‘unavowed theologeme’ and end up mixing faith, messianicity with ‘democracy to come’ and other socio-political fantasies, which criticize such earlier fantasies only by turning in the opposite direction along the same line... An idol is a finite, relative thing made absolute, a visible thing used to suppress the thirst – as it often may seem, to quench it. “What idol actually attempts to erase is the remoteness, the distance separating us from divinity...Filling this gap, the idol presses itself on us as divinity, confirms it and eventually degenerates.”20 In search of paradise, we find idols; thirsting to the woods, we raise cities, and to convince ourselves that this is enough we idolise them the more, the less calm they bring and the stronger our suspicion of their insufficiency.

A vague sense of some loss, the loss of something we do not know precisely what is, something like ...paradise, some happy state, a natural dwelling place – the sense of such a loss is a form of thirst, too. But we are not supposed to lose, and even if we do, we lose only what is ours. So “who can yet believe, though after loss,//That all these puissant legions, whose exile//Hath emptied heaven, shall fail to re-ascend,//Self-raised, and repossess their native seat?”21 Humans deserve ...well, what? It is not quite clear, but no matter what “their native seat” might be, an indication of any metaphysical ‘deserving’

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15The sickness unto death I.C.B.b.o.1
16Also Augustine’s opening remark that “our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee” [St. Augustine, Confessions. I:1] is a more psychologically appealing variant of the biblical (and rather morallyistic sounding) “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” [Mrk. VIII:36; Mt. XVIII:26] “The spiritual sense, the instinct for the real, is not satisfied with anything less than the absolute and the eternal.” [S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life. III:2]
17M. Buber, I and You. III
18St. Augustine, On The Holy Trinity. XIII:4.§7. [“the will to obtain and retain blessedness is one in all”]
19The Ashtavakra-Gita. XVI:2
20J.-L. Marion, Idol and Distance. [after M.-A. Ouaknin, Ouvertures hassidiques, p.106]
or ‘entitlement’ will not, eventually, stop before the highest unimaginable – ‘paradise’, ‘happiness’, ‘salvation’... Entitled to repossession of the lost seat, ‘[l]et us disdain things of earth, hold as little worth even the astral orders and, putting behind us all the things of this world, hasten to that court beyond the world, closest to the most exalted Godhead, There, as the sacred mysteries tell us, the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones occupy the first places; but, unable to yield to them, and impatient of any second place, let us emulate their dignity and glory. And, if we will it, we shall be inferior to them in nothing.”

Although one might emphasize the calls to transcend the merely human conditions present in The Oration, its tone is that of inspired Kabbalah, or in more ordinary terms, of the unrestricted ‘humanistic’ optimism – entitled self-sufficiency, that is, pride. What it veils, or rather what it does not unveil, is that its search for paradise, “impatient of any second place”, must evoke numerology or Kabbalistic practices, magic or spiritualistic media, in order to convince itself of the sufficiency of human efforts – precisely because this sufficiency is not given and has to rely on magical devices, precisely because everything originates from the sense of loss which at a deeper level feels irreparable.

Let us emphasize: search for paradise is totally well meant and involves only good intentions; no pride, no offense is intended. The whole world is full of good intentions, and the best of them are to ensure paradise – for oneself, for family, for others... “I would like my love to embrace the whole mankind, to warm it and clean it from the dirt of modern life [...] Often it seems to me that even mother does not love children as warmly as I do.”

It may seem strange that such feelings might have underlied the activities of “the bloody Feliks” Dzierżyński, one of the main architects of the communistic terror in Russia. But sympathy and compassion for X can easily involve hatred, even cruelty, towards Y, if only the latter is perceived as being guilty of the former’s misery. And if this misery is ultimate evil, so the guilt is inexcusable and deserves most cruel punishment. Idols, idols...

Any idealised society (where justice, equality and happiness rule over human imperfections and sense of incompleteness) is an idol, any deep and genuine dream of it a clear sign of alienation, and any attempts to construct it are guaranteed to end up the way they always used to end. Hell is paved with good intentions and those who end up there are almost exclusively those who have looked all too intensely for paradise. An infinitely thin line separates all too good intentions from all too ambitious goals, “Those who seek gold dig much earth and find little.” Few, if any people ever commit crimes in order to achieve evil. There is always some good which motivates even the worst deeds. But exaggerated intensity in digging for some good witnesses rather to its opposite. The higher and the greater is the good claimed to ‘motivate and explain’ a particular act, the deeper is idolatry and, usually, the more terrifying result. Good, like wisdom, can enlighten but not explain. Particular acts are never visibly traceable, not to say necessary, consequences of any higher good. It is only confutation of the highest good with the visible form of an idol which may seem to dictate with necessity any definite acts, as it turns the infinite love into activism, religiosity into moralism, commands into directives, and thirst into lack to be filled with visible efforts.

An idol, trying to fill the ‘absence’, marks a break with the origin, alienation. Thirst experienced as mere thirst, mere loss, which grows into unacceptable pain and searches

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22G. P. della Mirandola, Oration on the Dignity of Man.
24Heraclitus DK 22B22
only for ever new visible tranquilizers – is the sign of invisible rebellion which, making one look for paradise, directs one to hell. The initial voice of this rebellion calls to an active open war which, in more visible terms, means only intensified activity; not as yet any evil will but a blind and restless, no matter how apparently purposeful, search capable only of rising idols. No pride nor offense is intended, at least none can be seen, but their invisible seeds have already started germinating...

1.1.2. The circle of despair

Attachment to idols only increases thirst – the more we believe that it has disappeared and the less we feel it, the more present it becomes. Whether we actually feel it or not, whether we have any actual signs of it or not, we all the time know its presence – at best, we can only keep it at the threshold of actuality, for some time... Psychoanalyst could perhaps say that we suppress it, but it is not a simple game of conscious and unconscious. It is present and as such not suppressed. It lends all its power to our idols – the more intense and unbearable its presence, the more absolute power has to be and is ascribed to the current idols.

But less than All cannot satisfy man. We search for and find more things and matters to consider, more goals to achieve, more intensity and engagement, more power in lesser gods – but insatiability is still only serving the idols. Behind the circle of more, behind the horizon of visibility, there lurks already emptiness of despair. As always, it is not critical whether it enters the sphere of actuality and consciousness, or not – what matters is its very presence. One need not know that one despairs to despair. But knowing that one does may intensify the despair.

13. Idolatry is already a form of despair. But despair intensifies when one loses the faith in one’s idols which until now have been helping against the thirst, and then realises that all the idols are only images, masks, lies offering false promises and hopes. It is a meeting with nothingness under the spell of visibility, and hence only in its negative character, as emptiness, pure void. Idols had seemed to be something or at least to hide somebody. Some face was expected behind their masks, like the unreachable goals used to absolutise the relative, or the ultimate and visible goals used to justify the unjustifiable. But now, when all the masks have fallen, no face appears – and bare emptiness stares into one’s face. One tries to fill it with this or that, with some old or new idol, with work, fascinations or orgies, eventually also to pretend that, since actually nothing has happened so nothing has happened really. But void of nothingness is not like an empty glass and can not be filled with anything. One is bound to begin to live through, if not also realise, the fact “that there is no truth, that there is no absolute character of things, no ‘thing in itself’” and “that all faith, all accepting as truth is by necessity a falsehood: for there is no such thing as the true world.”

14. Admitting this ultimate indifference of the world, its aloofness which one still resists to take as enmity, is often misunderstood as an act of intellectual honesty. But it is only an act of existential despair.


One may try some more desperate acts. Ixion, having fallen in love with Hera, dreams of possessing her and makes successful advances (in some versions, Centaurs are the offspring resulting from their intercourse). His boasting of having had slept with a goddess is, however, a result of an illusion: he slept with a cloud which Zeus created in resemblance of Hera. Thus, trying to reach a goddess, he catches the air and, as a punishment, he is.
bound to a wheel on which he is whirled by winds for all eternity. Heaven is, according to the Greeks, always a gift from gods. The vanity of any attempts to reach it by one’s own means recurs with figures like Actaeon, Bellerophon, Icarus, Prometheus.

Such attempts, although deserving further punishment from gods, are themselves signs of already being in despair. The time spent on unsuccessful attempts to escape begins gradually to suggest: there is no escape! One may try to look for reasons and explanations, that is, for excuses and the guilty ones (“Hell is the others!” cries Sartre behind the Closed doors26), one may confront one’s own sinfulness (“Angst discovers freedom but this is the same as discovery of sin”27), but all that does not change anything: from emptiness, where there are no walls, there is no exit either. The impossibility is eternal.

Proper despair is to surrender to despair. As no exit is visible, one is doomed for remaining inside forever. “Inside”? But inside of what? There is only emptiness around. Yet the walls of emptiness create the most terrifying ‘inside’ – they isolate and alienate making man dwell ‘in desolate cities, and in houses which no man inhabiteth, which are ready to become heaps.’28 Alienation, the apparent freedom of empty nothingness is exactly the inescapable damnation – in one: accusation, trial and conviction. One remains ‘inside’ the imaginations and hopes of visibility. Their experienced and clearly known insufficiency to bring any consolation testifies to some ‘outside’. But there is only emptiness, so any ‘outside’ is impossible. It is, it must be because one needs it so much, it must be real because one cannot live without it – and yet it is impossible that it is.

To surrender to despair is to say No to the possibility of something being there, ‘outside’. Not only there is no visible exit, but there is no exit whatsoever because there is nothing toward which one could exit. “Also let a man mark, when he is in this hell, nothing may console him; and he cannot believe that he shall ever be released or comforted.”29 As there is no hope of exit, as all we confront is the eventual void, the “final hope //Is flat despair: we must exasperate//The almighty victor to spend all his rage..//And that must end us, that must be our cure – //To be no more; sad cure;”30 The circle of despair is self-strengthening as, accepting the impossibility of exit, one begins to despair over one’s own despairing. Hell has no end in time, it is ‘eternal’. “Let us think this idea in its most terrifying form: existence, as it is, without meaning or aim, but inevitably recurring, with no end in nothingness: eternal return. It is the most extreme form of nihilism: eternal nothingness (nonsense)!31

Surrender to despair is, as the initial despair itself, an invisible event. Consciously

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26 In the USA the title of the play was No Exit.
27 S. Kierkegaard, The Concept of Anxiety. V [modified]
28 Job XV:28
29 Theologia Germanica. XI. “He shall not depart out of darkness; the flame shall dry up his branches, and by the breath of his mouth shall he go away. Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompense.” [Job XV:30-31] In a much more profane language, “there is, alas, the loneliness which is without any hope of compensations, the loneliness due to the individual’s failure to reach some common understanding with the world. This is the bitterest loneliness of all, the loneliness which is eating away at the heart of my existence.” [F. Nietzsche, My Sister and I. IV:31]
30 J. Milton, Paradise Lost. II:142-146, [spoken by Bellal advising against the open war recommended earlier by Moloch]
31 F. Nietzsche, Notes about Nihilism. p.77. ‘Eternity’ of hell is always posited as the infinity of objective time (whether eternal return or just eternally lasting suffering). Infinite time, this bad image of eternity, witnesses to the continuing attachment to visibility. “The fear of future turns into the fear of death, and the fear of death into the fear of hell. It is always fear of the fate in time, of the lack of any end in time, that is, fear of the lack of exit from objectivisation, of infinite objectivisation.” [N. Berdyaev, I and the world of objects. IV:3]
one opposes it and tries to get out of it, one may be terrified and frightened. But as one keeps trying to avoid it, one only sinks deeper into the despair over one’s own despairing. The desperate attempts to oppose it are the actual signs of the surrender, of the invisible defeat, the No said silently in the depths.

1.1.3. Saying No

15. The circle of despair is the circle of damnation from which there is no exit. With one exception...? As Belial suggested, one may attempt the cure of non-being. As a spiritual being, he cannot commit suicide and non-being can only be a gift from God. For man it is a different matter: death “is the only god who must come whenever we only call him.”32 In the circle of despair, in the middle of nothingness which is the ultimate unfreedom, suicide appears as the last possibility of retaining and proving one’s freedom, “Man can kill himself because he has such capacity; and this capacity without the right to its use would be a luxury.”33 The argument is rather strange, suggesting that everything which is possible should also be allowed. But we sense the need to justify suicide by ascribing it the element of freedom in addition to, or perhaps even instead of, the reactive character of ultimate despair. (In Mainländer, the universal fact of the death of finite beings is even called the “will of death”, though in humans and living beings in general this metaphysical – yeah, even divine – will of death is covered up by the apparent “will of life”.)

16. The negative character of this freedom (if freedom it is) is obvious – it is a door of escape, ‘liberation from...’. Over 50% of studied suicide attempts are classified as individuals trying to achieve suicide. The rest are either trying to ‘manipulate’ the environment (to have revenge on a rejecting lover, to ruin the life of another person, to have the final word in an argument as in the so called “altruistic suicide”) or are combinations of both. In every case, self-inflicted death seems to be the last thing one is capable of achieving, is the last possibility of self-chosen act.34

In either form, the voluntary choice of death is saying No; it is accepting that only emptiness surrounds the horizon of visibility; and since nothingness is nothing, the only hope of transcending the unbearable situation is to pass into non-being. One might, perhaps, discern an element of heroism in attempting such a free act in the depth of spiritual enslavement, in sacrificing one’s life when confronted with a higher truth. But it is

33ibid., vol.IV/V:222. Perhaps one of the most extreme expressions of this direction of thought is metaphysics of annihilation in P. Mainländer, Die Philosophie der Erlösung, according to which the “thrill of annihilation” and “will of death” is the ultimate truth of the thirst for peace, in fact, of any spiritual thirst. In our days, Zapfe’s “Uninhabited planet is no tragedy” seems to repeat this aestheticism of annihilation, whose usual and only attempt at self-justification is appeal to nature – “what difference would it make to her were the race of men entirely to be extinguished upon earth, annihilated! she laughs at our pride when we persuade ourselves all would be over and done with were this misfortune to occur! Why, she would simply fail to notice it.” This last quotation, perhaps a bit unfortunately, is from D. A. F. de Sade, Philosophy in the Bedroom. Yet another effort, Frenchmen...
34Research indicates that most suicide attempts are not preceded by a clear and definite decision but that such people for the most are undecided about living or dying and as if gamble with death leaving it to others to save them. Such cases would nevertheless fall under our description of “self-chosen act” or “voluntary choice made by myself”, which mean of course more than reflectively conscious choices of goals and definite course of actions. Psychological differences between a person merely gambling with death and one determined for and efficiently carrying out a suicide do not concern us – each has chosen suicide and each has chosen it himself.
lamentable when this higher truth turns out to be nothing and the apparent freedom is only escape.\textsuperscript{35}

But there is also another way of saying No. Having surrendered to despair, one now accepts it. I am in prison, and there is no way out. "Nay, cursed be thou; since against his thy will I chose freely what it now so justly rues.//Me miserable! Which way shall I fly?//Infinite wrath and infinite despair?//Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell;"\textsuperscript{36} Since I am imprisoned, so I will stay imprisoned – there is nothing I can do about that. Eventually, staying spiritually imprisoned amounts to willing this imprisonment, "if it should now happen that God in heaven and all the angels were to offer to help him to be rid of this torment – no, he does not want that, now it is too late."\textsuperscript{37} There is an element of sick will in staying imprisoned, even if this will seems to be not mine, but somewhat imposed on me from above. This willing is no longer despairing over one’s despair, nor is it any longer aesthetising this despair. It is now “despairing of forgiveness, when someone because of the extent of his sins completely gives up hope in God’s goodness.”\textsuperscript{38} It is now accepting one’s despair, trying to turn it into something good. Just like voluntary passing into nothingness, suicide, so also this acceptance seems to be self-chosen, even if not self-willed. It is the despair of defiance, as Kierkegaard says, “the despair of wanting in despair to be oneself,”\textsuperscript{39} of insisting on myself when I should completely give up myself, of not realising that I am only getting the more imprisoned the more I resist to surrender.

This active choice of despair agrees on the impossibility of salvation – it is the final 18. acceptance that there is no exit. And so, “if heaven I can not bend, then hell I will arouse.”\textsuperscript{40} The only thing one can do now is to turn this evil of damnation, “the torment of perpetual penalty,”\textsuperscript{41} into good, pretend that evil is good, “Evil, be thou my good: by thee at least//Divided empire with heaven’s king I hold,”\textsuperscript{42} “I hold” because I still act on my own initiative, from my own choice. Yet, I never forget that exit was all I wanted, and so this ‘free’ choice of mine is only a renouncement, ultimate resignation. It knows, like Milton’s Satan and all his associates know, that it wished and still wishes something good, which here means exit. But this knowledge has hardly any visible signs and remains hidden underneath the actual goals and attempts. The active choice of No amounts to a definitive denial of this fact.

Having lost paradise, having “lost the eternal”, and now also the hope of regaining it, one still seems to retain the whole visible world. Mammon advises now to do only what

\textsuperscript{35}Admissibility of suicide is always an expression of absolutisation of the visibility beyond which nothing can be seen. The dignified suicide of a samurai or a Roman official, as the last way of preserving one’s honor, perhaps even of expressing one’s respect for the one commanding the suicide, is probably the best example of reducing human existence to a tool of the social system. Suicide is also often defended by reference to the need of preserving one’s dignity and self-respect in the face of unbearable suffering. The complexity of the issue eludes any simple judgments but we would, nevertheless, point out that taking one’s life amounts to ingratitude for this ultimate gift. (‘It’s my life and I can do with it what I want!’ I certainly can. But if you hear a drug addict pronouncing such an opinion you do not think he is right.) Retaining visible signs of (self-)respect by neglecting spiritual thankfulness is no less dubious just because it is common.

\textsuperscript{36}J. Milton, Paradise Lost. IV:71-73

\textsuperscript{37}S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death. I.C.B.b.3p.103

\textsuperscript{38}P. Abelard, Ethics. §177

\textsuperscript{39}S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death. I.C.B.b.3

\textsuperscript{40}Virgil, The Aeneid. VII:312 [modified translation]

\textsuperscript{41}P. Abelard, Ethics. §168

\textsuperscript{42}J. Milton, Paradise Lost. IV:110-111
can be done by one’s own powers. Indeed “great things of small, \[Useful of hurtful, prosperous of adverse,\]/We can create, and in what place so e’er\//Thrive under evil, and work ease out of pain\//Through labour and endurance.”\textsuperscript{43} In another context, this might sound almost convincing, but here Satan draws the eventual consequence of this whole invisible development. He turns in revenge against the visible world, against God’s last creation, “some new race called Man, about this time\//To be created like to us [...] Thither let us bend all our thoughts, to learn [...] what their power/\And where their weakness; how attempted best\//By force or subtlety; though heaven be shut, \//And heaven’s high arbitrator sit secure\//In his own strength, this place may lie exposed, \//The utmost border of his kingdom, left\//To their defense who hold it;”\textsuperscript{44} The invisible defeat, the active No, although affecting apparently only the invisible nothingness, brings about visible consequences which permeate the whole existence. Although the resulting activity may, and typically does, appear perfectly purposeful and rational, it is driven only by the fear of emptiness which it tries to cover up. For No, removing the invisible rest surrounding the visible world, leaves all visibility entirely to itself.

It belongs to the nature of damnation that it universalises itself. Just like one can not be happy in the evil world, one can not be damned in the middle of saints and saved. “To the unhappy, it is a comfort to have had companions in misfortune.”\textsuperscript{45} And when companions are hard to find, one starts producing them by demonstrating the universality of misfortune. “[T]he more I see//Pleasures about me, so much more I feel//Torment within me,”\textsuperscript{46} says Satan who can nothing else but try “all pleasure to destroy, //Save what is in destroying; other joy To me is lost.”\textsuperscript{47} “Rebelling against all existence, it thinks it has acquired evidence against existence, against its goodness. The despairer thinks that he himself is this evidence.”\textsuperscript{48} The damned, the active No, comes thus out of its closed room without, however, ever leaving it; it comes out as the visible activity trying to embrace everything but driven by the substantiated lack, its emptiness. Damnation finds its expression in every single thing and situation, it permeates all actuality, even when it itself remains non-actualised. It is, after all, the very impossibility of actualisation for it has removed everything which possibly might be actualised; equating the ultimate invisibility with emptiness, it has cut away the source of actualising meanings and, eventually, turns even actuality into nothingness. Only absolute emptiness can be absolutely insatiable. Insatiability, the impossibility of satisfaction, is a substantiation of thirst: like Thyestes devouring his own body, like Tantalus ever hungry and never able to reach the water and fruit brushing his lips. Insatiability of damnation is to spread its despair over all and everything, in search for a community beyond its alienation, “Man communicates by means of despair, when he no longer has any other community.”\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{43}J. Milton, \textit{Paradise Lost}. II:258-262
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid. II: 348-362. (Blake’s scheme of thirst which, when suppressed, turns into greed and envy owes much to Milton.)
\textsuperscript{45}C. Markow, \textit{Doctor Faustus}. V:42. (The Latin version – \textit{Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris} – was quoted by many authors, but its origin remains unknown.)
\textsuperscript{46}J. Milton, \textit{Paradise Lost}. IX:119-121
\textsuperscript{47}Ibid. IX:477-479
\textsuperscript{48}S. Kierkegaard, \textit{The Sickness untoDeath}. I:C.B.b.β
\textsuperscript{49}E. Durkheim, \textit{The Suicide}. III:6. Durkheim speaks here only about the tendency to, what he calls, “egoistic suicide”, arising from the dissolution of social structures and increased individualisation or, as we might perhaps say, alienation. “The individual’s appetite for life diminishes because the connections relating it to the society are weakened.” We would not identify our alienation with Durkheim’s ‘individualisation;’ just like we would never identify absolute with ‘society’. But putting absolutisation of the social aspect aside, we can easily recognise the accuracy and relevance of Durkheim’s observations.
1.1. The hermeneutics of thirst

It is also eternal, for one can not possibly get out from the place where there is no visible exit. The lack of exit means that "no end is limited to damned souls"\(^50\), means the eternity of damnation. (Bad eternity', of course, infinite temporal duration, for the damned remains thoroughly within time.) The only relief one can then find consists in the confirmation that "damnation is the truth", that "so is the world", that "hope is an illusion". Extreme pain soothes lesser pain; common degeneration in the world around seems to attenuate my own degeneration; nothing seems to allay more the meaninglessness of the private suffering and despair, than the realisation that this is actually the universal truth of life. It would be futile to ask what comes first – suffering or the perception of its common (if not universal) nature. Suffering is indistinguishable from its experience, while "universal", "common", etc, are here only actualised expressions of the 'objective' character of evil, of the fact that it overcomes me, is 'greater than me'. At this last circle of despair, the suppressed thirst solidifies, one could say, substantialises the ultimate emptiness as a universal truth. But since this actual truth is not any truth, one is bound to keep searching for its confirmations.

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What we have called "despair" Kierkegaard would classify as only its higher stages, perhaps, as "the despair which is conscious of being despair". Already our thirst would be classified by him as lower levels of despair. Indeed, the stages of the gradual intensification of thirst to despair referred to above correspond closely to the intensification of despair described by Kierkegaard in The sickness unto death, I:C.B, Despair viewed under the aspect of consciousness. So, what's the difference? Is there any?

We do not see the need to be so dramatic. There may be humility in thirst which would be hard to find in despair. But we also sense a more significant difference. What we said in §3 about the commonality of thirst, might have been expressed by Kierkegaard, for instance, as follows: "An older woman who has supposedly left all illusion behind is often found to be fantastically illuded, as much as a young girl, of how happy she was then, how beautiful, etc. This fainhus [we have been], which we so often hear from older people, is just as great an illusion as the younger people's illusions of the future; they lie or invent, both of them."\(^51\) All that is probably true, in a sense, but it is not right. If people "invent or lie" and they do so throughout the whole history of mankind, then the problem lies rather in the diagnosis than in the diagnosed. Thirst, as we shall see, is not something which, like Kierkegaard's despair, one just has to dissolve in active consciousness. It certainly is not, as is despair, a sin which cannot avoid deepening alienation. And this is the crucial difference – Kierkegaard insists on a kind of consciousness: "what characterises despair is just this – that it is ignorant of being despair"\(^52\). Yet, "the more consciousness, the more intense despair"\(^53\), and this seems to present a problem with the relation between consciousness and spirituality. The two seem often identified, "inwards, at an even higher level of consciousness"\(^54\), as if inwards required actual consciousness.

Perhaps, it is only a minor technicality in need of a proper interpretation, but it seems to harbour the fundamental conflict of Kierkegaard's, of which the tension between the

\(^{50}\)C. Marlowe, Doctor Faustus. XIX:171. ("limited" meaning appointed, fixed definitely.)

\(^{51}\)S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death. I:C.B.b.a.1

\(^{52}\)Ibid. I:C.B.a

\(^{53}\)Ibid. I:C.B.a

\(^{54}\)Ibid. II:B
intensity of actual consciousness and the passivity of the spiritless (bourgeois) is only an epitome. “But despair is exactly man’s unconsciousness of being characterised as spirit, [...]
Most people live without being properly conscious of being characterised as spirit – and to this one can trace all the so-called security, contentment with life, etc., which is exactly despair.”

We are unable to share the gnostic oppositions of such classifications. Spirit is most present where it least appears. Being ‘properly conscious’ of anything is no goal of life, neither is seeing desperate involvement in every world involvement, especially in the secure and content one. Sure, one can attempt a bit sharper interpretation, giving more plausibility to this opposition. But we think it is unnecessary because what counts in Kierkegaard’s, as in any other philosophy, is the fundamental mood, the fundamental truth which it elaborates in all possible forms. The mood of Kierkegaard is that of a dramatic tension, yeah, of a prophecy arising from the opposition to the neglect and disrespect shown by the world, by “the small market town”, to the higher, spiritual things. There may certainly be a tension between the two elements, but spiritualising consciousness makes it into an unbearable contradiction. The result seems quite a bit unhealthy, especially, if we take into account that “health is in general to be able to resolve contradictions.”

Kierkegaard is the unresolved contradiction between the two poles: an individual, free spiritual existence and the world, sunk into impersonal spiritlessness. If you like, it is the contradiction between the self, founded in the relation to God, and God himself, whom the self can not reach through mere consciousness. Whichever form, we do not want to end in the same point. If the world is an enjoyable place of comfort and (why not? aesthetic) content, then the goal is not to leave it. And if the world is impersonal, inauthentic, despairing, then the goal is not to leave it, either. One lives in this world, and the fact that its platitudes and spiritlessness can sometimes feel discouraging does not mean that spirit lives somewhere else. If it lives anywhere, it is only in the midst of this world, not perhaps in its dissociated things and spiritless activities, but between them. Such a depersonalised world, such deindividualised people as existentialists, following Kierkegaard, used to describe are “inventions or lies”, for people appear so only when viewed through the requirements of plain visibility and transparency. The opposition of a reflected personality to the stupefying noise of mass-media or narrow-mindedness of a market-town does not extend to the contradiction between spirit and spiritlessness, nor that between faith and sin. One’s world is one’s soul, and accusations against it turn out to be self-accusations.

Consciousness of despair can certainly intensify the despair, but despair can also reach quite deep levels without active consciousness. We have emphasized that deepening of despair is, at the bottom, an invisible process, and realising it consciously is only an additional possibility – certainly complicating but not necessary. It is unnecessary because one always somewhat, in the depth of irreflective self-awareness, knows one’s spiritual condition. One knows it because despair makes a tremendous difference. One knows it because one lives it. This is not knowledge of reflective consciousness, fully realising what’s going on, whence it comes and whereto it leads. This inability of actually seeing (what it is, whence it comes, perhaps even that it occurs and, in every case, how to cure it) deepens the despair as long as one remains attached to visibility. But it contains also the germ of revival, suggesting that the possibility of healing does not lie in the autonomy of reflective consciousness. We will return to this point in 3.1 but first we generalise the observations on despair to all attempts which, trying to quench the thirst, only deepen alienation.

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55 Ibid. I.B
56 Ibid. I.C.A.b.β
2 Spiritual No

Despair is a form of alienation, of turning nothingness into nothing or, what amounts to the same, being cut off from the origin. It is the ‘ontological’ separation carried to the ‘epistemic’ extreme of dissociation. But this ‘epistemic’ mistake affects the whole ‘ontology’ for in the sphere of spirit there is no distinction between being and knowing. The form of confrontation is the confrontation itself, and what and how it is lived determines the ‘ontological’ character of what it encounters. The ultimate emptiness, apparently so abstract and irrelevant for here-and-now, once it finds the site in the depth of one’s being will only spread further and further down, putting gradually more and more regions under its spell. Whether it experiences itself as evil, or only finds evil in its experience, it is a seed from which more evil arises. For even if evil is at the bottom lack and negativity, it is lack which propagates and grows, it is negativity which universalises itself.

Alienation is the substantialisation of thirst which, unable to maintain the positive – even if impossible, objectless and hence unimaginable – character of its intention, absolutises the negative character of the experience as absence, as a mere lack. Despair may for quite a long time remain in a suspension as to its character – as suffering, and hence an evil experience which, however, need not be an experience of evil. As long as it remains so suspended, it is suffering but it does not become evil. Renouncing the impossible possibility of exit, it ceases to suffer. But it ceases to suffer only because it ceases to feel and know, only because it has now turned its suffering into impossibility of liberation, into the ultimate alienation, that is, evil. Despair need not be evil though, in the moment it begins to re-cognise evil behind its suffering, it is on the way to become it itself. Every evil expresses this alienation which, unable to stand the suffering, begins to experience it as a substantial entity and objectifies it as ‘evil’ (cause, person, accident, life, world). Thus, distancing itself from it, it becomes also distanced from an aspect of its life and, at the bottom of it, from its source. Evil, we might say, is suffering which became substantialised in an attempt to escape it.

Unquenched thirst brings pain and pain, just like suffering, is a great danger; it can infect the soul.57 “A hit with a hammer into the head can damage the soul.” The one who is suffering asks all the questions of Job’s and, eventually and inevitably, asks “Why?”. Left without answer, one grants oneself the right to accuse the surroundings, other people, the world – for undeserved suffering, for neglect, then for injustice, for immorality and, finally, for evil. “I did not deserve this! It is evil!” And who are you to know what you deserve and what you do not? Whatever the accusations, at their basis lies No which having all the reasons (bad rather than good, but seemingly sufficient) to blame and accuse, becomes hate. Hatred is not an irrational, unjustified feeling without reasons. As anger, according Seneca, it hardly ever occurs without reasons and, typically, it has plenty of reasons for its own justification, it “does necessarily presuppose an injury, either done, or conceived, or feared.” It only “proceeds to the resolution of a revenge, the mind assenting to it.”58

But hatred, again like anger, “passes the bounds of reason, and carries it away with it” or, as we would say, it is an expression (one of the strongest ones) of alienation, of the

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57 Pain can be here taken to refer generally to all kinds of what is often called “natural evil” – physical pain, sickness, natural catastrophes, etc. Hardly any of the following formulations would require change if we interpreted it this way. We do not draw rigid distinctions here, but “suffering” is meant in the more fundamental sense, as the personal – whether physical, emotional, moral or spiritual, whether only felt or also lived and deeply experienced – pain, without any consideration of its causes.

58 Seneca [after A. O. Rorty, ed., The Many Faces of Evil.]
negative separation from the hated object, person, the other, the alien, which caused my pain. Then, when the “why?” does not find any satisfying answer, and one is unable to stop dwelling on one’s pain, the granted hatred may embrace the whole world.  

Suffering which does not disappear grows. Time heals only wounds which have ceased to cause pain. But even a negligible pain, if it lasts, becomes a constant element of one’s life which can affect deeper and deeper levels of one’s soul. Initially it may affect only the actual situation which one is able to face with all the vitality and actual strength. One may gather one’s strength and say “it hurts but I can stand it”. And sometimes it works. But if it does not... One can not distinguish clearly one’s soul from one’s world, nor one’s world from this world. A suffering soul sees only suffering which, if unchecked, spreads over the whole world.

22. We do not have to list examples of how pain experienced by children may deform their personality. But we should keep in mind that such a pain is not necessarily a child abuse, a sadistic attitude of the father, or any other plain form of violence. A molestation, minor annoyances, tokens of indifference or undeserved blame, when confronting a sensitive soul may be experienced as deeply hurting and painful. A mere negligence, or else, high demands and expectations, when not compensated by the overall atmosphere of love, underlying care and understanding may constitute painful experiences. A mere presence of a child at a scene of a humiliation, revile, deception, ravishing, even of a simple quarrel between adults may cause enough pain.  

23. Evil is primarily a reaction – a reaction which seems justified but which is neither controlled nor even realised. The first form of love – because it is also the form of thirst – is the need to be loved. Evil is born between men from the lack of love but also, and primarily, from pain caused often without any intention, as if by accident. Yet pain, even suffering, need not be evil. It becomes so when one rises a wall of defense against the ‘evil world’, against all the forces which bring suffering, when suffering begins to alienate.  

There are innumerable ways of causing pain and of suffering, and it would be futile to attempt their classification. It would be futile first of all because, obvious as some of such ways might be, we do not know them all and we can not know them – it is not a matter of any general classification, but of the concrete attention paid to all the aspects of the actual situations. There are no objective, visible criteria not only for what, in more subtle cases, may constitute a painful experience, but, above all, not even for what consequences inflicted pain may have. An unsatisfied need of a crying baby may turn out just an insignificant accident, but also a first suggestion of a lack, on which later disappointments will grow; an aggressive sentence stated carelessly to the spouse, may happen to be ignored by a child accidentally present in the same room, or else it may hit the most sensitive core of its

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59 Self-pity is, in fact, also an expression of alienation. Pitying itself, it dwells in attachment which is underlaid by the image of ‘the evil world’, the ‘evil’ which is out there, against which it is impotent.  
60 The director Robert Wilson, in cooperation with an anthropologist, conducted a film analysis of a situation mother-child: the child is crying, the mother lifts it. Split into 300 frames sequence displayed unexpectedly that, in the first phase, the mother reacts aggressively and that the child responds with a complex of movements and sounds expressing fear; only then the actions of the mother become caring and protective. The woman did not want to believe that. Wilson’s conclusion: there are subconscious «frequencies of contact» below the globalising level of words, exchange of signals so minute that they can be brought to the surface only by an analysis in slow motion. [after K. Wolicki, Convictions of the theatre of counterculture (2).]  
61 Although it is common to consider suffering an evil, we will not identify them without further ado. Suffering is experienced, one would be tempted to say, an essential aspect of human life, while evil is only a conclusion drawn from suffering, posited behind it, as possible as unnecessary.
understanding; a misunderstood joke may become a mortal offense.

There may be far from such events to evil but, like all actual experiences, they too penetrate gradually the soul’s virtual depths. Evil emerges at first as a mere consent to evil, perhaps only ignorance of it, and it emerges from such ‘mishappenings’ – it is born between men, but it is born into them.

2.1 Privative evil

Emptiness of eventual alienation is not anything one chooses for its own sake. At first, it is perhaps only an irrelevant annoyance, a slight threat, then it becomes terrifying, and eventually becomes a horror, horror vacui. Nothingness is not anything one chooses at all, for it lies far above the sphere of possible actual choices. To begin with, “Nothing is a thirst for Something,” as Böhme says. Not knowing what this ‘Something’ might be, it is at first only a search, a search for ‘Something’. The soul, even the infected soul, does not want anything evil. It only searches for something it has lost. But missing ‘Something’, missing ‘Something’ to believe in and to rest on, turns gradually thirst into despair and suggests that, perhaps, there is not much to search for. This early stage of nihilism – not knowing what to believe – may still have all the signs of innocence and undeserved suffering. But it may also, and more typically it does, appear in a variety of forms determined by the still functioning idol (all idols are also forms of alienation): as egocentrism, as a self-satisfied activity (which negates all that does not serve its goal), as amiable aesthetism of Dorian Grey (whose soul rots in the closed room), as an American-dream hero (who only occasionally must visit his psychoanalyst), as an obedient functioning of a scruptulous clerk (accidentally, working in a concentration camp).

Anonymous and impersonal evil grows on the passivity of such a nihilism. XX-th century has taught us the lesson of the most impersonal workings of evil; as Hannah Arendt described, it is the mere failure to reflect which accounts for the impersonal banality of evil. Satan does not any longer visit individuals the way Mephistopheles visited Faust; he remains invisible and unheard, appears only now and then as a hardly identifiable, even if remarkable, person. He acts, as Woland in Bulgakov’s Master and Margarita, kind of incognito, impersonally, through other executioners, and only the final results show to the public that devil must have been involved. He is no longer a psychologist but a sociologist, perhaps, a politician.

\[\text{Böhme, Mysterium Pansophicum. I}\]

\[\text{And barely suspecting that nothing can be believed. It was called “passive nihilism” in L. Landgrebe, Zur Überwindung des europäischen Nihilismus, and in W. Kraus, Nihilismus heute oder Die Geduld der Weltgeschichte.}\]

\[\text{Another powerful image in modern literature was drawn in reference to the society suffering equally and from the analogous disease as the communist Moscow afflicted by Woland. Visiting Leverkühn in T. Mann, Doctor Faustus, XXV, devil enters as a petty individual of a very dubious appearance and social status, but even this personal, or rather impersonal trait changes several times during the conversation, suggesting the presence, as effectual as imperceptible, throughout all the layers of the society and culture. In 1995 French theologian summarises: “Satan’s greatest success in modern times is replacement of the direct activity – arising the fear of the devil – by an organic, imperceptible, and hence tranquillising activity, which penetrates the social texture without noise, devoid of the signature of the prince of this world, run by his agents occupying appropriate, strategic positions.” [R. Laurentina, Satan, a myth or reality? p.118]}\]

\[\text{In spite of the catholic insistence on the personal and concrete being of the devil, his workings appear quite impersonal: “We know well that this dark, destructive and disquieting being really exists and acts, preparing against us sophisticated traps meant to destroy the moral balance of humans.” [Paul VI, 1972, in Report on the State of Faith] But this depersonalisation of devil, his dissolution in impersonal forces,}\]
Evil of the lowest, most impersonal, but for this reason also the most global kind, is not anything one chooses but something one participates in, it is 'greater than me'. It is unintentional, unwilled, perhaps even well meant - a 'force which would do good ever yet forever works evil'. This fact, that it happens as if in spite of me, through me but not by me, illustrates the aspect of alienation almost at the psychological level. Persons affected by Woland become like machines: not because they suffer from some depersonalisation disorder, not because they merely feel detached, not because they cease to think and lose the ability to choose, but because the world, taking away their possibilities to act and influence it, has become foreign, evil. They get involved into situations created completely behind their back, which they can only continue acting without a slightest possibility of exercising any influence on further development.

25. Evil of many socio-political systems of the XX-th century left the astonishment: "How can it be possible?" Humans seem to do all that, but it is inhuman; nobody wants that, and yet it happens: "all I know is that there is suffering and that there is none guilty."65 The impersonality of this evil seems to leave all human beings innocent. Only the defective social organisation carries responsibility for it. From there there is only one step for the intellectualism of a sociological provenience to conclude that 'subject must be dead'. Human 'subject' could not possibly effect cruelty, murder and torture on such a broad scale. "It was not me! I did not want it, and hence I did not do it! Nobody wanted it, hence nobody did it!" Unfortunately, all that happened, and so this petty human 'subject' is apparently so insignificant that it must be declared non-existent.

Even if subject has never been more than a dead abstraction, so human person is as alive as it always has been and one is as responsible for one's acts as one always have been. The removal of human subject amounts only, willy nilly, to postulating an analogous center of subjectivity at the level of society, stimulating the search for the hidden mechanisms and structures of power, control and degradation. But no matter how much agency one manages to ascribe to the impersonal forces of cultural formations and socio-political systems, transferring one's responsibility to them only deepens alienation.

26. Involvement into impersonal evil takes the form of participation which happens beyond, and even in spite of, any 'subjective' choices and intentions. But it still needs some necessary conditions which here happen to be the participating individuals. I participate in evil which is 'greater than me'; I do not have control over its full strength and effects, I contribute only my small part to the totality which happens to be beyond every single among the involved individuals. Nobody controls it and yet it happens! Perhaps, we should revive the notion of collective responsibility (as it was done after both World Wars).

In its passive, private form, evil can appear everywhere, but it will grow only in certain conditions of axiological passivity. Although it never lives fully in any individual, it is always among us, if not actually then only virtually, germinating. But virtuality is already

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65F. Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov. Ivan to Alosha in II:V.Pro et contra: Rebellion [The Grand Inquisitor]
fully real, and when it starts blooming, it may bring forth fruits which are surprisingly and incomparably more sour than the seeds from which they have grown. The shock of the XX-th century is not madmen like Stalin, Mao or Pol Pot, but the legions of common people who carry out the most inhuman operations – the more inhuman, the higher are the idols who bless their actions. The terrifying inhumanity of the genocide on the native Americans is not embodied by the people like Lt.n. Colonel George Custer, U.S. Cavalry soldiers from Wounded Knee Creek, from Bloody Island or other places of Indian massacres. On the contrary, it emerges through the apparently positive developments (exchange of goods, expansion of the missions) and, eventually, even underneath the genuine and honest attempts to repair the damages, best wishes of people like John Collier (Roosevelt’s chief of the Bureau of Indian Affairs implementing “New Deal” for Indians) – the inhumanity of the genocide whose mere scale excludes any personal guilt, but which continues in spite of the increasingly good intentions or bad conscience of the guilty ones.

Even if we subtract, in all such cases, the expected amounts of private gain, of personal will to power and money, of resentment and revenge, we are still left with legions of ‘normal people’ participating in global evil. (Unfortunately, we are dealing with ‘normal people’ even if we do not subtract anything.) They are legions because to participate in this evil is so easy, almost natural: just obey the orders, or do your job, or sometimes, do not pay too much attention.

It seems that we thus encounter …the original sin, or at least its possible variant. We could certainly refer to the above paragraphs to counter the unreserved claims of Pelagian flavour that human can freely choose goodness which is in his power and that sin (as a cause or result – or both – of evil) is the matter of every individual. It is in one’s power to actually decide, or rather only admit, that one wants something which is good, that one “thirsts for Something”, but one’s power ends about there. “They want good but effect evil, for they know not what they do.” As desire for good, and even genuinely good character, is fully compatible with it, this original sin is not an “innate sinful depravity of the heart”, it is not a moral category appealing to personal consciousness and making it visible “that the soul of man, as it is by nature, is in a corrupt, fallen and ruined state,”66 that his “whole nature is a seed of sin; hence it can only be hateful and abhorrent to God.”67 We certainly do not want to get all too puritan or revivalist. In a strange way, it is the sin which anchors individual in the community, the sin which is as if committed only by the community, and therefore one in which everybody participates.68 It is impersonal evil

66J. Edwards, *Original Sin*. I.1.1; I.1.3
68As this sin apparently gathers (while evil divides) and as it is not something intended nor actually willed (while “[there can be no sin that is not voluntary” [St. Augustine, *On True Religion*. XIV:27]), the followers of St. Thomas would call it a sin only in an analogous sense, only a shadow of sin properly so-called. Participation in sin implies responsibility for it, and this is the whole and only sense of its ‘voluntary character’ in the present context – for one is responsible for everything one participates in, even though no actual willing is involved and no actual responsibility can be imputed.

In the older and more traditional societies, the same idea seems to have been present as the fear of pollution with correlative craving for ritual purification. Pollution results from ‘unclean’ actions but can also become infectious or hereditary. (Thus, for instance, there seems to be no signs of such infectious or hereditary transmission of *miasma* in Homer, but in the Archaic Age it became both and was accepted as such to the Classical Age. Plato would still debar from religious or civic activities those who had voluntary contact with even slightly polluted person, until they have been purified (*Laws*, 881DE.) Such involuntary, uncontrollable and almost mechanic workings of pollution suggest equally mechanic purification which develops from simple forms performed by laymen in Homer to advanced rituals of *catharsis* in the Archaic Age.
which spreads among individuals merely thirsting for ‘Something’. It grows and effects results which might not have been intended by anybody, for which no particular person actually carries full responsibility. Yet, everybody is responsible for it, so we might say that the original sin is one which no individual commits, but for which every individual is responsible.

Just like the lowest level of despair is characterised by the lack of any knowledge thereof, so the one (that is, everybody) affected by the original sin hardly ever realises it, never meets its efficacy in the actuality of one’s consciousness, and consequently hardly ever confronts any actual choice related to it. One may still live the ethos of one’s parents, family, nation, one may still be active in valuable ways, yet one is already exposed to the unclarity of values and concrete decisions. One is not evil – on the contrary! Many of Hitler’s willing (and unwilling) executioners were decent citizens. Good family fathers were tools of the most inhuman evil.

Lack of any evil intentions, however, is not sufficient to disclaim responsibility. For the inhumanity of all socio-political evil is nourished by the idols who enter the stage as the promises of quenching the thirst. Dostoevsky notes in his Notebook: “In fact, we were the nihilists, we in the constant search for a superior idea.” Privative evil spreads by not being recognised or not being opposed actively enough. But this passivity in the face of it is only another side of the active support given to the idols who, promising visible goals one may even be able to accept, take on the character of the ultimate good. It amounts always to trading the invisible ‘Something’, the ultimate object of thirst, for some actual goods and values. And even if the latter are recognised as not being the highest and ultimate ones, so having replaced the latter, they become idols.

Studying mere psychology and analysing mere individuals will hardly ever give the full concept of this form of evil except, perhaps, as a demonic force overcoming individuals with irresistible power and taking possession of their souls. For it is anonymous, it only sneaks between humans through their ‘misunderstandings’ – on the local, personal, or else on the social scale. These two, apparently opposite poles (of personal and social interactions), share the same element of unintentional, non-voluntary, we could almost say, natural emergence of evil. Its germs may appear without anybody noticing. We do not know all the conditions under which thirst becomes lack. In the traditional language, the natural predisposition to the emergence of evil, the appearance of evil between humans in spite of their natural thirst for God, was called “original sin”. But although its sources may lie outside the individual control, its growth is possible only when individuals attempt to quench the thirst substituting visible idols for its transcendent object.

2.2 Negative evil

Just like the transition from despair to the despair over despairing may be hard to observe, so the transition from not knowing what to believe to not believing anything may be imperceptible. This most negative stage of nihilism marks also a more personal level, for the experience of the all-embracing emptiness, erasure of all idols, acts also as a painful individuation principle. Detachment from this world, independent and splendid isolation, is the figure of its dubious hero.

It should not be necessary to repeat all the stories and analyse various forms of meaninglessness and boredom, nausea, insensitive irritability, strangeness, remoteness, foreignness which have been thoroughly described by writers from Hölderlin and Hebbel, through the
Russians like Turgieniev, Gogol, Dostoevsky, to Sartre, Camus, Beckett... Personal disintegration of the heroes of this tradition is the evil of alienation reflecting the metaphysical emptiness surrounding them and the world in which they live. As there is hardly any distinction between me and my world, the emptiness of the latter results in the dissolution of the former. And this is no paradox that emptiness causes dissolution, nor that the indissoluble person disintegrates. For dissolution is exactly the alienation of actuality from the self and it is effected by the emptiness which sneaks in between the two, which, announcing the emptiness of heaven, dissociates it from earth. In actual situations one can observe alienation from the world, from the surroundings and other people, but these are only consequences, only visible signs.

The common theme underlying this process is the sense of unreality. First, the invisible becomes unreal (for only what is visible is real), then the world around me, losing all sense and meaning becomes unreal, too, and finally, even I myself, my whole life become unreal. This sickness to unreality is but another face of the despair over one's own despairing. It, too, is self-strengthening, for once started it can only spread until it embraces the whole world. And once completed it, too, offers no exit, for having embraced everything, having turned everything into unreality, it has left nothing 'real outside'.

The emptiness of heaven, nothingness of invisibles, marks a deep alienation. In terms of evil, it is its loneliness reflected by the internalisation. Evil walks alone, in spite of its possible activity it is introvert, self-directed; it acquires the character of privacy which is only another expression of the progressing alienation.

But it may be unclear what is being called "evil" here. Evil seems to happen to the affected person who is suffering all these calamities rather than contributing to them. Is such a person evil? Hardly. He seems even less evil than the ones passively accepting it – he only suffers it and can appear as a tragic hero. Yet this suffering has a malicious element of acceptance, just like the second stage of despair was only despairing over one's own situation. He is in a grasp of evil which is much stronger, deeper and more penetrating than the passive, privative evil. Reflectively, he may oppose it, yet the alienation has progressed further, has reached a higher, that is, deeper level.

But he himself does not cause any alienation, he does not spread evil! Or so, at least, one would like to see it, believing that one is responsible only for one's voluntary choices. Does he really not spread evil by going around (or, for that matter, closing himself 'inside') and being so deeply affected by it? Evil brought against oneself is in no way better than evil brought against somebody else. Yet, he did not bring it over himself, it happened to

69H. Rauschnig, *Masken und Metamorphosen des Nihilismus* describes 3 stages of post-Nietzschean nihilism with the last stage being characterised by the whole reality becoming unreal (albeit, in his case, as a consequence of the fall of the idol of collectivism which defines the second stage). Rilke: "I really did build my own house and everything that was in it. But it was an eternal reality and I did not live and expand with it. [...] it does not give me the feeling of reality, that sense of equal worth, that I so sorely need: to be a real person among real things." [I. Salomé, *You Alone are Real to Me*. Letter from Rome, 1904, p. 45] In this close association, if not equipollence, of the sense of unreality and alienation – from oneself as much from the world and others – "when others feel themselves understood and totally accepted, I feel prematurely torn from some sort of hidden place." [Ibid. Letter from Obernau, 1905, p. 60] Gombrowicz's works, starting in the 30-ies, far from being nihilistic, give nevertheless an excellent description of this aspect of unreality, where nothing is itself any more, where even "the Fear itself is but a Fear caused by the lack of Fear", and where the only "wish of my soul is: that something would Happen." [W. Gombrowicz, *Trans-Atlantic*. p. 88/114]

70Killing oneself is in no way 'better' than killing another. Not because it is worse, but because there is no sense in such a comparison. Whatever effects alienation is evil, and whatever is evil is so irrespectively
him! He needs help, not accusations! But — everybody may need help and nobody needs accusations. We are not accusing anybody. And we admit that it may be a tantalising thought that one serves evil in the midst of opposing it; that one is responsible for it only because it happened to find a site in one’s soul; that one is guilty by a strange accident, which accuses one of evil in the middle of the fight one leads against it. Unfortunately, every fight witnesses to the presence of an adversary. And when the adversary is in me…?

Deep suffering, hopelessness, and despair over hopelessness, are ways of being affected by evil and, at the same time, of answering to being so affected. The one suffering is not, of course, evil but he is exposed to a trial in which evil can enter his soul. Prolonged suffering can lead either to externalisation of evil as some devilish power responsible for exposing one to it, or to recognition of one’s responsibility — not, perhaps, for any voluntary acts and evils but for one’s imperfections. Either choice deepens alienation and hence increases evil. “When a man truly Perceiveth and considereth himself, who and what he is, and findeth himself utterly vile and wicked, and unworthy of all the comfort and kindness that he hath received from God, or from the creatures, he falleth into such a deep abasement and despising of himself, that he thinketh himself unworthy that the earth should bear him, and it seemeth to him reasonable that all creatures in heaven and earth should rise up against him and avenge their Creator on him, and should punish and torment him; and that he were unworthy even of that. And it seemeth to him that he shall be eternally lost and damned, and a footstool to all the devils in hell, and that this is right and just and all too little compared to his sins which he so often and in so many ways hath committed against God his Creator.”

31. Although hardly chosen (not to mention voluntary choice), this form of existence partakes of evil. And to participate in evil is to be affected, even consumed, by it (even if we won’t say that it is to be evil). This is a deeper level of being a victim, perhaps, a victim of plain violence. Exposure to violence does not, by itself, make one evil. But it poses before one choices which strengthen the possibility of saying No: the arising will to settle the accounts, perhaps the conviction of right to exercise unmitigated revenge, perhaps to nourish hatred. The alienating power of the sickness to unreality, not to mention exposure to suffering, lies in strengthening the tendency to pollute with the appearance of evil not only particular situations but the world. The whole world, the quality of human life as such can appear as evil or as originating in evil. Looking for the the reasons responsible for one’s suffering, unreality and alienation, stops typically by finding ones — and they are evil! The next step, from seeing evil around oneself to choosing it, is even smaller than that from pitying the miserable fate of X to hating Y who caused it.

2.3 Active evil

32. As we have learnt from Nietzsche, there is a difference between not believing anything and believing nothing. One struck by the negative evil lives the fact that there is nothing, no
2.3. Active evil

God, no sense, that questions about meaning are not only unanswerable but ultimately empty... But not finding anything, one can still resist the decision that there is nothing. It is, indeed, possible to balance on the edge of this apparent contradiction, but it is very difficult. The more intensity in the attempts to retain the balance, the stronger the force dragging one towards the conclusion which only confirms the actual situation – there is nothing ‘outside’, only emptiness, void.

As Dostoevsky observed, if there is no God, then everything is allowed. The lived emptiness breeds nihilism all the way down – nihilism, that is, the lack of any criteria, the total ‘freedom’, ‘freedom from...’ or, what amounts here to the same, meaninglessness (for since every meaning carries with it a ‘threat’ of external authority, total ‘freedom from’ can appear only as arbitrariness.) And the more devastating consequences it has in the lower, visible sphere, the greater the chance for the conclusion that there is nothing and that one should draw some consequences of this ‘fact’. It is impossible to exit for there is only emptiness ‘outside’. So I must obviously stay here, in the middle of this emptiness, but I can, for that matter, act – true, towards things and situations which became immersed in emptiness, which lost all their significance and importance, but which still offer all the visible material for action.

“Naught” means both ‘nothing’ and ‘evil’ (as in “naughty”). Tradition associating evil with negativity utilised also the distinction between mere lack, privation, and negation. The former, privation could be read as negation of something particular, of an individual thing, and then negativity would correspond to a total emptiness, negation of Being as such. Our privative evil has little in common with the former, but we retain negativity more or less in this form. In either case, it was difficult to see any positive activity in evil, since it was merely an ontological lack, a pure non-being. It was a non-substantial negation, incapable of any action emptiness. “For evil is the absence of the good [...] But only good can be a cause [...]”

Eventually, we will perhaps follow this tradition but we should not, for this reason, forget the active character of evil. Emptiness is not necessarily physical annihilation and destruction, but alienation, the spiritual emptiness of heavens, nothingness which became void. The No which declares this ultimate emptiness expects some visible cash in exchange (as one used to say, selling one’s soul.) Evil has a tendency and power to grow and spread. It does not help calling it “negation”, “lack” or “emptiness”, because these may seem empty and inactive only when taken abstractly. But evil acts in human soul, consumes and corrodes it. This corrosion may be viewed as a gradual negation, but it does not make it unreal – it is a deterioration and increasing alienation. The fact that the final result is negative emptiness does not mean that the process which led to it was equally empty and non-existent. Evil becomes active when it reaches the spiritual choice of No, when it declares that there is nothing ‘outside’, and when having thus annihilated the sphere of invisible, it turns to what is left – acting in the visible world to compensate for, or else to revenge, the invisible loss above. This evil is not only capable of action, but could be almost defined by it, as opposed to the two kinds we have considered before. “Evil, be thou my good: by thee at least //Divided empire with heaven’s king I hold” – these are words

72[If you have no God what is the meaning of crime?] [F. Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov., II:Bk.VI:Ch.3 [Father Zossima]] “[Since there is anything no God and no immortality, the new man may well become the man-god, even if he is the only one in the whole world, and promoted to his new position, he may lightheartedly overset all the barriers of the old morality of the old slaveman, if necessary.” [F. Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov., IV:Bk.XI:Ch.9 [Ivan’s Nightmare]]

73St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica. I.q49.a1
of a resolute (even if defeated) being determined for action. This is resoluteness of the ultimate resignation. Accepting the defeat and impossibility of reconquering paradise, it turns away from the emptiness and directs its activity to all, and only, visible world. Satan sum et nihil humanum a me alienum putò.\textsuperscript{74} Active evil, the evil of active No, apparently leaves the passivity of negation (to which it was merely exposed) and decides to act, to take its damned fate into its own hands, and turn it into whatever it chooses, that is, into whatever it is able to. For “to be weak is miserable” while “To reign is worth ambition, though in hell: //Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.”\textsuperscript{75}

34. This decision is not, at least not primarily, any actual decision. It is an invisible event which starts plaguing the soul. Actual decisions, like all the psychology of evil, are only reflections of the invisible No which, in turn, is thirst for ‘Something’ culminated in the resigned conclusion that this ‘Something’ is nothing.

Now, there is no question about the psychological possibility of being motivated and attracted by some evil. Such a possibility may be inexplicable for the psychology identifying the good with the desired, but it certainly obtains. I can be attracted to some evil not only because “there is a certain show of beauty in sin”, but also because I desire it for its evil’s own sake. Augustine recollects: “The malice of the act was base and I loved it – that is to say I loved my own undoing, I loved the evil in me – not the thing for which I did the evil, simply the evil.”\textsuperscript{76} But does it mean that our activities, the whole life, does not, after all, go on sub specie boni? Discussing detailed goods and exemplifying attractive force of detailed ‘evils’ may merit descriptive correctness. But behind every actually willed evil there hides a non-actual motivation, as one used to say, a disposition of the soul. And just like soul may consent to something it does not want,\textsuperscript{77} so man may live sub specie boni and yet choose evil, even for its own sake. “For he certainly desires to be blessed even by not living so that he may be blessed. And what is a lie if this desire be not? Wherefore it is not without meaning said that all sin is a lie. For no sin is committed save by that desire or will by which we desire that it be well with us, and shrink from it being ill with us. That, therefore, is a lie which we do in order that it may be well with us, but which makes us more miserable than we were.”\textsuperscript{78} Preferring and choosing evil for evil’s sake is possible at the level of actual will, but it is a result, a reflection of both the original thirst and its misunderstanding, of the invisible No.

35. History knows many examples, people like Nero, Gilles de Rais\textsuperscript{79}, Billy the Kid, Marquis de Sade, whom we would like to classify as pathological cases, assign them appropriate labels and shut in a cabinet with horrible curiosities. But they provide examples of spiritual deterioration which, irrespectively of their actual causes and context, reveal an inherent possibility of human existence. And every single example of a human being illustrates the potential of being human, the potential which can find its expression also in other humans, of which, at least in principle, every human being is capable. Intelligence of de Sade makes

\textsuperscript{74}“I am Satan, and deem nothing human alien to me.” [F. Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov. IV:Bk.XI:Ch.9 [Ivan’s Nighthare]]

\textsuperscript{75}J. Milton, Paradise Lost. I:157; 262-3

\textsuperscript{76}St. Augustine, Confessions. II:4 [More recently, similar point is made for instance in M. Stoecker, Desiring the Bad…]

\textsuperscript{77}“There are also people who entirely regret being drawn into consenting to lust or into an evil will, and are compelled by the flesh’s weakness to want what they don’t want to want. Therefore, I really do not see how this consent that we don’t want is going to be called ‘voluntary’ […]” [P. Abelard, Ethics. 33-34]

\textsuperscript{78}St. Augustine, The City of God. XIV:4

\textsuperscript{79}G. Bataille, The Trial of Gilles de Rais
his texts express with particular clarity most points we want to make. In particular, he declares his choice of No with exceptionally self-conscious determination. We will follow him for a moment, but only in order to arrive again to the point that actual wanting of evil is only a reflection of the inability to want anything else.

"[It is not the object of libertine intentions which fire us, but the idea of evil, and [...] the greatest pleasure is derived from the most infamous source."\(^{80}\) Or, the same fascination with transgression, expressed in a slightly different way: "beauty belongs to the sphere of the simple, the ordinary, whilst ugliness is something extraordinary, and there is no question that every ardent imagination prefers in lubricity the extraordinary to the commonplace."\(^{81}\) Such an ‘ardent imagination’ finds its inspiration in the low and the ugly, in their variation and manifold which, negating everything above and ‘outside’ the horizon of their plain visibility, can only attempt to intensify its narrow contents. "It is the filthy act that causes the greatest pleasure: and the filthier it be, the more voluptuously fuck is shed. [...] the more pleasure you seek in the depths of crime, the more frightful the crime must be."\(^{82}\)

As sadism became a label for something one might even be willing to call a particular "sickness", one might also be less willing to consider it evil. Such labels serve the general tendency of reliving the conscience and ensuring everybody that it was not his fault. But if evil happens to be nobody’s fault, it only means that everybody is guilty. In case of "sick" people, like de Sade, there should be little doubt. Sickness is not necessarily evil nor is it necessarily making one evil – but as every pain and suffering it can do both. (Pain, sickness, deformity, as natural associates of evil are consistently symbolised by all hunchbacks, deformed sorcerers and ugly witches in fairy tales.) However, if one acts evil, it does not matter much whether it is because of some experienced pain, sickness or unhappy childhood. As there are no sufficient reasons, no amount of negative experience ever justifies evil. Usually, it functions only as a better or worse excuse. Actual evil is evil, whether the person causing it had happy or unhappy childhood, whether he is healthy or sick, whether he suffered much or not. Evil is the impossibility of justification, therefore it always looks for excuses.

One can attempt a justification by the ‘truth’ of the impressions arisen by inflicting pain and, in the last resort, by referring our propensity to evil simply to our ‘nature’. "Certain souls seem hard because they are capable of strong feelings, and they sometimes go to rather extreme lengths; their apparent unconcern and cruelty are but ways, known only to themselves, of feeling more strongly than others."\(^{83}\) Strength and intensity of feelings work as a sufficient excuse for de Sade, in fact, as the highest good itself. Following such impulses is only to follow the nature. "We are no guiltier in following the primitive impulses that govern us than is the Nile for her floods or the sea for her waves."\(^{84}\)

The felt intensity may be very true. But its untruth lies in the narrowing of the whole reality to its momentaneous immediacy. One searches for moments, moments of sensation which could fill one with the stimulating experience. These, at least, offer undeniable ‘truth’ of their intensity, which seems to fill the emptiness. Stavrogin still complains “Here I liked to live least. But even here I was unable to hate anything. [...] I may desire to make a good act and it causes me pleasure. But just in a moment I desire an evil

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\(^{80}\)D. A. F. de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom*. The eight day
\(^{81}\)Ibid. Introduction
\(^{82}\)Ibid. The seventh day-The eight day
\(^{83}\)D. A. F. de Sade, *Fragments*. Last Will and Testament
\(^{84}\)D. A. F. de Sade, *Fragments*. Aline and Valcour
one and feel equal pleasure. Both this and that feeling is as always too flat, and I never desire strongly.  
De Sade has his answer: “True felicity lies only in the senses, and virtue gratifies none of them.”  
It is the intensity of a momentaneous sensation which appears as the most gratifying, the most true element of experience. And the highest intensity can be found in pain. “We are much more keenly affected by pain than by pleasure: reverberations which result in us when the sensation of pain is produced in others will essentially be of a more vigorous character, more incisive, will more energetically resound in us [...] hence pain must be preferred, for pain’s telling effects cannot deceive, and its vibrations are more powerful.”  
“Pain, be thou my good” is but another version of the motto we have extracted from Milton’s Satan.

37. “My manner of thinking, so you say, cannot be approved. Do you suppose I care? A poor fool indeed is he who adopts a manner of thinking for others! My manner of thinking stems straight from my considered reflections; it holds with my existence, with the way I am made. It is not in my power to alter it; and were it, I’d not do so.”  
Strangely enough, this might almost sound plausible ... but not when spoken by this person! It should be easy to discern behind these words the deep loneliness of alienated individual. “All creatures are born isolated and have need of one another.”

Alienation is a break in continuity – first, continuity between actuality and its origin, then continuity with others and the world and, finally, continuity of time, of this moment with other moments. Having turned away from the invisible, there is only one possibility: to embrace and conquer the visible. “What is remote is no longer important, only yesterday; and tomorrow is more than eternity.”  
Without the continuity with the origin, this world shrinks and begins to disappear, becomes first mere actuality, more actuality, even more, until it reaches the limits of immediacy, and threatens with disappearance in emptiness of a single moment from which it is rescued only by the intensity of the momentaneous feeling. And as it withdraws, one can only look forward to the next one. A moment devoid of the element of eternity becomes a desperate expectation of the next moment. Intensity is, we could say, a noetic counterpart of such a noematum ‘moment’. Intensity tries to dissolve in this noematic correlate, and failing – tries again. The intensity searched for is also the impulsivity emanated, and as the moments become more and more intense, they also fall apart, each becomes its own universe of intensity collapsing inward, and giving rise to an impulse arising from nowhere. Acting from an impulse has often been associated not only with unreasonable lack of control but with evil – evil which surprises, is unpredictable, emerges suddenly. The word “impulse” carries the meaning of application of sudden force but also, even if only secondarily, of a suggestion coming from an evil spirit. For ‘evil is

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85F. Dostoevsky, The Possessed. III.8. Epilogue  
86D. A. F. de Sade, Fragments. Aline and Valcour  
87D. A. F. de Sade, Philosophy in the Bedroom. Dialogue the Third. (Masochism might be here considered only a variation on the same theme as sadism. ‘Morally’, perhaps, more acceptable than the latter, it expresses the same desperate yearning for irrefutable immediacy of ‘truth’, pain or pleasure, the same deterioration of the soul. Masochism and sadism affect often the same person and vary depending on the ‘balance of power’ with the actual partner.)  
89D. A. F. de Sade, Fragments. Aline and Valcour.  
90L. Salomé, You Alone are Real to Me. Rilke’s letter from Oberneuland-bei-Bremen, July 25, 1903, p.44. We are, of course, not equating Rilke’s poetical resignation and de Sade’s vital intensity. The difference between the two can be seen as the difference between the negative empress embracing the soul of the one and the active evil chosen by the other. But the latter’s choice responds to the processes described also by the former.
2.4. Human, impersonal

Let us gather some common elements of these levels of gradual growth of evil.

We said "believing in something", "believing in nothing". Such formulations did not concern, at least not necessarily, any actual, reflectively pronounced beliefs. As usual, reflective consciousness does not matter much - it only registers by dissociating, reflects something which is there already. Evil is never willed for its own sake; even if extreme suffering perverts one's soul to the point of actively choosing evil, it is still only a helpless reaction or, as the case may be, hope that at least this will be some good.

It arrives unwilling, from unregistered and unrecognised meanings of one's acts and words, from 'misunderstandings' which prove hurtful, from depersonalised rigidity of humans turned clerks, from impersonal heights of socio-political system. It is born between men but it is born into them. An individual may attempt, and often even succeed, to check his evil predispositions, but he is hardly ever guaranteed that evil emptiness won't ever affect him. On a larger, social scale, emergence of evil is simply unavoidable, and the only thing we can try to do is to moderate its strength and scope. The unintentionality of evil, underlying these unpleasant observations, was termed the "original sin".

The unintentional and impersonal (as one might also say, generational and collective

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91 Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names. IV:23. One can also say "that vice is a weakness of the soul - pointing out that the bad soul is easily affected and easily stirred, carried about from one evil to another, easily stirred to lust, easily roused to anger, hasty in its asents, giving way freely to confused imaginations." [Plotinus, Enneads. I.8.14]

92 "Original sin" is not meant to explain the appearance of unintended evil (we do not explain anything) - it is only a term of description.
rather than individual) character of the original sin does not in any way abolish human participation in it. ‘Killing the subject’, dispensing with it (in the name of impersonal forces of power, capital, social mechanisms), does not make any amends. It may give valuable analyses of some condemnable phenomena of social, political or economic life but it does not improve understanding of evil. It only apparently relieves the participants from the sense of responsibility.

Evil is an event of human life and without humans there would be no evil. We have ignored all kinds of natural evils which one distinguishes from moral evil. We are certainly not justified in ignoring such an important aspect. But we do not classify objective appearances, only experiences. Many things happen due to natural processes, and some of them have more or less devastating consequences for some humans. Yet, we would not only refrain from distinguishing them as natural evils, but even from calling them “evils”. For evil calls for a justification (which is impossible), while a storm or an earthquake do not—“catastrophes are innocent.”93 It is either the infantile idea of some omnipotent Being with good will and actual intentions, or else of an ultimate objectified meaning, eventual telos, which might suggest looking for any ‘justification’ of this platitude. Natural disasters, like diseases, call for strength to put up with them when nothing can be done, and for inventiveness in preventing them. Calling them “evil” is like getting offended on the world for not pleasing us.

41. Evil is maintained only in humans, it requires a human, though this might appear as a mere consequence of its understanding as alienation from the origin. We could probably suggest that it constitutes the differentia specifica of the human species: to be capable of evil. There is a strong tendency to see only innocence in all the cruelty of the living nature; a predator, an animal killer is not evil—how could it be?—it is a survivor. It is impossible, or in any case naive, to transfer such observations to the world of humans.

Although we do not place evil in nature but only in humans, it does not mean that it becomes human. Affecting human being, it remains thoroughly impersonal. It is almost instinctive to view an ‘evil man’ as invaded by some foreign force, some elemental power which, however, only oppresses and corrupts his soul. As privative evil, this foreignness amounts to literal externality of the evil forces acting in spite of one’s good intentions and will. As negative evil, it is a force which overcomes individual, often without much warning and without giving any account. As active evil, it is but a defeat of an individual confronted with the force which, being ‘greater than him’, drives him to empty heavens and seek refuge exclusively among the visible achievements. In all cases, the effect of this force, which is adversary and foreign, is experienced as various degree of alienation.

Whether an evil socio-political system, whether Woland who never argues but only commands, or else Mephistopheles who appears in person to discuss with Faust, the force which is brought forth is not mine, does not belong to me nor, for that matter, to my self. It is impersonal, because its strength does not flow from the original site of personality. On the contrary, its constitutive feature is exactly that it prevents me from regaining this site. It ‘individuates’ by breaking continuity, by dissociating heaven from earth and thus alienating and isolating. Loneliness, like foreignness, is an actual image of alienation which follows evil even in the midst of the thickest crowd. This loneliness is alienation from the origin, the loss of the personal center, and thus the opposite of the unique individuality of existence. Participation in evil, submission to this impersonal force, amounts to veiling the self under the cover of some idol, ‘selling one’s soul’ for visible cash.

93Z. Herbert, King of the Ants. Cleomenes
If we were to personify such events, we would ascribe evil the *intention* of becoming *visible* (its surrogate for *concreteness*), which it achieves by invading a human soul and, through it, overcoming its own impersonal abstractness. A person of active No, but also a sinner who approaches the deeper layers of emptiness, is a substantialisation of evil; a substantialisation which proceeds gradually, as the emptiness embraces the soul and finds its *visible* expressions, but which never becomes complete, which never reaches the goal. For the goal would be, as it always is, to reach the very center of Being, to achieve the ultimate justification by meeting the *origin* - this, however, is the exact opposite of evil. The ultimate, *invisible* site of evil is not in the center of Being, in the *origin*. For it is exactly *alienation* from the *origin*, *alienation of myself* from *self*, which is evil. Thus, “evil always lessens good, yet it never wholly consumes it; and thus, while good ever remains, nothing can be wholly and perfectly bad. Therefore, the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 5) that "if the wholly evil could be, it would destroy itself"; because all good being destroyed (which it need be for something to be wholly evil), evil itself would be taken away since its subject is good.”

The impossibility of reaching the *absolute*, the lack of *concrete founding* in the *origin* is 42. *alienation*. Allow us to call such a continuity of Being, the *concrete founding* in the *origin*, “*justification*”. Then evil as *alienation* is exactly the lack and impossibility of *justification*; it is what can not be *justified*.

This impossibility finds its expression in the exclusive directedness towards the *visible world*, which becomes the sole source of motivation and explanation – the substitutes of *justification*. Soul infected by evil keeps trying to fill the expanding emptiness; it keeps *thirsting* for *justification*, for “the desire for the bliss, which she had lost, remained with her even after the Fall.” *Justification*, however, can only come from *above*, while evil – seeing *nothing above* and declaring it to be void – must produce it itself. All it is capable of producing are arguments supposedly explaining the attitudes it develops and actions it performs; explaining, that is, demonstrating that this is actually right, natural, or even necessary, thing to do. Being the lack of *justification*, evil always tries to explain, that is, excuse itself.

We have mention an attempt of self*-justification* by reference to the ‘human nature’. “We are no guiltier in following the privative impulses that govern us than is the Nile for her floods or the sea for her waves.” Most generally, such attempts amount always to pointing to the actual existence of evils in the world. They may display rare ingenuity in the search for evil, so that eventually nothing remains which would not appear affected by it. A “good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”* Using some evil as a justification of anything is dubious, if not directly dangerous, for a step from there to justification of more evil is invisibly small. A rigid moralist defends the world against all evil which lurks behind people’s back, without them noticing it. As a matter of fact, he only tries to defend himself against his progressing *alienation*. But finding evil in all corners of the universe and human

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94St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I,q9,a3
95We are not, of course, speaking about any actual grasp on the *absolute* which is missing. (An aspect of evil is to both deny the *absolute* and grasp to as something *visible*.) “Reaching the *absolute*” refers to the continuity of being, *existential openness* to the other world founding steadiness in *this one*. It has nothing to do with epistemic, nor other actual, pretensions. We will return to this aspect.
97J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. IV 777C-D
98Mt. XII.35; I.k.VI.45
soul, this defense only strengthens the adversary. It multiplies evil instead of diminishing it – multiplies it at least in the soul which sees it everywhere and forgets "that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him." A profound moralist, whether of a revolutionary or pietistic flavour, will often turn out faultlessly cynical in his actions, which no longer aim at the person but only at the evil hiding behind. And thus, "in morality, man treats himself not as an «individualum» but as «dividuum»." 

Evil used as a justification only increases the need for more evil and when it does not find it, it produces it. "That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man." Eventually, "people who are completely debased find pleasure exclusively in other people’s unhappiness." The ways in which evil spreads are innumerable, so we only notice its general tendency to expansion, if not to self-strengthening, which begins with ‘seeing evil around’ and which serves as the means of supposed self-justification.

43. This ability to expand and pollute all visible world around, to universalise itself in the impossible search for justification, characterises the activity of evil. Now, the long tradition used to deny being and, consequently, also any activity to evil. St. Thomas’ argument should be both sufficiently representative and detailed: "A thing is said to act in a threefold sense. In one way, formally, as when we say that whiteness makes white; and in that sense evil considered even as a privation is said to corrupt good, forasmuch as it is itself a corruption or privation of good. In another sense a thing is said to act effectively, as when a painter makes a wall white. Thirdly, it is said in the sense of the final cause, as the end is said to effect by moving the efficient cause. But in these two ways evil does not effect anything of itself, that is, as a privation, but by virtue of the good annexed to it. For every action comes from some form; and everything which is desired as an end, is a perfection. And therefore, as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv): "Evil does not act, nor is it desired, except by virtue of some good joined to it: while of itself it is nothing definite, and beside the scope of our will and intention."

We have agreed to the last point, namely, that evil is willed only as a good, as a misunderstood good. The second point seems to be left rather uncommented, but it refers probably to the fact that efficient cause must be a being, and as such it is good (we will return to this point shortly). Formal causality, mentioned first, does not seem to worry St. Thomas as any real activity. Probably rightly, for there is not much ‘real causality’ in it. These Aristotelian causal schemata do not appeal to us any more and, today, we would not consider a subsumption of an instance under a general concept as any form of causality. But this is all St. Thomas is willing to grant evil: it acts (causes) some evil in the way whiteness makes white. Yet what hides (or at least, can be found) in the sterility of a formal cause, seems often to be the most real process of actualisation of the virtuality. Evil in which I participate, which alienates me, is capable of actually expanding this alienation – both within my soul and, through my evil acts, in the world. Once present, it tends to grow. “Whatever we nourish within ourselves, that grows: this is the eternal law of nature.

99Mk. VII:18
100F. Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human. II:57
101Mk. VII:21-23
102Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I,q48,a1,r-0.4
103We have commented it in Book I, beginning of subsection 6.1, §115-§115. Otherwise, ‘whiteness of a white thing’ was dealt with under the discussion of concepts and supposed ‘essences’ in II: 1.2.2.
There is within us an organ of dislike, of dissatisfaction, just like an organ of enmity, of suspicion. The more we nourish and exercise it, the greater it becomes, until it eventually turns into a terribly overgrown tumor which devours everything around, swallowing and annihilating all life-giving juices.\textsuperscript{104}

This is the main meaning of the claim that evil acts – left for itself it may, perhaps, eventually, effect its own self-destruction, but in the meantime it will try to infect everything in its vicinity. Thirsting for justification, it explains itself by finding its like around. True, it always requires me to be around, as a tool; all its activity must pass through my actuality; everything it possibly can do, it can do only with my hands. Yet, it acts, that is, actualises itself, for after all, I am not the master. It unfolds like a hermeneutical spiral of self-elaboration: from the virtual, impersonal and invisible seeds, which mature and ripen unnoticed, to the eventual consequences, deterioration, visible dissolution and emptiness. The uprising of Satan, his fight against the good, finds place in heaven – the earth only observes the consequences.

This emphasis on the active element of evil may be a mere subtlety which does not reflect any significant disagreement – we follow closely the tradition which sees evil primarily (though not merely) as negativity. Indeed, we do. There is, however, another aspect of this tradition which is harder to accept.

\textquoteleft\textquoteleft No Thing is contrary to God; no creature nor creature’s work, nor anything that we can name or think is contrary to God or displeasing to Him, but only disobedience and the disobedient man.\textquoteright\textquoteleft\textsuperscript{105} “Disobedient” or, as we would say, alienated. St. Thomas does not stay behind that in optimism. “Every being, as being, is good. For all being, as being, has actuality and is in some way perfect; since every act implies some sort of perfection; and perfection implies desirability and goodness, as is clear from \textsuperscript{a}1. Hence it follows that every being as such is good.”\textsuperscript{106} According to Pseudo-Dionysius, “evil hath no being, nor any inherence in things that have being. Evil is nowhere \textit{qua} evil; and it arises not through any power but through weakness. Even the devils derive their existence from the Good, and their mere existence is good.”\textsuperscript{107}

Common to all these variations on this Neoplatonic theme is the Aristotelian opposition between act and potency which coincides with that between perfection and imperfection and, eventually, between good and evil. Thus, everything which \textit{actually} is must, so it appears, be good. Devils, perhaps, in so far as they exist are good, too. But what about a torture dungeon? It might have arisen “not through any power but through weakness”, though St. Thomas would probably still argue that there is some perfection, actual power, in the mere fact of its actualisation. But even in the tradition which sanctified Aquinas, one can state that “evil is not only a lack of good, but a living and spiritual being, though one who is deprived and depriving.”\textsuperscript{108} Any thing, say a house, may be bad as this particular thing, it may be a bad house, but still, in so far as it \textit{is}, its very existence, is good. But it does not seem possible to argue such a case! A concentration camp is evil and it is not an evil which merely deprives some substantial good – the very \textit{fact} of its existence is evil,

\textsuperscript{104}Goethe
\textsuperscript{105}Theologia Germanica. XVI \textit{["God is the supreme existence, that is to say, supremely is [...] Consequently, to that nature which supremely is, and which created all else that exists, no nature is contrary save that which does not exist. For nonentity is contrary of that which is. And thus there is no being contrary to God, the Supreme Being [...]" [St. Augustine, The City of God. XII:2]]}
\textsuperscript{106}St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica. Iq5:13.
\textsuperscript{107}Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names. IV:34
\textsuperscript{108}Paul VI, in The Ratzinger Report, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Vittorio Messori, 1985
its very existence is evil. Evil not only “inheres in this thing which has being”, in fact, it constitutes its ‘being and essence’, for except for being evil, this thing is nothing, without being evil, this thing would no longer be itself. It won’t help to claim that its buildings might have been used for other purposes; it won’t help to blame the formal, nor even the material causes for the evil which accidentally inhabited this essentially good being – it is evil through and through, including all the involved engineering perfections. It is the more evil, the more such perfections it involves! The fact that it got actualised won’t help anybody to claim that somewhere, at the bottom, it must be good – it can only indicate that not only there is no equivalence between, but not even any implication from act to perfection, from actuality to goodness. The mere actuality, the mere fact of the existence of Birkenau must be very “contrary to God and displeasing to Him.”

45. That “every being, as such, is good”, that “[t]hings solely good [...] can in some circumstances exist; things solely evil, never, for even those natures which are vitiated by an evil will, so far as they are vitiated, are evil, but in so far as they are natures are good,” that every actualisation as opposed to a mere possibility is good – this other side of the face which sees evil as a mere negation, which “by the name of evil [signifies] the absence of good” – can not, possibly, stay unmodified. 110

Speaking abstractly, evil is a negation, but negation of what? For certainly, negation is not evil, that is, it is not always evil. In our setting it is negation of the origin, negation which turns nothingness into emptiness, which thus berefts the existence of its fundamental character of confrontation, negation which alienates myself from the self, and then, from others and all the world. In the derivative sense, everything which leads to and strengthens alienation is evil, too.

As the confrontation with the origin is existence, we may consider it as such, as existence simpliciter, to be good. But this does not entail that its negation, non-existence, is evil. Not because it must be wrong but only because we do not know what that possibly could

109St. Augustine, The City of God. XII:3
110And this not because something particular happened with Auschwitz, Stalin’s collectivisation or Khmer Rouge regime which would require re-evaluation of anything. The only special thing about them is that they happened recently. If any comparisons were allowed, one would have to admit that the fate of native Americans witnessed to evil much more powerful, long lasting and, eventually, more successful and hence more terrifying than the relatively brief, even if horrifying, excesses of Nazism. (The fact that it has been perpetuated by the countries which, at present, possess enough power even to adjust the official definitions of the terms like “genocide” in order to exclude their own case, is at most of only political relevance. [W. Churchill, A Little Matter of Genocide]) Many peoples disappeared not due to some processes which we might find excusable and understandable in historical terms, but as a consequence of intentional policies applying the most advanced technologies of the time for systematic extermination of others. Describing his expedition against Damascus, the Assyrian king Shalmaneser II records: “I desolated and destroyed, I burnt it: 1200 chariots, 1200 horsemen, 20,000 men of Biriqdi of Damascus; 700 chariots, 700 horsemen, 10,000 men of Irhuleni of Hamath; 2,000 chariots, 10,000 men of Ahab of Israel [...]” The expedition found place in 854BC, and similar boastings can be found on clay tablets and in chronicles ever since. That numbers are probably exaggerated does not change the fact that the mood and intentions are not. Extermination in battles does not change the fact of extermination, but people were more systematic than that. Assyrians of the Second Empire (after Tiglath-pileser III, 745-727BC.) are the recorded inventors of mass deportations of peoples with the object of breaking down their national spirit, unity and independence. Thus ended the existence of Hitites, whose wealth and trade passed into the hands of the Assyrian colonists after the fall of the capital Carchemish in 717BC. Romans were certainly not exterminators yet, was it merely their systematic warfare which left only residual rests after Celts who once populated most of Europe? Systematic neighbours left no traces after ‘christianisation’ of Jatvingians, Prussians (the original Baltic people, not the Teutonic Knights and German settlers who claimed their place and name), Slavic tribes like Polabians, Abotrites, Liutizians, etc., etc., etc.
mean. What is “non-existence”? Is it the total lack of any existence whatsoever, the total lack of life? We certainly feel that things are better with life than without and agree that extermination of life would be evil. But if life had never appeared? It is hard to judge counterfactuals, especially ones with conditions excluding the very possibility of judgment. But it is also hard to imagine what inherent evil would be in the total indistinctness. So, would non-existence be the non-existence of Pegasus? Of a person we could imagine to exist? Unless one identifies the distinction evil-good with potentiality-actuality, there is no ground for claiming that things would be better if all our fancies had material existence. So, perhaps, existence of a person who has died would be good as opposed to the fact of his death? Death of a close person is a painful experience. But considering the suffering it involves to be evil is, besides getting again offended on the nature for not pleasing us, to protest against the very character of existence, that is, to restrain existing itself.

Evil is alienation – it is that which inhibits existence in existing, which breaks the continuity between actuality and its origin and thus prevents their confrontation. But this inhibition is not the same as the flat and abstract negation. Alienation amounts, so to speak, to closing off existence within some horizon, putting an artificial – typically, though not necessarily, invisible – limit to its otherwise open unfolding towards its origin. It is a special kind of negation, a special form of it, and this specificity suggests to the language the word “evil”, in addition to the mere “negation”. Alienation makes (parts of) the world and life foreign, puts them ‘outside’ the border which becomes the absolute division line between mine and not-mine. In the psychological terms, it amounts to absolutisation of mineness, if not to a straightforwardly, self-occupied egotism. It reflects the inability to find anything but emptiness above the visible goals. In the more objectivistic terms, it amounts to closing the very possibility of access to some fields of life, making such an access principally impossible. It is often enforced by external prohibitions raised around particular, visible areas. Alienation is the resulting incarceration which, specific differences notwithstanding, breaks the continuity with the surroundings, the open and free flow of the contents arising only from the eventual origin.

The specificity of this negation is that it does not negate flatly existence but, rather, the open existing. It is primarily concerned with existing and not merely (that is, generally) with all being. “Indeed, our vices or sins, which are what are properly to be called evils, are unable to exist except in souls – that is, in good creatures.” One can hardly be evil towards dead things. One’s destructive tendencies towards them may, at most, indicate some alienating processes going on in one’s soul, but these are only signs. One can be evil towards living organisms (which fall under our generous definition of existence), though here, too, the judgment will often see the signs of potentially greater evil. What seems most appalling in the image of a person molesting an animal is not only the pain he causes but the question “What must be going on in him? What a rotten person he must be!” Eventually, evil affects only human being, “yet it never consumes it.” Things solely evil cannot exist in so far as evil is the accident of human existences. These – and only these – are, in so far as they exist confronting the origin, good.

In the derivative (and this does not mean metaphorical nor weaker) sense, things can be evil to the extent they serve evil. But unlike existence, things (and also acts) can be wholly and totally evil. That “evil always lessens good, yet it never wholly consumes it” applies to the existence which is affected by evil but is never totally underlied it. For evil is but the limitation of existing, the alienation from the origin, which indeed is never complete.

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111 P. Abelard, *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian*. II:§401
Things, on the other hand, or generally anything actualised, when dissociated and locked within the horizon of actuality, can become dead signs, epitomes of mere evil and nothing more. The problem with ‘things’ like concentration camps is that even a slightest attempt to look for anything good in them is inappropriate, if not directly detestable. They not only served evil purposes (while, perhaps, they could have served others) – their mere being is purely evil, as they epitomise nothing but the strength and depth of evil which corrupted the humans who invented and utilised them. They are thoroughly evil because they have no rest above the pure evil of their purpose, and of the precision in its execution – they are actualisation of nothing but evil. “[A] corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”

But while a corrupt tree can, sometimes, recover, its evil fruit, once it has fallen on the ground, can not.

The short history of mankind, according to Anatol France, is: “They were born, they were suffering, they were dying.” But the fact that all kinds of ‘evils’ are a constant element of human history, and every individual human life, that “ye have the poor always with you,” does not entail the conclusion that “it is good for any evil to exist, although nevertheless no evil is good.” Such a conclusion is motivated by a series of postulates, the most important among which are that, for the first, “everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause, for without a cause nothing can be created,” then that all such causes converge in one common cause and, finally, that such a cause is itself good or for some other reason creates only good things. But we have replaced ‘cause’ with virtuality and ‘causation’ with actualisation through existence – the connections between the last effects and their first origins are neither so plain nor so visible and they may get corrupted at every stage. We can, nevertheless, discern the powerful existential call in the claim that existence of everything, even of evils, is good. It translates into a call to openness, humble acceptance of every particular as something, at its bottom, if not at its surface, good. In so far as this aspect is concerned, we are in full agreement. Also, such a concretely founded acceptance does in fact lend all the things the element of goodness, of participation in the origin. But such a goodness does not apply universally and unreservedly; it is not any fact of mere ontology which one can discern in the matter of the objective world if only one analyses things thoroughly enough. It, just as its opposite, is an existential possibility.

2.5 Attachment

Despair and evil are basic forms of alienation, of broken continuity of traces which no longer lead to the origin but stop short of it. Alienation results from denying the originarity of the origin, from the fundamental spiritual choice of No in which Psyche, following the doubts sown by the oracle and her wealthy sisters, not only prepares to kill but actually succeeds in killing her heavenly husband, Eros, whom she has never seen.

The choice is spiritual because, for the first, it is not made by me – it is made above me, but also for me, so that I carry all the consequences, as well as full responsibility, for it. There is, indeed, nobody to blame, and looking for excuses leads nowhere – psychology

112Mt. VII:17-18
113Matt. XXVI:11
114P. Abelard, Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian. II:§412
115Plato, Timaeus. 28a
2.5. Attachment

... may know about suffering or sickness of the soul, but it knows nothing about damnation. For the second, the spiritual character amounts to the absolute objectlessness of the choice. It is not directed towards anything whatsoever, whether visible or invisible – it is lifted above all distinctions and directed towards nothing. No turns this nothingness into mere emptiness, total void, lack. It says: “there is no exit, because ‘outside’ there is only void”, “there is nothing in nothingness”, or perhaps, “nihil ex nihilos”. This refusal, the denial of the foundation in the invisible origin of nothingness is a nexus of several denials.

Denying the invisibility of the origin amounts to the claim of self-sufficiency. Things are visible and there is nothing which, at least in principle, could not be appropriated, embraced by the actual look, grasped by the actual power of our faculties. It is I who decide and control, my life is entirely the matter of my choices. The exclusive directedness towards this world denying that I am not the master and attempting to reduce everything to the visible and controllable can be called “pride”.

Freedom, in its negative form, is an aspect of pride in that No turns nothingness into emptiness and thus does not recognise anything which might be above. It is freedom to arrange the visible world entirely as I find it appropriate since, at the bottom, it is just the freedom from any higher commands which might be understood as limitations of my free will. The absolute autonomy, the absolute self-government of the I, the absolute freedom from ... is possible only as a reflection of ultimate emptiness.

If I am something, I am in particular the source of my actions and achievements. And certainly, I am, but here there is more to it – I am the only source of all that. So I am the master and there is no reason for any indefinite thankfulness which, as a matter of fact, would actually offend my dignity. Since the visible world of mine is all that is, there is nobody to be thankful to, and nothing to be thankful for. On the contrary, there is a lot to be blamed, as whenever some evil makes itself effective. It is always unclear what actually is to be blamed, whenever one pronounces a general idea of the inherent evil, or at least, malice of the world. As with most general ideas, it ends as a mere statement of ‘the fact’ which only reflects a quality of one’s life. This statement is, too, an aspect of No – let us call it “ingratitude”.

Nothingness surrounding everything is a mere void, while this world is here, that is, out there, in a very definite, objective sense. What it is is not easy to say, and the most natural intuition is that it is all that is visible, the totality of all things, facts, people. These facts and things, having at most some causes but no origin, are experienced as given; the variety of visible distinctions is found with the unmistakable stamp of being there, being ready-made.116 This certainly offers an inexhaustible field of possible inventiveness but, in the spiritual sense, it is a closed – because dead – world. It does not invite to unconditional acceptance of whatever one might meet but, on the contrary, to separating and dissociating – things from things, people from people – to searching for and selecting only what is agreeable. Although such a world is open, in the sense of indefinite flexibility, the givenness of its building blocks, the Sartrean ‘in-itself’ of its ‘hard facts’ and, primarily, the abyss of emptiness surrounding it, mark it by a kind of rigidity and stiffness – let us call this aspect of No “closedness”.

Pride, ingratitude, closedness are but aspects, only a few aspects of the spiritual No. 51.

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116Heidegger would say ‘ready-at-hand’, though he would all too definitely identify that with technical manipulation. Sartre might say that they are ‘in themselves’ – things turned into dead objects, even others enslaved by the restless freedom of ‘for-itself’. It is this extreme possibility we are intending here.
As the fundamental reduction of the ultimate *invisibility* to emptiness, it amounts to self-centeredness or – what is here a synonym – world-centeredness. *Attachment* is *No* to the ultimate *origin* said through the *exclusive* directedness towards *this visible world*.

No does not necessarily signify hatred, nor evil, nor despair, though it eventually manifests through such forms. *Attachment*, with all its *aspects*, is a *spiritual* attitude, that is, addresses *nothing* (even if it is not directed towards it) and does not imply any unique ways of *actual* being and thinking. It is not necessarily evil nor despair, it is not necessarily egoism nor egotism, it is not even necessarily selfishness. It may involve unselfish *acts* and attitudes, but the very fact of their being unselfish reflects the underlying *attachment* to the categories of *mineness*. One may truly attempt to reach beyond *oneself*, to establish and live according to some unselfish principles. One may – and, indeed, one often does – make absolute claims. But this absoluteness inevitably degenerates into a mere universality, a crude subsumption of all thinkable instances. *Visible world* is what is *below me* and I am *my life, my life is my world* and *my world is myself*, II:§66. The two can not be dissociated: attention to *myself* happens already within the horizon of *visibility*, and preoccupation with the *visible world*, in whatever form, involves *myself*. Narrowing the attention exclusively to *this world*, I narrow it to *myself*. Whether I do it in a selfish or unselfish mode may make a difference to adolescent psychology or sterile ethics, but *spiritually* both – and, first of all, the very opposition itself – amount to *attachment*.

The names of manifestations of *attachment* are “plenty” and easy to imagine. We therefore only sum them up in saying that *attachment* is the pattern of all *idolatry*, abolutionisation of the *visible world* or some of its elements.

### 3 Spiritual Yes

52. In a Sumerian myth (written down at around 1750 BC.) Inanna, the queen of Heaven and Earth (or else, the goddess of love, fertility of nature and war), “from the Great Above opened her ear to the Great Below”, to the moaning call from her sister Ereshkigal, the goddess of the Underworld. Descending to the Underworld, Inanna is on the way stripped naked of all her clothes by the servant of Ereshkigal. After 3 days in the Underworld, she returns helped by her dedicated servant and a cunning plan of the god of Wisdom and Water, Enki, which seems to fool moaning Ereshkigal. (In some versions, to leave the Underworld, “she must provide someone in her place”, and the one is Dumuzi, her husband, the Shepherd or the Lord of the Sheepfolds, ensuring fertility and fecundity, who now has to leave the world for the half of every year.)

The theme of the descent and the challenge of facing nakedness, isolation, helplessness, recurs frequently in later Indo-European mythology. Looking for his way back to Ithaca, Ulysses descends to Hades, Orpheus visits the house of shadows to regain his love Eurydice (who however dies again on the way back, because of Orpheus’ turning around against the prohibition of Hades), Heracles was granted immortality on the completion of the 12-th labour – capturing Cerberus, the guard dog of Hades (whom, on the god’s command, he had to defeat with bare hands).\(^{[17]}\) Paradigmatic (though written down only in the second century AD. by Lucius Apuleius) is the story in which Aphrodite, in her attempts

\[^{[17]}\text{For our purposes, the Underworld can be considered synonymous with hell, though more detailed distinctions and comparisons are easily possible. In order to keep analogy, we won't count Elysium, the Isles of the Blest, as part of the Underworld, while Tartarus, the place of ultimate punishment, should certainly be included.}\]
to annihilate Psyche, orders her to fetch some water from Styx and then even to enter the Underworld and obtain a piece of beauty from Persephone. Only successful completion of these tasks (with some help from Eros) leads to the final recognition of Psyche’s right to her divine husband and the grant of immortality.

Among other variations, involving additional aspects but still centering around the same theme of temporary isolation before renewal or rebirth, we could mention the common motif of the child who, threatened by the envious ruler, is led by the mother to a seclusion or remote country. Sometimes, the future hero is abandoned in the mountains, or else placed in a boat or chest which, put adrift, reaches safely some shore far away from the civilised dwellings and where the hero is helped and reared by modest people or even animals. Likewise in the myth known already to the Sumerians and Hittites, the deluge, sent by God as a punishment and for the purification, is survived in the isolation on the ark only by a few God-chosen ones. A less dramatic variant is that of being hanged – as if suspended, in a thin air, in a state of isolation and helpless awaiting for relief or enlightenment, as in purgatory. Jesus’ death on the cross was but the first stage before descent. In Tarot, the Hanged Man is the card signaling a state of solitude and submission to divine will, suspension between the forces of heaven and earth and sacrifice bringing mystical knowledge and redemption. Odin had hanged head down from the World Tree, Yggdrasil, for nine days, pierced by his own spear, thereby acquiring sacred wisdom, learning nine magical songs and eighteen magical runes. Scholars not willing to see in this Norse myth merely a garbled version of Christ’s crucifixion, point out other related motifs: in shamanism, climbing of a World Tree by the shaman in search of mystic knowledge is a common religious pattern; sacrifices, human or otherwise, to the gods were commonly hung in or from trees, often transfixed by spears.

We certainly do not intend any review of mythology nor any elaborate interpretations. Hanging in the air may have vast structural differences from surviving a deluge, while we only want to see in both the aspect of isolation and complete immersion in the elemental power. We do not want to see the descend and rebirth as identical with, nor even as related to the cycles of nature, the eternal return of the seasons. We see it purely existentially – rebirth is not a cyclic event of nature, but a unique possibility of existence.

We want to see all the above as examples of the same pattern: the necessity of a lonely descent to the Underworld, of surviving the flood (locked in a chest or ark), of temporary isolation in the air – in order to revive, to obtain the ultimate reward, enlightenment, salvation. “Christ’s soul must needs descend into hell, before it ascended into heaven. So must also the soul of man.” This often postulated necessity, the assumption that the way to paradise must lead through hell, causes us some trouble. Although suffering plays a fundamental role in the development of a person, it does not follow that also hell is necessary. This necessity seems to arise only when the ultimate reward has the character of enlightenment, is somewhat associated with knowledge. The knowledge-thirsty Odin hangs himself from Yggdrasil exclusively for the sake of sacred wisdom; gnostics, equating salvation with insight, have to go through the evil world only to renounce it. Al-Ghazali

118 E.g., Abraham according to the midrash Ma’ase Avraham, in Bet Ha-midrash 1:25ff; Jesus.

119 Paris; Oedipus; Cyrus the Great (who, according to the legend in Herodotus, The Histories 1:108-113, was not so abandoned only thanks to the disobedience of king’s executioners.)

120 Moses; Romulus and Remus; in some versions Oedipus.

121 Utnapishtim from The Epic of Gilgamesh, the first man Manu from the Vedas, biblical Noah, Greek Deucalion.

122 Theologia Germanica. XI
makes this relation to knowledge very clear: “For were it not for night, the value of day //would be unknown. Were it not for illness, the //healthy would not enjoy health. Were it not for //hell, the blessed in paradise would not know the //extent of their blessedness.”

3.1 Being and knowing

It is not necessary to actually know in order to be; it is not necessary to know that one is in hell to be there. Past visit in hell may intensify the actual realisation that one is not there any more; the realisation which, perhaps in itself, can mean that one is in heaven. But it is not a necessary precondition for being in paradise, for it is equally unnecessary to actually know that one is in heaven in order to be there. Active search for heaven is the more suspicious, the more visible it is, and the doubts about its genuine character coincide with the doubts about the value of knowledge as such – or, more generally, of the actual signs – of heaven.

The insistence on the necessity of a passage through the heart of darkness, in order to reach the light, need perhaps not, in itself, be a sign of a gnostic dualism. But it has similar origins in an intellectual bias towards the visibility of actual manifestations and demonstrations. It is not necessary to know in order to be, but knowing one pole of a contradiction requires and implies knowing the other. It is the earlier experience of hell which, when contrasted with the experience of heaven, clarifies the latter and makes the fact of its presence visible. The myths of descent, or Underworld in general, often have this aspect, too, though it is less dramatic and less visible. Entering the Underworld involves helplessness, nakedness, or else oblivion and forgetfulness, one could say, immersion in the elemental power. Persephone takes away the memories and understanding from the souls entering there – Teiresias was an exception who retained “his understanding even in death, but the other ghosts flit about aimlessly.” Only those who manage to return from there retain their mental powers or, as we might say, the strengthened consciousness of their present state as opposed to the dark oblivion of the Underworld. Similarly, the flood does not serve the purpose of purifying the survivors. They survive it because they have already been pure, or as the myths have it, selected by god – the flood only clarifies the scores, makes the predestined results visible.

Thus, we distinguish clearly the two aspects: on the one hand, the invisible event of being selected, the God’s decree which makes the actual understanding helpless and appears for it as an arbitrary predestination and, on the other hand, the actual knowledge, the visible signs of this fact.

55. Knowledge and being are closely related but neither is any simple function of another. Some forms of knowledge are impossible without some forms of being and knowing something

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124 Homer, *The Odyssey*. X:495
125 An element of arbitrariness in the selection of the survivor by the god appears in most flood myths: Utanapishtim is chosen by the goddess Ishtar (the Babylonian counterpart of the Sumerian Inanna), or sometimes Ea/Enki (Tablet XI) for no apparent, in any case no mentioned reason; when JHVH decides to destroy the world with the flood, Noah simply “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” [Gen. VI:8]; Deucalion was a Greek, so reasons and explanations get longer, though the bottom line remains unchanged – he was warned about the flood by his father, Prometheus who, although not a god but only a Titan of second generation, was as such immortal. In the Hindu version it is the first man, Manu, who is warned by a fish about the coming flood (in *Mahabharata* the fish is identified with the god Brahma, while in *Puranas* with incarnated Vishnu).
3.1. Being and knowing

may promote particular way of being. As always, we will stay satisfied with few necessary conditions without looking for the sufficient ones.

Most abstractly, knowledge is a relation while being participation. One might immediately object that participation, too, is a relation but it is not. (At least, we now want to make a distinction which earlier might have been blurred, even by using the word “relation” for participation as, for instance, when speaking about being as an asymmetric ‘relation’.) A relation, a reflective relation\(^{126}\) presupposes distinct entities which it binds together. Relation to \(Y\) requires \(Y\) to be something else, something alien, remote, opposite, not-mine – it requires a distance, and if there is no distance, the relation will create it. This distance appears as the distance separating me from \(Y\), but at the bottom it is the distance separating the poles of the relation from their being (established by their dissociation from the prior nexus involving both). In short, relation, a reflective relation, presupposes prior being of its poles.

Participation is that which constitutes this being. Although it involves the separation of the participating being, it is not a relation, for it makes the poles not merely related, but intimately involved into each other. To the extent various relations appear as traces of prior nexuses from which their aspects have been dissociated, we might even say that participation is the limiting case, or rather the initial stage, when the distinctions have not as yet resulted in dissociation. Participation in \(Y\) requires \(Y\) to be ‘greater than me’: I do not participate in my acts – I perform them; I do not participate in my life – I live it. Yet, this ‘greater than me’, although above me, is not an opposite and distanced pole of a relation but, on the contrary, something which embraces and is embraced, something very intimately mine, eventually so much mine, as my own definition, as the ground of my very being. We could say that participation is the relation which is not ‘added’ to the given entities but which constitutes their very being. But this mode of speaking tends to conflate the horizontal and vertical dimension and, like the assumed spatial analogies of spirituality, confuses rather than clarifies the latter.

Knowledge is concerned with appropriation of the alien element, it stretches always beyond itself trying to reach what is out there, remote, in fact inaccessible because, by its very nature, separated by a distance. It extends along the horizontal dimension of transcendence. Having fixed the subjective pole, it now tries to extend its scope along the categories and distinctions pertaining to its level: as a subject it reaches towards the object and the objective; as an ego it thirsts for more; as me it searches for what is not-mine, whether psychological insight, subordination or understanding of others, personal love, alternative worlds... Being, on the other hand, is concerned with dissemination and radiation, it does not search, it gives. It does not have to search because it already is, it does not have to climb the vertical steps of transcendence, for these steps reflect only the perpetual anchoring of actuality in its founding origin. Being is the presence of the vertically transcendent element, eventually, the presence of the origin.\(^{127}\)

Knowledge, as a relation, is always founded in being – not of its object, but of itself. Relation binds the distinct poles and knowledge asks only about ‘being’ of its opposite pole. But it is the being of the whole relation which founds it and its poles. The object of my understanding and the concept by which I understand it are opposite poles of a relation, they are in no way the same. But they both originate from a higher unity, from the

\(^{126}\)That is, not a reflexive relation, but a relation as perceived by reflection.

\(^{127}\)In §15, p. 8 and then in 6.1.2, we said that to be is to be distinguished. And this remains the most generic notion. But being we are talking about now is a more specific being in a more specific context, namely, the being of existence in relation to knowing.
III.3. Spiritual Yes

distinctions made in the texture of experience, of chaos, eventually, of the indistinct. It is only actuality which definitely dissociates the subject and the external object. Knowledge, as a reflective enterprise, fixates the actuality of a subject dissociated from the object and keeps asking about their relation. In this way, it is indeed determined by the character of its object, or rather, of that which it makes into its object. As contents are fetched from different levels, knowledge must adjust its character to the distinctions pertaining to the respective contents. Thus, what we call "knowledge" is much more than what is usually so called. We will now relate this abstract discussion to various levels and will recover the more common meaning as the objective and actual form of the general notion. The points 1.-4. below summarise the respective subsections 1.1-1.4 from Book II.

1. At the lowest level, actual contact with an object is a form of knowing. Whether the object is given physically – sensed, perceived or felt – or else only ‘ideally’ – thought, remembered or imagined, in a complete externality – is not so significant here: it does not change the fundamental importance of its proximity and immediacy, inscription within the horizon of actuality. The constitutive feature of this, say immediate knowledge, is on the one hand its total dissociation from its object: the object is known (felt, seen, sensed, imagined) but remains external, that is, not affected by the relation; and on the other hand, it is the emptiness of the actual concept which here reduces to the pure immediacy of distinguishing ‘this’, the mere consciousness that it is. It is the knowledge of ‘this’ not being ‘that’ without, perhaps, being able to specify the difference; it is the knowledge with which I know my body, without knowing anything about it, it is the knowledge of any distinctions and their limits dissociated to the limit of immediacy.

Subject, i.e., the subject of this form of knowledge, apparently exhausts its being in the relation to such an external object. But this is only apparent, immanent description of the relation. Subject is not by acting or reacting (cognising, perceiving, feeling, etc.) within this horizon of immediacy, but only because it is immersed in the vertically transcendent element, because it emerges from a higher level as an actual appearance of ego.

2. Essentially the same, though more developed kind of knowledge pertains to this higher level of actuality, where concepts of elaborate reflection yield understanding of complexes – internalised through this understanding, but appearing all the time as the residual externalities. This dissociated form of knowing, episteme (whether of actual or purely immediate kind) allows one to ruminate on the general characteristics of knowledge and its acquisition, on the methodology of science, on the most universal laws of reason, etc., etc. To ask any epistemological questions, one has to assume that the crucial aspects of knowledge can be treated independently from its object. Such a possibility obtains because one has already decided the scope of investigation limiting it to the objective knowledge. Whether it happened only with Galileo, Descartes or already with Aristotle does not concern us – we stop here with the objective (i.e., actual or immediate) knowledge, constituted by the dissociation of the conceptual modeling from the modeled, external realities.

Again, although the subject of such a knowledge, ego (which often tries to hide under the depersonalised entities like ‘mind’, ‘intelligence’), spends its time on associating and dissociating, matching and modeling, its being is never exhausted by such relations. More work and thinking may generate only yet more work and thinking but it never reaches any being. To get a sense of it, it has to notice the real person, oneself.

3. As we move higher up in the hierarchy of being, the dissociation of the ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’, or – let it be allowed to say – of being and thinking (knowing), becomes less and less precise. Being an immoral bastard is not at all affected by the fact that the
3.1. Being and knowing

person knows it. Depending on what one knows and how, it may make the immorality more cynical and repulsive, or else more amiable in its understanding of fallibility; in some cases, it may even indicate a direction of a possible change. But by “knowing that I am immoral bastard”, we refer here to the objective knowledge of the fact ‘that…’ This knowledge actually includes knowing various ‘whys’, ‘hows’, ‘whats’ but all these only signal a level of increased reflection, that is, dissociation. (The more systematic analysis we attempt, the more confusion seems to result and, eventually, the more all our self-knowledge seems to reduce to the mere ‘that’ from which we started.) It is no particular art to know ‘that’ one is a bastard, the big art is to cease being one. Even stupidity usually knows itself to be stupid – it only can’t help it. This gulf between knowledge and being is a gulf between the objective knowledge and the horizon of mineness, the distance between the actual and the non-actual.

However, as we have moved higher up in the hierarchy of being, the dissociation became less and less precise, eventually, losing completely its justification, if not entire sense (II:§72 ff). I am my life, my life is my world, general thoughts are as ‘subjective’ as ‘objective’. Looking for any objective knowledge at this level amounts to reducing it to the level of actuality. It may be quite true that I am, indeed, an immoral bastard; it may be a fact, an objective fact. But no such objective truth, nor any combination and sum thereof, ever capture the truth of my being – at best, they may express an aspect of it, approximate it. The merging of the ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ aspect is reflected in a more intimate interleaving of being and knowing. Not only because here knowing is essentially knowing oneself (possibly, another person), but because this knowing, if knowing it still is, loses the objective character and does not any longer know so precisely what it knows.

The general thoughts expressed in literature or poetry, the thoughts of Vedas or Bible, the wise advice of old men or good friends – all these teach us something, we can learn from them and thus, perhaps, increase our … knowledge. Living through new situations, confronting new (or old) challenges, wining or losing, we learn something, but what is it that we so learn? We learn how to live but this does not say much. We learn but we do not quite know what we learn, we know more than a year ago, but we do not quite know what we know. We gather ‘life experience’ – we learn something about the world as much as about ourselves, for all that amounts to refining and clarifying the relations we have with the world and other people, and the ways we handle them. There is no need for making it explicit, it is knowledge which lives in my body, in my instinctive reactions and habits, in my way of responding to and initiating things, in my way of creating and handling situations. Only a tiny part of it becomes, occasionally, an object of explicit reflection or verbal expression, and even that happens only post factum. It is knowledge of life, of my life, and my life is only living this knowledge – the equality (not a nexus) which, once dissociated, will never return to itself even through the most dense and intense hermeneutical circles. To distinguish it from the objective knowledge, let us call it the “life knowledge”.

It is nevertheless knowledge, for it spans the relation between me and what is mine and, on the other end, not-mine. From this constant relation there emerges also the residual point, the noumenal self as the center of my being.

4. Somewhere at the bottom, past the bottom of one’s soul, and somehow, definitely though imprecisely, clearly though vaguely, one always knows oneself, one knows the basic mood and quality of one’s life. It may be merely recognition of the same, recurring doubts, recognition of something various moods of silence seem to intimate without unveiling. But beyond that, above all visible signs, one knows even more, one knows also if life is a generous
gift or something else: a strange accident, a suffering of a constant trial without any goal or reason, only rarely interlaced with brief pleasures; or, perhaps even an unbearable damnation, a doom of eternal incarceration. This is no longer any *episteme* nor *sophia*, any knowledge of things or life which one could utilise and apply. It is a mere tacit self-awareness, not any *actual* constellation of the state, but the mere being in the state. It is *spiritual* knowledge which, at the risk of creating completely wrong associations, let us call *gnosis* or *spiritual* knowledge.\(^{128}\) This knowledge is simply living itself, is the simple fact of being this, and such, *confrontation* which it is.

56. *Knowing Yes*

At the *spiritual* level there are not only no *objects*, but no *distinctions* which could be opposed to their external meanings. There are only primordial *distinctions*, mutually distinct but not opposed to each other. At this level – raised not only *above* the earth but also *above* heavens, like a wind which “bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth,”\(^{129}\) “invisible […] to mortal eyes, beyond thought and beyond change”\(^{130}\) – at this level being is indeed knowing. This knowledge, however, must not be confused with *actual* knowing of reflective consciousness. Being and knowing are the same not because the *dissociated subject* and object mysteriously coincided, but because the knowing and being of the one who knows are here indistinguishable. *Nothingness* of the *self* is *confronted* exclusively with *nothingness* of the *origin* and exhausted by the fact of this *confrontation*. Living this *confrontation* is the same as knowing to be thus *confronted*.

It is knowledge because it is relation (*separation* which founds *confrontation*), but it is being because this relation is *absolute* leaving nothing outside which might complete it. The *horizontal* and *vertical* dimensions of *transcendence* coincide making this *spiritual* knowledge the same as the being of spirit. In the *actual* terms, it is simply knowing *that*: *that I exist*, *that I am confronted*, *that I am not the master*. Although such platitudes can not satisfy intellectual curiosity, they constitute the only indisputable certainties, reflecting the ultimate *that founded* by the *separation* by *birth*, I:§129. It is not by any necessity manifested in any particular, *actual* form for any such form, being its expression, is also its veil. Never being given as any *actual* ‘what’, as any particular object or image, in *actual* terms such a *that* is ignorance rather than knowledge. “You will so ask: what does God effect without ‘image’ in the foundation and essence of the soul. I am not able to say that, because soul’s faculties can perceive only through ‘images’. And because the images enter into her from outside, it remains hidden from her. And this is most salutary for her, because this ignorance tempts her with the mystery of something wonderful and makes her chase it. For she feels very well *that* it is, but does not know ‘what’ it is.”\(^{131}\) *That* is beyond any ‘what’ and needs no ‘what’ – and this is all to be known about *that*.

Negativity of this constant element of mystical reports, of this unknowing knowing of Eckhart’s or *docta ignorantia* of his dedicated reader Cusanus, is only apparent as it concerns only the absence of any particular images. One can honour by silence “the hidden

\(^{128}\) We are not intending here any *actual* knowledge, and hence any associations with any form of the traditional *gnosis* are out of place. In one respect, namely, in its complete lack of any dualism, it might be compared to the ‘optimist gnosis’ of Neoplatonic Renaissance which is opposed to the dualism of traditional ‘pessimist gnosis’ in F. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*.

\(^{129}\) John III:8

\(^{130}\) *The Bhagavad-Gita*. II:25

Mysteries which lie beyond our view,"\textsuperscript{132} still expecting that something (differentiated) must be hidding behind the veil. Only such expectations give \textit{deus absconditus} character of negativity. Yes, however, recognises fully positive \textit{presence} of \textit{that} which lies above all \textit{distinctions}, it acknowledges the \textit{absolute} border between the differentiated and the \textit{indistinct}.\textsuperscript{133} The adjective “hidden” is therefore useful only in a metaphorical sense. The \textit{origin} is hidden because no \textit{visible} categories of understanding are applicable to the \textit{indistinct} one. It is hidden but it is not hiding for this absence of \textit{distinctions} does not veil anything from the view but only presents the \textit{indistinctness} of the \textit{origin}. For \textit{reflection} this difference is crucial because it thus merely limits the understanding of the \textit{origin} against all differentiation, without endowing it with any contents.

Being an \textit{actual} ignorance, involving no particular image, it does not give certainty about anything specific. But it gives the \textit{absolute} certainty. It is the fundamental state of \textit{existence} which sometimes can \textit{actualise} in the revealing \textit{signs} but which, primarily, is known only in the sense of permeating the whole \textit{actuality} with its \textit{traces}, of putting on it the \textit{invisible} stamp of indubitable \textit{presence}. If you try to point at it, to capture ‘what’ of this knowledge, it evaporates dissolving in an empty concept. But if you let it be, it remains with the most \textit{clear presence} and \textit{absolute} certainty. “It is only when you hunt for it that you lose it//You cannot take hold of it, but equally you cannot get rid of it//And while you can do neither, it goes on its own way.//You remain silent and it speaks; you speak, and it is dumb.”\textsuperscript{134} For the \textit{actual} claims to verifiable certainty, it is only an indefinite premonition, a sense of ‘Something’, and often even its conscious negation. At best, it is a \textit{vague} and \textit{clear} sense of gratitude and thankfulness which does not present, let alone fill, the soul with anything nor image. But it fills it with the \textit{absolute} certainty. “In what concerns divine things, belief is not fitting. Only certainty will do. Anything less than certainty is unworthy of God.”\textsuperscript{135}

\textbf{Knowing No}

The \textit{existential confrontation} is nothing else but \textit{participation} in the \textit{one}, and even the most active \textit{No} is only turning away from it, and thus is still \textit{confronting} it facing, at the bottom of its being, its \textit{absolute} certainty. It might thus seem that \textit{No} is a possibility of the same order as \textit{Yes}, that it is but another alternative. It is, however, an event of a different order, it only veils the deeper \textit{Yes}. It does not acknowledge the \textit{absolute}, it only denies: refusing \textit{thankfulness} for the \textit{gift} of the \textit{origin}, it seems to remove this \textit{transcendent} pole but, as a matter of fact, it only pushes it away at an inaccessible distance, reduces it to a mere relation, exchanges certainty of being for the falsity of its knowledge.

“To despair is to lose the eternal”\textsuperscript{136} says Kierkegaard. Seemingly, one might know that

\textsuperscript{132}Dionysius the Areopagite, \textit{The Celestial Hierarchy}. XV

\textsuperscript{133}In the XX-th century, Karl Rahner advanced forcefully the thesis of the positive content of “incomprehensibility” as the primary name for God.

\textsuperscript{134}Yung-chia Ta-shih [after A. Huxley, \textit{The Perennial Philosophy}. I]

\textsuperscript{135}S. Weil, \textit{Waiting for God}. Forms of the Implicit Love of God: Implicit and explicit lovep.139. Such a \textit{spiritual} knowledge amounts to (a variant of) what has been called “ontologism”, for instance, of St. Bonaventura and his followers. Indeed, (1) the \textit{absolute} is the first only in the order of Being but also in the order of knowing (\textit{gnosis} is the constant knowledge of Godhead, if not of God.) (2) This knowledge is intuitive, not abstractive – it really coincides with the fact of \textit{existing}. The last point, (3) that in the light of the idea of \textit{absolute} we acquire all other ideas, can be taken or rejected, depending on the meaning of ‘idea’. If it is an intellectual construction, proceeding from the \textit{reflective dissociations}, then only its strife after unity reminds about this first knowledge. But if idea is taken as anything whatsoever which can be distinguished, perhaps even conceptualised, then it arises only from the \textit{indistinct}.

\textsuperscript{136}S. Kierkegaard, \textit{The Sickness unto Death}. I.C.B.b.α.1
one lost the eternal, but what knowing is that? What do I know then, what is it that I so know? Nothing, except my actual state, feelings of despair, irrecoverable loss, sense of damnation – I know the distance, impassable, from here to eternity. My knowledge may be quite correct, I may know how it feels and even what I feel but is it ... knowledge? In fact, I have hardly any idea of what is going on, for it is impossible to lose the eternal, simply and plainly impossible. We live in it, whether we feel it or not, and the despair of the loss is the despair over one’s own actuality – not over the loss of the eternal but over the loss of the contact with it. Knowledge of the loss of having lost the eternal, eventually, knowledge of being in hell, will seldom call things with such words. But it knows them because it lives them. It lives its No and, no matter how rosy all actual things really are, at the bottom it is scared by the gnawing suspicion of their insufficiency, of a great mistake. The lost eternal is the lost spirit or, as one used to say, the sold soul. But it is lost in spite of the fact that it can not be lost. It is only the feeling of loss one despires over. The despair is real because it is deeply felt, but the loss which it pretends to reveal is completely untrue. The true despair is indeed to say something like “I have lost the eternal” and think that it may count for knowing, that it may mean anything more than a mere status report of one’s moods and feelings.

As with the spiritual knowledge of Yes, we are by no means implying that one always has full consciousness of No. For the most, we actually do not know it and when we do, the actual knowledge is often an inversion of the factual state. Yet, actually knowing No may be also something like a prevailing sense of ingratitude, disappointment, meaninglessness or unreality which in the reflective form turn into negation of some of the earlier mentioned that’s: I control my existence, I am the master, I know. In the extreme cases, it may be also actual realisation that I am damned, which opens the doors to deeper hell. As hell, with its alienated attachment to mere visibility, is much closer to earth than the invisible paradise, it is easier to imagine a kind of certainty – coming close to the actual knowledge – of being in the former than in the latter. Any prolonged suffering gives an intimation and an image of it. One has observed that traditional representations of paradise – whether in painting, sculpture or literature – are unearribly dull and monotonous as compared to the fascinatingly eventful representations of hell. This could be classified merely as a result of the simple psychology of mass-media and news reports (according to which devastating tragedy sells better than peaceful happiness). We would, however, see here a deeper difference: heaven generates few, if any, visible signs, it does not inspire our imagination with so definite images as hell does. And there is a good reason for it: the former is the point of ultimate invisibility embracing everything visible, and then the bare reflection of nothingness, while the latter is exactly its negation, not only directedness towards visibility, but exclusive directedness towards visibility and only visibility.\footnote{The distinction between directedness and exclusive directedness (toward this world) is hard to determine and impossible to define. Consequently, the gnostic tendency to identify this visible world with the source of all and only evils (if not with the hell itself) is the constant theme in the history of spirituality. Such a gnostic denial of this world reflects, however, not the spiritual inspiration but its misunderstanding which, having said No to the invisibility of the absolute, can not stop clothing it in visible, conceptual images and despairing over the inadequacy of the actual things of this world for this purpose. It no longer simply lives in this world but, being enclosed within it, seeks liberation through denial.\footnote{The Bhagavad-Gita. V.28}}

\footnote{137} Knowing this situation involves much more than the simple knowledge of living Yes. This more, however, is only more visible facts and reasons, more attachment. Spiritually it is, in fact, less, lacking the open, unwavering determination of one who “with life and mind and reason in harmony, and with desire and fear and wrath gone, keeps silent his soul before his freedom.”\footnote{138}
Covering up the underlying knowledge of Yes, it becomes more occupied with the variety of beguilements distracting the thirst. But it knows its situation, it knows that distractions are only distractions, even if it does not any longer know from what.

\* \* \*

It should be clear that we are not aiming at any particular experiences of unio mystica, even if we do not have to deny their possibility. Nothingness of the self is an imago of nothingness of the origin and in this respect might be almost said to be one with it. But self is not existence, only its deepest aspect. The unity of existence is not in any way confused with the unity of the one. The former arises only in confrontation with the latter.

In particular, spiritual Yes is not the matter of any specific actuality, of any actual knowledge. It is the knowledge, gnosis, of living Yes, of recognition of all visible things as relative and irrelevant for imaging the absolute. In so far as actual knowledge is concerned, it is at most recognition of all visible things as manifestations of the absolute. But it is not actual knowledge which appropriates the external element bringing it under one’s control. It is lived knowledge, being in the face of ineradicable transcendence.

The most concrete way to such an accepting awareness goes through suffering. Suffering is one of the fundamental forms of meeting transcendence, of being sentenced to something one can not control and, by the same token, being called to transcend oneself. Yet, suffering can liberate or break one. Return from the Underworld is the extreme image of the most extreme form of purification and liberation. One who has returned from suffering knows what it is and ‘what’ of suffering involves unmistakably the ultimate that. But suffering, depriving one of all visible hope, can also break the soul which henceforth becomes capable only of clinching desperately to the reminders of its visible world as they turn gradually into insignificant emptiness. Thus, we distinguish between those who, suffering, end up in hell and those suffer but do not. Hell is the extreme form of suffering, the place where the initially human suffering becomes, by being answered with the active No, almost inhuman, impersonal. Yes does not require a descent to such depths. (It expresses, after all, the ontological foundation which precedes all ‘epistemic’ mistakes.) Yet, besides the fact that suffering is a common lot and that some can find themselves there, the opposition to hell provides the a clear illustration of the dynamics and the meaning of the spiritual choice of Yes. For just like No ends up substantialising its suffering as ‘objective evil’, so Yes learns that salvation is the liberation from evil but not from suffering and that the latter need not involve the former. We will therefore, for the sake of presentation, follow this opposition.

3.2 Yes

Our vocation is to listen – not to talk; to listen to the silent presence which fills our life with all its contents. At the deepest level of our being, at the point where one becomes many, the invisibles become present in the ways which we can hardly feel, and never produce or control. Without any reflective attention, the invisibles are present as the most constant aspects – not moods, not feelings, not thoughts – which do not have any objective content and which do not pertain to any object; which therefore can be predicated of anything, though we will tend to ascribe them to the most general ideas, to life, world, existence.

The experience that I am not the master is what makes true listening possible. Since my control over all visible things does not exhaust my life, there are, perhaps, other voices worth listening to. In the reflective experience, the invisibles can be present as unreal
dreams, impossible ideals, something we long for without any hope to obtain it – not because we are unable to hope, but because we are unable to imagine ‘what’ we are hoping for. Such dreams turn out to be much more ‘real’ than all the ‘reality’ of actual objects and situations, persisting with the calm and yet intense and irrefutable force. They do not go away as long as what they announce does not find a concrete expression in our life. They are only images, always false ones, but these images remind us of something which, apparently forgotten, remains present above all our acts and activities, above all visible and invisible distinctions.

Imagine a man whose whole life was, by any reasonable standards, a series of failures and disasters, an unhappy, unredeemed, misfortunate life. Then, when his last moment came, on his death bed he says: “I had a good, gratifying life.” And it is not misunderstanding of the words, it is not any self-deception. Do you think it can possibly make any genuine sense? – like a moment of revelation, when the invisible sense of his life becomes manifest, when he realises that this life was worth living, that the very fact of living is gratifying and deserves thankfulness. A moment when one hears “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be […] in paradise.” In spite of the wretched life, in spite of constant misfortune, “to day shalt thou be in paradise”. A ‘moment of truth’? But the same might have been true all the time, all his life, even if the man never recognised any visible sign.

60. Nihilism, despair, the deepest circles of hell are all consequences of attachment, eventual consequences of the declared and exclusive dependence on visibility. And thus, there can be no cure against them, for the only medicine one could possibly accept would have to be visible. Insisting on objectivity or truth, externality or proofs, one wants only one thing: to be convinced in advance, that is, to avoid the discomfort of trust, to keep one’s life unchanged. But he “that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” The cure is only the change of fact into value, of the merely ontological foundation into the concrete form of it: nothingness is not emptiness but origin – “who shone //where nobody appeared to come” equally dark, silent and invisible as emptiness and yet, its complete opposite… This, however, is a spiritual choice, which can not be enforced by logic, arguments, sufficient reasons, efficient causes, anything visible. He who would like to be convinced, to see why and how he should choose so and what it is, will never see anything. What could one see in total darkness? There is no visible way out of No; hell is the place surrounded by void and hence with no exit, for one can not exit into void, “[o]ne cannot will into void.” What could one hear in total silence? Nothing, indeed – the beat of one’s heart, the whisper of one’s breath. This, however, is no longer void. Nowhere happens more than in such a moment of silence, when nothing is heard because only nothingness whispers and opens one’s heart. “[A]nd I saw nothing then, //no other light to mark//the way but fire pounding my heart.”

61. It has been there already.

In 1.1 and 2 we described the gradual sinking into hell, as well as development of evil, as the results of misunderstanded thirst for paradise. The culminating “Evil, be thou my good” conforms fully to the old claim that each being seeks the highest good and, as Scheler taught, that such a highest good is, objectively and a priori, a value above any other, even

139Lk. XXIII:43
140Jh. XII:25; Mt.X:39; Mk.VIII:35; Lk.IX:24, XVII:33
141St. John of the Cross, The Poems. Dark Night
142W. James, What the Will Effects?. [after G. Cotkin, William James: Public Philosopher.]
143St. John of the Cross, The Poems. Dark Night
if nobody actually knows what precisely it might be.

It has been common to see in such a highest good a return to some original state. Descent to the Underworld happens in search of lost happiness, retribution for one's guilt being only a special case (Orpheus seeks Eurydice, Ulysses is only on the way back to his home, Innana wants to help her sister Ereshkigal). The survivors of the flood are from the beginning marked by God and the survival can be taken to correspond to the return among the righteous. "This excellence whose necessity is scarcely or not at all manifest to search, exists, if we could but find it out, before all searching and reasoning." Then the theme is repeated again and again: "in human soul there is engrafted desire of true good" and the search for, and then recognition of it, is possible because the soul "did not forget itself completely." And so, what she finds, has already been there. "Thou wouldst not seek Me, if thou hadst not found Me." In II:§99 we have observed that Plato's anamnesis is more a simile of the recognition of invisibles rather than of theory of knowledge. Now we can recall it again and give it the place it deserves as yet another record of the insight into the true spiritual choice as an event of repetition and return.

The choice of Yes means to recognise nothingness as the one, the ultimate invisibility as the origin. It thus returns to its source, and every return is a repetition. Here, it is the spiritual repetition of the only ontological event—second birth. As such, it will also lead to another repetition, the concrete counterpart of the ontological founding, but this will be addressed in 3.3. For the moment we are concerned only with the event itself.

As one sinks into the hell of despair, one gradually accepts despair for its own sake, as the inescapable lot and damnation. And one is advised to continue, for "whilst a man is thus in hell, none may console him, neither God nor the creature, as it is written, 'In hell there is no redemption.'" When one starts despairing, the only thing one can do is to despair more. But this despair is not any emotional complain, ruefulness, nor any sense of undeserved loss, which all reflect only the conviction of entitlement. Only heroes wander in the Underworld, for it takes courage and determination to say: "Let me perish, let me die! I live without hope; from within and from without I am condemned, let no one pray that I may be released." "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived."

As long as it stops short of pronouncing the ultimate No, such a resignation is in fact an expression of deepest trust and hope. For underneath all despair and resignation, one

144 Plotinus, *Enneads* V:8.6 [MacKenna's translation]
145 Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. III:2.4
146 Boethius, *Commentary to Isagoge*. V:3.22 [after R. Heinmann, ed., *The Medieval Philosophy*.]
147 B. Pascal, *Pensées*. VII:553
148 This double aspect—of re- and -birth, of repetition and new foundation—is captured marvelously by the Greek expression γενναθε ἀναθεν. Ἀναθεν is sometimes translated as 'anew', 'again' (e.g., "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" or "Ye must be born again" [John III:3/7]) But more often it means 'from above' ("He that cometh from above is above all", "Thou coudest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above." [John III:31/XIX:11] In Acts XXVI:23, it is rendered as: "Which knew me from the beginning"). Likewise, anagnenna, appearing in 1 Peter I:23, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible," and meaning literally 'to produce again', is also used in metaphorical sense for having one's mind and attitude changed. As is often the case, attempting to disambiguate such apparent ambiguities, is to confuse the issue rather than to clarify it. Both aspects are present and second birth is as much second as it is birth, as much a birth again, resurrection from the dead, as birth from the new foundation above.
149 *Theologia Germanica*. XI, [Probably reference to Ps. ILIX:8]
150 Ibid. XI
151 Job III:3
has always an invisible rest unable to accept the situation to which one has already given one’s consent, a reserve which underneath all “Let me perish, let me die!” says, in a silent, unheard voice: “I am damned, I can’t expect anything, so I have to perish. But I do not want to!!!” This apparently childish and irrational act – not even of will, for it is a mere exclamation, and hardly any actual one but made at the bottom of one’s soul – comprises the essence of the survival. Intensifying despair has the meaning, for only then one can reach the invisible seed of hope, expressed in such an event. This is the admission that I am not the master, that I would like to leave the place, but I can not do it on my own. It is a desperate scream for help and, as such, already an expression of trust. It is not any faith, it does not believe in anything, it does not hope for anything, it only turns towards nothing and admits, without saying: “This is unbearable”. This apparent surrender, this deepest resignation in the face of nothingness is a sign of trust. As long as it does not say it explicitly, when it is no longer able to say it, then it really says: “Please, release me…”, for “to believe in one’s own undoing is impossible.”\textsuperscript{152}

63. One can reach such a surrender at various degrees of despair and humiliation which everybody can imagine for himself. What matters to us here is the fact, rather than the intensity, of the apparent paradox: the impossibility of any visible release and, on the other hand, the impossibility of accepting this lack, “that in human terms the undoing is certain and that still there is possibility.”\textsuperscript{153} Trust does not appear between these two – trust is just the tension of this, as one would like to call it, paradox, is just the ability to live (with) it. It has a dual aspect of faith and hope, both understood in the spiritual sense, that is, without relation to anything visible. It is only admitting the unbearable character of the present state, is a mere reaction which, however, is directed against it, without recognition of any chance to overcome it. (Again, the reflective consciousness presents one only with the desperate and unbearable life, and knows little about the trust which underlies it.) This ‘against’ carries the character of faith, hides the impossible possibility of overcoming that which according to all visible signs can not be overcome. As such, it has also the seed of hope – not any definite hope as to how this impossibility could, perhaps, occur, but hope contained already in the very exclamation, disrespecting all the visible proofs to the contrary and asking for help where no possible source thereof can be seen.\textsuperscript{154} In such a time, “[t]he soul knows for certain only that it is hungry. The important thing is that it announces its hunger by crying. A child does not stop crying if we suggest to it that perhaps there is no bread. It goes on crying just the same.” “Release me…” – not pronounced loudly, not pronounced at all, but lived underneath the despair – that is all. Release me whence? How? Where to? Who? The danger is not lest one does not find any answers but lest one forgets that one has ever asked. “The danger is not lest the soul should doubt whether there is any bread, but lest, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry.”\textsuperscript{155}

64. \textit{Necessary, but insufficient.}

Yes says only that nothingness is fullness, that emptiness is untrue, that beyond it

\textsuperscript{152}S. Kierkegaard, \textit{The Sickness unto Death}. I.C. The forms of this sickness (despair)A.b.β

\textsuperscript{153}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{154}The Greek \textit{pistis}, translated usually as “faith” or “belief”, can be, and often should be, rendered as “fidelity”, “assurance” or “loyalty”. (This is even clearer in the primary verb, \textit{peîtho}, from which \textit{pistis} is derived, and which means to persuade or be persuaded (e.g., Matt.XXVII:20,XXVIII:14, Acts XXI:14), to trust (Matt.XXVII:43, Lk.XI:22), to obey (Acts V:36-37.) Besides obedience and reliance, this humble faithfulness is the primary aspect of trust.

there is ... ‘Something’, and hence that there is an exit, even if invisible. The silent cry “Release me!” is the witness of that, for the most real is that which you can not live without. At the same time, the cry is also an admission that I do not have the power to exit on my own. After all, I do not see any exit. The spiritual choice says Yes at first only in the form of accepting damnation and despair and yet, in spite of that, not accepting it, nourishing somewhere in the depth the inadmissible trust that, after all, I won’t stay here forever. This paradox reveals only the insufficiency of any actual choice (or, for that matter, of anything I can do) to effect the transition. All I can do is to say Yes, first in the deep silence of invisibility, then perhaps in a louder and more conscious voice. But saying so Yes is only saying that I am willing to accept the possibility of release, that I indeed ask, seek and knock and hope that “every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”\textsuperscript{156} The cry, knocking or, as we can also say, the mere consent opening one to the possibility, is all one can do. It is equipollent with the infinite patience because, as one can not do anything, all one can do is to wait, and as one is not waiting for anything visible, so one waits eternally, above time. “[I]t is necessary that one has the patience to begin so, that one in truth admits, that it is a feat of patience”\textsuperscript{157} through which one gradually regains one’s soul. This patient waiting, with or without clear consciousness thereof, calms down the storms preparing the opening. But it is not yet the opening itself.

\textit{Gift.}

The choice of Yes is only a necessary but not the sufficient condition of exit. As usual, we do not know the sufficient conditions, but here they have been given a name – “grace.”\textsuperscript{158} Since we do not deal with the sufficient conditions, “grace” will mean for us simply the possibility of the apparently and humanly impossible, the fact that, although there is no visible exit, some people do return from hell. Trust is thus openness to the possibility of grace and both together can become effective only when I have said Yes, admitted that I am not the master, that “I live yet do not live in me.”\textsuperscript{159}

\textit{I am not the master and so grace is a gift, a true – that is, undeserved (or, as a philosopher might prefer to say, unaccounted for) – gift. But it is not a gift from anybody, for I have not found any new master. Just like hope and thirst are directed towards and ask into absolute nothingness, so grace comes only from there, it is a gift of nothingness. It did not come from any visible place; it is only all surrounding nothingness which is the origin of this gift. One can receive gifts coming from no one, from nothingness, and one can likewise be thankful without being thankful to anybody. Spiritual thankfulness does not concern anything in particular – it concerns nothing, that is, everything. It is not even thankfulness for grace, for thankfulness is but an aspect in the nexus of grace.}

\textit{Ex nihilo?}

The spiritual choice of Yes finds invisible richness of the origin in the indistinct nothingness which for No remains an irrelevant void. Yes creates something which was not there before: from the deepest thirst for ‘Something’, from the thoroughly logical actuality of solipsism, perhaps, from the deepest despair of emptiness, it emerges into the full presence,

\textsuperscript{156}Matt. VII:8
\textsuperscript{157}S. Kierkegaard, \textit{Eighteen Edifying Discourses}. IX. To gain one’s soul in patience p.155
\textsuperscript{158}It would be probably closer to the actual grace, which is withdrawn after the performance of the act for which it was granted, than to the sanctifying grace, which has the constant, habitual effect and makes one permanently holy, but we will leave such distinctions to the theologians.
\textsuperscript{159}St. John of the Cross, \textit{The Poems}. 

from the knowledge that, it emerges into participation, into Being. It thus seems to create ex nihilo, from the total emptiness. It looks like an arbitrary decision, perhaps, a mere projection or a hypostasis, and those who like will always see it in such terms. But it is only the assumption of emptiness, the assumption that nothingness is indeed void, which makes everything that follows Yes into a mere projection. Such an assumption wants, first of all, to see some definite reasons which would oppose it, which would invalidate the sense of emptiness. But no such reasons can be given and then everything that follows turns into a void equal to that which is there from the start – in human, visible terms, indeed, nihil ex nihilo, “nothing can come out of what does not exist.”  

In short, this is a way of saying No, and we are not concerned with it any more.

The choice of Yes does not create ex nihilo (which form of creation pertains to God alone). It turns alienation into concrete participation, creates good from evil. It creates participation by finding the origin, finding fullness where it sees only emptiness. To see here only a projection is the same as to see nothing, as denying the meaning of the whole event, as “dragging” the revelation of the greater down to the level of one’s littleness.”

For any interpretation in terms of the actual knowledge, this finding is impossible and untrue. In such terms a relation which requires being of one of its poles never counts as sufficient for being of the other. In such terms nothing has been found because nothing ‘objective’ appeared, only something has been thought, ‘subjectively’ posited. Thinking which knows nothing but its concepts is a sad affair and it indeed can not get further than such a denial. It can not recognise that this ‘thought’ of fullness beyond emptiness is not an objective thought of an actual state of affairs or of some actual agent; that thinking it as a merely possible hypothesis is to deny it and think its opposite; that this thought would not be itself without being already a trustful admittance, pistis; that it is impossible to approximate it, for in its simplicity, it can only be thought as bare Yes or not thought at all; that it is knowledge which, recognising presence, becomes participation, or simply, participation which recognises itself as such. But this knowledge, this gnosis, is not of the actual kind, it does not provide any visible justifications or forcing reasons. If it did, the choice would not be a free event. Only in the fact that it can be denied, in the complete lack of any reactive character, consists the absolute freedom of the spiritual choice.

Good from evil

The silent scream “Release me!” fills the emptiness with … nothing. Yet, nothingness ceases to threaten with hollow darkness and void and, instead, becomes the source, the (new) origin. Spiritual aspects – humility, openness, thankfulness – turn the indistinct nothingness into a warm and living friend, both remote and close. Of course, it is still nothingness, there is nobody out there, but the indistinctness started to live, and its life is fully consummated in the spirit, the absolute relation. It is like creating by mere willing, but willing at this level means close to nothing – in actual terms, perhaps, only surrender without resignation, trust without hope, hope without expectations… The spiritual choice of Yes, aiming at nothing and presenting nothing, may indeed suggest inventing something more definite, something more communicable which could be posited as the active agent responsible for everything – Nature, Fate, Zeus, God, JHVH… Reflection is bound to do that, and the ‘objective images’ nourish its natural sense of participation as the sense of dependency. But the only active agent is the spirit, the tension between nothingness of the one and nothingness of self, between God and God-image, between God and existence.

160 AristotLe, Physics. 187a.33-34
The rest is a more or less adequate manner of speaking, perhaps, conceptual positing, perhaps even objectification...

We think that emptiness is when nobody speaks, so we wait for some signs, for the sound of some words. But ‘silence is a fence around wisdom’ and it is God’s voice. Emptiness is not when nobody speaks but when nobody listens, when we speak, scream into void. Strangely, here being listened to is simply to dare to speak, to admit that I can’t will into void, that I can’t live in the middle of emptiness. This admission amounts to Yes, to willing ‘Something’ to be, but ‘Something’ which is neither this nor that but everything... “What you desire strongly, with all your will, you already have and this cannot be taken away from you neither by God nor by any creature, if only your will is complete, wants it because of God and stands in front of Him. Let there be no “I would like”. This would only be a future. But “I want — now — and hence it is”. Truly, with my will I can everything.”

The choice of Yes, raised above all visible reasons, is a free creation — it is needed to create the situation of participation from alienation. The choice of No does not have this aspect because it is motivated by the visible misery and alienation — it only accepts and surrenders to it. The alternative of these two possibilities represents the absolute freedom of choice between creation and resignation, between participation and alienation: “if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.” The choice is what it creates: “He who knows the Brahman as non-existing becomes himself non-existing. He who knows the Brahman as existing him we know himself as existing.” No creates alienation by giving up the possibility of finding anything and eventual alienation is nothing else but this No. This is only a resignation, it creates only nihil ex nihilo, so we won’t call it “creation”. It is Yes that creates by transcending the emptiness. It creates concrete participation which, in turn, is nothing but accepting the gift of the origin. In short, both Yes and No are nexuses — of choosing, receiving, being, knowing — founding the opposite concrete modifications of all the aspects.

**Without you God would not be God**

As we have emphasized, Yes is a free creation but not creation ex nihilo, only of good from evil, of participation from alienation — or else of concrete God from abstract Godhead. “Without me God would not be God. I am the cause of God being God.”

Meister does not say “I am the cause of God”, only that the existence is the cause of nothingness being God. Indeed, without the confronting existence, the indistinct would remain indistinguishable.

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Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?
Ich bin dein Krug (wenn ich zerscherbe?)
Ich bin dein Trank (wenn ich verderbe?)
Bin dein Gewand und dein Gewerbe,
mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn.
Nach mir hast du kein Haus, darin

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162 Eckhart [after R. Otto, *The Mysticism of East and West*. B:Al.1] This might be misconstrued as a sheer voluntarism but will which is complete, which is concretely founded, is not exhausted by its actual intention. We will return to it below in 3.2.2.
163 Chr. I:28.9
164 Shankara [after S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore, eds., *Indian Philosophy*. For our purposes, we don’t distinguish Brahman from one.]
dich Worte, nah und warm, begrüsse.
Es fällt von deinen großen Füssen
die Samsandale, die ich bin.

Dein großer Mantel läst dich los.
Dein Blick, den ich mit meiner Wange
warm, wie mit einem Pfuhl, empfinde,
wird kommen, wird mich suchen, lange –
und legt beim Sonnenuntergange
sich fremden Steinen in den Schooss.

Was wirst du tun, Gott? Ich bin bange.166

Just like the alternative Yes-No offers no third possibility ("He that is not with me is
against me;"167), so God is either living or dead, and he lives only in the human soul. "The
soul is a heavenly housing of eternal Godhead. So that He completes His divine work only
in it."168 "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord."169 The concrete participation,
this living presence of God’s in the soul is not a fact, an objective truth – it is only the
possibility of Yes. Without Godhead’s nothingness, there would be no me and no world.
But without me, without the place where Godhead can become concrete and where God
can incarnate, there would be no God, or else, Godhead would have to remain one, a mere
principle, perhaps, a reflective abstraction, ‘the first mover’ or ‘the ultimate cause’. It is
said about God “I love them that love me”170, but, in fact, God’s life is nothing else but
this love. The “intellectual love of the mind toward God is the love with which God loves
Himself.”171 If I deny this love, if I do not live it, then what can God do? Man’s eventual
freedom is God’s helplessness. His command leaves me free, it always leaves the place for
saying No, and if I say No, if I die – “What will you do, God? I am worried.”

69. Abstractly, the choice is between nothing and everything. Yes recognises the indistinct
as the origin, it distinguishes it above all visibility, and so it is. The existence saying
Yes acquires being which is no longer merely ontologically founded in the one, but which
is concretely founded in it, which is participation. As such a transition from nothing to
‘Something’, Yes is a new creation of the world, or what amounts to the same, a second
birth. No sees only emptiness, does not distinguish it, and so it is not. It is ontologically

166 R. M. Rilke, Das Stunden-Buch. Vom münchischen Leben
167 Matt. XII:30; Lk XI:23
168 Eckhart. According to a Mesopotamian myth from VI-th century BC, Marduk, “in order to prepare a
habitation for gods in the midst of their hearts // Created humankind.” [after R. Graves, R. Patai, Hebrew
Myths I,2] The theme dominates Neoplatonic anthropology with a clear expression in Eriugena, developing
the quote from Maximus Confessor “For they say that man and God are paradigms of each other.” A recent
return of the theme – perhaps, in its academic fashion, somehow disguised and politied: “God is supposed
to be absolutely powerful in our tradition. [...] I’m trying to think of some unconditionality that would
not be sovereign, that is, to deconstruct the theological heritage of the concept, the political concept, of
sovereignty, without abandoning the unconditionality of gifts, of hospitality, and so on. That means that
some unconditionality might be associated not with power but with weakness, with powerlessness. [...] I’m
trying to think of some divinity dissociated from power, if it is possible.” [J. Derrida, Roundtable at the
conference Religion and Postmodernism III. [after J. Caputo, Without sovereignty, without being...]]
169 Prov. XX:27
170 Prov. VIII:17
171 B. Spinoza. Ethics. V.Prop.XXXVI. (We must distance ourselves from Spinoza’s partition of God and
summation of parts back into His totality again. The actual formulation says “...is part of the infinite love
with which God...”)

3.2. Yes

founded in the same origin, but this founding remains as abstract and irrelevant as a simple fact, unavoidable truth; it does not find a concrete counterpart in one's life.

There is only one God, and everything is his sign. But although the presence is obvious, it is not obvious that it is His presence, and so he has two faces: nothingness can be all or nothing. He can be life or death, generous giver or sower of despair, peaceful love or fearful vengeance. It is not entirely up to me to choose which face he will show – the spiritual choice is not my act. Often, one can only search for this face which others told about. Before saying more about things one can do, let us recover some of these descriptions of the spiritual Yes in a context where one would hardly expect them.

3.2.1. Anselm's argument

Aliquid, quo maius cogitari non potest, being greater than which nothing can be thought... 70. The shocking content of Anselm's argument from Proslogion consists in the fact that existence is demonstrated from a mere concept, that being follows from knowing. The unjustified – and unjustifiable? – transition from esse in intellectu to esse in re, raised as one of the earliest objections already by Anselm's contemporary Gaunilon, has the same content as the creation, the second birth we were just speaking about.

The list of other objections of various kinds could be rather long: that 'being' / 'existing' is not a predicate which could be added to the concept of anything, that 'being greater than' remains unspecified and cannot be given meaning making the argument work, that 'being greater than which nothing can be thought' is not a legitimate concept and one should at least show that it is not contradictory, that what is demonstrated is only necessity of a being provided that it exists and not its existence, that... 172

All the objections, with all the pretensions to formality, may be interesting and nice, but they are necessarily involved into actual distinctions which do not apply at the level addressed by the argument. We leave the pedantic analyses of the logical forms, merits and mistakes of this beautiful argument to those who deem such exercises worthwhile.

The argument intends not so much to prove God's existence as to confirm it, make it more transparent. Anselm repeats Augustine's credo, ut intelligam – "For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand." 173 Such a search is underlined by the sense of looking for something already present, §§61 ff. If we were to accept the name "ontological", given by Kant to the argument, it would not be because it somewhat deduces being from a concept but, on the contrary, because it finds

172 After the well-known criticisms by Gaunilon, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, the discussions still continue. E.g., E. Gibson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy p.118, footnote 35.; J. N. Findlay, Can God's existence be disproved?; a review can be found in N. Malcolm, Anselm's ontological arguments. (Some of these actually do not oppose Anselm, but only his argument, and some not even that, though they discuss possible objections.)

On the other hand, one should remember the tradition using the same 'definition' of God but with 'better' instead of 'greater', as for instance, "nothing can be thought of better than God, and surely He, than whom there is nothing better, must without doubt be good." [Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy. III:10]. God "is thought of as something than which nothing is better or higher." [St. Augustine, Christian Doctrine. I:15], "What is God? That than which nothing better can be thought" [St. Bernard of Clairvaux, On Consideration. V:7.15] 'Greatness' itself appears already in Seneca: "What is God? The totality that you see and the totality that you do not see. His greatness belongs to him in such a way that nothing greater can be conceived" [L. A. Seneca, Natural questions. I:Preface 13]. Also, though with respect to the perfection of the universe, M. T. Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods II:7-8.

173 St. Anselm of Canterbury, Proslogion. 1. The subtitle given by Anselm to Proslogion was Fides quae rens intellectum – Faith in quest of understanding.
something which already is there, which is presumed on a different, and stronger, basis
than the conceptual context of the proof itself.\textsuperscript{174} The argument reflects the presence of the origin. It does not tell, in the manner of \textit{a posteriori} ‘proofs’, how finite understanding could reach the infinite – Anselm’s dissatisfaction with his earlier proofs from \textit{Monologion}, his search for an \textit{a priori} argument can be seen as an expression of the fact that only such a structure reflects the underlying postulate that this has already happened, that understanding already is involved in the infinite.

72. If nothing else, then at least the constant presence of the argument since the XII-th century, shows that ‘being greater than which nothing can be thought’, or perhaps only an idea(1) thereof, is highly troublesome for the partial ratio with its pretensions to universality. The troublesome aspect is that knowing which coincides with being is \textit{gnosis} and not plain \textit{episteme}. \textit{Episteme} can go no further than the \textit{actual} dissociations: the ‘real object is one thing, and the understanding itself, by which the object is grasped, is another,’”\textsuperscript{175} hence: the argument would be a valid proof if the idea of God in human mind and God’s being were identical. This identity, however, is impossible for \textit{actual} thinking – for it “being” means only ‘real object’, \textit{external objectivity}, completely dissociated from the ‘human mind’, and as such the opposite of a ‘mere idea in the mind’. This form of objection does not really consider the form of the argument at all but merely points out the impossibility of proving that anything is: a proof is a thought, while thing is a being – the two, once dissociated, can not be the same by their very nature, ‘by definition’.

The argument has nothing to do with any thing which can be thought in the mode of such a \textit{dissociation}. It does not apply to any \textit{actual} things, and “if anyone should discover for me something existing either in reality or in the mind alone – except ‘that than which a greater cannot be thought’ – to which the logic of my argument would apply, then I shall find that Lost Island and give it, never more to be lost, to that person.”\textsuperscript{176} But God who, without me, would only be impersonal Godhead, God about whom I should worry, in case I die, God who does not live somewhere else, in a deistic \textit{dissociation} from this world and human life but, on the contrary, in its midst, who is hardly anything else than the \textit{spiritual} tension of this life, the \textit{absolute} pole of the \textit{existential confrontation} – well, with such a God there is no difference between his being and being \textit{present}, between his being alive and being alive in me (or in you), or – if one insists on the inadequate mode of expression – between his ‘being in and for and by himself’ and the ‘idea of him in my mind’.

Thinking it is not yet knowing it, for knowing it is not the matter of \textit{episteme} but of \textit{gnosis}. It is nothing else but to recognise this knowledge as one’s being, to recognise \textit{confrontation as participation}, to say \textit{Yes}. Anselm’s argument appears as a recurring shibboleth of the ever recurring suspicion: that all \textit{actuality} strives only for what it already is, that knowledge becomes being which it already has been, that understanding of the \textit{visible} follows in the \textit{invisible traces} of its origin. These, in turn, are only conceptual figures of the deepest possible transformation of human being, in so far as man can contribute to such a transformation, of the creation of good from evil.

73. The disputes over the validity of the argument will hardly ever stop, because the possible

\textsuperscript{174} In terms of mere conceptual inferences, we have perhaps only “presupposed an existence as belonging to the realm of the possible, and have then, on that pretext, inferred its existence from its internal possibility – which is nothing but a miserable tautology.” [I. Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}. I:2nd Division.3.4, A597/B625.] Perhaps, in terms of mere inferences. But every valid inference is only a tautology, and all tautologies are equally miserable.

\textsuperscript{175} Gaunilon of Marmoutiers, \textit{On behalf of the fool}. 3

\textsuperscript{176} St. Anselm of Canterbury, \textit{Reply to Gaunilo}. 3
interpretations will always not only reflect the available repository of concepts, but also mimic the assumptions, or rather the deep motivations, one had in advance. It is of little value to argue “[h]ow far the idea of a most perfect being, which a man may frame in his mind, does or does not prove the existence of a God […] For in the different make of men’s tempers and application of their thoughts, some arguments prevail more on one, and some on another, for the confirmation of the same truth.”

Men may, of course, disagree not only with respect to the validity of proofs and arguments concerning ‘the same truth’ but also with respect to this truth itself. In the most abstract and extreme form, the poles of this disagreement reflect either Yes or No, and there are no visible, objective reasons allowing one to choose between them. “The ontological argument is a report of experience” and reduces really to what one wants to understand by “aliquid, quo maius cogitari non potest”. If one takes it to be what is intended, to be God, then one has already drawn the conclusion. For merely thinking God, without thinking him as being, is to think something else. Either an empty concept, a mere word, or a non-empty concept which, by the very fact of its non-emptiness, can not be the concept of God. Without any existential import, the mere thinking will never be able to think God. “For in one sense a thing is thought when the word signifying it is thought; in another sense when the very object which the thing is is understood. In the first sense, then, God can be thought not to exist, but not at all in the second sense. No one, indeed, understanding what God is can think that God does not exist […]”

The argument provokes one to realise that merely thinking God is not thinking him at all, that thinking God properly is not an operation of mere episteme, a play of concepts, but requires existential relevance, gnostic anchoring in Being above the actual dissociations and arguments.

3.2.2. Reflective Yes

As announced at the end of §69, we now want to say a few words about things which are in our power and which may have some influence on the spiritual choice. Let us, however, start by emphasizing that the actual attempts should not be confused with the spiritual choice. Yes is not an act, it is an event above the horizon of mineness. It affects not only me but my whole being and does not require even slightest reflective consciousness. It is exactly something which transcends visibility of actual contents and objective facts.

Now, “it may be asked, is Brahman known or not known (previously to the enquiry into its nature)? If it is known we need not enter on an enquiry concerning it; if it is not known we can not enter on such an enquiry.” If it amounts only to finding ‘Something’ which already has been found, to becoming one’s self which one always has been, then one might ask what is the value of such a tautological confirmation. This value is simply the continuity of all levels of existence, replacement of alienation by participation in which actuality becomes not only ontological but also concrete reflection of the origin – what we called justification in §42. Although its reality, grace, happens in the invisible depths, in the very origin of Being, we may attempt a reflective description of some of its aspects.

177 J. Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. IV:10.7
178 S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life. V:11
179 St. Anselm of Canterbury, Proslogion. 4
180 Invisible event like this one is not, of course, a momentaneous event in time. Like everything else, it can be placed in objective time, but only as a gradual transformation forming the nexus of Yes. It only opens actuality, immersed in the objective time, on the eternity of the origin.
181 Śaṅkara [after S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore, eds., Indian Philosophy.]
Such actual expressions will constitute elements of the reflective acts of the choice of Yes which it is in our power to perform and which can contribute to the invisible event. This choice means to recognise nothingness as the one, the ultimate invisibility as the origin. In such a recognition, one admits several things.

75. **Humility.**

Firstly, reflection that I am not the master admits the insufficiency of one's actual acts and choices. One understands oneself when one understands one's limits. Yet any particular limit, any specific obstacle or prohibition can be, if only in principle, overstepped. The very first issue is to recognise impassability of limits which surround visibility as such. I end where this world ends, while beyond there is something which, from the perspective of this world is but nothingness. That I am not the master is to say that there is something more than I and this world, that the nothingness beyond it is not emptiness, is not lack of reality but, on the contrary, is the most real source of whatever is encountered in this world. One does not The impassable limits are not any visible lines stretched around by some authoritarian ruler. They are limits of visibility as such, the invisible limits which are impossible to overstep anyway, and humility is simply an accepting recognition of this fact. Eckhart asks “When does one stay humble? I answer: When you apprehend One separated from others. And when does one step beyond humility? I answer: When one apprehends everything in everything, then one steps beyond humility.”

Humility does not mean that one recognises any particular master governing this world. Humility in this spiritual form is not a submission to any particular power. Even more, it excludes such a power or, to the extent it experiences it, it transcends it, acknowledging its possible reality and efficacy but not its absoluteness. Encounter with any awe inspiring, ineffably powerful tremendum sacrum may easily lead to humiliation rather than to humility. Humility which is a reaction to anything specific, which is caused by no matter how vague, but still a particular cause or power, is perhaps an emotion, “the sorrow produced by contemplating our impotence or helplessness,” but it is not a true, spiritual humility. This latter is humility in the face of nothingness. One does not submit to anything, yet one submits – unreservedly. Only that, recognition of the absoluteness of the origin, makes it a truly spiritual submission. “Let me be humble, that is, one who thirsts for the origin.”

76. **Thankfulness.**

Humility faces the ultimate gift and amounts simply to its acceptance. Only “the miser always fears presents.” In this acceptance, one admits that the world in which one lives is given to us, is the result of a process which might have involved one’s self but certainly not one’s ego. The world, just like grace, is a generous – because unmerited – gift. This does not mean that no single thing in this world is a result of one’s activity, only that, eventually, all such things are grounded in the transcendent sphere of invisibility. The world is a gift, one’s life is a gift and everything ever encountered is a gift. I am while there is no sufficient reason for me being here. I am while I might not be. Recognition of the world and one’s life as a gift of transcendence amounts to thankfulness.

It is essential for spiritual thankfulness that we recognise the gift as arbitrary, as having no sufficient reason – creation is a mystery. The recognition of the one as the generous source admits only that it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Any search for

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183 B. Spinoza, *Ethics. III On the origin and nature of the emotions:Definitions of the emotions:* 26

184 Z. Herbert, *The prayer of the traveling Mr. Cogito.*

185 S. Sturhunson, *Hávamál. 48*
sufficient reasons, any attempt to explain the necessity of this gift amounts to explaining it away and to renouncing the attitude of thankfulness. The arbitrariness of the gift is what founds the spiritual thankfulness. Its spiritual character means just that it is not thankfulness for anything specific; it is thankfulness for nothing, that is, for everything. If only one starts looking for reasons for being thankful, for any positive things worth gratitude, one renounces the spiritual dimension of thankfulness. This does not necessarily mean that one opposes it. But the insistence on finding some visible reasons, not to mention treating them as indispensable conditions for one’s attitude, encloses one within the sphere of visible explanations and thus removes one from the reality of the unconditional gift. Spiritual thankfulness accepts that one owes everything, that one is in debt which it is impossible to pay back. As long as this acceptance tries to find any reasons, it retains an element of guilt, for in this world the one who does not pay his debts back remains indebted, remains guilty. Spiritual thankfulness turns this sense of guilt into gratitude.

Openness.

The arbitrariness of this gift means that it might have not taken place or else that it might have been entirely different. Instead of ‘this’ one might have gotten ‘that’, instead of being ‘this’ one might have been ‘that’. No matter what, in visible terms, one has obtained, does not change the nature of that of the ultimate gift which deserves the same thankfulness. Anything that one is or encounters is but a particular instance of the fundamental generosity. Especially misery and suffering, which one can actively oppose, do not imply any metaphysical evil but an existential trial, a call to transcend one’s actuality towards the recognition of the generosity of the one which simply gives. ‘What’ it gives depends already on the names with which we call it and calling it “evil” contradicts the spiritual thankfulness. This unreserved acceptance of the gift amounts thus to openness in which a man, “whether in a pigsty or in a palace,” “[w]hatever befalls him, //He lives in happiness.” It is not openness to this or that, to anything specific but an unrestricted thankfulness, spiritual openness to nothing, that is, to everything.

Love

These aspects — humility, thankfulness, openness — reflecting the respective aspects of the nexus of Yes, §§61-68, we call jointly “love” or, to avoid confusion, the “spiritual love”. Love does not consist of humility, thankfulness and openness; it is the unified and indistinct attitude and these are but aspects of the same nexus of Yes. Other aspects might be listed, but it should not be necessary to exaggerate elaborations. For instance, openness amounts to trust as much as to hope, while humble thankfulness to fidelity. Love is the aspect of grace, the first element founded concretely in the spiritual Yes.

3.2.2.1. Works

The difference between the spiritual and reflective Yes concerns not so much the contents, as the place they occupy in the field of existence. If a nexus founds particular forms of understanding or acts, then achieving such a form of understanding or performing such acts will contribute to formation or strengthening of this very nexus. Loving grace is the relation of Being in the heart of existence, it embraces its whole being, without leaving anything outside. At the same time, it may remain almost indifferent with respect to

186 The Ashtavakra-Gita. XVII:7
187 “Charity” or, since we rely mostly on the Christian tradition, “agape”, or even “obedience”, in the sense used by the Church Fathers and mystics, may be here equally good — in fact, synonymous — words.
actual situations and moods – indifferent, that is, unnoticed if one tries to capture it by the actual look. The contents of the reflective Yes, on the other hand, occupy actuality without, necessarily, witnessing to the presence of their spiritual counterparts. I can think as long as I wish about humility and thankfulness, without ever becoming humble and thankful. I can even perform a lot of humble acts which, however, do not make me humble (especially, if humility is my intention.)

A closer relation between the two levels obtains when the reflective choice is made genuinely, that is, actually tries to reflect the aspects like those listed above in its own attitude, when it does not deliberate thankfulness, but tries to find it, does not ask about humility, but tries to live it. The actual choice is not even a necessary condition for the spiritual event of Yes, but it is certainly helpful, especially for reflection which has already been involved into the game of invisibles and which is in a sore need of clarifying it. Eventually, the spiritual choice says only Yes to nothingness, and so does the reflective one. But “it requires an eminent reflection, or rather a great faith, to sustain a reflection on nothing, which is to say infinite reflection.”

Works and particular acts – the elements of reflective attitude – do contribute to the invisible sphere and, when performed in a right attitude, to Yes. The mechanism of such a contribution was described in II:2.3. Although the actual experiences, feelings, thoughts, acts do not influence directly the sphere of invisibles, they accumulate and pass gradually into the virtual depths of the soul. It is not so that “in every good work the just man sins”, that “every work they attempt is accused,” for good works accumulate and strengthen the goodness of the soul. But there are no obvious, causal or otherwise, connections, no guarantees nor any precise rules determining the virtual effects of the actual works. Also, all actual elements are surrounded by the uncontrollable rest which, too, adds up to the result. The descriptions remain forever partial. Fortunately, “the gods have a care of anyone whose desire is to become just and to be like God, as far as man can attain to the divine likeness by the pursuit of virtue.” “As far as man can” because actually attaining to this likeness, the spiritual Yes and grace, are invisible events. Their dependency on the visible sphere may be claimed but never observed, may be concluded but never proved. A spiritual event, when it comes, comes only and unmistakably as a gift.

80. “The faith of man follows his nature. Man is made of faith: as his faith is so he is.” As above, so below, and we have followed this direction almost all the time. And yet, “[n]ot by refraining from action does man attain freedom from action. Not by mere renunciation does he attain supreme perfection. For not even for a moment can a man be without action. [...] For there is no man on earth who can fully renounce living work, but he who renounces the reward of his work is in truth a man of renunciation.” The work done with thankful acceptance of any, possibly even none reward, with humble renunciation of one’s pretensions to ownership and authorship, with exclusive attention to its own standards – such work marks the path on which “[n]o step is lost.” Complete dedication means that the work, needed for one’s life as it may be, is actually a sacrifice, an expression of self-surrender. “Offer all thy works to God, throw off selfish bonds, and do thy work. [...] This man of harmony surrenders the reward of his work and thus attains final peace: the man

188S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death. I.B [56]
189J. Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion. III:19.2.4
190Plato, Republic. 613a:7.b.1
191The Bhagavad-Gita. XVII:3
192The Bhagavad-Gita. III:4-5/XVIII:11
193Ibid. II:40
of disharmony, urged by desire, is attached to his reward and remains in bondage.  

This bondage of attachment may, too, have the appearance of intense and dedicated work. But such an inverted form announces not a peaceful self-renunciation but self-annihilating and all-consuming insatiability. On the other hand, “[t]he man who in his work finds silence, and who sees that silence is work, this man in truth sees the Light and in all his works finds peace. [...] In whatever work he does such a man in truth has peace: he expects nothing, he relies on nothing, and ever has fullness of joy. [...] He is glad with whatever God gives him, and he has risen beyond the two contraries here below; he is without jealousy, and in success or in failure he is one: his works bind him not.”

Silence, after all, is the voice of God. But although it speaks from the beginning so to hear it, above actual noises, is man’s true end.

Pure work is both an expression of Yes and the means of approaching it. “Seekers of union, ever striving, see him dwelling in their own hearts; but those who are not pure and have not wisdom, though they strive, never see him.”

Like many apparently vicious circles, so this mutual dependence, underlying all the disputes about the primacy of faith over works or works over faith, is but a trace of a nexus — here, the nexus of Yes. Nothing is first; the fact that we can decide and attempt only what is actually in our power, does not make the works either superior nor inferior to the faith. “Faith without works is empty, works without faith are blind.”

Both follow the same course and neither is possible without the other. Works contribute to faith and faith can not fail to manifest itself in works.

If only we do not try to reduce goodness to any utility, usefulness or other visible categories, we can say: the works of a good man are good and only such works are good.

We would certainly not speak about the necessity or indispensability of works; indeed, “Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.”

Yet, we would object to denying works any helpful function.

Thus:

1. Works are not indispensable but are helpful.
2. They are the only things which one can intend and, to some extent, control, with respect to one’s spiritual destiny.
3. They are thus the only visible means — and hence the only means — of striving for the unity, of keeping heaven and earth together.

Their spiritual relevance is determined not only by their content but primarily by their rest. Those bringing one closer to Yes:

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194 Ibid. V:10/12
195 Ibid. IV:18/20/22
196 Ibid. XV:11
197 I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. I.2. Introduction.1, A51/B75
198 The ground upon which good character rests is the very same ground from which man’s work derives its value, namely a mind wholly turned to God. Verily, if you were so minded, you might tread on a stone and it would be a more pious work than if you, simply for your own profit, where to receive the Body of the Lord and were wanting in spiritual detachment.” Eckhart [after A. Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy, XI]
199 Amos IX:2
200 The objections against such a possibility of ‘influencing God’s will’ do not concern us, because what we possibly might find behind the expression “God’s will” is simply the ever present possibility of saying Yes. It remains unchangeable and unaffected by anything happening within the world, among the distinctions. ACTUALITY remains ontologically founded in the one and anybody willing to return is invited to and promised the possibility. But God’s appearance changes and it changes exactly according to whether one lives Yes or No. Works are the only way in which one can help oneself to do the one rather than the other. But they are also only help: the eventual result is not in man’s power.
4. are dedicated to God, are only visible expressions of the spiritual self-renunciation,
5. are not mine, are not performed for any reward but as thankful sacrifice.

In section 3.3 below we will consider concrete founded effected by Yes. In this connection, we will see several specific examples of attitudes founded by Yes which provide thus also examples of attitudes strengthening the invisible currents leading to it.

3.2.2.ii. Projections?

One could perhaps ask the natural question which appeared briefly in §66. Does not spiritual choice amount to a projection? Do we not say that the indistinct and unknowable one has to be endowed with the qualities of the source, goodness, power and what not? The answer is no, and if you see this, you may safely skip this section.

Indeed, there "can be no greater incongruity than [for a disciple of Spencer] to proclaim with one breath that the substance of things is unknowable, and with the next that the thought of it should inspire us with awe, reverence, and a willingness to add our co-operative push in the direction toward which its manifestations seem to be drifting." There might be an incongruity in suggesting that the ‘unknowable’ should inspire one to anything. But we have neither anything ‘unknowable’ nor any inspiration in any particular direction. The indistinct is unknowable only if knowledge means the actual episteme, knowledge of ‘whats’. But we do have full knowledge of it, we know all that is to know about it, if not in this narrow sense, then in the sense of gnosis – it is indistinct, one above distinctions. As to the inspiration then, indeed, it is only to silence. But silence can be a calm voice of eternity or a mute emptiness. It may inspire but it does not tell ‘what’ to do: it leaves you completely free to make your choice. This choice, the spiritual choice is a thoroughly real choice between the only two alternatives offered – not by the ‘unknowable’ but by the absolute which, in its indistinctness, remains indeed indifferent. Only we are affected, and we are affected by confronting the face of one which corresponds to our choice. What we have done with, or rather out of the concept of indistinct in Book I, can be taken as a description of the grounds which might incline one towards seeing it as the origin, that is, towards saying Yes. There is, however, no necessity, no sufficient reasons which might force one to make this, rather than the opposite choice.

We should carefully distinguish the choice from mere psychological effects. According to James, “to find religion is only one out of many ways of reaching unity […] In judging of the religious types of regeneration […] it is important to recognise that they are only one species of a genus that contains other types as well. For example, the new birth may be away from religion into incredulity; or it may be from moral scrupulosity into freedom and license; or it may be produced by the irruption into the individual’s life of some new stimulus or passion, such as love, ambition, cupidity, revenge, or patriotic devotion. In all these instances we have precisely the same psychological form of event, – a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency."

One can form hierarchies of genera and species as one finds appropriate but if these have ‘the same psychological form’ (which here probably means something like psychologically indistinguishable, even if contentually different), then thank you very much for the psychological contribution – spirit is above psyche and here our ways part definitely with

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201 W. James, Essays in Pragmatism. I:p.19
202 W. James, Varieties of Religious Experience. VIII
psychology. Indeed, having only *actual experiences* of a ‘subjective’ psyche as the basis of distinctions, all such states may end up in the same sack. Yet, even James does not include these later instances in his treatment of the religious experience. So, after all, they are distinguishable? The sense of purpose, of direction and goal, of mission, or else of finding a valuable sphere of *experience* may indeed, especially if taken as absolute, give firmness and stability. All *idols* can, and many minor matters can. *Idols* are seldom entirely false – they gain followers exactly because they contain an element of truth. But the *unity founded* by the spiritual choice is not derived from any sense of goal, direction or mission – the goal is *nothing*, the direction is ‘anywhere’, and the mission is “love, and do what you wilt.”

One can manifest itself in innumerable ways which may be, on the one hand, psychologically indistinguishable from the effects of *idolatry* and, on the other hand, mutually as different as trembling and adoration, as fear and attraction. Such differences can often be found behind different visible characters of various religions.

An experience of God’s presence will have tremendous influence on one’s life, and the form of this influence may depend heavily on the character of the experience. But it is not its character, its content which may account for its influence – it is the lack thereof, expressed as the tremendous force, *majestas*. Psychologically distinguishable content plays its part but what is constitutive for such an experience is what this content reveals – the ultimate, *absolute* force which groans into one’s face without showing its own. It is the intensity of such an experience, its irresistible power, which is its essential content, not the form under which it appears. And this power is *objectless* and contentless, it has no agent, it is the power of nothingness, but it is. There is, consequently, nothing to be projected, there is only something to be recognised – in the simplest sense, that I am not the master.

*Spiritual choice* is not a matter of any experience just like religiosity is never reducible to any experiences which, perhaps (though even this ‘perhaps’ seems too much), may be psychologically indistinguishable from a sudden attack of fear on a neurotic (or even a healthy) person, or from ecstatic joy which recurrently visits an infantile or senile one. Happening in the face of absolute nothingness, it is lifted above all distinctions, is independent from any actual contents.

A meeting with *absolute* ‘objectivity’ does not require any specific context or experience. Specific character of particular experiences can play some (psychological) role but it concerns only the expression of the experienced power in actual terms. For such experiences are possible actualisations, as Otto says, ‘schematisations’ of the *a priori* ground of all experience. To the extent the presence of *numinosum* is recognised above their content, they themselves are *a priori* – irreducible to any visible experiences or categories, concepts or feelings, but grounded in the ultimate *invisibility*. The fact that absolute may (in fact, always does) invade only one person and not another is such an argument for its ‘subjectivity’ as it would be against the objectivity of Japan that some people were there while others were not. That it is unverifiable? What is? It is as unverifiable as the accusation of its being a ‘subjective projection’ is self-confirming. For as long as one insists on proofs and reasons, on a visible characterisation, one is unable to get any meaning whatsoever of its nature and value. But “*a priori* recognitions are not the ones which everybody has but ones which everybody may have.”

Whatever meets one in any situation, comes from beyond the horizon – not only the horizon of actuality but, eventually, the horizon of distinguishability. Certainly, many things are

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expected and predictable but they, too, enter not on one’s command but on their own—one can at most help them, never force them. And they, too, eventually emerge from beyond the horizon of the distinguished contents, from the indistinct. Reflective Yes is hardly much more than the admission that I am not the master, that indistinct is and remains indistinct, albeit, remaining so is also the source of distinctions. In particular, it is exactly the attitude of not projecting anything beyond the horizon of distinguishability, but merely admitting its constant presence. Yes admits only that, in the face of nothingness, any requirement or expectation of something specific and visible is idolatry which grows from angst. “The soul or mind reaching towards the formless finds itself incompetent to grasp where nothing bounds it or to take impression where the impinging reality is diffuse; in sheer dread of holding to nothingness, it slips away. The state is painful; often it seeks relief by retreating from all this vagueness to the region of sense, there to rest on solid ground, just as the sight distressed by the minute rests with the pleasure on the bold.”\textsuperscript{205} Angst, however, is nothingness facing the attachment to visibility, is the horror vacui facing one who, attempting to see nothingness, sees only void.

To fill this void, attachment forms images of the absolute based on visible patterns. To great “absurdities men were forced by the great license given to the imagination, and by the fact that every existing material thing is necessarily imagined as a certain substance possessing several attributes; for nothing has ever been found that consists of one simple substance without any attribute. Guided by such imaginations, men thought that God was also composed of many different elements, viz., of His essence and of the attributes superadded to His essence. Following up this comparison, some believed that God was corporeal, and that He possessed attributes; others, abandoning this theory, denied the corporeality, but retained the attributes.”\textsuperscript{206} All this, according to Maimonides, leads to polytheism for one is eventually forced to deify each separate attribute of the divine essence. Pantheism, understood as the deification of the totality of visibles and also relativism, which differs from pantheism only by denying this totality any divine character, are possible further consequences of such attempts to capture God’s essence. In all cases, the image of the absolute, also when negated, becomes a projection of our forms of understanding. “The divine essence is nothing else but the essence of man; or, better, it is the essence of man when freed from the limitations of the individual, that is to say, actual corporeal man, objectified and venerated as an independent Being distinct from man himself.”\textsuperscript{207}

It is easy to agree with the criticism of the naive, childish image of God—and here one agrees with Maimonides as much as with Feuerbach.\textsuperscript{208} But the two part ways very quickly. For while Maimonides, Xenophanes and most others criticise a misconception of God, Feuerbach identifies naïveté of such a misconception with the essence of religion.\textsuperscript{209}

\textsuperscript{205}Plotinus, Enneads. VI.9.3 [MacKenna’s translation]
\textsuperscript{206}M. Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed. I.51
\textsuperscript{207}Feuerbach [after F. Copleston, A History of Philosophy. vol.VII:11.15]
\textsuperscript{208}Or, for that matter, with many others, one of the first being Xenophanes accusing poets of ascribing to gods all too human features: “They have narrated every possible wicked story of the gods: theft, adultery, and mutual deception.” [DK 21B12/11] The observation that “Aethiopians have gods with snub noses and black hair, Thracians have gods with grey eyes and red hair” [DK 21B16] summarises Feuerbach’s reductions of theology to anthropology.
\textsuperscript{209}It might be very easy to pretend that statements like “God created everything through me, when I was in the ineffable foundation of God [...] If I were not, there would be no God. There is no need to understand it” [Eckhart [after R. Otto, The Mysticism of East and West. A.IX]] support such identification, §§68 ff. The difference concerns only the presence of the ultimate transcendence behind such statements – Godhead, after all is there, even if He acts only through me. Only this, apparently minimal, invisible difference separates two completely incommensurable views.
It is not Yes but, on the contrary, any other attitude which amounts to a projection: either of emptiness, as in the case of definite No, or of some visible idol.

Spiritual choice is not a choice of any particular God. Neither is it a choice of love, of morality, of charity, of unselfishness, of anything which might be opposed to something else. It is the pure and bare Yes. It does not choose any specific content which it might try (or has wished) to project ‘outside’ of its ‘subjectivity’. Yes chooses only silence, the confrontation with nothingness (and No exchanges this confrontation into words, concepts and, eventually, emptiness). “If the mind reels before something thus alien to all we know, we must take our stand on the things of this realm and strive thence to see. But, in the looking, beware of throwing outward; this Principle does not lie away somewhere leaving the rest void; to those of power to reach, it is present; to the inapt, absent.”

It is ‘throwing outward’ which amounts to projections, to either emptying nothingness and reducing it to a void, or else to populating it with finite idols. As it happens, the choice of Yes has tremendous consequences, but these are consequences, not projections.

Unlike every other choice, based on some particular experiences, thoughts or feelings, the spiritual choice is absolute, not relative to any particular being or region of Being. Now, every choice suspends the relevance of subsequent feelings and thoughts. As will’s act it says: “I choose this, no matter what might come”. However, any such choice related to particular aspects of experience, continues being involved in them. Subsequent changes in their configuration may render sticking to the original choice the matter of pure dogmatism, inflexibility, stubbornness. Every choice is a projection of its actual decision into the future, every act and action is a projection – as Heidegger would say, a “project” – saying “I want this thing to be so”. The reflective Yes is an act, and thus, in a similar way, it too externalises its content. But this externalisation does not result in any particular object, in any dissociated entity, nor in any quality ascribed to something which, subsequently, might turn out not to possess it. It is the act recognizing the ultimate transcendence, say, the ultimate ‘objectivity’, which is not dependent on the form or quality of any possible experiences. Through this act reflection only admits this presence and, by the same token, the insufficiency of its own modus. It recovers the constant, underlying all experiences presence, which it always knows, if only dimly, through self-awareness, that is, awareness of the transcendence. The truth of this act, the conformance to the origin, is thus lifted above and lasting beyond and independently from this world. It delivers reflection from its dissociation and thirst back to the eternity of its origin. “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.”

Yes does not require any feelings or impressions, does not involve any specific thoughts or contents which might be projected. It is a response to the command of nothingness to become self, reflection of the origin. It leaves all feelings and thoughts, all visible signs and particulars below, centering around the the one which becomes also the axis the world. It is absolute because it chooses the absolute – not instead of but above everything visible and relative. “The person is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisherman discovered a fine large fish. He threw all the little fish back into the sea, and easily chose the large fish.”

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\(^{210}\) Plotinus, Enneads. VI:9.7 [MacKenna’s translation]

\(^{211}\) Matt. VII:24-25/Lk. VI:47-48

\(^{212}\) The Gospel of Thomas. 8
This choice is absolute also in the sense that it effects the final division, the definite separation of “wheat from chaff” which until now have been mixed together. It takes the spell of closedness from this world and opens it to the inspiration from another. But this happens only through the absolute renunciation of this world, that is, of its idolatry. Any pretensions on its part to absolute validity and importance, to the ultimate and all-determining ‘objectivity’ are removed.

The absolute character of the choice amounts, in short, to the lack of any particular contents which possibly could be projected. Responding to the command to renounce oneself, it is the choice of the attitude which transforms the world: not in any of its temporal and visible aspects, but in its absolute foundation – it transforms the character of the whole existence. If somebody wants to call this “projection”, it is of course his choice, although such a choice amounts to much more than it believes to be doing. It might even view itself as an act of “intellectual honesty”, which does not posit anything where nothing can be seen. But such an “intellectual truth” amounts to the deepest existential falsehood.

3.3 Concrete founding

In Book I, we had only to do with ontological founding: there would be no experiences without experience, there would be no experience without the chaos of distinctions, and there would be no distinctions without something to distinguish, or as it may be, to distinguish from. In Book II we saw, in a reverse order, its ‘epistemological’ counterpart: from the immediacy of reflection to the actually reflected experiences, from experiences to the experience and to the awareness of its invisible background, from chaos to the underlying non-actuality of invisibles and, eventually, to the existential confrontation with the indistinct one. The two hierarchies are, in fact, the same and differ only by the emphasis one puts either on the element of participation or relation, being or knowing; the difference of emphasis which is possible when viewing the same hierarchy either, so to speak, ‘bottom up’, from the assumed primacy of the dissociation into subject and object, or else ‘top down’, in the order of founding.

This founding is, as abstract ontology or epistemology in general, perhaps curiously interesting but existentially, at best only helpful and, at worst, irrelevant. It happens and works as it does, no matter what we do. Even if its understanding may reward our curiosity, it does not really affect us. We have several times observed that events at different levels may happen relatively independently from those at other levels. The ontological founding amounts exactly to establishing relatively independent ontological spheres. The lower elements, once dissociated from the higher ones, acquire relative autonomy and become almost completely unrelated to the events of higher levels. They do not miss their anchoring in the origin, but this anchoring, if it is discernible at the lower level, then only as some vague traces which reflection always attempts to reduce to a purely actual form. Thus, although the hierarchy does proceed from the unity of the one, it is not experienced as such in concrete terms. Reflection is only haunted by the vague sense of unity and its acts remain dissociated from their origin which, actually, means from each other. The intimations of unity, clearly known as they may be at the deeper layers of ‘knowing’, slip out of precise reflective grasp and dissolve in vagueness.

If x founds y then y participates in x: both these ‘relations’ (which are one and the same) may also have, in addition to the universal and ontological form, the concrete one. Concrete foundation does not found experience in general, but a particular way of experiencing, a concrete experience that the particular things and distinctions of the lower levels
3.3. Concrete founding

originate from those at the higher levels. Concreteness is not, as the common confusion and language usage suggest, immediate precision. The table in front of me, the more precisely it is perceived and identified, becomes only the more abstract, because the more dissociated. Concreteness is the experiential continuity between the contents of actual experiences and their foundation, eventually, their origin. Concrete is only that which carries the traces of anchoring in the ultimate personal site, and the lack of such traces amounts to abstractness, that is, indifference, 1:§138.

Unlike the ontological founding, the concrete one is not something that simply ‘is that way’, that simply is granted by the hidden but universal order of things which one can only discover and accept. Without Yes, without one’s love, it actually is not...I can find gaiety, joy, fun in small things of this world, but unless this fun participates concretely in the higher mirth, and the mirth is surrounded by happiness of my whole soul, and by tranquillity of the spirit, the fun can become only an escape towards more fun. “Fun I love but too much Fun is of all things the most loathsome. Mirth is better than Fun & Happiness is better than Mirth – I feel that a Man may be happy in This World.”[213]

The ‘happiness in This World’, however, as even the ascending levels in Blake’s description might suggest, is only a reflection of being clearly anchored in the other world. Man is a borderline between what is below and what is above, and visible is just another side of the invisible. An attitude towards the one is, at the same time, an attitude towards the other. The spiritual Yes to the invisible nothingness, accepting everything, founds also some actual attitude in the visible world. Just like “holiness is never the mere numinosum, even at its highest level, but is something which is always in a perfect way permeated and saturated with rational, purposeful, personal and ethical elements,”[214] so actuality is not merely the site of closed, dissociated immanence, but the eventual sign of the origin, the meeting point of traces of the invisibles, the eventual place of incarnation. When the actuality is reflection of nothing less but the origin, when the traces reach all the way to the origin, in short, when the visible and invisible spheres are no longer dissociated, the just quoted words of Blake seem only to echo, in the reversed order, those of Plotinus: “The loveliness that is in the sense-realm is an index of the nobleness of the Intellectual sphere, displaying its power and its goodness alike: and all things are for ever linked.”[215]

The attitude towards the visible world which is an expression of the spiritual love is non-attachment. This concept, although it is only negation of attachment described in 2.5, deserves nevertheless some closer remarks.

3.3.1. Non-attachment

“Put not with God other gods, or thou wilt sit despised and forsaken.

Thy Lord has decreed that ye shall not serve other than Him”[216]

Thirsting for eternity, we flirt with time, but the moods of silence are never satisfied by anything visible. The thirst is not for anything particular, anything visible. This does not mean that to quench it, one has to deny all the visible world, that only death is the ultimate peace. This means only that this world itself is not enough, that it does not ‘fill the soul’, that since it contains all and only answers, it never gives the answer...To quench the thirst? “But how is this to be accomplished?

[215]Plotinus, Enneads. IV:8:6 [MacKenna’s translation]
[216]Koran. XVII:22-23
Cut away everything."\(^{217}\)

3.3.1.i. Renunciation

Mystics and sages have always spoken about self-denial and denial of this world. In a sense, grace, living and lived spiritual love, the union of which mystics speak – lifted above this world, seem to be exactly such a denial.

However, the renunciation (not the denial) is only an aspect of Yesand, as the means, should not be confused with the goal. They at the same time speak always about the need for constant alertness, presence of mind, active attention to the actual situation. This constant vigilance may seem to contradict the supposed peace of the union with God based on absolute self-denial. There is, however, no contradiction because grace is but the second birth, is re-birth not only of soul but of flesh, is resurrection of the body, that is, of this world as much as the other one. The union with God is also the union with the world. The difference is that before, this world was only ontologically grounded in the other world and thus there was not a real, concrete unity of the two. Resurrection is the spiritual event which brings the two worlds together, which makes visible not only a mere actualisation, but a true manifestation of the invisible, making everything “on earth, as it is in heaven”.

The ‘death to this world’ means only that visibility loses its absolute importance, that it is seen now sub specie aeternitatis, with, as St. Francois de Sales called it, holy indifference. I remain myself as I have always been, but this mineness is no longer the axis of the world. It is now experienced only as an accident of the origin, as only one of its possible, actual gifts. “[A] man should so stand free, being quit of himself, that is, of his I, and Me, and Self, and Mine, and the like, that in all things, he should no more seek or regard himself, than if he did not exist, and should take as little account of himself as if he were not, and another had done all his works. Likewise he should count all the creatures for nothing.”\(^{218}\)

This, indeed, is the reflective attitude conditioning spiritual love. But all this “counting for nothing” expresses only non-attachment to the visible things, the acceptance that, in their actual existence, they should not make one unconditionally dependent on them. It is not denial of their existence, nor of their possible relevance. It is only denial of their absolute power. “Fear not the flesh nor love it. If you fear it, it will gain mastery over you. If you love it, it will swallow and paralyze you.”\(^{219}\) One still lives among and acts on things of this world, but one’s life is not exhausted by such actions. One tries to attain visible goals, but one does not crave them, one enjoys them, but one does not worship them. And if one fails, if one does not attain them, if one does not enjoy them, then … it does not matter. One’s life is never exhausted by them, it always carries the rest, the inexhaustible potential. This rest contains thankfulness even for one’s failures. For all these actions, attainments and enjoyments are themselves only visible things of only relative value. One can try again or one can let it go – one need not know what one will do, this will turn out at the proper time and one may be vastly surprised. Everything is a gift and one can not have anything which one is not prepared to lose.\(^{220}\)

\(^{217}\) Plotinus, Enneads. V:3.17 [MacKenna’s translation]

\(^{218}\) Theologia Germanica. XV

\(^{219}\) The Gospel of Philip. Describing the man who stepped beyond all unnecessary worries and distinctions, The Ashtavakra-Gita says: “Because he is freed, //He neither craves nor disdains//The things of this world.” XVII:17

\(^{220}\) A closely related thought of Schopenhauer dismisses the possibility of any complains: justice is equally
3.3. Concrete founding

3.3.1.ii. Idols

Renouncing this world, one does not deny its reality or value. One only denies it absolute validity, refuses to rise any idols. This refusal is equipollent with renouncing oneself, for mineness is the pattern of all idolatry. Behind every idol, there is the idol of mineness. Even apparent self-denial for the sake of truth, justice, progress, freedom hides often cherishing myself as the one who is able to reach something ultimately important and inaccessible to others. “Do not strive to seek after the true, only cease to cherish opinions,”221 after all, “human opinions are children’s toys.”222 Idols are not visible things, but visible things considered as all important, which eventually means, raised to the level of absolutes. Idolatry, ‘worshiping images’ is exactly that – to take as absolutely important something that is not.223 ‘Cherishing opinions’ may be so much, and may be nourished by so many mechanisms. (‘Being entitled’, often ‘entitled to one’s own opinion’, and even ‘entitled to be heard’ are quite common forms.) At the bottom it is to make an idol of mineness, is to think that something visible is worth cherishing an opinion about, and that I am entitled to cherishing such an opinion. Cherishing an opinion, I cherish myself.

Again, all this does not mean that I can not mean anything about anything. I not only can – I am bound to. I will have opinions about things, I will participate in arrangements of things, in research, in work, in all kinds of activities of this world. Moreover, I will accept all these things as my part, as relative, yet absolutely real, though not as absolute reality. But in the moment I start cherishing them, I cherish myself, I become attached, that is, start to worship idols. Giving up idols is, at bottom, giving up oneself, for attachment is the pattern of all idolatry and all idols are things which, being below me and being raised to the absolute, possess me.

Idols are what can ‘possess’ man, ‘being possessed’ consisting precisely in making the relative into the absolute. Even if I have all the good reasons for adhering unreservedly to a given opinion, my being possessed by it consists in the unreservedness, in the perhaps unintended, but therefore the stronger and more effective, turning it into an absolute.

Rationalism, defined as acceptance of actual statement or position with the recognition of its limited validity (and in the best case, also of its actual limits), is the opposite of being possessed. In this respect, it coincides with innocence which is just that – being pure, that is, not being possessed. But every ‘-ism’ indicates being possessed, absolutisation of some relative sphere or expression. One’s intense and deeply convinced materialism or idealism, atheism or theism, liberalism or dogmatism, Protestantism or Catholicism, intellectualism or existentialism – all testify against one’s innocence. One can become possessed even by rationalism itself which, unfounded and dissociated in its proud complacency, tends towards agnosticism, relativism, scepticism or just dry rigidity.

3.3.1.iii. Obedience

Giving up idols does not mean merely to replace the ‘object’ of such a worship, to exchange 93.

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221 Anonymous Zen master
222 Heraclitus DK 22B70. A related advice of Heraclitus is: “Let us not conjecture randomly about the most important things.” DK 22B47
223 Of course, we will not go as far as the iconoclasts of the IX-th century did in considering any representations as idolatry. The question, as always, is about the attitude towards things – enjoyment of artisitic expressions, whether religious or not, is very different from idolatry.
the relative for the absolute, but still retain one’s attitude. What is being worshiped determines the visible aspects of the attitude. Worship of patriotism is different from worship of communism; worship of scientism is different from worship of money. Yet, they are the same in so far as idolatry is concerned. To cease worshiping idols is to recognize their thoroughly relative character, relative not only to each other and to particular circumstances, but also to the foundation from which they emerge; eventually, it is simply to recognize the absolute character of the one which is unconditionally above the world of distinctions.

“Behold, in such a man must all thought of Self, all self-seeking, self-will, and what cometh thereof, be utterly lost and surrendered and given over to God, except in so far as they are necessary to make up a person.” The crucial aspect of non-attachment lies not in any grandiose opening to the above and ascetic self-denial, but in the small reservation “except in so far…” I do not deny visibility, I only renounce the image of its absoluteness.

Another expression for such a renunciation of idols is “obedience” which, however, does not mean submission to any specific agent, even less to any specific commands. It is obedience to nothing, that is, to everything. Obedience is just another way of saying that I am not the master and, on the other hand, that I am thankful. These two – not any servile submission, lack of autonomy, sense of inferiority – exhaust the sense of spiritual obedience. It is not any conflict of the wills in which one must yield to the other, for only we, limited human subjects, have any will. If it is a conflict, then only of my will with nothingness, which “is poor, naked and empty as though it were not; it has not, wills not, wants not, works not, gets not.”

Obedience, or as one often used to say, “obedience to the Divine Will”, means only that I cease to insist on my will, that is, that I cease to insist on myself. “Do not strive to seek after the true, only cease to cherish opinions.” My ego is the site of idols which disturb more than I am ever able to realize, opinions which are mine (and true!), images which drive my will in all possible, often pleasant, directions. Obedience means only (only?) that I let them go, I may still use them, but I cease worshiping them.

I am not the master and I am obedient – eventually, this means that I am nothing. Not having any master and being obedient to nothing, nothing becomes my whole treasure. Nothing is mine, not only things, but even acts, also the spiritual choice is not mine – it happens above me. Even thirst is not mine – it was only given to me as a gift of remembrance. Nothing is all you have, is your only treasure, and “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

We react against ‘obedience’ which berefts us of our ‘autonomy’, just like we think that emptiness is when nobody speaks. But emptiness is when nobody listens, and the whole obedience is to listen to the silence, not to any specific orders. It is to accept that I am not the master, not finding another one nor even barely looking for one. Nothing is the master and obedience is but openness to its gifts, free thankfulness lifted above all particular gifts, as opposed to the free rejection which loses all its autonomy to the degree it insists on it.

Obedience does not follow any specific commands which concern visible world. It follows only one command, the command to become one self, to recognize the presence where nothing can be seen and say Yes. This command reaches only above all visible contents and specific noises, in a moment of silence, a moment of eternity in time – nowhere and never happens more than in such a moment.

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224 Theologia Germanica. XLIII
225 Eckhart
226 Matt. VI:21; Lk. XII:34
3.3.1.iv. Spiritual unity

Yes says that the visible impossibility does not count. In this sense it renounces this 96.
world, renounces its pretensions to absolute validity. Renouncing all visibility leaves only
nothingness, the place where everything can appear anew. But it is no longer a place
divided into this world and another world. Incarnated spirit is the unity of – not only a
borderline between – the visible and invisible. In what does this unity consist, concretely?
In nothing particular. “Damn the flesh that depends on the soul. Damn the soul that
depends on the flesh.”227 The spiritual unity of soul and body, of higher and lower, modifies
but does not change man’s existential situation. Man is a borderline between what is below
and what is above – visible is just the other side of invisible. The unity amounts to concrete
foundation in the origin, openness to seeing the aspect of gift in every actual situation.

Actually, no intention towards the origin is needed, if at all possible. Such an intention is
already an indication of a mistake – the one can not be made correlate of our intentions
or acts, unless it is reduced to some objective from. Intentional acts find place only in the
sphere of visible contents, distinctions which are sharp enough to be turned into reflective
objects, objects of action or of reflection. An act consciously intending ‘goodness’ is not
good. It need not be evil, nor wicked, nor malicious, but it is not pure. The intention of
‘being good’ pollutes every act unless it is withdrawn from the sphere of actuality, unless
it is nothing, an invisible rest. But this means exactly that it is not any intention. ‘Being
good’ emerges, as it were, only as a side-effect of acts which themselves are occupied only
with their actual object and visible relations.

This applies to all higher things which one might try to posit as one’s intentions, even
goals. An act whose main goal is to be compassionate, is not compassionate, just like an
act by which I try to prove and show my freedom is not free. A person focused on making
always ‘right’ decisions may, indeed, happen to make them ‘right’. But he spends time
in constant worry about doing just that. And since ‘right’ is entirely vague category, one
never rests. A person focused on his salvation may happen to do a lot of good things, but
his focus will always bother him: “Has it already happened or not yet?”

Spirit, as a contentless openness to nothingness is purity and poorness. Beyond the actual
objectives, it does not aim at any higher, invisible goals. It does not seek the spiritual, does
not worry about it. This is the only way of its concrete presence. “Blessed are the poor in
spirit.”228 Walking the spiritual paths may be an expression of a genuine spiritual thirst
– but this only means, the absence of spirit. “Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my
footsteps slip not.”229 Any strife, any search, whether spiritual or not, is but a lack. The
more spiritual such a search is, the more it circles around the vague and indefinable that
and the less it is satisfied with any ‘what’. But spiritual search is not spirit. Spirit either
is, either is thoroughly, concretely and absolutely present, or it is not at all, is only some
unidentifiable and ever missing rest.

If we view the ontological founding from Book I as the descent of which mystics and
philosophers of the Neoplatonic orientation spoke, while its lived and understood reflection
in the levels of Being from Book II as the corresponding ascent, then the incarnated love
marks the final and definite return.230 It does not end in a momentaneous illumination, in

227 The Gospel of Thomas. 112. “Hate and lust for things of nature have their roots in man’s lower nature.
Let him not fall under their power: they are the two enemies in his path.” [The Bhagavad-Gita. III:34]
228 Matt. V:3; Lk. VI:20
229 Ps. XVII:5
230 This seems to be the natural way to interpret much of the mystical ascent though, of course, there are
an ecstatic contemplation, in any *actual experience* of mystical union with a constant wish for its repetition. It does not live in *another world*, but it does not have to descend into *this world* either – there is only one world, and *actuality* becomes the scene of constant, concrete presence. The *origin* is no longer remote and separate – *spiritual love* is nothing else except the attitude towards the visible world. *This world* is not only a sign of the other world – it is the only sign, the only form of invisible presence.

### 3.3.1.v. Forgetful remembrance

99. *Spirit* is first of all *humility* towards the spiritual, towards the invisible origin. *Openness* towards *nothing* directs it towards *this visible world* which is the only field of possible *activity* and which is no longer *dissociated* from another world, of which I am not the master. “There is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?” Or, we might add, to *see* what is above him? *Spirit* is the relation to *nothingness* completed in its rest with the mere *that*. As there is nothing more to do about *nothingness* than saying that it is, *spirit* is the *restful return* to this world. To *rest* is to accept the invisible *rest* – to give up all the attempts at making it visible – and in this sense, to *forget* it. *Spirit* is forgetfulness of the spiritual.

100. Thus, *spirit* is the renouncement of *this world* and forgetfulness of the spiritual. Indeed, *nothing* is left. As soon as something more *precise* gets involved, a distinct thought, a specific feeling, the *spirit* seems to evaporate, to lose *actuality* giving place to the flesh – perhaps, to *myself*, perhaps, to *my ego* and body. But I live only in the world of *distinctions* and this withdrawal is spirit’s only *true presence* – it *incarnates* only when the attempts to *actualise* it have ceased. Being *invisible*, it can never become actual, but it can be *present* around and above *actuality* which means, in the very midst of it. If you look to the left, you won’t find it, if you look to the right, you won’t find it, if you look forward or backward, in past or in future, you won’t find it. Because, when you look for it, you have already found it, you only have to stop looking. “[The kingdom] will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, ‘Look, here!’ or ‘Look, there!’ Rather, the Father’s kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people don’t see it.” But ‘to stop looking for it’ is as difficult as it sounds easy.

There is a great difference, which may appear as a paradox, between forgetfulness and forgetfulness, or perhaps, between forgetfulness and denial. Forgetfulness of the spiritual is the deepest remembrance of nothingness – remembrance, however, not in the form of a constant, actual remembering, of incessant focus on the desired, even if impossible, actuality of the spiritual. It is remembrance which, for the first, remembers only nothing,

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*other possibilities. Hermes Trismegistus* is probably one of the clearest examples emphasizing this element of return – not to some sphere *above* but to *this world*: “as below so above” but also “as above so below.”

231[Excl. III:22. Although we will not confuse such remarks with the stoical endurance, which is a matter of resignation and surrender to the world overgoing one’s powers, not of thankfulness for its gift, we may nevertheless notice affinity of expression: “We must make the best use that we can of the things which are in our power, and use the rest according to their nature. What is their nature then? As God may please.” [Epictetus, *The Discourses*. I.1]]

232[The verb “rest” here (and the noun “rest” as ‘tranquility’) is, obviously, something different from the noun “rest” as ‘reminder’ which we have been using earlier. The homonymity, however, serves us perfectly because the equivocation is thoroughly intensional. To rest is to admit, to allow for, to accept the rest.

233[The Gospel of Thomas. 113]

234[This is the source of bad conscience, not yet in any moral sense, but in the spiritual sense which tran-]
only *that* it is, but does not worry constantly about ‘what’ it is; and, for the second, remembrance which itself is not *actual* but thoroughly *invisible*, which does not enter the sphere of *actual* considerations and intentions and does not try to bring the *invisible rest* into explicit *actuality* of *here-and-now*. It is forgetfulness as far as the *actual* occupations of the *subject* are concerned, for these deal only with *visible* things. But as far as *my* being is concerned, it is the remembrance which *I* have become, the *self* which is no longer overshadowed by *my self*, not to mention, by *myself*. *Actual forgetfulness* is the eternal remembrance.

By its very nakedness and *nothingness*, *spirit* grants *actuality* all the validity it possesses as the only place of our acts and works. But to find this place, one has to lose it first. *I* can not have anything which *I* have not already lost. Ibsen says, “Only the lost is eternally owned,” 235 but one might sense here some literal and resentful meaning of loss. Bitterness, closing one’s world in the ever narrower circle of disappointment, is a frequent companion of *attachment* unable to live the *actual* loss. But ‘having lost’ precedes any *actual* loss and amounts rather to suspending its validity without, however, negating it completely. It is more like an intense joy over a minute thing which as if suspends the validity of the whole world. It does not narrow the horizon to the mere *here-and-now*, but rather opens it up – not for all the things in the vicinity, not for all the *visible* things around, but for the *clear* joy, inflow of its rays. “When the heart weeps for what it has lost, the spirit laughs for what it has found.” 236 So also on the other hand, if *I* have not lost *this* whole world, if *I* stay *attached* to it, *I* am not able to fully and deeply enjoy any single thing.

To have some particular thing is to have already lost it, to agree that it is not *mine*, that *I* do not control it. Only then can *I* truly have it. Having already lost it is simply to admit its fragility, which only makes the appreciation greater. Expectation of its possible loss may certainly cause some worry. If, and when, one *actually* loses it, this may certainly cause sorrow and pain. *Spirit* does not abolish such negative moods, thoughts, feelings. On the contrary, it actually *opens* one for their thorough and deep experience. This happens because such worries and sorrows are as real as they are relative, and although they may affect me, they do not affect the tranquil *unity* of the *spirit*.

We are not saying that *spiritual unity* is a tranquiliser, a placebo against finite failures and *actual* dissatisfactions. *Spirit* is a full directedness towards such finite and *visible* things and events, it does not supersede them. It only makes one worry for the things of *this world* without worrying about the ultimate things, without looking for the *absolute* in the *visible*, that is, without establishing *idols*.

It makes one care for all finite things because, having *founded* one’s being in the only *absolute of nothingness*, it allows one to recognise their fundamental fragility. A thing which one could not *possibly* lose (if such a thing existed) would be, or in any case would turn with time …worthless. An eternal life, imagined vulgarly as merely temporally infinite, would be, if not unbearable, then eventually boring. And boredom would not come from the fact that there were no new things to encounter. It would come exactly from the fact that there would be nothing else to encounter than mere novelties. Death is the

235*Brend IV* last scene. “Whoever abandons things as they are accidental possesses them as they are pure being and eternal” [Eckhart *German Sermons* Si.L:10; Ac.I:4. in B. McGinn, ed., *Meister Eckhart*… 16b:29.]

complete return to indistinctness. And it is the knowledge of this ultimate nothingness, of the fragility of all visibility, which makes life so valuable. However, life occupied exclusively with the maintenance of itself, forgetting that, i.e., that there is something more worthy than it, perhaps even something for which it could be sacrificed, becomes a mere social, even a mere biological phenomenon – deindividuated, impersonal, eventually, meaningless. Although it is hardly possible to live fully such an idea, it is possible to actually believe it.

Eventually, only visible things of this world are given to us, so that we can “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” But reducing Being, and what then follows, our being, to such things only, dissociating them from the nothingness of their origin (as is typically the case in the attempts to see, re-cognise and admit the value which they do possess), turns them into dead and empty objects. It makes us forget so that we do not remember. Forgetfulness, too, directs us towards visible things but not as the only and absolute form of Being. Forgetfulness makes us remember that they are only signs, but also that they are the only signs of the invisible. “Know what is in front of your face, and what is hidden from you will be disclosed to you.”

3.3.1.vi. Losing and winning

Non-attachment is the consent to having lost this world, it is Yes which, being directed to nothingness, is unconditional. And just like No, motivated by the attachment to this world, turns it eventually into nothingness, so the apparent renunciation of this world turns out to be Yes to all the visible things. Non-attachment is a concrete presence in the midst of this world. But it is not the goal to make one so concerned with this world – it is only the effect. To achieve it, one has to renounce it, for “the Supreme for which the soul hungers though unable to tell why such a being should stir its longing-reason, however, urging that This at last is the Authentic Term because the Nature best and most to be loved may be found there only where there is no least touch of Form.” Only giving up all the forms, life acquires the ultimate and concrete foundation and so, “whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

We care often for things because we value them to the degree which we do not even realise. We can do good works because our boss, our spouse, other people expect that or because our hidden inhibitions prevent us from doing otherwise. All this has nothing to do with the spirit, even if the externally visible results may be exactly the same. For external results do not give us as deep a satisfaction, as we often would like to believe, and acts performed for the sake of reward are not of spirit but of attachment. But we can also care for things and do good works because there is nothing else to do. We would like to reach the paradise but we know nothing about ways to it except those which, at each

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237 Gen. I:26
238 The Gospel of Thomas. 5. Bluntly put, spirit is the true life of the flesh, but it lives only in and through the flesh. As we learn from the long tradition, one can easily construct contradictions between the two, but easiness as seldom lends any credibility as contradicitions witness to health. Say, a ‘contradiction’ between the defense of the lower, sensible world in Plotinus, Enneads II:9 Against the Gnostics and, on the other hand, passages like V:3.17, footnote 217 and others advocating renunciation of this world. Such contradictions disappear once we observe that what is wrong with the lower, sensible, material, visible world is not its being as such but our attachment to it. The calls to renunciation of this world do not try to negate its reality and even beauty, but only our idolatrous attitude with respect to it.
239 Plotinus, Enneads. VI:7.33 [MacKenna’s translation]
240 Lk. IX:24, XVII:33; Mt. X:39; Jh. XII:25
3.3. Concrete founding

single step, remind of it. Care for finite things, work carried out with conscientiousness, respect and humility, do keep heaven and earth together. Work – hard, tiring, exhaustive work – which has engaged fully body and mind, makes us forget which Forgetfulness finds the expression as respect for ‘the order of things’. At the same time, forgetting thus ourselves, we remember ‘Something’. Sloth is a cardinal sin because there is no such thing as disembodied, non-incarnated spirit, which “bloweth where it listeth” without touching the earth. There is only living, concrete spirit, which unfolds itself in the body, in this world. Dedication and thoroughness, hard work and conscientiousness are not, in any case, not necessarily signs of attachment. More often than not, they are signs of spirit. And as all acts which are expressions of spirit, they also strengthen it. “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.”

To be sure, concrete presence of spirit is nothing common. Perhaps, it is even very rare, though it seems that it is less rare than we want to admit or are able to realise. But the fact that no statistical investigation may ever give a slightest indication of it means only that it is the most real, that is, the most individual and personal possibility – unrepeatable, not because of varying visible conditions but because thoroughly concrete; and always the same, because consummated in the same existential situation, in the face of one nothingness.

3.3.2. Inversions

Before giving some examples of concrete founding, there are a few observations to be made.

Love has unlimited number and forms of incarnation which are always purely personal. Love is a virtual nexus which opens unlimited field of possible manifestations. “Temperance is love surrendering itself wholly to Him who is its object; courage is love bearing all things gladly for the sake of Him who is its object; justice is love serving only Him who is its object, and therefore rightly ruling; prudence is love making wise distinctions between what hinders and what helps itself.” Furthermore, every concrete manifestation of love, although it may seem to express only one or few of its aspects, is always a full expression of all of them. For nexus can not be divided and present only partially; only its aspects can possibly exclude each other from the actuality which they fill, leaving no place for others. Say, modesty may seem a natural example of humility, but it involves equally thankfulness and openness. Modesty is not a servile admission of one’s inferiority. It is a humble gratefulness which does not argue about the qualities and conditions of the gift – one’s own achievements and labor being, too, “nothing more than the finding and collecting of God’s gifts.” And it is grateful for everything it obtains, for a person who is now modest and now not, is simply not modest but only behaves modestly in some situations.

Now, all the aspects of love are predicated adequately about the spiritual attitude, and only analogically about anything within the visible world. Together with the unity of all the aspects in every expression of spiritual love, this may easily give raise to apparent inversions. Roughly, inversion is a manifestation through something which appears as the opposite of the manifested. This happens especially when judged by No, not recognising anything beyond the visible categories of merely human, or egotic, level.

241John III:8
242Prov. XVI:3
243St. Augustine [after A. Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy. V]
244M. Luther, Luther’s Works. 45p.327 [after P. Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther. II:10.1]
Inversions originate in the most general schema of nothingness being (the origin of) everything, which is also reflected in the fact that the apparent renunciation of myself and this world in non-attachment amounts truly to the genuine return to the world. Thirst is a sign of genuine presence, spirit is forgetfulness of the spiritual. The apparent lack may be the true manifestation, albeit in an inverted form. On the other hand, the total absence of spirit is, too, its total forgetfulness. On the surface the two extremes may be indistinguishable, for what separates forgetfulness from forgetfulness, presence from absence, is an invisibly thin line. With respect to the spirit, such lines are the most crucial boundaries and only attachment to visibility will view their expressions as paradoxes which often permeate the language of spirit.

107. Modesty is to do everything one can. Although this is all, it may need an explanation, so let us add: and knowing that one can not do more. My own achievements are also gifts, only ones which I can influence. Waiting resigned for a miraculous gift from heaven has nothing to do with modesty; perhaps with laziness or sloth. An achievement is an inverted form of a gift. Modesty works with full dedication, it employs all the abilities and potential for achievement of its goals. It confronts the task and makes one disappear in the process of this confrontation – one is still here but, in a sense, only for the sake of the task. Modesty is this disappearance of myself. Only having done everything, only meeting the limits, one becomes modest. And when one has done everything one could, one also knows it – for knowing that one can not do more is the same as having done everything one could. The addition of ‘knowing that...’ does not add anything; it only seduces us to think of ‘knowing’ merely as explicit, actual and fully reflective knowing. (It even seduces us to think that what we said may be self-satisfied and detached “I am done with it (‘cos I can’t do anything else.”) Modesty is never done with anything, for it knows that no matter what it has done, more could be done, only that it can not do that.)

A person trying actively to accomplish some task may spend a lot of time and effort in this direction. He may become a highly skilled expert with very high professional standards. From outside, and seen only in abstract terms, it may easily look like he is only craving for reputation, recognition or just for professional achievements of which he could be proud. Although often this may be the case, it certainly does not have to be. Modesty depends on one’s capacities and standards one applies to oneself – if these are exceptionally high, others will rather see ambition and pride. But the person may – though only may – be full of openness and modesty, and what is (typically in the impersonal sphere of gossip, rumours and newspapers) judged as craving and striving may be but dedication, energy and ... true humility.

In short, what appears as arrogance may, in fact, be thankfulness; what appears as preoccupation with one’s little world may, in fact, be openness; what appears as pride may, in fact, be humility. Likewise with the opposite, we never know “under which tempting and affection-rising forms lie can, in spite of everything, penetrate to the deepest layers of || spiritual honesty.”245 One does wisely suspending one’s judgment in such matters.246

245M. Proust, John Ruskin.
246Inversion is more than mere confusion. It is common that, for instance, “vices shew themselves off as virtues, so that niggardiness would fain appear as frugality, extravagance as liberality, cruelty as righteous zeal, laxity as loving-kindness.” [St. Gregory the Great, Epistles. Book I:XXV. To John, Bishop of Constantinople, and the Other Patriarchs [Also, The Book of Pastoral Rule... II:9]] Inversions can indeed give rise to misunderstandings, but it is their inherent feature that what is manifested appears actually as its opposite. They are more adequately described by St. Augustine: “A father beats a boy, and a boy-stealer caresses. If thou name the two things, blows and caresses, who would not choose the caresses, and
3.3. Concrete founding

Humility – pride

"But if there were one in hell who should get quit of his self-will and call nothing his own, he would come out of hell into heaven."\(^{247}\) Spiritual choice recognizes oneself as nothingness, admitting not only that I am not the master but that, in fact, I am nothing. If I think that I am anything – no matter what, wise or not-wise, good or bad, rich or poor – I am still attached to ‘images’. “I am a son of X. These are my relatives. I am happy. I am unhappy, I am an idiot, I am a leader, I am pious, I have a relative, I was born, I died, I am old, I am a criminal.”\(^{248}\) If I use any names, not only for the invisible, but also for myself, I think that I am something.

Saying, on the other hand, that I am nothing and, perhaps also, that nothingness is the origin, can be construed as proud detachment attempting to rise itself above all such things of fundamental value to most people. One can even attempt to construe love and humility bordering on holiness as simple egoism, exclusive preoccupation with one’s own self and one’s own salvation – for “that love occupies the highest place in the hierarchy of egoisms does not change the fact that it is egoistic.”\(^{249}\) However, calling holiness of love for “egoism” is to deny it. Holiness does appear as something higher and, perhaps, distant but, at the same time, it is never absolute ‘otherness’ separated from us by an impassable distance. On the contrary, it always embraces everything around itself as if telling to everybody: that art thou, too. But not hearing this silent voice, one will think the distance to be infinite, and see detachment instead of presence. The humility of non-attachment, indeed, brings one above this world – not, however, in any sense of despising this world, of contempt for human weaknesses and vanity of all things, but only in the sense of not accepting anything visible as absolute. Humility is founded in the face of nothingness – it is humble in the face of visible things because they are its gifts and nothingness penetrates their whole actuality. Thus, its actual manifestations can indeed be felt as a proud challenge. They need not bear the appearance of obvious humility, inferiority and self-depreciation of an ascetic, if not also a Franciscan, flavor.\(^{250}\) Just like the ambiguous modesty mentioned above, humility may appear, in the eyes of the world, as its exact inversion; instead of non-attachment, one can see detachment, instead of humility – pride raising its head above this world.

Passivity – alertness

Openness founds concrete presence, in fact, omnipresence of God in all situations which, visible and limited to the horizon of actuality as they are, emerge from the invisible origin. Every meeting, with a person, with a situation, with a problem, is a gift; sometimes, a challenge, sometimes, but a pleasant confirmation, sometimes a plain disaster. No matter what the specific character of this meeting, I should be thankful for it because, at the bottom of it, the very fact of being able to meet something deserves deepest gratitude, and decline the blows? If thou mark the persons, it is charity that bears, iniquity that caresses. See what we are insisting upon; that the deeds of men are only discerned by the root of charity. For many things may be done that have a good appearance, and yet proceed not from the root of charity. For thorns also have flowers: some actions truly seem rough, seem savage; howbeit they are done for discipline at the bidding of charity.” [St. Augustine, Homilies on the First Epistle of John. VII:8]

\(^{247}\) Theologia Germanica. LI

\(^{248}\) Saṅkara [after R. Otto, The Mysticism of East and West. B:II.1.2]

\(^{249}\) M. Proust, John Ruskin.

\(^{250}\) It took St. Bonaventura, doctor subtilis John Duns Scotus, venerabilis inceptor Ockham and few other Friars Minor to overcome the view, inherited after St. Francis’, which contemplated knowledge for being a sign of pride.
because every such meeting is also a meeting with the origin.

This thankfulness, however, does not mean that I am to fall flat and thank God for bestowing on me yet another disastrous gift. The spiritual passivity is only to stop cherishing opinions, to stop idolising oneself. It is not to stop discriminating. Being annoyed, being displeased, being disgusted are impressions and feelings one need not get rid of – they are feelings of human saints as much as of human wretches. To be thankful for particulars is to stop absolutising them, to meet them with all the respect they deserve as signs of the origin, and then to try to place them on the right shelf in 'the order of things'. And if I have no clue where something belongs, then it can stay where it is, at least for the time being. Valuing things we also value our life and express our gratitude. The alertness and presence of mind is just the steady preparedness to meet things with such an attitude. It is founded in the transcendent openness, but it concerns all the immanent, particular things. The spiritual thankfulness might seem to imply passive acceptance of everything but, as a matter of fact, it is the opposite of slothful passivity or mere aestheticism – it founds active and vigilant attitude to all actual situations.

110. Weakness – strength

Strength isn’t much more than such an open alertness. It is not strength of will, it is not strength of abilities but just that – strength, preparedness to meet everything with equal tranquillity and openness, to face things and be ready to handle them or, as the case may be, to be defeated by them. One is strong when one has learnt that it is impossible to lose, no matter what defeat one might suffer.

This secure determination equals its meek openness. Strength has nothing to do with hardness, with the defensive, self-protective shell one can, often with ingenious inventiveness, rise as if in an anticipation of all possible dangers. Hardness is but an extreme case of false security which spends years on designing schemes and laws of things making everything fit neatly here and there, on the right or on the wrong side, and which, eventually, realises that the whole scheme was but a construction; security which, in the most unexpected moment, in the moment of uttermost complacency, is suddenly surprised, and that means defeated, to the bottom of its scheme. The fear of unexpected, natural as it might be, and which we might call insecurity, is founded in false security, in closedness of No, which tries to build walls, houses, cities and yet, all the time, knows that there still may be something it did not take into account, although it has no idea what it might be. Rising cities, it thirsts for the woods and fears fires...

Hardness assumes that one has to protect oneself against potentially harmful, dangerous situations. Strength sees the possible dangers, too, but its purpose is not to protect itself. Greatness displays strength. “Great man […] is strong […] but he does not desire power. That which he desires is realisation of his intention: realisation of spirit. For this realisation he needs, of course, power because power – if we clean this notion of the dytyramic pathos in which Nietzsche enveloped it – means nothing else but simply the ability to realise that what one desires to realise.”251 Greatness does not seek itself, but involves the ability to realise the ‘objective’ intention. Strength, too, will attempt to realise the intention, to maintain ‘the order of things’, but it will not be weakened, as greatness would be, by its failure. Strength founded in humility may appear strange but is always unmistakable. It may be associated with the abilities to posit and reach particular goals, but its strangeness consists in that it does not depend on such abilities. Failing, it perseveres because what it attempts to achieve is not merely a particular actuality but an expression of the invisible

251 M. Buber, The Problem of Man, p.55
command, realisation of spirit. Strength is the infinite patience which is possible only because it knows the eternal presence. (Patience, able to wait for a particular event, in a constant conflict between the expectation of the future and the current situation, in short, living the tension between the non-actual and actual, is a visible form of strength.) Eventually, it is the strength of not expecting anything particular, of not feeling that one is entitled to this or that, of having given up everything and, therefore, having regained it. It is strength which does not have to search because it has already found, which does not have to fight because it already has everything.

Above the world – in its midst

All the inversions may be seen as variations of the apparent opposition transcendence–immanence. One is fully both: remaining indistinct above the world, it is the rest ever present between any distinctions. Dissociating these two aspects is the common mistake which may be, partly, blamed on the inverted form of manifestations. Dissociating the transcendent aspect of the one yields an abstract idea of some static and immobile, incomprehensible ground. “This ground is some homogeneous silence which remains immobile in itself. And yet from this immobility all things are set into motion and all things receive life, all which live suprasensorily, silently in themselves.” The motion belongs apparently to the visible world, but the opposition immobile-mobile – like that of transcendent-immanent, one-many and most others – is but a construction; it may be required by the actual discourse, but it is harmful when its terms get dissociated.

The inversions are no contradictions but only reflective expressions of the unity of the respective aspects: thirst is the sign of presence, forgetfulness is the way of remembering, strength is the sign of humility, vigilant alertness of thankfulness, and rising above the world, in the genuine sense, amounts to nothing but a full return into its midst. “In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword.”

3.3.3. Examples

The examples of concrete presence will confronted with the possible variations of the respective experiences which are not concretely founded. The main abstract difference between the two is that the former, originating in the nothingness, span the whole hierarchy of Being, while the latter are limited to the current level at which they unfold. They may have all the amiable appearances of this level but they are unable to reach beyond it, as if cutting the hierarchy at this point, and so remain incomplete, thirsting for ‘Something’.

3.3.3.i. Love

4. Love at the level of invisible, the spiritual love was described in section 3.2, in particular, §§61–68 and §§75–78. It is the gift of grace helped by a reflective attitude of the whole person, which passes from nothingness towards the visible world, in the unity of humility, thankfulness, openness, as well as other aspects which never exhaust its reality. All these aspects are not related to any particular region of Being but found the unbroken continuity throughout this and another world. The concrete founding of love amounts also to concrete founding of the unity of the world which ceases to be split into this and another one. This unity, of the world, and of oneself, in the open confrontation with the origin, is the

253Job V:20
genuine sense of any actual experiences of unio mystica. It is the same as love and "[i]t is therefore wrong to reproach the mystics, as has been done sometimes, because they use love's language. It is their by right. Others only borrow it."254

113. 3. At the level of mineness, such a love will find expressions as a living love with which the soul embraces the world or, perhaps, its particular region. The most obvious example is personal love. Love of another person can have many degenerate forms, but in its true form it is never a focusing on this only person with the exclusion of everything and everybody else. A true love of another person is impossible without the presence of the underlying love. Love between two people is always immersed into something bigger, something which only the lovers share and which, in its concrete and invisible presence, makes their love offensive to the social law and customs, bringing the lovers out of this world, like the magic of the fatal drink, and then the woods of Morois, to which Tristan and Isult have to flee from the king Mark's court.

Personal love is the highest form of relation with another, because it is the ultimate form of sharing - sharing the origin. It is thus not really a relation but being, as one says, "being together". As the meeting with another person in the face of the common foundation, personal love is a true communion, the communion of sharing the origin. The two lovers are meeting with something third, something above them both, which lends its meaning and depth to their mutual relation, that is, their being. And in all their sharing - of life, that is of the world, of time, of works and days, of joys and sorrows - this founding element, this indefinable rest remains always present as an invisible guarantor of their actual love. Offering thus each other only visible uncertainties of daily life, they raise from them a rock solid house.

The concreteness of such a personal love may involve fascination with this or that feature, this or that characteristic of another person, but all such features are but attractive accidents - they may be needed for one to fall in love, but they do not constitute the exclusive foundation of this love. For love is directed toward the whole person, which means, toward the person as transcending all particular features and particular ways of being and behaving - the person as the center and origin of all such particulars. I do not divide the loved person into aspects and traits and decide to love her because of a, b, c and d. If I can tell why I love a person, then I do not love. Sure, I can list a long series of agreeable and wonderful features of this person, but if this list exhausts the reasons, then this is a calculation rather than love.255

Love of a person is love of the whole person, the person seen as the site of incarnation and this person's "features, activities, abilities are included into love's object because they belong to this particular person."256 In this respect "the loved one is impeccable in his vesture at the very beginning of being, because nothing lowers nor stains him in the first moment of his revelation and being."257 One can see all the negative sides of the loved person, but to the extent one loves the person, these are only lower aspects, possible failures

255 Analogous remarks concern friendship in Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics VIII:3 [1156b]; IX:1 [1164a].
256 M. Scheler, The Nature of Sympathy. B:III
which, as a matter of fact, can be even charming.

The matter is quite different with a love which is not founded in love, but which stops at the level of mineness.

The lower we descend into this world, the more strength of will may be needed to stay true to the inspirations and to nourish the constant intensity of feelings. But the strength of will is needed only to the extent the original commands get clouded by the lower aspects. The very attempts at nourishing and keeping the intensity of the beginnings are already expressions of a loss, that is, expressions of attachment, attachment to the past. Whether I insist on my feelings, my expectations, my goals it is all attachment to the visibility of the past – whether by attempts to preserve it or negate it – which has separated me from the invisible source of love. Such an attachment actually ‘divides’ the loved person, puts ‘+’ at a, b, c, d and ‘−’ at f, g, h, and when the calculus of ‘+’s and ‘−’s yields a negative result, I become disappointed … with the person. The disappointments reflect only the fact that my love was not directed towards the whole person – it was cultivated and maintained not for the sake of the loved person, but for my own sake. Only preoccupation with oneself – with its common form of the sense of entitlement underlying all expectations – encounters disappointments; only nourishing my own image, can I imagine that the world owes me anything. Disappointment is not a consequence of such an attitude – it is its inherent aspect. And when the traces of one’s commitments do not reach beyond the level of mineness, such disappointments can indeed seem to sum up to the whole person who, because of f, g and h, is no longer worthy of one’s love.

There are no disappointments if, instead of expectations, one nourishes hope. Hope is the lack of expectations, unreserved openness, patience which does not await. Love is full of hope not because it all the time awaits something new and better, but because it does not – it already has everything. It knows that all the particulars need leniency, respectful openness and acceptance. But such a true patience and care for things and people are not ontological gifts of the origin. They are founded only in the deepest humility and openness. If they are not, the patience and respect will, sooner or later, reach the end and then only laziness can prevent them from jumping to new conclusions.

2. Personal love, which at the level of actuality and ego may also be expressed through infatuation, embraces things and situations lending them the character of enchantment and agreeable vitality. This may be a mere feeling, a series of impressions which change and pass as soon as infatuation goes away. As Eckhart says about the emotional and sensible love, it “does not unify. True, it unites in act; but it does not unite in essence.” The ‘unity in essence’ is not any emotion, is not a mere infatuation but a lasting love, which immerses the loved one, and the whole world shared with the loved one, in a peaceful presence. The traces of another’s personality, expressed in actual situations, transform them into a joy of participation. Even situations which otherwise might be inattractive or repulsive, acquire this character through the presence of the loved ones.

The spiritual love is a constant inspiration for the lower levels, an inspiration to embrace, strengthen and invigorate – whether the loved person or the things towards which it turns at a given moment. It is manifested through care and respect for things, as well

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258A simple example is a love through which I merely seek a compensation of some fundamental lack on my part. Not (necessarily) a lack of strength or intelligence or success, but a fundamental lack – the emptiness at the bottom of my soul which the other person would fill, the uncanny loneliness which the other person would cure, the undefinable dissatisfaction with my life which the other person would calm, the thirst... All romanticizing apotheosis of privacy and tragicism of love is built on this scheme.

259Eckhart [after A. Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy. V]
as for the particular behaviors, feelings and reactions of the loved person.\textsuperscript{260} This care and respect need not, of course, mean unconditional acceptance of everything the loved one does. But all particulars which one finds blamable are placed at the level to which they belong, at the level of actual failures, and in no way diminish one’s love. As we know, the blindness of love may not see, and if it sees will excuse, many things which others find inexcusable. Shall we say that this blindness is what we have called an inspiration from above? Not necessarily because a mere infatuation may have similar effect. But it does exemplify the general way of concrete founding, that is, transformation of the events at the lower levels by the concrete events at the higher ones.

116. Love at the level of actuality which is not spiritually founded, will be directed at things, typically, things which I want to possess, which is just an expression of idealisation of my ego as the highest value. It is hard to recognise any true love in narcissistic self-idolatry, but even such extreme forms of egotism may hide themselves behind the appearances of love. Not recognising anything higher than the actuality of ego and visibility of its objects, one can still yearn for love and this yearning may easily find occasional expressions of less egotist character. But these will only be occasional expressions, constantly confused by the tyranny of egotist impulses.

Another person is no longer loved only for my sake, honestly though confusedly, but for the sake of some particular thing. “I love her smile”, “I love her meekness”, “I love her determinacy”, no matter what particulars happen to arise the reaction, it is only a reaction, it is only a response to an actual fascination which is cherished for the sake of satisfaction it gives me.

117. At the lowest level of immediacy, love, like anything else, finds only the most momentaneous expressions. Sex may provide a very good example, since the infinite gap separating the purely carnal sex from the event of making love to a loved person will be equally clear to all who have experienced both extremes and to many who have not. The sensuous pleasure is not necessarily spiritually founded in any higher order of things, but it is tremendously modified if such a founding has taken place. On the one extreme, it may be a mere moment of escape from the unbearable suffering, a moment of sudden meeting with eternity in the midst of confusion and evil, like is for instance experienced by the war time lovers of Remarque. It may be even more desperate attempt to convince oneself that, after all, there are good things in life, things which, in the brief moments of pleasure let one forget about the otherwise empty and desperate life. All such moments do provide the pleasure they promise, but the pleasure turns out to be insufficient to calm the soul. And then there remains only more pleasure, more intensity, more – “the cry of a mistaken soul”. On the other extreme, a sensuous pleasure of a moment can be embraced by the context of mutual respect and understanding, and, at the deepest level, of the ineffable love which, by a lucky coincidence, found an incarnation in the other person, in this very moment, like

\textsuperscript{260}This is perhaps obvious, but let us emphasize that this care and respect are quite different from Heidegger’s care – Sorge. Sorge, that is, “the Being of Dasein ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world) […] is used in a purely ontologico-existential manner. From this signification every tendency of Being which one might have in mind ontically, such as worry or carefreeness, is ruled out.” [M. Heidegger, Being and Time. p.192.] This corresponds more closely to our horizon of experience, with its spatio-temporal actuality confronted with the non-actual, which precedes the constitution of time and separate experiences. Care and respect we are talking about here are, to use Heidegger’s terminology, precisely ‘ontical tendencies’ which Dasein may or may not realise.
an inexplicable gift which never ceases to surprise and please.

We will not try to reduce such considerations to a mere contextuality of actual experiences. 118. The context of an experience is more of other experiences, and a well experienced and well paid where can create such a context. One can only buy moments, actualities, separate, scattered parts. But such parts, and contexts which are their complexes, especially if they are merely bought, will never sum up to an experience which in a single moment traverses the whole hierarchy of Being and reaches smoothly to the deepest intimacy of transcendent presence. One does not reach the origin by taking, one after another, the same single step at a time, even though taking one step at a time is all we can do. In all pleasant delusions, which I bought or arranged, which I find purposeful and satisfying, I always also know – if only I do not ask too intensely – that they are but momentaneous pleasures, delights of a hedonist, real because actual and insufficient, perhaps even empty and unrewarding, because only actual.

There is no such thing as a single experience which is not permeated by the whole Being, and it would be as useless to focus on this fact as it is impossible to ignore and forget it. There is no such thing as a true moment of love, unless this moment is immersed in the texture (not context) of body, ego, soul and spirit, which all together agree on the humility of love – in an agreement which goes beyond the bottom of one’s soul and heart, where the spiritual love incarnates. Only this whole texture lends the actual moment its full meaning, only it makes up its quiddity, makes it this concrete experience rather than that. No visible rules can ever grasp this distinction with the adequacy and precision the actual reason might desire. And yet, everybody knows it and most people can also recognise it.

3.3.3.ii. The communion

Communion is sharing and that which is shared determines the character of the communion, in particular, whom the communion includes and the way in which the others are experienced. Nature and the physical world is not ours, we share it with all the physical things and living organisms, and this is a form of communion. We share more with animals than with dead things, and more with higher animals than with lower ones. We share quite a lot with all other people, but there are always special people, friends, family, the loved ones with whom we share much more than with the mass of anonymous individuals.

That which is shared is not to be confused with that which is merely common. Common – in its full ambiguity of universal and ordinary – is the objective version to which sharing reduces when seen only from the perspective of actuality. What is ‘common’ can not be shared, it can only be multiplied, like a universal instantiated in many particulars, like the sexual drive, common to most animals but never shared by any two. Looking for most ‘common’ features and traits which, as one thinks, would promote the most universal communication or the sense of community, leads only to reducing everything to the least common denominator, to that which being the most universal is also the most ordinary. Such a search for universality is an attempt to capture more, to overcome the horizontal transcendence – it may be useful, but never concrete.

Sharing, on the other hand, refers always to the vertical transcendence, what is shared is eventually above me. Sharing is not a relation between individuals, but being-together, that is, participating-together in the one and the same.

4. The ultimate communion is sharing the origin, which does not get multiplied and distributed between many, but which remains one, undivided and indistinguishable. That I
have the origin does not mean that it is mine. It means only that I have originated, that I was born – the origin remains above me, and thus can never be mine, it is mine as much as it is yours. In the expressions like “having the origin”, the word “having” does not express the possession but its opposite: participation.

Having the origin is the same as sharing it, for everything has originated from nothingness. It thus founds the highest form of communion, the communion of participation, that is, of being. The origin is shared – with whom? With nobody in particular, with nothing, that is, with everybody. This communion permeates the whole world, includes all the people, all visible and invisible things, everything which is. It is perhaps a form of mysticism, the exact opposite of the detachment from this world, the deepest form of communion which announces “That art thou”, which encounters everything sub specie aeternitas, as a manifestation of the same origin.

Metempsychoysis is perhaps one of the oldest expressions of the feeling of such a communion. But it is only a conceptualisation, is the experienced unity brought to the level of visible signs, perhaps, to an attempted explanation. “For I was once already boy and girl, //Thicket and bird, and mute fish in the waves.”261 Interpreting such pronunciations as declarations of metempsychoysis is a vast over-interpretation. They express genuine feelings, but ones which manifest only something transcending any expression, that is, something which may be present also without any expression. One could hardly postulate migration of souls without recognising that also animals and even things possess souls, that they too participate in one and the same. Metempsychoysis is but an image of this recognition and hence, eventually, of the experienced unity. And likewise, its images are the feelings of universal life and ensoulment, “knowing that all things have their emanations,”262 the sense of deep kinship which permeates us and lets things grow into and out of us:

Durch alle Wesen reicht der eine Raum:
Weltinnenraum. Die Vögel fliegen still
durch uns hindurch. O, der ich wachsen will,
ich seh hinaus, und in mir wächst der Baum. 263

Noticing the presence of such feelings we are not pointing in the direction of any pantheisms and, in case of doubt, one may consult again 1:6.2.2. But we accept their witness to the communion. Sharing the origin has also a more primordial aspect, without any pantheistic connotations, namely, that of origin sharing itself. The world is a result of dissociations, of objectivisation and externalisation, but it is also the world unified in its nature of a gift. This nature means exactly that it is shared – not by me with others, but with me as a gift of transcendence. As a gift, the world is not only distinct from me but is not mine at all – it is shared with me by its origin. As such a gift of the world, the confrontation with the origin is the primordial communion. This communion of the origin sharing itself, the existential confrontation which is not opposition but openness, can be called the dialogical character of existence. The concrete God, the incarnated Godhead, is thus the one who shares the gift, Thou who communicate, a partner of a dialogue, albeit a dialogue with no words, the silent dialogue which existence conducts with its origin. “Every concrete hour which, with its world content and destiny, is allotted to a person, is a noteworthy language.”264

261Emepedocles DK 31B117
262Emepedocles DK 31B89
263R. M. Rilke, Es winkt zu Fühlung...
264M. Buber, Dialog. I.Verantwortung.
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As was observed in II:§105, the higher things are also those which admit of more unconditional sharing, which are less diminished by being shared among more. Since the origin is common to all, it is most intimately shared by all, we all participate in one and the same source from which our lives and worlds originate. This spiritual sharing is not sharing of this or that, but is sharing of the origin. To the extent we truly share any actual things or moments, any visible entities which by and in themselves can only be multiplied or divided but not shared, we do so only in the light of this invisible communion.

3. The center of personal being, the emergence from the confrontation with the origin, has thus the character of a dialogue, of a confrontation with another. This other is not, however, any foreign otherness but the most concrete Thou, in the face of whom I become myself. “Man becomes self through Thou.” This primordial dialogue, when expressed at the level of mineness, as a dialogue with another person, amounts not to exchanging opinions, observations and views of life, not even to agreeing on any such issues, but to the recognition of sharing the origin, of participation in the same, higher sphere of Being. The genuine community is simply recognition of the communion. Recognition, of course, is not necessarily re-cognition and has basis in the rest of original signs, in the sense of unity only vaguely discernible in the background of actual intentions. “It seems to me that both in the order of (atemporal) founding of functions and in the order of genetic development, the feeling of unity <is the fundament> of sympathy [Nachfühlen].”

Thankfulness for the gift of life and world amounts to trust and fidelity, for acceptance of everything leaves simply nothing to mistrust. In the same way, the community of this gift is also the concrete foundation of the mutual trust. At the bottom, it is only the recognition that, eventually, the other is a person like myself, sharing the same origin, thirst and all significant spheres of experience. “Acceptance of the sameness of reality conditions the spontaneous emergence of love to a human being, that is, love to a being only because he is <human>.” Not only love, but any truly personal relation – of love or deep admiration, of dedication or respectful enmity – is based on such a recognition. In a bit different words, it requires recognition of the whole person, that is, recognition that the other reveals to me something that is so intimately mine, that it is impossible to draw any border telling where his ends and mine begins. The deepest truths of my existence are reflected in such relations to the others, for the community of our differences is concretely founded only in the sameness of the origin. What is so reflected, what is being shared, might seem to be both mine and yours but, as a matter of fact, it is neither mine nor yours, for it is shared only by being above us both.

‘Recognition and apprehension of the whole person’ is exactly to see this person as sharing the origin, as having an invisible pact with God, just like the one I have. ‘Human life touches the absolute through its ‘dialogical character’; [...] man can become whole not through a relation to his own self but only through a relation to another self. This other self may be equally limited and conditioned as he is, but in being together one experiences that which is unlimited and unconditional.” Buberian emphasis on the dialogical element is obviously concerned with the experience and the form of the experienced, which we certainly can accept. But we are more concerned with the foundation of such experiences

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265M. Buber, I and You. I.
266M. Scheler, The Nature of Sympathy. A:VIa. Scheler’s Nachfühlen means, literally and inelegantly, re-feeling (or feeling-after) and is intended as an emotional re-presentation of an object or another’s experience. It is, in turn the fundament of empathy, Mitfühlen, literally, co-feeling, feeling-with.
267Ibid. A:VIc
268M. Buber, The Problem of Man. II:1.5
which, as also Buber maintains, is the unconditional, the absolute. The experience of a genuine dialogue is often also an experience of the unconditional. But the unconditional presence is not the object of such an experience—it is the rest experienced only along the actual situation, through the meeting with the other. It is the participation in the absolute which founds ontologically such experiences, and only the genuine openness of Yes which founds their concrete possibility.

This founding can be expressed by saying that the community is established always via way of something shared. “If we both see that that which thou sayest is true, and if we both see that what I say is true, where, I ask, do we see it? Certainly not I in thee, nor thou in me, but both in the unchangeable truth itself which is above our minds.”

In the deepest respects you understand me only because you already participate in what I might want to communicate, because we only exchange actual signs of something which we share. In the words of Leibniz, this ultimately shared is the presence of God: “in simple substances this influence of one monad over another is only ideal, and it can have its effect only through the intervention of God.”

In short, if one monad communicates with another, it is only because the other is not such an ultimate stranger as some preachers of ‘otherness’—opposing with certain right the centuries of sameness, leveling off and evening out—would like to see him. If not at the sociological level (which can rightly nourish much of the ‘otherness’ talk), then certainly at the human level the other is, in the deepest respects, the same. The other is the same as you—only another. One birth, like every absolute beginning, is virtually the same as any other—only numerically distinct. Sure, he is a different person, with whom you even may be unable to communicate—not to mention, to agree. But communication and agreement have all too often been degenerated to a petty accord of opinions, if not a sheer coincidence of wordings, to deserve some censuring. One can not understand the other by the sheer act of accepting his otherness. Accepting otherness means nothing else but searching deeper into oneself (which is not looking for more discoveries about oneself but searching for the harmony of and in one’s self). One can understand the other only because, at the bottom both share the most fundamental aspects of human existence: eventually, they share the

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269 Dialogues with other persons do not exhaust such experiences. An unexpected recognition may often give rise to it, as when we suddenly get swept by the immense beauty of a landscape. An experience in which the fact of encounter comes strongly forth, involves often equally the sense of unity. These two aspects together constitute the dialogical character of experience. Mystical experiences provide many examples, while here is a bit more mundane case of a similar force: “From a low hill in this broad savanna a magnificent prospect opened out to us. To the very brink of the horizon we saw gigantic herds of animals: gazelle, antelope, gnu, zebra, warthog, and so on. Grazing, heads nodding, the herds moved forward like slow rivers. There was scarcely any sound save the melancholy cry of a bird of prey. This was the stillness of the eternal beginning, the world as it had always been, in the state of non-being; for until then no one had been present to know that it was this world. I walked away from my companions until I had put them out of sight, and savored the feeling of being entirely alone.” [A. Jaffe, ed., Memories, Dreams, Reflections of C. G. Jung. [after E. F. Eitingon, The Creation of Consciousness, p.14-15]]

270 St. Augustine, Confessions. XII:25

271 G. W. Leibniz, The Monadology. 51. (With all possible reservations against the particular ways in which Leibniz imagined God and this ‘intervention.’) Let us also quote the philosopher of the dialogue expressing the same thought: “Above and below are tied to each other. His word, who attempts to speak to man, without speaking to God, does not fulfill itself…” [M. Buber, Dialog. I:Och und unen. The sentence continues: “but his word, who attempts to speak to God, without speaking to man, goes astray.” Concrete founding of communion means that, existentially, the spiritual Yes and the true communion with others are indistinguishable, or better, co-extensional—whenever there is the one, the other is too. But we are a bit more pedantic than Buber—the dialogue with origin, the concrete founding is still founding, and it founds a whole nexus of aspects of which communion with others is only one.]
3.3. Concrete founding

origin, stand before the same God.

Now, of course, community has also the inter-personal, cultural or sociological dimension. The above, universally human community becomes relativised as sharing concerns more specific contents. But it is all the way founded on sharing. It is not so that, for instance, problems or enemies create community; at best, only common problems and common enemies do. But in order to be common they must threaten some shared dimension, that is, they only reveal, make visible the community which has already existed.

It is essential for a community to share something which transcends mere actuality, only such sharing can found any community. A group of mere common interests, an actual group which shares only a hobby or a problem, is not a community. Any group of only actual common goals or interests is as relative and transient as these goals and interests themselves – it may be only a surrogate of a community. A community transcends any actual horizons, as does a cultural tradition, a nation, a tribe, a family. I once heard a native American saying to his children: “White people have been here for 500 years, we have been here for 15,000 years. They make choices based on what seems cool and advantageous to them but this is not how we make our choices. We have got this land and we have to care for it for future generations. Our private wishes are not what counts most.” Belonging to a tribe is to share in its world which is far greater than mine. It is to be only a member of a community which transcends the sphere of my life. The respect shown for one’s land and its tradition is an expression of sharing something which does not belong to anybody, which is greater than me and you, than our ancestors and successors. Similarly, the respect for the ancestors, or generally for the history (of the nation, tribe, family), is an expression of the constitutive role of the transcendence – not only the mythological beginnings, but the whole past of the community lies beyond our actual grasp, and its great moments express and witness to the unity of the shared ethos and origin. Only a transcendent element can be shared. Ultimately, it is the origin, but in the more particular cases as those just addressed, it is still transcendence beyond any private or communal actuality. For actual, immanent contents can not be shared, they can be only divided, exchanged, multiplied. And where one can get more only if another gets less, we are no longer speaking about community founded in sharing but about a commercial enterprise, a concretely unfounded community.

At the personal level, the unfounded community recognises the other as you but not as Thou. You may be an equal partner, perhaps a guide or a friend, with whom I can establish a community through interaction and sharing values, views, life-style, something more than mere goals and contents dictated only by the actual situation. But as long

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272 In terms of the mere objective time and the sheer numbers this might seem to be much more of a ‘community’ than the personal relations which concern us. However, we do not study sociology, nor even the individual reflections of a social domain. Such a reflection is possible only because the individual is already a dialogical being, capable of genuine sharing independently from the form of community into which he is born. Moreover, it is the personal relations which open most directly the sphere of community in the face of the same origin. The tribal, communal, social, traditional organisation will first of all veil and entangle the direct, original signs of sharing into the objective – and hence both lasting but also less readable - forms of symbols and other reflective signs. To become a member of a community means often to decipher the codes of its tradition in a way which allows me to live them satisfactorily, that is, with a personal conviction but also with a full respect, though not unreserved openness, to other traditions.

273 One might be tempted to see in various encounters with uros, in much of the science-fiction frenzy and in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence, the signs reflecting a relatively high level of global consciousness which sees humankind as a unity but, scared by its apparent emptiness, that is, lacking foundation, still needs ‘another’, a ‘common neighbour’ if not enemy, as its external and objective guarantor.
as not concretely founded, this remains an incomplete relation. The relation will carry
the negative counterparts to those listed in §122: I may recognise you as simply different
person, without recognising that we share the origin, I may reduce the shared to something
merely common, eventually, some actual contents which tend towards objective and egotic
characteristics. Thus our relation, bereft of higher foundation, becomes afraid of every
conflict at the level of actual opinions and decisions, becomes threatened by more and
more minute details, like ebbing love often does. As always, whatever is not concretely
founded, which in particular means, founded in something higher, tends toward its lower

Unfounded communion at the level of mineness is still sharing. It is not, however,
sharing something higher but sharing myself, whatever I happen to understand by this at
the moment. I can dedicate my activities to a common good, to a beneficial work for the
society, I can become personally engaged – but in all that I share only myself. Focusing
on the categories of mineness, I will tend to oppose selfishness to unselfishness, the circle of
my private life and interests to the good and interests of others, and the engagement into
the latter will easily assume a character of a sacrifice on my part. No matter how possibly
useful and socially valuable, such an attitude, called by Kierkegaard “ethical”, finds itself
in a constant conflict which it is unable to resolve otherwise than by negating it or turning
my attachment into an idol of my generosity, my benevolence, my self-sacrifice.

But as “one cannot will into void,” all my dedication must be directed towards
some positive contents and values. A common form of this is ‘identification’ with one’s
community, various cases of communal or, perhaps, communistic consciousness, when the
abstractly universal good and interests of this community become one’s highest values.
When one’s community – tribe, nation, class, religion – becomes the only source of truth
then, indeed, nationalism or tribal consciousness acquire unhealthy form of ethnocentrism.
Such an absolutisation of a relative is possible only because one does not recognise its
foundation in a deeper, higher sphere – here it ends, there is nothing above, and this is
the last, highest value, its final form.

125. As a matter of fact, not only dogmatic nationalism or class consciousness but, equally,
relativism is an example of such an idolatry, of the inability to recognise any higher value
above the multitude of visible differences. It differs from ego- and ethnocentrism only in
that it avoids absolutisation of one particular ethos. But staying at the same level, it is only
its complementary and inverted side which does not reach any deeper. Its characterization
at the personal level, with which we begin, will apply also to cultural relativism.

“Every person coming to the world brings something new, something that has never
existed before, something original and unrepeatable. [...] Every man is a new event in the
world and is called to fulfill his uniqueness on earth.”

274 M. Buber, Man’s way according to the Chassid teaching. p.22
275 E. Lévinas, Beyond the Slutans. [after M.-A. Ouaknin, Ouvertures hassidiques.] (The following is only
an elaboration of this expression which, for Lévinas’ part, we would be willing to take as a bit unfortunate
metaphor. Accusing him of pantheism and relativism would certainly be unjust, though shadows of both
can be occasionally discerned behind eschatological predilections and Kabbalistic inspirations.)
see the reappearing tension between One and Many, which tries to disappear in the close relationship between the perspectivism of the latter and the pantheistic understanding of the former. This last quote suggests that the absolute is somehow the sum of the individual perspectives. But such a sum is only a posited totality, not anything absolute, it is the vertical transcendence of the one thought in terms of the horizontal transcendence, of a totality of multiple actual manifestations. The unrepeatability of every man is founded in the very confrontation with the absolute; it does not merely add a bit to its actualisation. But taken in the merely horizontal dimension, it turns indeed into the ultimate relativism, where the absolute aspect of every separate existence does not carry more weight than that of the actually different contents, of one actual part of the whole. Like all the attempts to reduce the absolute to the actual, it results in delegating the absolute not only to the sphere of transcendence (where it indeed resides) but also out of the sphere of immanence, outside the horizon of anything an individual might ever confront with full concreteness.

We follow only the first of the above quotes. The uniqueness and unrepeatability of every existence not only does not exclude the confrontation with the absolute but is founded exactly in it. Every existence is a reflection of the same absolute, not a part of it, but an absolute image, imago Dei. The images may differ without ceasing to be the images of the same and without implying that only their sum total catches the glimpse of what they reflect. “And just as the same town when seen from different sides will seem quite different, and as it were multiplied perspectively, the same thing happens here: because of the infinite multitude of simple substances it is as if there were as many different universes; but they are all perspectives on the same one, according to the different point of view of each monad.”276 The differences of perspectives emerge with the visible contents where, indeed, every one may have his own view and understanding. However, ignoring the lowest and most trivial cases, these differences do not result from any subjective choices. At the bottom of it, nobody decides which perspective he will entertain – one’s perspective is an integral aspect of one’s concrete existence and evolves along with it. Above all, it concerns only visibles, for even our understanding of the invisibles and absolute is only actuality of visibles. Consequently, all these differences never sum up to give any whole, because the absolute is not any totality of visibles. All the actual differences are equally founded in one and the same, and all existences are equally confronted with it. To reach this confrontation no addition is needed, because the absolute is not any totality of differentiated contents, but their prior unity. If one does not find the full weight, truth and concreteness of the absolute in the existence of a single individual, one will not obtain it in their society.277

Looking for the absolute in any totality is to absolutise the visible differences, which we have termed pantheism. Relativism is but a variation on this theme which absolutises not only the differences but also the absence of any higher values which might still be visible. It is the inability to recognise anything higher than the visible divisions, only combined with the inability to sign the doom which narrow-minded egocentrism or ethnocentrism
pronounces on all otherness. This inability is simply a sign of lacking self-respect, of the fact that one’s or one’s own community’s values are not so convincing and deep as that one is thinking for. Genuine respect in disagreement, recognition of other values which I do not share, can be founded only in sharing of their source. If such a source is not found while, at the same time, one feels uneasy absolutising the mine with all its historical and social contingency, then indeed, the only possibility is to state relativity of all visible signs. This relativity of relativism is not, however, the relativity of the actual sign anchored in the absolute origin but, on the contrary, the mere arbitrariness of this sign as opposed to that sign. Relativism is grounded in the inability to find anything higher than the multiplicity of actual signs. The problem with relativism (a bit like with negative theology) is not that it is too extreme but, on the contrary, that it does not go far enough. Relativism is idolatry which seems and claims to have escaped all idols. It does not put this value/nation/group/...in front of that, it does not idolise this by putting it above that. It does not. But it idolises some level of, usually, visible distinctions as the absolute one, above which no more sharing can possibly obtain.

Now, one can be proud of belonging to one’s nation, one can be even willing to sacrifice one’s life for it, but if this nation is the deepest value which one is capable to recognise then it will easily end in nationalism of a dubious shade. However, one may be proud of that and, at the same time, recognise the possibility of others being proud of belonging to their nations and even of some not bothering about such a thing at all. The conflict between one ethos and another may be of fundamental character but for the most it is a conflict resting on the absolutisation of visible expressions, of the signs which merely announce, always only in one particular form, the invisible presence which is truly shared. One can live thoroughly the values of one’s cultural or religious formation and, at the same time, recognise equally thorough validity of other values. But for this recognition to be genuine and honest, one must first find the true inspiration in the values one is living, that is, to recognise their spiritual foundation. To respect other ethos or religion is to recognise its genuine foundation. But to do this, one has to, in the first place, be able to recognise it at all. “[W]e must have [first] given all our attention, all our faith, all our love to a particular religion in order to [be able to] think of any other religion with the high degree of attention, faith, and love that is proper to it.”278 Such a recognition of, at once, relativity and absolute foundation, is not perhaps common, but is far from impossible.

Just like all visibility is founded in the invisible, so all presence of the absolute is interwoven into the matter of this world. There is no other way of participation than through some form of tradition, historical consciousness and involvement into the actual world. Only through visibility is the invisible present. The task is to recognise the manifestations of this presence in the world in which one is living. The multiplicity of religions expresses only the unavoidable incarnation of the invisible in the visible. And to the extent these are true religions (that is, to the extent they, recognizing the invisible origin above this world, gather individuals and not masses) they all provide ways to rebirth and salvation. The fact that somebody born in Tibet does it on the way of Buddhism, while somebody born in Europe on the way of Christianity, does not in any way diminish the ultimate sharing. This sharing, however, does not mean uniform agreement. It is possible only by living one’s own, concretely founded ethos, for the differences between cultural and religious formations, relative as they are, are thoroughly real. Originating in the same, they reach the level of actuality where all our acts take place. To the extent one lives an ethos

of a community, one can live only one such at a time, and whoever tries to live more than one, ends up living none. But there is no need to live more than one, because each true ethos is a full expression of all levels of Being. If one does not find it here, one won’t find it there. It takes an analphabet to believe that the Truth is written somewhere else. The inability to recognise the deepest values embodied in one’s culture underlies the escape towards ‘otherness’ and its ‘truth’. It is only a stage of relativism which, despairing over insufficiency of its visible means, absolutises some others. And having gone that far, the convert turns against his old ethos with the determination and dogmatism characteristic only for the converts. Because what he found is only a new context for unfolding his unquenched thirst, not a true, concrete foundation. If he found the latter, he would see that it has been here all the time. True religion is a form of ultimate sharing, and finding it one place, one recognises it everywhere. But if one does not find it, one keeps looking and, in the course of deeper and deeper disappointments, one can eventually start believing that it is nowhere to be found, and that one should get rid of the ladder, having climbed on it to the roof of this ‘insight’ in the relativity and mere auxiliary role of all ladders.

2. The actual expressions of founded communion amount to sharing the actual experiences, situations, problems, joys and sorrows, pains and satisfactions. A multitude of acts can express sharing – acts of cooperation and exchange, of compassion and helpfulness, of criticism and appraisal... Such acts address the actual situation involving, perhaps, the other’s problem or achievement. This problem or achievement is not something which belongs to the other and is privately his, just like your problem is not merely yours – they are just that: problems, achievements, sorrows, joys. When you meet them, they are simply there and become yours by arising your reaction. They are shared to the extent you recognise their objective character and do not focus on the fact of their belonging only to the other. The strongest form of such sharing is actually living the same experience, for instance, the loss of a beloved child by parents or more trivial examples of a team sharing, along with the same goals, the successes and defeats in their realisation. The same structure underlies genuine sharing experiences which, phenomenologically, belong initially to other person. Meeting a smile, a joyful spark in the other’s eyes, a happy moment in his life, you do not share it by observing it, concluding that it belongs to another, and then deciding to participate in it. Neither do you participate in it by trying to evoke the feelings and impressions the other might have. To the extent you participate in it, to the extent you share it, the fact that it is another’s and not yours is thoroughly real, yet of negligible importance: a part of the world, the actual situation is shared and it is neither his nor yours. And although reflection will tell you that there is a sharp distinction, you know that it is not telling the whole truth.

Sharing other’s joys and happiness expresses genuine communion no less than sharing other’s problems for, as we know, envy of other’s happiness divides often more strongly than the mere laziness in stretching a helping hand. Let us, however, use as an example compassion. It is not any feeling which has to be aroused in order to reproduce another’s pain. Actual communion is not a mere empathy, a mere emotional identification with that which is other’s. Reducing actual communion to empathy, misconstrued as entering into another’s feelings, is a subjectivistic reduction, which not only misses completely the nature of the phenomenon but also precludes the subject from leaving its solipsistic universe. In fact, compassion need not be (though it often is) accompanied by any specific feelings. Feelings, moods and impressions are only signs – as all signs – of something transcendent, that is, not reduced to their subjective immediacy. They reveal an aspect of the world and
point to something which can also be revealed in other ways. People with apparently cool and unemotional personality are capable of perfectly compassionate attitudes and acts, no less so than others. Sharing expressed in an act of compassion need not be accompanied by any specific feelings – but it must be concrete! It must spring from the depth of the person, from the recognition of the need of it, of the call from the actual situation. The fact that one can genuinely feel with another, pain or joy, is secondary to the fact that one relates to the same sphere of the world from which his pain or joy arises. One does not feel his pain, and one does not even try to imagine it. One feels one’s pain which participates in the same – shared – painful experience as does his pain. Whether this experience is given also through other forms (for instance, knowing why he is in pain, or why he should be even if he does not seem to be) or only through his painful expression, is only of secondary and minimal importance. Compassion addresses the same experience to which his reaction was pain.

As it happens, shared pain diminishes. “Pain is alleviated when friends share the sorrow.” Of course, one might say, the pain of the one who suffered first, but not of the one who joins in. But no, the pain of both or, let it be allowed to say, the total amount of pain. Pain and suffering is not any invisible truth which only increases by being shared. On the contrary, particular pain – just like money – diminishes when it is shared with another, it becomes divided between all who share it. For the other, who comes with compassionate support, it diminishes to the same extent as it diminishes for the one who was suffering. For what motivated compassion was pain which he experienced, perhaps in a very different way from the one actually suffering, but still entirely and really. Moreover, genuine compassion comes with the voluntary acceptance of the pain. This acceptance does not intend any compassion. It is a mere act, a mere answer to the call which is founded in – we may say, dedicated exclusively to – the ultimate communion, that is, Yes for which pain is not evil but trial.

128. In a given situation, compassion is directed exclusively and completely towards the person and yet, in a sense, it is completely ‘impersonal’. This ‘impersonality’, however, is an expression of deepest respect for the person. The situation where, for instance, one acts compassionately towards the suffering person but only because and in so far as he is a member of … one’s family or group is not an example of a genuine compassion. The suffering person is the absolute center of the situation and compassion is an expression of the ultimate communion – with this person. “It is not so that «compassion – as such – is shameless», as Nietzsche says, but compassion without love towards the one whom we compassionate. […] Therefore we notice also that every expression of compassion without love to the person is felt as a brutality.”

279 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics. IX:11 [1171a]
280 Avoiding pain is natural and it could be used to motivate avoiding compassion which amounts to sharing it. The above says that, on the contrary, sharing does not amount to seeking pain but to its diminishing. True compassion results always in help. Moreover, there is a difference between avoiding and escaping, between not looking for pain and turning away in the face of it. In the latter case it is already too late and this is the case where compassion is called for. Escaping from actually encountered pain is like escaping from suffering which, as said in §20, is a source of alienation.
the ‘impersonal’ non-attachment which, in a sense, disregards who this person actually is, expresses the concret foundation of compassion in love transcending and thoroughly permeating actuality.

This expresses only the concrete foundation, not any universality of compassion, of which the present person would be only ‘an instance’. Compassion is a property of acts, not of life. It is not like love which, underneath every act and activity, extends to the whole world. Suggesting such a universality of compassion, as done for instance in M. de Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life, amounts also to suggesting that the whole world is in a soar need for it, that the whole world is a scene of all embracing misery and that life has only tragic sense. Such an exaggerated compassion, a category of actuality applied to the whole world, is but an exaggerated feeling which comes closer to patronising in its lack of the basic thankfulness. Compassion does not pity anybody nor anything, for pity hides some lack of respect, we could say, pity is compassion without respect. Compassion does not pity the tragic sense of life, the unbearable and unavoidable involvement into the evil of the world, the corruption of one’s soul. It arises only in actual situations which call for it and, otherwise, knows that everything is a gift, though some of these gifts may be harder to carry than others.

As described in 3.3.2, concrete founding of acts can often be expressed by an apparent inversion. Recognising and accepting the whole person, concrete communion may (sometimes even should) lack the unconditional acceptance of everything the other person does. Critique and disagreement is possible – in full friendship or love – only when the community is not reduced to the level of the actual situation, to one’s feelings and acts. Only because it is founded in the recognition of the personal value, in the deeper community of values and, eventually, of the origin, it can judge the act without judging the person. The unfounded community of mere actuality will often do the opposite and acclaim everything the other does, like confused parent or teacher following guidelines of all too liberal pedagogy. One feels forced to accept every actual wish and expression of the other because, without any deeper foundation, everything one is able to relate to are actual expressions, whether of genuine needs or of mere whims. Thus, although one still strives for a deeper community, one remains confused by the traces which do not reach to their true origin but stop at the level of actual impressions of the ego dissociated from the person.

Without such a deeper foundation, ego remains a dissociated atom, a pure subjectivity, reduced to the privacy of its actual feelings and thoughts which – not only etymologically – amounts to privation. Ego without concrete foundation is the archetype of alienation, whose frequent actual form is loneliness. Loneliness is another side of privacy, a result of the other having been pressed outside the sphere of my privacy and reduced to a mere aspect of my situation, perhaps, still an active subject but not one to whom I have any personal relation – the other becomes a mere ‘he’. It can be an anonymous adversary in a situation where, although himself present, he functions only as a ‘third person’, a mere factor in the actual game. This is the way we often relate to clerks or salespersons, when the whole contact is reduced to an impersonal relation dictated by the actual context. The communication is a mere matter of routine exchange or else of gaining control over the external factors which, accidentally, can also be embodied in another person. Exactly the same superficiality characterises cocktail-parties which have the more jolly and merry surface, the more despair and hardship is trying to hide under it. One often seeks a merry company as a medicine against bad mood. In such a company, however, one does not so

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2824 *Privare* means ‘to deprive’ and its passive participle, “*privatus*”, serves also as adjective and noun.
much share the good mood as is infected by it. Such a contagious, often heavy, atmosphere characterises all forms of actuality in which the participants, wishing for a community, almost force themselves to actually share something, overcoming the felt alienation in the depersonalising power of a trance: a discotheque, a politically agitating meeting, an orgy, a gambling hall, a sermon of televangelist.  

Sartre's novels and plays provide extreme examples of such a community which is a mere multiplicity of alienated, mutually external egos. Being and Nothingness gives a systematic description of the absolutised subjectivity failing to establish any meaningful form of community, of the constant attempts of the for-itself to turn another into an objectified and devitalised in-itself. Even love reduced for the poor man to a mere masterslave dialectic between dissociated subjectivities trying to subdue each other. This, of course, leads nowhere as benefiting from another's submissive acts establishes perhaps dependence, but not any communion. And even if the other's acts are voluntary and made of good will, they do not necessarily open for me the door to participation in any communion. For the strongest bonds knit us not with people who did us good but with those to whom we did some good – and the bonds are the tighter, the more good we do to them. Receiving gifts or services, made of good will alone, is a much more difficult art than one commonly imagines. Genuine freedom is required to receive gifts without becoming inferior (for shamelessness can protect only against the mere sense of inferiority). When such a freedom is missing, obtaining more from others is weighted only against giving more from oneself, with the resulting attempts to either subdue others or to protect oneself against them – in either case, the alienation of increasing loneliness.

At the social scale, the lack of concrete foundation results in the total anonymity which invades the threatened and alienated ego. As alienation is the loss of concreteness, so community gets now reduced to a mass of statistically anonymous individuals. The fear of anonymity is but a reflection of the missing sense of community. The apparent medicine against it is...success, public recognition and attention which puts a photograph in place of the lost face. This has also a deeper aspect. Dreams of exceptional achievements, of leaving one's mark for the future development, of becoming socially/politically/scientifically/...respectable, as one's own monument in one's home town – all such egotic thrills, which often indeed form the ground for outstanding achievements, are but expressions of the thirst for community which got reduced to the purely egotic hope of establishing an exceptional, even if only ephemeral case against the background of statistical mediocrity, that is, anonymity. As if the most common sign of mediocrity were not exactly the dream of being exceptional. To be exceptional is ego's only dream, its degenerate expression of the thirst for becoming self. Although such dreams express the need to confirm ego's uniqueness, their second bottom is thirst for community. As the common universality is mistaken for the lacking community and public respectability for the lacking self-respect, alienated ego searches only for becoming a public persona, even though public is only the anonymous crowd.

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283The classic of G. Le Bon, The Crowd, provides excellent descriptions of the involved mechanisms.

284The custom of potlatch (M. Mauss, The Gift), amounting to almost destructive competition in surpassing the generosity of the received gift by the returned one, can be viewed as a social expression of the psychological dependence of the recipient. On the other extreme, there are societies where the fear of owing anything makes it almost unthinkable to receive any, especially minor, service from a stranger without immediately paying one's debt.

285We are speaking about both the anonymity of a crowd of faceless units and the anonymity of my being lost in such a crowd. The two are aspects of the same anonymity.
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The anonymous crowd, which an individual confronts instead of a meaningful community, is not a simple result of the increased numbers, of the mass pseudo-culture which flattens and deindividualises the social sphere. It is rather the other way around – the anonymous mass confronts individual who dwells exclusively at the level of his ego and, consequently, loses the concrete sense of belonging to a community.286 The unfounded community at the level of actuality is an anonymous crowd.

Communication.

Sharing the signs and actualities amounts to communication. We say “sharing” because although all signs are actual and situations are common to more people, it does not mean that every actual situation involves and every sign is a genuine communication. The unfounded communication would be a mere transfer or exchange, and not sharing, of the signs. The immediacy of signs makes them perfectly amenable to direct exchange. But communication is not an event of exchanging signs, not even of exchanging them according to some specified rules and protocols. It is not an event of exchanging any signs but of comprehending them, of recognising the shared reality above the actual signs.

Communication is a possible visible manifestation of sharing; the more we share with others, the easier and more complete is the possible communication. We do not communicate that well with bacteria or butterflies. They have quite different structure of experience; their world has few common points with ours. We communicate a bit better with cats or dogs; we and they perceive some of the same things as obstacles. We also find in them more advanced expressions of ‘feelings’ than can be found in ants or butterflies. Their experiences cut the background along the lines sufficiently similar to ours and provide them with a lot of things which we too distinguish and recognise. So, perhaps after all, “if a lion could speak, we might understand him,”287 though it certainly would not be the same degree of communication as we can achieve with any human being. And, of course, we communicate very differently with different people. “Each word means something slightly different to each person, even among those who share the same cultural background.”288

This, however, in no way makes communication impossible, in fact, it is what makes it different from an exchange of information bits. We can understand words which for another mean something different because we share the reality to which they refer. Eventually, communication is like pointing and eventual answer to the question “What do you mean?”, after a series of clarifications and explanations, is simply “This is what I mean, just look here.” It is an event of narrowing down the shared horizon (of humanity, language, culture, personal experience) to the actual content and, by the same token, of endowing this actuality with meaning – the meaning of belonging to the concrete and shared horizon.

Perfect unambiguity of expressions and ultimate precision of the language is the domain of computer programming but whenever something is communicated, it can also, at least in principle, be misunderstood. The possibility of misunderstanding is a necessary condition of a successful communication, that is, of conveying some meaning which goes beyond the

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286 We do not negate the statistical prevalence of negative and alienating effects of various social diseases, like inhuman working forms, depersonalised public sphere or its spiritual emptiness. We would perhaps suggest that, to begin with, such forms are rather expressions of the egotic mentality raised to the social norm. But most importantly, alien and anonymous crowd may confront individual under any circumstances, if only the individual reduces his life project to the level of ego. Also under unfavorable social conditions (like those just mentioned), it is eventually the individual himself who has to consent to the reduction of person to ego.

287 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. (modified)

immediacy of the sign. It is only the lack of shared background which makes precision of all signs ultimate necessity – for where nothing is shared one can only exchange signs. As Wittgenstein observed, even an ostensive definition would be impossible without sharing enough to understand what the other is actually pointing at. “Whoever has seen, knows what I am saying” was a phrase used by a mystery-initiate when addressing others: perhaps, to avoid divulging secrets but more probably because details would not help those who have not seen. We “need not be surprised if only those ideas which least belong to us can be adequately expressed in words.” And by “adequately” one likes to mean unambiguously, precisely, excluding any possibility of misunderstanding. According to Kierkegaard, there is no direct communication, and although he too would limit this statement to the deeper truths of the genuine faith, we would extend it to all communication. For communication is conditioned by sharing: in its presence, many different signs or words may be used, while in its absence no words will result in communication.

This remains valid through all the levels. The most intimate communication is founded on the most intimate communion. It is only at the personal level, and only with an individual person, that full communion is possible and it leads to very specific ways of communicating, intentionally as well as not, most intricate aspects. But they are communicated not due to any univocal precision, not due to universal adequacy of the used signs – signs are here always inadequate. Just like a symbol may seem an almost arbitrary and accidental representation of the symbolised reality, so here too, an apparently most insignificant word, a mere look, a sheer grimace or gesture, a casual phrase, can actually carry the deepest meaning. It does not, however, happen because the signs somehow carry this meaning in them, but only because the possibility of this meaning is shared before it has been pointed to. The art of communication does not consist in the ability to interpret the unclear signs by narrowing their meaning to the most precise content, but rather on the contrary, in the ability to use the actually precise signs to grasp the imprecise (and often clear) meaning which transcends their immediacy.

132. Wittgenstein used to ask questions like: How can I be sure that saying “green”, I and you understand what is being said, in particular, understand the same thing? The problem is of course with ‘the same’. But this problem arises only when one is committed to some form of psychologism, to some private impressions and ideas which somehow live within one’s subjectivity, and which get, rather mysteriously, transferred between the monads by words like “green”. But every event of a successful communication is founded on recognition – the actual and mutual re-cognition follows only the recognition of shared background.

If by the meaning (of “green”) we understand some intrinsic properties, some impression or idea of greenness perceived or imagined inside one’s head, then indeed, it may be impossible to be sure. But ‘green’ is only a limit of distinctions made in one, made by you and me in the same one. The limits may vary from person to person (just like Prague may end at different points for different people, just like stripes of the rainbow interpenetrate) but these variations retain a major overlap. We agree on the use of the words because we share the common reality and structure our experiences in similar ways. (As we said earlier, I:§23, learning a language itself contributes significantly to, but does not determine, this structuring.) In the same way, though to a much lesser degree, we agree on the use of various signs with dogs. Communication, “this influence of one monad over another is only ideal, and it can have its effect only through the intervention of God.” This ‘intervention of God’ is not any mystical interference of some magical power, but the fact

289H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*. II
of, at first, only ontological foundation in the one, of having the same origin, and then also of concretely sharing the same reality.\textsuperscript{290}

One might still wonder: we agree on the use of the words, but do we agree on their meaning? “With most names, we’ve come to know which things they go together with from their use in speech, although we are unable to determine what the correct meaning or understanding of them is.”\textsuperscript{291} A variant of empiricism, say “linguistic empiricism”, would attempt to reduce the latter to the former, even to replace ‘meaning’ by ‘use’. The more the mood of such a project seems different from that of behaviourism, the more surprising is the similarity of the goals and procedures. “Why is it not possible for me to doubt that I have never been on the moon? [...] But if anyone were to doubt it, how would his doubt come out in practice? And couldn’t we peacefully leave him to doubt it, since it makes no difference at all?”\textsuperscript{292} We certainly could but, the absence of any observable difference in social praxis notwithstanding, could one reasonably claim that there would be no difference for the person having such doubts? The ‘difference for the person’ need not have anything to do with what the person actually, practically does. One can deny any such difference for the involved person only by denying the reality of the doubt, or in a more extreme case, by claiming its impossibility, perhaps, on the basis of the impossibility of the private doubt and, eventually, meanings. The linguistic empiricism tries to dissolve the phantom of the extra-linguistic meaning in the inter-subjectivity of the language usage or social praxis. But sharing is much more than merely obeying similar rules of social or linguistic praxis. If we did not share anything, how could we even agree on the consistent use of any rules? Just like communion requires a distance, so sharing some reality requires this reality to be present, as if independently, with all who are sharing it. It is only because we all share most of the world (practically or impractically, actually or not), that actual communication – transfer of and agreement on some meaning – is possible and may even result in new forms of experience.\textsuperscript{293}

\textsuperscript{290}Plotinus thus describes the souls in their intellectual dimension: “as they do everything they do in order and according to nature they would not give orders or advice and would know by intuition what passes from one to another [...] and before one speaks to another that other has seen and understood.” [Plotinus, Enneads, IV.3.18]

\textsuperscript{291}P. Abelard, Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian, II.§399. Let’s only remind that in the medieval grammatical theory ‘names’ included not only nouns but also adjectives (the identification reflecting the corresponding phenomenon of the Latin language). It would be hard to imagine why, in the quoted sentence, one could not allow also all other words.

\textsuperscript{292}L. Wittgenstein, On Certainty, 117/120

\textsuperscript{293}This is particularly plain in communication with children before they acquire mastery of language. They often understand what one means without knowing exactly what one is saying. The shared context, involving also the tone of one’s voice and facial expression, leave often only one possibility of understanding one’s words, even when the words themselves are not yet understood. A crying baby understands the consoling words of the mother only through the loving embrace accompanying them. Only because they share the situation, is it possible for the baby to learn the language from its parents.

A vulgar analogy can be found in computer communication. The transferred bits have no significance unless they are sent and received by programs obeying some protocols which in advance determine the scope of possible communications, as if, the shared space – of use and interpretation. But even following agreed rules is not sufficient for communication beyond mere transfer of messages. It is impossible to establishing so called “common knowledge” without the assumption of a prior sharing of some information. The idea is: you and I want to reach an agreement on the issue ‘x or y?’ but so that each of us knows that we both know that we have reached it. We do not, however, share anything except some communication channels through which we can send messages (say, by post which, to simplify everything, is 100% reliable, though it does not guarantee any time of delivery – I do not know when you will receive nor that you have received my message, unless I obtain a confirmation from you). Suppose I prefer initially x and send you the message 1 : x. Suppose you agree. I do not know that, so you should respond, confirming
"If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either."\footnote{L. Wittgenstein, On Certainty. 114} Allow us to reformulate it as follows: If you do not recognise any distinctions, the mere words and their exchange will not teach you that either. Every expression draws some boundary, either a boundary which, to some degree, already was there (as in descriptions or clarifications) or one which appears only with this expression (as in speech acts). The meaning arises between the actual utterance/reading of the expression and the background which acquires a determination. The meaning of a statement, or any word, is not subjective because to be meaning it must transcend the mere immediacy of the sign. It is not private either because, at least in principle, I am never the only person able to recognise it. And this is the case because all boundaries are drawn in the shared reality, eventually, in the indistinct background of the one.

But I may have doubts which have no consequences for others (nor, in practical matters, even for me), I may go around meaning something which I never manage to communicate to others, I may spend my life intending something which I never manage to express. If this were impossible, communication would be impossible also, or else, communication would not be a reflection of genuine sharing, would not be a conveyance of meanings but a mere exchange of labels, a mere transfer of signs.

133. Just like concretely founded communication rests on sharing conveyed underneath everything actually communicated, the unfounded communication is determined by its lack, that is, the constant fear of failure. As sharing reduces to universality and meaning to its visible expression, one searches for some actual, common basis which, as we learn from many attempts, it is impossible to circumscribe concretely, let alone precisely specify.

The idol of 'rational argumentation' can serve as an example. Trying to convince oneself and others that we are all rational beings (whatever that means), one postulates some ideal goal of rational morality consisting in the unreserved acceptance of rational arguments. One may even insist that it recognises the dignity of humans paying all due respect to their value – which happens to be the same as the value of their rationality.

Let us ignore the fact that there is hardly anything, hardly any action or attitude, which could not be supported by plausible arguments. In some contexts (of which the academy may be the paramount example), openness to other's arguments is certainly a matter of professional ethics. In life, one can also occasionally learn something from listening to other's arguments. But when raised to the level of the fundamental principle it becomes a caricature of genuine communication. Have you ever been convinced by an

\footnote{2: x. Now I know that you agree with me on x, but you do not know that I know that. So, I have to confirm the reception of the confirmation, sending 3 : x. Now, you know that I know, but I do not know that you know that I know. And so on. (The scenario corresponds to theorem 6.1.1 – in R. Fagin et al., Reasoning about Knowledge – which precludes the possibility of achieving common knowledge of anything having been delivered. Stronger versions, e.g., theorem 4.5.4, apply to slightly modified situations where no common knowledge may arise, as a consequence of complete asynchrony of the components.) Misusing such arguments for our purposes, we could say that in the absence of initial sharing, it is not possible to establish it either, even in the presence of most reliable communication, understood as mere transfer of messages (whether mere bits, pictures, 'mental' meanings or deepest ideas). Technically, one reaches the fix-point of the appropriate functional (where everybody knows that everybody knows that everybody knows that... only as the infinite limit which, misinterpreted in practical terms, means that it is unreadable. In short, if we do not initially share knowledge, the mere exchange of messages will never lead to achieving common knowledge. But common knowledge arises trivially if we, for instance, share the same location and both point at the x (observing each other's action) or when we speak directly to each other. In the above example, if we initially shared the knowledge that each message is in fact delivered after, say, 1 minute, then 1 minute after I sent 1 : x we would achieve common knowledge of x.}
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argument? That is, convinced not in some petty matter of this or that, not in the common attempts to come up with a solution to some problem, but in a matter of significance, in a matter having existential relevance. If one believes in God, is it because of an argument? If one does not, is it because of an argument? Doubtful, very doubtful. In this last case, it may rather be because one does not find any argument, and rests satisfied with one’s ‘rationality’. But there are no forcing arguments, or rather, no sufficient reasons. At best, there are only clarifications of meanings, accounts of experience.

At the level of immediacy, physical force or other forms of physical influence (shouting, crying, bad eye) are the only possible ‘arguments’. At the level of actuality, although physical coercion (like lasting torture) is still possible, one has also more complex means of enforcing one’s will and argumentation is one such. But it is still the means of enforcement. For there is very far from listening to another’s arguments to listening to what he is saying and, then, from listening to what he is saying to listening to what he is. This gradual increase of the listening attitude reflects only the decreased level of imposition. One can argue about various general thoughts and even about invisible truths, but such arguing is bound to leave the issues unsettled. For arguments, understood as forcing reasons, have their only legitimate application at the level of actual issues allowing precise enough analysis and arrangement. When applied beyond the sphere of precisely defined, actual problems, they either become an intellectual game or, when taken seriously, boil down to one thing: “Either you are stupid since you do not see that this is right, or else you are respectably rational and accept it.” Argumentation and persuasion, when taken to the extreme, that is, when absolutised are much closer to brute force than they are willing to admit. Appeals to some ‘ideals’, like ‘communicative reason and rationality’, ‘undisturbed rational communication’, ‘tolerance’, ‘solidarity’, etc., are unable to cover up the underlying disrespect for the human being – for the whole human being. The calls to assuming a respectful attitude towards the opponents become necessary, because it has to be added on the top of all arguments, like a meek tablecloth covering a dirty table.

A different example can be that of groups establishing and requiring the use of secret codes. Establishing private codes of communication – words, gestures, expressions which carry the full meaning only to those initiated in the community – is characteristic for lovers and close friends. But their privacy is different from secrecy. In the extreme cases of secret organisations such codes are established for the purpose of hiding the secrets as well as for the confirmation of the identity of the community and its members. Secret initiation rites, secret rituals follow the clandestine operations and hidden purposes. In many situations, secrecy may be understandable and even justified (as, for instance, in the cases of organisations opposing aggression, political oppression and the like) or less so (as in the case of criminal organisations or mere fear of openness). But in either case, the secrecy of the codes signals the broken community, the impossibility or unwillingness to openly found the communication across the social, political or even personal division lines.

Secret codes, being codes, insist on the strictness of the rules – the unambiguity of the greeting sign, the rigidity of the ceremony, the impossibility of deviation from the predetermined sequence of acts or formulae. The less or the shallower is the meaning to communicate, the greater the need for rigid rules, for their precision is the last thing which may give an impression of inter-subjectivity, of sharing anything with the others – provided they follow the same rules! Sick cases are extreme examples of such a reduction to the level of actuality where the ability to follow sequences of sterile and precise signs seems the last residual of communication. Clang associations (“real, seal, deal, heel”) or irrelevant,
though possible, associations (a person sending a new year's greetings and wishing another a fruitful year, ends with the wishes of good apple-year and pear-year, and then sauerkraut, and cabbage year...); difficulties with abstract reasoning and the resulting literal/specific interpretations (e.g., the proverb "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." gets commented: "If you are able to catch a bird you might be able to sell him for money.") – all such symptoms of schizophrenia are also expressions of the communication which gets disturbed by the rigidity of following only plain rules. The disturbance is not the lack of a rule but the lack of anything but the rule. It is not the lack of any meaning but the fact that the whole meaning is only the mere conformance to some rule, that the actually followed rule is the only discernible content of the message. Even more extreme example is a correct but impersonally stiff language which is spoken too perfectly and too grammatically, as if by a person using a foreign language he learned in a classroom; the lack of colloquiality and subtleties of emotional tone; the adequate knowledge and application of the formal rules of the language along with the complete lack of the idea of communication. These defects, extending also to nonverbal communication, characterise some forms of autism.

135. One thing is the study of languages, of their properties and structures; quite another is the obsession with Language. Proliferation of the disciplines and intense investigations in linguistics, semiotics, logic, grammar, parsing, machine translation, etc., etc., can certainly produce valuable results. But they gain paramount relevance for a philosopher primarily when he has lost – or sees the loss of – the sense of any community. Language can be interesting in most circumstances. But it becomes imperatively important when it ceases to function properly, that is, when its foundation, the community which makes communication possible, deteriorates, when the distance to the shared reality becomes impassable because that which is shared gets reduced to that which is common and the clear meanings which might be communicated to the precise means of communication. All that one is still able to hope for is actual agreement, adequacy of the signs, consensus concerning the rules. Fiddling with the language one hopes to improve the actual communication and thus, perhaps, to reestablish the community. But the more intense and precise are the determinations of all the visible signs, the more all the sense of community disappears in the empty cracks between them.\footnote{We would not claim any causal relations, but observing some rough simultaneities is too tempting, even if also too daring. (1) Some parallels to such a coupling of linguisticism and the lack of community might be discerned in Europe in the VII-th and VIII-th century: on the one hand, the final stages of the disappearance of the Roman culture, the gradual dissolution of the Merovingian empire, conflicts between the major domos for the succession after once powerful dynasty; and on the other hand, the conviction that the nature of things are recognisable in the etymology of their names underlying the whole of Isidore of Seville, Etymologies; linguistic arguments for the existence of nothingness in Frigidusus of Tours, On the Being of Nothing and Shadows; Alquen's minuscule and struggle against barbarian, germanized Latin; dealing at the same time with the nature of things and the properties of their names in the encyclopedia of Hrabanus Maurus, De universo. (Even if the two last ones belong to the Carolinian renaissance, they can be seen as contemporaries of the linguistic line.) (2) Around the beginning of the XII-th century, the new money economy and the Gregorian reforms began to yield the divisive and destabilising consequences. The reforms attacking the simony among the clerics opened up, as was claimed, for the emergence and proliferation of the heretical movements, almost absent since the V-th century. At the same time, the increasing interest in language and the study of its foundations develop into the Scholastic grammar with its theory of supposition and, eventually, into Ockham's nominalism vindicating language and logic to the level of ultimate truth-bearers, along with the atomistic ontology. (3) The social disintegration of the XX-th century hardly needs any comments. It is paralleled by the fascination with the philosophy of language, also emergence of formal languages and logic, and the thread leading through logical positivism to analytical philosophy which ends... where it ends. Perhaps, the ecstatic opening to 'otherness', just}
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1. At the lowest level of immediate experiences, communion amounts to sharing the actual moments. With whom? It may be the loved person, or else people who happen to be present. But it need not be anybody in particular, nobody may be actually present. Thankfulness is sharing through participation, and every moment, even if lived in loneliness, is but a gift of the transcendence. Recognition of this gift in a single moment is the same as sharing it with others - whether actually present or not. It is sharing with others because the gift, although given to me, is not mine, is not given only to me.

Although immediacy does not seem to leave the space for any distance, the concrete communion of a moment respects both the distance to the origin of the gift and to the other with whom it is shared. Other, in particular, requires a distance. This platitude seems to be forgotten quite often, so let us repeat - only distance makes otherness possible. The ultimate otherness is constituted by the ultimate confrontation (which is a form of distance). But so is another person - he emerges as another only through and from the distance which separates us. Only distance makes relation possible, and only distance makes being-together possible. The true communion can find an expression in the immediacy of a pure 'now' only if the distance is maintained. The sense and perhaps even the feeling of unity in and of a moment is possible only when the aspect of the distance is retained, when one remembers that it is unity of distinct poles, when we join each other from the distance of distinct individualities. In fact, keeping the trace of this distance in an actual moment is itself enough to experience the unity - at once, of sharing this very moment and of sharing its origin. This distance and otherness, present in the immediacy of a moment which apparently makes it impossible, is the trace of the concretely founded communion.

Expressions of this are as varied as moments one may encounter. It can be, for instance, respect for things in the immediate vicinity, within the horizon of our acts. The care we take for things is not grounded in our infinite love for their absolute value, but in our love for them as particular gifts of the origin. It is love in analogical sense, love which is but an expression of communion. As always, telling one from another, telling such a love from idolatry, is not a matter of any rules and laws, but of concrete, personal presence. What is the ultimate good of this or that thing? Fortunately, there is no general answer, because if there were, our lives would be pretty boring. Petting a cat or watering a plant can hardly be anything evil, but it may be an expression of a quiet pleasure or respectful care or, on the other hand, of a nagging doubt about one's likability or usefulness. In the former case the moment is shared and in the latter stolen.

Exclusive restriction to the level of immediacy is hardly possible. Lack of concrete foundation leaves then hardly any possibility of sharing anything. Things and objects viewed from this level appear as arbitrary events of pure immediacy. Consequently, all kinds of relations between them, as well as between them and the subject, are as if purely nominal, unreal, abstract, indifferent. Appropriation and minute enjoyment can be attempts to establish some immediate community. 'Use-and-throw' attitudes, 'things are for me and I do what I want with them', all forms of disrespectful arrogance acting from the impulse of like the personal spiritualism of the New Age (both with roots reaching at least to the end of the XIX-th century), could be seen as a reaction against the stiffened linguistics and predilections for rigid formalities. The associated cacophony of language looks like a culmination of a century long analytical attempts to heal its metaphysical sickness by... capturing and formalising its essence. Dare we to consider it as yet another analogy? - namely, to the post XII-th century heresies (especially Wyclif's but also most controversies of the time, continued into Reformation, all with an element of gnostic dualism) aiming at replacement of the visible, stiff and degenerate ecclesiastical tradition by the invisible and living church, the true community founded exclusively on the revelation of the absolute 'otherness' - Bible?
the moment are immediate expressions of the unfounded community, that is, of the lack of community.

In terms of relations between people, this lack of foundation amounts to extreme atomicty, to positing every individual as a totally independent ‘it’, dissociated from any context and influences from ‘outside’. The other who has thus become a mere ‘it’ can be encountered just like other things. Everybody may have his private goals and life, but these are not in any way shared which means, other’s life in no way affects mine. “All creatures are born isolated and have no need of one another.”

3.3.3.iii. Freedom

4. We have said in §48 that freedom, in its negative form, is an aspect of pride. This qualification may need some refinement. We are dependent on various things, we have to eat and sleep, etc. We are involved into causal relations of this world but ... it in no way contradicts our freedom. For freedom is not freedom ‘from’ every possible form of dependence but only from enslavement. Freedom which tries to establish itself as a total independence ‘from’ everything, ends up in the blind street of other self-referential paradoxes by realising that it is sentenced to freedom - having proved (to itself) its independence, it cannot escape ‘from’ this very fact, it becomes doomed to this fact. The attempt to rise above, to liberate oneself ‘from’ every possible dependence is exactly an aspect of pride for which every dependence seems a form of slavery. But finding only emptiness above the interplay of visible dependencies, the only project that remains is to keep liberating ‘from’ this, ‘from’ that, ‘from’... It is this negative freedom ‘from’, the insatiable freedom of emptiness which is an aspect of pride.

Liberating oneself ‘from’ this and ‘from’ that has also the aspect of paying back one’s debts. Having borrowed or obtained something makes one feel unfree and settling the accounts one liberates oneself ‘from’ that. Man who owes nothing to anybody stays cool and free, above the pettiness of daily debts, he remains remote, unaffected and ... proud. But freedom is not to pay back all the debts – this is simply impossible, and thankfulness amounts also to the recognition of one’s infinite debt. The freer one is the more one owes, and nothingness of self, owning nothing, owes everything.

On the other hand, some like to remember the unhappy events and days of childhood, complaining about the family and relatives who did not do their due... About the society which did not and does not function to promote personal happiness... About others, met then and now, who take away one’s spare time, money, possibilities of enjoyment, one’s life. So one offers one’s time and energy and imagines that others owe him something. All such complaints can seem justified but their only work is: enslavement. Nobody, and least of all the past, owes anything to a free man.

There is the abyss of freedom, the abyss of nothingness which attracts a slave with the indeterminacy of its emptiness, like a false promise. The dread of this terrifying attraction is the price of the freedom which, equated with emptiness, proves illusory. The true, absolute freedom is not only to possess nothing but also to owe everything. It is equivalent to a surrender, to renouncing oneself, that is, renouncing all claims one might believe to have, all debts others might possibly owe. It is the freedom to accept the undeserved gift, to recognise the absolute character of the command, which in particular means, the

296The destructive character of such an observation relies on the combination of both the negative freedom ‘from’ and the attempts to prove it as an unavoidable truth. But the two easily go together.
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possibility one has to deny it. Having accepted it, the complete lack of actual contents leaves one entirely free to realise it, to give it an adequate actual form. (What form is adequate, however, is too concrete a question to be addressed in such abstract categories.) “God forces no one, for love cannot compel, and God’s service, therefore, is a thing of perfect freedom.”

This freedom to express the invisible, this presence of transcendence in the midst of immanence, is thus not my freedom. As all dimensions of the absolute it simply is, or is not at all, and I can at most participate in it. To be free is to forget one’s freedom. (Let us only remind that forgetfulness is not the same as denial, a mere slipping out of memory or simple blindness, §98.) The Yes, suspending the presumed absoluteness of this world and anchoring my being above it, makes me completely free in relation to it. This freedom is precisely the content of non-attachment, of erasing the dependence on the idols, the visible pretenders to absoluteness. It founds the experience of freedom which permeates my whole being, and which is not contradicted by any problems, obstacles, restrictions at the lower levels. In a sense, it liberates one from the dependence on the visible world simply by abolishing the need to look for the final proofs and ultimate confirmations of freedom there.

This is yet another example of inversion: just like the Yes to Godhead turns out to be the deepest Yes to this world, so the humility and submission to the highest command is the fullest form of freedom. Freedom is not any ‘faculty’, any separate, empty power which could be filled with arbitrary contents, and which, by some universal law of human nature, every soul either possesses or not. It is an aspect of the universal possibility, which everyone may desire or detest, attempt to achieve or neglect, pray for or forget.

3. I cherish my dreams, my images – of happiness, fulfillment, completeness – and stay attached to these idols in constant attempts to find an actual medicine against the thirst. One will say, OK, but these are my images and dreams, and as such they make me free from the external constrains. There may be some psychological truth in that, but of little value. For it only posits this image in order to liberate itself ‘from’ that, it tries to perform the impossible leap and get rid of the externality which is only an aspect of its very subjectivity. This may be a common image of freedom at the level of mineness, of unfounded freedom which sticking to some visible idols is at the same time trying to escape ‘from’ any such dependency.

My freedom, the unfounded freedom of this level, focusing on mineness insists on making one’s own choices, on following one’s own course of actions, on being an authentic Dasein, or else an independent Übermensch. But mineness, which has divided the world into mine and not-mine, is exactly the site of the negative freedom ‘from’, independence ‘from’. Insisting on the independence ‘from’ whatever is not mine, what has not been freely chosen by me, it can only encounter deeper and deeper ‘certitude of abyss’. As it often happens in the face of ultimate emptiness, this negative freedom turns around to seek solace in the things of this world and one can indeed “ask the question if man, following the need of psychological and metaphysical bonds, does not prefer dread over freedom.”

For dread remains only as long as one is staying at a distance and does not plunge into

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297 Hans Denk [after A. Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy, p.93]
298 We are, of course, simplifying tremendously all the references here. For instance, Nietzsche’s Übermensch is supposed to act from the pure positivity of his own, vital energy. But it is still his own and the main emphasis lies on independence, on ‘not being concerned with others’ which, somehow, remains bothered by others being there. Every call to liberation and independence witnesses to enslavement.
299 T. Mann, My Times.
the abyss. Thus dread, real as it is, is only a new idol worshiped for its being so deeply mine and allowing me to remain what I was. Balancing on this edge between freedom ‘from’ this world and dread in its face is the epitome of loneliness and alienation. “You are and... nobody cares” is the eventual truth of this ‘freedom’, so thoroughly described in existentialist literature that it hardly needs more words.

141. I cherish the dreams and images – of happiness, fulfillment, completeness – but all these dreams are like a mist, vague and unclear, in fact, entirely contentless, sheer ghosts. What do you dream of when you dream of happiness? Do you ever dream of happiness? A dream seems to require an image, so perhaps you manage to substitute this or that, but then you also immediately start to suspect that it does not exhaust the meaning of your dream.

The deepest dreams manifest thirst, they aim at the nexus of Yes, and so can be falsified by any attempt to make them too visible. Every image threatens with a reduction of meaning and if it is not kept at the appropriate distance, required by its origin, it becomes a pretension or entitlement. For we are all entitled to happiness, and since this is happiness (for me!), I should be entitled to this. Then I get this and so I should be happy, but I am still not. Or, perhaps, I am eventually happy but then I am not... free. And what is happiness good for, if one is not free? But everybody is entitled to freedom, right? (human right!) so now, what does it mean to be free?

Wrong questions breed wrong distinctions. The mist of happiness, the ghost of fulfillment for which we thirst, is not different from freedom. They are but aspects of the same nexus. Speaking more specifically, we can say that freedom at the level of mineness is non-attachment, is freedom from the slavery to idols, be they images, things or ideas, or else empty words which despair endows with ever more precise meanings – they are all gathered under the idol of mineness. Its ultimate and typical expression is confusion of freedom with my sense of being free, of freedom with my feeling of freedom. Thus attachment trying to realise its freedom only engrosses itself into unfreedom. Freedom, non-attachment, is the total non-entitlement, which is the same as the lack of fear, that is, openness for every gift. And thus freedom is unbreakably bound with meaningfulness which is exactly the concrete presence, openness to vertical transcendence and thankfulness for its gifts. The lack of meaning is also the lack of freedom, just like is the lack of respect.

142. Freedom as a total independence ‘from’ causal relations of this world is an invention of attachment, of attachment to this world which tries to detach itself from it, which tries to liberate itself by rising above it and... still stays in this world, because above it, it finds only emptiness. Causality, this much overemphasized notion, and more significantly the physical existence, the body, the physiology, in short, the whole sphere of most actualised contents, does not in the slightest oppose the freedom because they belong to different levels of existence. But attachment, reducing all that is to what is visible, can not but oppose the two; for it, if there is any freedom, it must be found exclusively within the sphere of visibility.

This involves reflection over freedom into the opposition to determinism. The objective world of complexes is rational and understandable, which eventually means, underlied necessary laws. The celebrated problems of free will emerge as a result of reducing human existence to the same level and considering it only in terms of the objective complex and natural laws. By the same token, the will gets degraded to the egotic ability of freely selecting goals among the objects, complexes and constellations of the world. In this tradition even predestination acquires a form of determination and one has to take recourse to various distinctions like, for instance, between necessity of all events when seen
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from the point of divine knowledge vs. their occurrence through free will when seen in their own nature by human understanding (Boethius). A related distinction of Leibniz' between the absolute necessity (whose opposite would involve a contradiction) and the hypothetical one (which rests on God's foreknowledge and free decision and corresponds, as a matter of fact, to the contingent events of our world), the distinction borrowed from Stoics by Spinoza between free acceptance of the laws vs. unfree because unproductive opposition to them. Necessity and determinism form the ultimately objectified image of our limitations, of the fact that nobody possesses unlimited power enabling him to ‘do as he wishes’, pushed to the ideal limit. And like every ideal limit, it loses contact with the concreteness of existence and becomes only the more troubling and apparently more important, the less relevance it retains. In fact, necessary and inviolable laws would need no observance – this is the essence of their necessity. So confronted with them, the only remnants of free choice would be between 1) rejection and denial, in a childish opposition to the unavoidable, or 2) resolute acceptance and obedience. As rejection of the unavoidable is irrational, true freedom must then amount to expedient use of the laws, to the ability to manipulate and apply them. It is freedom which liberates ‘from’ the necessities of this world only when these can be utilised for one’s own purposes. However, the more necessity, the less content and, eventually, such laws which might be believed to apply unreservedly, get applicable only to more and more precise and objectified contents, II:§§212 ff. In a practical context, this is the way in which money and power give freedom of choice and action, freedom which, mixed with and constantly opposed to the limitations imposed by the surroundings, keeps fighting for its own sake and, at the same time, doubts its ultimate foundation. For overcoming various actual limitations, it suspects some fundamental one, but not finding any visible necessity, it can avoid the ultimate emptiness only by pushing the idea of necessity further and further away from itself.

The problem of freedom and free will is usually posed in the manner of an objective question about some ‘matter at hand’: “Are we or are we not free?” “Is our will free or is it not?” Also such questions lead naturally to what one would consider the ‘real’: the physical world, causality, the natural laws – these give at least a context for speaking about that which ‘is’, and ‘from’ which one might be free. But such questions have only wrong answers. If one says no, all common-sense objects forcefully, if not scholarly. But if one answers yes, gives reasons and arguments showing that, indeed, we are free, then one gets immediately captured into the necessity of this answer which makes one unfree with respect to the (now necessary) law of freedom. However, freedom is not any fact but

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300 This makes, in fact, deterministic necessity into a mere phantom since it becomes merely a property of divine knowledge without any influence on and relevance to human life. Everything happens as if there were no necessity, for God foreknows simply the results of free choices which, in temporal terms, remain undetermined until they are actually made: “if Providence sees an event in its present, that thing must be, though it has no necessity of its own nature. And God looks in His present upon those future things which come to pass through free will. Therefore if these things be looked at from the point of view of God’s insight, they come to pass of necessity under the condition of divine knowledge; if, on the other hand, they are viewed by themselves, they do not lose the perfect freedom of their nature. Without doubt, then, all things that God foreknows do come to pass, but some of them proceed from free will; [...] if they are viewed by themselves, they are perfectly free from all ties of necessity.” [Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy. V]

301 Here, one makes any indeterminacy and freedom a mere illusion. Stoics used the following illustration: “If a dog which wanted to follow the cart were bound to it, then it would both go and be dragged after the cart, doing voluntarily what it must do of necessity; but if it did not want to follow the cart, it would still be forced to do it anyway. The same happens to the humans.” [after W. Szczerba, The Concept of Eternal Return... p.76, footnote 185; Hipól [my retranslation]]
an existential possibility, it is not given, it is not something everybody has or, as the case may be, does not have.

We have, perhaps, liberated ourselves from this mode of speaking, but still, do we not hear, occasionally, talk about the ‘problem of free will’? It can, indeed, be made into a tremendous problem. Here I am, in this world, determined by the laws of nature, and yet I can choose to do this or that, I do have a definite feeling that I have free will. But do I? How is it possible in the world, of which I am a part, which is just a clockwork. OK, we do not believe in this clockwork any more. A stone which hypothetically thinks that it is endeavoring to further its motion as much as it can, a compass needle which desires to move north and opines that it turns itself independently of another cause, or that dog of Stoics which, desiring to follow the cart, was also bound to it so that it followed it both voluntarily and under compulsion – these images do not exercise such a strong influence on our sense of relevance, because the underlying idea of an inescapable mechanism is not so convincing any more. We do not believe in this clockwork any more but we haven’t got anything else to believe in instead. Although we, everybody with his will, are no longer confronted by (an image of) a deterministic clockwork, the doubts concerning freedom seem to persist. The world, perhaps, is a bit more indeterminate than a clockwork, but the question still remains: am I free?

Reduced to the level of actuality, freedom becomes only freedom to choose one course of action rather than another – one asks if the choice is made freely, if the will is free. Will is mine, it is something I have, not something I am; that is, it is an aspect of ego, in fact, the fundamental aspect emphasized always by every egotist being or culture. As ego, so also will is involved into the interplay of all visible distinctions, and all possible relations between them. Trying to liberate itself ‘from’ the visible laws of the visible world, it has only emptiness of indeterminacy and arbitrary choice left. But replacing natural, perhaps even necessary laws by some stochastic processes, by indeterminate laws of social interactions, by Heisenberg’s principle, does not change the least thing, no matter how much one would like to believe that indeterminacy of the world is more pleasing to one’s freedom than its necessity would be. Meaninglessness is an aspect of unfreedom and increasing the indeterminacy of things does rather the opposite than what one would like to believe. It is doubtful if anybody reading Camus, Beckett or Sartre is able to discern any sense of freedom, of genuine freedom. Their free will chooses perhaps freely, that is arbitrarily, but it also seems strangely un-free, captured somewhere between nausea and Sisyphean heaviness. Identifying freedom with the freedom of choices amounts to a tremendous reduction of the idea to the momentaneous quality of a single act. The shadow of arbitrariness, which always appears in the background of such discussion, is only to be expected. Do we really want to reduce freedom to such actual choices? Any actual decision concerns only more or less petty matters, and the more we insist on deciding ourselves, the pettier we become. Is our freedom the freedom to decide whether we will have an ice-cream or a chocolate? Is this freedom we want to speak about? Is this freedom? In any particular matter, the issue is not to decide oneself but to decide rightly, and freedom of choice has close to nothing to do with that.

Free choice of free will might seem to ensure that my ego manages to detach itself from this world. Perhaps. But detachment is only a form (inversion) of attachment, a despair capable of nothing more than negation.\textsuperscript{302} In fact, one would probably feel much more

\textsuperscript{302}This is the constant association of the theme of freedom and liberation from this world with the variants of detachment and abnegation, whether in the original Orphic and Plutonic, then Manichean, Gnostic and Cathar type, or more modern kinds, of which Heidegger and later existentialists are the prime
unfree in a completely chaotic world, facing the ‘certitude of the abyss’, than in the world of Newton, or even Laplace. Such a world, fully determined by causality (or other law), is only an image and freedom does not amount to overcoming causality or other possible determinations of our acts. Various acts in various situations may be performed under various coercing factors. In fact, ‘[n]o one wills what he can will because he can, without some other cause [...].’ But this does not change the fact that most important human acts have no discernible, visible causes – for causality, as Kant teaches, is a category of mere actuality. (This does not mean that acts are indeterminate and arbitrary – they may not be caused, but they are almost always motivated.) Experience of a free (that is, motivated, and not arbitrary) choice is irrefutable, and so determinism must ignore experience and appeal to some ‘deeper’ aspects, possible theories, splashy images, hidden mechanisms, future investigations. Consequently, possible perhaps as it in principle might be, it remains since millennia a mere postulate – the postulate to figure out all the sufficient and determining causes.

Non-attachment is freedom from attachment but it is not freedom ‘from’ this world. On the contrary, it is only freedom to live and act in this world. Actual freedom is not liberation ‘from’ things and their order but respect for them, that is thankful acceptance.

Because one no longer values any of the visible things as absolutes, that is, one does not expect them to quench the thirst, one can accept them, whether they are one way or another. Accepting things is very different from surrendering to them. Acceptance means here the same as respect. One does not require explanations and one does not require reasons or arguments which is precisely to say: one respects them. They run their course, they may have their logic and it may be highly rewarding to study their ways and to inquire into (not require) their reasons. Freedom is the freedom to do this. Arranging them according to one’s wishes and likings are but petty consequences which may be useful but which have nothing to do with one’s freedom. Freedom, true freedom, is freedom to respect ‘the order of things’, for ‘no Thing is contrary to God; no creature nor creature’s work, nor anything that we can name or think of is contrary to God or displeasing to Him, but only disobedience and the disobedient man.”

Disobedience is but another word for attachment; attachment which worships instead of respecting, and thus remains enslaved in the midst of its search for liberation. Just like one actuality excludes another, so one idol opposes and tries to avoid or defeat another. Any attempt to escape from this or that, and the eventual form of the attempt to liberate oneself ‘from’ the whole order of things and this world, is an expression of attachment, of an involvement which makes this world the only reference frame, of the underlying feeling of enslavement which sees its only alternative in negation, in detachment. ‘Use-and-throw’ attitudes, ‘things are for me and I do what I want with them’, all forms of disrespectful arrogance are expressions of unfreedom (just as they were expressions of the lacking communion in §137). Also, an inverted attitude, the stoically resigned ‘acceptance of the world’, the realisation that I can not oppose ‘the whole world’ and that therefore it is wiser not to fight against it but humbly accept whatever it brings me, is an expression not of freedom and wisdom but of defeat and surrender. It may look like respect but, typically, it will be a mere servility, a mere observance of all rules, regulations, customs. Although there is nothing wrong with all that in itself, it often carries at its bottom the

example. Shestov’s aggressive opposition of Jerusalem’s faith to the reason of Athens’ would also fall into this category.

303St. Anselm of Canterbury, On the Fall of the Devil. 27
feeling of unfreedom when it is a mere act within this world, a mere defeat in the face of visibility, that is, when it is not concretely founded in the openness to gift of this world.

145. Freedom viewed from the level of unfounded immediacy is hardly anything more than arbitrariness of appearances. This seems to be the character freedom acquires in some forms of idealism, for instance in Fichte’s Ego, and it is quite explicit in Sartrean for-itself. The ideal immediacy of an equally ideal subject leaves no room for anything except spontaneous production, positing, apperception, appearance of arbitrary contents. The only alternative, in which thinking such immediacy inevitably gets itself involved, is between the contents being posited by the subject or else being completely independent from it. Even the laboriously reworked by the categories of understanding contents of Kantian sensations are, eventually, arbitrary elements confronting the subject occupied with its transcendental – and atemporal only because momentaneous – activities. The sense of freedom, whether on the side of the subject or object, is just the spontaneous emergence of contents. It is but a reflection of the reflective act which, dissociating its object from itself and from all the rest, posits it in the ‘freedom’ of arbitrariness.\(^{304}\)

Some original feelings which might be related to such an idealised perspective would present me with the actual situation as absolutely indeterminate. The world seen as a chaotic collection of isolated entities, as a pure play not even of chance but of arbitrariness, the alien and alienated world to which one nevertheless still feels some form of belonging and which one would like to see in an attractive, positive manner, in short, a deep existential crisis, may lead to such a perception of freedom. One day man will go mad to prove that he is free – as Dostoevsky prophesied.\(^{305}\) Mad minuteness is only a step from minute madness which collapses the whole world to immediate proximity. Arbitrary spontaneity of such an isolated moment is the last resort of apparent freedom left to a slave who had to escape that far.

The arbitrariness of all the events and complete lack of control over them provide the grounds for denying that they have any value, that bad is as good – since equally arbitrary – as good, that my only role is to confront and accept whatever is encountered. Let this description not mislead us – it might almost apply to the attitude of thankful acceptance. The difference is that arbitrariness levels and equates all things because they have lost all meaning and become equally empty, while thankfulness accepts all things still differentiating and even choosing between them. As most thinkers, not only of the rational school, always maintained, freedom requires a rational element – it is not an arbitrary choice (which is only the other side of meaninglessness) but one concretely founded in a higher sphere of deeper motivations.

146. Freedom, founded freedom of any act is rest, is its anchoring in all the higher levels of being. An act of will is still only an act, and the sense of its freedom amounts to the degree of its dissociation from the causal dependencies which, eventually, means simply the degree of its dissociation. But the constitutive quality of an act is its very limitation to the horizon of actuality, its dissociation. Thus every act carries with it this sense of freedom. This sense, however, has no direct implications for the freedom of the act which

\(^{304}\)We would probably not impute Fichte, and certainly not Kant, such a concept of freedom. We only identify the presence – and significance – of such an element in their frameworks.

\(^{305}\)If you say that all this, too, can be calculated and tabulated – chaos and darkness and curses, so that the mere possibility of calculating it all beforehand would stop it all, and reason would reassert itself, then man would purposefully go mad in order to be rid of reason and gain his point!” [F. Dostoevsky, Notes from the Underground. I:8]
is almost its exact inversion: the concrete anchoring in the transcendence as opposed to a dissociation from it. There is no such thing as a ‘free act in itself’, for a free act is simply an act of a free person, an act founded concretely in the freedom of existence.

In one of the most cruel situations of enslavement, when ten prisoners are selected to be tortured to death for the absence of one person at the roll call, a lucky, unchosen man steps forth and asks to change the places with one of the selected men. Thus Maksymilian Kolbe died in Auschwitz, while the man whose life he saved survived the war. No situation deprives man completely of the possibility to choose, that is, to act. The situation in which one, say, has to lie or be killed may not have been chosen voluntarily, yet the choice of the alternatives remains. “Therefore although he either lies or is killed unwillingly, it does not follow that he lies unwillingly or is killed unwillingly.”\(^{306}\) All too elaborate comments on the choice of Kolbe’s would be inappropriate but a few words should be allowed. It may serve as an example of an act of ultimate freedom and, by allowing also others to retain the faith in its possibility, of liberation. If we were to call it an “act of being-towards-death”, we would have to emphasize that it is not any ‘directedness’ towards death and nothingness, cherished for their liberating ultimacy, but only preparedness for death, a true sacrifice choosing something one does not want, and choosing it in the name of something which transcends infinitely any actual aspect of the situation.\(^{307}\) Freedom of such an act is anchored in the knowledge of its extreme consequences and their full acceptance, i.e., the continued ability to put up with them. Choosing thus what one does not want to choose, consenting to what one does not want, effects an inversion, for by choosing death Kolbe really chose freedom. There may be situations where the only free choice is Hobson’s choice, the choice of (or the consent to) the only alternative of death. In such situations, the inability to sacrifice one’s life may make this life not worth living. In fact, man seems the less willing to sacrifice his life, the less worthiness his life contains.\(^{308}\)

A less tragic (because leading eventually to the survival) but more dramatic (extend-
The examples are intentionally so extreme because they clearly illustrate that freedom is not at all a matter of the external situation. Although some situations, contexts, political systems will make free acts more difficult, and the feeling of freedom almost impossible, it is nevertheless possible even in the most extreme cases which one might want to classify as the worst examples of unfreedom. Freedom is not liberation 'from' the actual dependencies but the way of handling such dependencies. Most importantly, actual freedom of acts and actions is not any intrinsic property of them, but the fact of being concretely founded in the freedom of the person. Thus founded freedom is indistinguishable from the meaningfulness of being, for which traces of every actuality and act reach through the deeper motivations all the way to their ultimate origin.

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147. The question is not if one, by a universal decree of human nature, by an undeniable, natural or unnatural law, is free or not, if one's will chooses the ice-cream because of one's upbringing, peer pressure, gluttony or else just because it chooses so, in a complete indeterminacy of emptiness. The question is if one, by the power of one's spirit, is able to live the apparent paradox of submission to the contentless command, and thus become worthy of receiving freedom from above. True freedom is only an aspect of the nexus of Yes, is being where it is best to be. For "one who is as he ought to be, and as it is expedient for him to be, such that he is unable to lose this state, is freer than one who is such that he can lose it and be led into what is indecent and inexpedient for him." 310 Freedom is only a side-effect of submission to the command and the resulting non-attachment.

3.3.3.iv. Responsibility

Let us close this list of examples with a seemingly lesser and more modest issue: responsibility. We touched upon this in connection with the original sin in 2.1.§27, footnote 68. Genuine responsibility is the actual attitude of response to the higher voice. When this trace is followed all the way to the absolute origin, responsibility coincides with what the theological tradition called "obedience to God's will" and what we have recognised as an aspect of humility.

148. 4. We have said, §27 and §§39.ff, that the original sin is neither willed nor deliberately committed and thus, technically, it is not a personal sin. Yet, as we share in the penalty for the original sin without personally sharing in the sin itself, many maintained that one may have to endure punishments which one has not merited. We might exaggeratedly say

309 S. Grzegorczyk, Five years of KZ. III. Mauthausen p. 95-96
310 St. Anselm of Canterbury, On Free Will. I
that one is responsible even for sinking into the mud of despair – not because one can do something specific and avoid this sinking once it started, but because one is still responsible for taking up the challenge of not accepting the visible impossibility of relief, that is, of accepting its invisible possibility.

We can exaggerate even more than that. As a form of sickness of existence which loses its concrete foundation in the absolute, the original sin (in our sense) is evil and for it, like for any other evil, we are responsible. Responsibility, as a response to the absolute, is simple non-acceptance of any evil, of alienation. In this sense, everyone is genuinely responsible for all evil and all sins which are committed, not only for those which one has committed oneself. “Every man who sins, sins against all people and every man is to some degree guilty of another’s sin.”  

It is unacceptable to all manner of thinking involved into any form of subjectivistic reduction – of sin and guilt to feeling of sin and guilt, of freedom to unconstrained voluntary choice, and eventually also of responsibility to such a choice. But we are responsible not only for what we choose but also for what we are; not only for the subjective acts of choice, but also for choices which we live, even though they were made before and above us; not only for what we could somewhat, voluntarily and actively repair but also, even primarily, for all that we can not. One resists such a responsibility, firstly, because it seems to restrain one’s sense of freedom and, secondly, because it cannot possibly be put into any specific action. With regard to freedom we have just seen that it amounts to openness to the communion and not to fortifying oneself behind the walls of private choices. And this apparently empty and unproductive sense of responsibility ‘for everything’ (which is just another side of the deeper sense of guilt, not intended nor actively caused and yet committed), could be equally well characterised as sympathy and fellow feeling for everything, as a mere compassion with all the victims, a mere recognition of the evil which met them, and as repentance for evil as such – as love of universal communion. Regarding ‘unproductivity’, let us quote Scheler’s response to the same accusation against repentance: “The jovial gentlemen say: Do not repent, but design good projects and do better in the future! But the jovial gentlemen do not say whence the strength for designing good projects and even more for their execution should be fetched, if no prior liberation and self-empowerment of the person, through repentance, against the determining power of the past has taken place.”  

Strangely enough, strength to carry out actual tasks is only an inversion of humility. It increases proportionally to the latter, §10.

The universal scope of this responsibility, surpassing any particular actuality, is a sign of continuity between the actuality and its invisible origin. This form of responsibility may be different from what is commonly, let alone legally, understood under this name, but responsibility it is nevertheless (if not in other way, then simply by founding any active, visible manifestations of responsibility.) Refusing it, one breaks the continuity of Being, reduces oneself to mere subjectivity and the communion to mere association. And every spiritual reduction is a form of alienation.

3. In a more specific sense, I am responsible for my whole life and, as strangely as above, also for all the evil which affected me. For even if it is not accepted voluntarily, it affects me only if I consent to it – consent, perhaps, by not seeing anything, perhaps, by seeing it no evil, perhaps by giving up the resistance to it – in either case, even if not accepting voluntarily so still accepting. More precisely, I am responsible not for the evil which affects

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311 F. Dostoevsky, The Possessed, At Tichon’s II
312 M. Scheler, Repentance and Rebirth. p.36.
me as such, but for the fact that it affects me, that it affects me as evil.

Herein lies an important difference between various people not only reacting differently but also developing differently under apparently quite the same circumstances. Eventually, I — and only I — am fully responsible for what I have become — blaming the society, school situation, family conflicts, and what not, may have some merit only in so far as the objective improvements of the respective social contexts are concerned. Being exposed to evil influences is not a sin but one sins very easily by an irresponsible response to such an exposure, a response by which one damages oneself or, what amounts to the same, finds inexcusable evil in the world which one makes responsible for the evil which infects one’s soul. Irresponsibility, whether inability to recognise one’s responsibility or escape from it, is thus not only escape from suffering but even from things which are seen as its source. It is a sign of broken communion, an aspect of enslavement by evil — the posited evil — of the world. In the ultimate form of such an ingratitude men accuse God for having created or allowed all these evils and “lay blame upon [...] gods for what is after all nothing but their own folly.\textsuperscript{313} Yet, through such a distancing oneself from the evil and responsibility for it, one only deepens alienation from oneself. For one thus forgets that God acts only through one’s soul, that “all works are performed by warmth, [and] if the fiery love of God grows cold in the soul, the soul will die.”\textsuperscript{314}

\textbf{2.-1.} Responsibility from §148 can be likened to an impulse to help and repair all the suffering which, although impossible to follow for trivially practical reasons, founds all particular acts of genuine help. It is responsibility of a response to the call of conscience, a response to the command reminding one about the suffering — one’s own or others’ — hearing which and remaining indifferent would amount to a consent. Of course, we do not suggest that the communion expressed in the sense of responsible compassion with all suffering should be brought to the level of actuality in the same universal form.\textsuperscript{315} In every actual situation challenging one’s compassion, and hence also responsibility, one has to weight the possibilities of actually following the call against multitude of other factors. Even if all such factors prevent one from actually doing anything specific, the mere compassion with the needy ones is also an expression of responsibility. (When Solon “was asked how men could be most effectually deterred from committing injustice, he said, «If those who are not injured feel as much indignation as those who are.»\textsuperscript{316})

Irrespective of situation and other factors, one carries full actual responsibility for everything one does and leaves undone. The question may only concern the degree of this responsibility and its consequences. This actual responsibility for one’s acts and deeds is not something one may assume or not assume, but something that follows from their very foundation in one’s being and its communion. Ultimately, responsibility is simply the fact of, on the one hand, ontological foundation and, on the other hand, of the influence of the lower levels on the higher ones. The first aspect concerns the actual responsibility for everything one has done and is doing, also for avoiding or removing the consequences of the

\textsuperscript{313}Homer, \textit{The Odyssey}, I:32
\textsuperscript{314}Eckhart \textit{German Sermons}, Lk.VIII:54. [O. Davis, ed., \textit{Selected Writings} 26, J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., \textit{Meister Eckhart... 85}]
\textsuperscript{315}Such constancy of the sense of guilt and repentance without any accompanying shrinkage of personality or decrease of energy is probably as seldom as holiness. “It belongs to the increase of humbleness and holiness in man that — as life testifies to the most holy — the sense of guilt gets functionally refined accordingly to its [guilt’s] objective decrease and that thence even lesser misconduct is heavily experienced,” [M. Scheler, \textit{Repentance and Rebirth}, p.48]
\textsuperscript{316}Diogenes Laertius, \textit{The Lives and Opinions}... I:2.x
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evil which affected one. Doing something blameworthy can be blamed on being temporarily unconscious, affected by drugs or childhood trauma, but no such excuses provide a complete justification. Eventually, one is responsible for what one is, and everything one does is a reflection of that. In the most trivial situations, saying "I am sorry", one is not sorry for one’s bad will and intended act but exactly for something one has done without intending it, for something which merely happened through one. "I am sorry" not for intending to collide with another person but for the very fact that I did not notice him and run into him. This is the actual responsibility for my past.317 The other aspect is directed towards the future, is responsibility for what one becomes. It amounts to the fact that everything one does, every actual project and act may with time seem to disappear from the actual memories, but it nevertheless contributes to the virtual seeds of one’s soul. Although the exact measure of this contribution and its eventual consequences are only seldom possible to discern, its very fact is hardly disputable, II:2:3. In this sense, every evil done, increasing the alienation of the soul, breeds its own punishment.

Actual responsibility not founded concretely in the higher community, gets involved into interminable search for the criteria separating things for which one should be (held) responsible from those for which one should not. Such criteria are certainly of forensic importance but do not concern us here. Lack of foundation demands often explicit assumption of responsibility. It is like marking a new area as being mine, belonging to me, falling under my responsibility. Such acts are often required in various contexts of cooperation and subordination. But if this is their only foundation, it witnesses to an ego which is sufficiently alienated to believe that there are things – sufficiently remote, sufficiently not-mine – for which one might not be responsible. Reducing responsibility to such very specific contexts and situations goes hand in hand with other forms of reduction. For responsibility is interwoven into a whole nexus of ontic presuppositions which have to be reduced when one attempts to reduce its scope.318 For instance, a temporal loss of consciousness can be used to exempt one from responsibility for the act performed in such a state. This, of course, presupposes a specific reduction of person according to which, for instance, sleeping man is not a person. Well...No! Of course, he is but...Well. Likewise, one will often use past history of a person to excuse his acts implying, as it were, that they are merely consequences of bad influences of the environment. It is then really hard to get out of the impasse because now, so it seems, responsible person is only somebody not exposed to any negative influences, as if the crucial aspect of moral responsibility did not concern exactly the ways in which one is affected by and reacts to such influences. Reduction of responsibility to only conscious and voluntarily intended acts is just another form of reducing person to a subject.

Let us only remark one final detail. Everything we have said about responsibility concerns only my responsibility, only what I am responsible for. No consequences follow for imputing responsibility to others. The problem with such attribution, like with any demands of moral behaviour, is that nobody can be forced to recognise its validity. You can

317Agamennon admits: “it was not I that did it: Jove, and Fate, and Erinyes that walks in darkness struck me mad when we were assembled on the day that I took from Achilles the meed that had been awarded to him. What could I do? All things are in the hand of heaven, and Folly, eldest of Jove’s daughters, shuts men’s eyes to their destruction.” [Homer, The Iliad, XIX:86ff] But this workings of Folly (or as others translate it, infatuation, momentaneous loss of control) is not cited by Agamennon as any excuse; higher forces have been at work, but they worked through him: “I was blind, and Jove robbed me of my reason; I will now make atonement, and will add much treasure by way of amends.” [Ibid, XIX:137]
318R. Ingarden, About Responsibility... conducts a systematic analysis.
not make somebody responsible for something — you can only force him to take responsibility. This is an issue for law enforcement units and not for us. In contacts with people one will, of course, assess the level to which they feel responsible for various things and act accordingly, perhaps, by suggesting more responsibility than they are prepared to admit. Rising children one will teach them taking responsibility — directly, by requiring them to actually take responsibility for various things, and indirectly, just by being responsible the way one is. Our 'universal responsibility', like everything else, is only for personal use. It is the way of avoiding alienation, of avoiding posing objective evil by imputing responsibility for encountered suffering. Objectivisation of evil and resulting tense responsibility is the domain of a rigid moralist who is ready to censure every single act, of others’ or oneself, for its moral shortcomings. Strict and solemn seriousness of such an attitude finds the more offenders and becomes the more self-justifying and irritably sensitive, the more doubts about its ultimate justification germinate at its bottom, that is, the less concretely founded is its perspective on human existence which terminates at its moral dimension, if not at the level of single acts.

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152. The above examples might suggest an ideal which seems as fantastic as unrealistic. But ideals which do not and can not live are posited phantoms, regulative ideas or ideological goals, egotic projections, in short, idols. Well, for the first, "[a]ll things excellent are as difficult as they are rare." More significantly, all invisible aspects of concrete foundation appear ridiculous when reduced to the actual categories; the appearance which is only strengthened by possible inversions. All embracing, spiritual responsibility, when attempted at the level of actual feelings and expressions, will result not in any factual responsibility and acts but rather in the hysterical lamentations of elderly (and good) women over the evils and cruelty of the world. Actual responsibility for everything, actual freedom of every single choice and action, actual communion with every man one meets, actual love towards every person, animal and thing — all such reductions reflect only the reduction of self to ego, the fundamental misunderstanding which attempts to interpret the spiritual in visible terms, to turn the quality and rest of acts into facts, the wind into stones. But "[t]he wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." Forgetfulness of the spiritual, involved in concrete foundation, dispenses with any such reductions which is just another side of dispensing with any attempts to re-produce invisible as some visible image, to reach the infinite making only finitely many finite steps. But leaving any ‘whats’ aside, it keeps the clear sight of the fact that its actuality is indeed founded in the higher sphere, and that it carries responsibility for the concreteness of this foundation, even if it is not entirely its work.

Unlike unreachable ideals which can only be approximated, we are dealing here with the most concrete presence — it need not be approximated because it can not be made actual and palpable. Indeed, one can not defend it, nor fight for it, nor try to reach it — one can at most live it. Some impossibilities are difficult only because they are too simple. But, as Confucius says, life is simple and only man insists on making it complicated. Any experience of love which is not fully incarnated love is distorted and is aware of its imperfection. Most experiences are of this kind but love is not, for this reason, an unattainable ideal, a regulative idea, an inaccessible goal. If only one person in the whole

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319B. Spinoza, Ethics. [the last sentence]
human history reached its experience, this would be enough to maintain its universal possibility. There are all reasons to suspect that there were more than only one and, in case of doubt, one should look carefully around oneself, expecting the unexpected. The imagined absence is often only the inability to recognise the presence. Concrete love is not a mere state of mind, a mere feeling, an image, vague and unclear, of something ideal and its mere desirability completely ‘unreal’ because not actual. It is a thoroughly concrete manifestation flowing from the center of personal being and embracing the whole life, from above all general thoughts and qualities, through all actions and goals, to the most immediate acts.

But one might still ask: where is the necessity? Where is the necessity of concrete foundation of all these lower elements in the higher ones and, eventually, in the spiritual love? We can easily imagine a man who is strong but not patient, who is strong and patient but not humble, who finds great sense in life without having confronted nothingness, who is alert and vigilant but not open, who acts morally and responsibly not only without any higher command but exactly because he does not recognise any higher authority, etc., etc., etc. Indeed, we can as easily imagine such a man as we can imagine Pegasus. For imagination enables us exactly to put together, almost arbitrarily, various features earlier dissociated from each other. The games which reflection can play with its dissociated signs are almost unlimited. And they affect the world, just like other distinctions do. The question is, however, whether such abstractly drawn distinctions and arranged complexes correspond to others, whether they can be woven into the unity of existence and its experience of the world – and that concretely, not as mere imaginations.

Necessity of concrete foundation does not concern any specific aspect. Each aspect can indeed be found at a lower level without concrete foundation in the higher ones. The old question, whether virtues can be possessed separately or only all together, posits wrong alternative – in practice, in nature, both cases occur, albeit the former much more frequently than the latter. Focusing on one such feature, the difference between the two cases might, for an outside observer, seem slight to the degree of insignificance. But the lack of actually observable differences does not, by itself, witness to anything of significance. In fact, the difference is infinite and, like every infinity, actually unobservable. So, after all, the alternative is real but it concerns something much deeper than the mere occurrence of this or that virtue. It concerns the whole person.

The unfounded virtues can be dissociated and appear in very different constellations. One will then, perhaps, strive for strengthening some of the virtues one does not possess and such exercises can easily take big part of life. Such virtues can be acquired piecewise. The process may even turn out very valuable and lead to a deeper development. However, there is also always the chance that aiming particularly at, say, perseverance, one will keep biting one’s teeth and grow only more stubborn, or else more bitter as the posited perseverance keeps sneaking out of one’s actual look never matching the intended image. Developing (right) habits is a lengthy and complicated process which even in the case of children escapes clear-cut rules and all too precise guidelines. It is particularly difficult, if not outright impossible, when one aims at only one specific aspect. The unity of a person has also this trivial consequence that, for instance, quitting smoking may result in increased consumption of candies, while developing perseverance may result in a loss of, say, the sense of spontaneity. Every change of no matter how small aspect affects the whole person or, as one also puts it, must be integrated into this whole. Such psycho-egotic manipulations have always side-effects which are as understandable, having once emerged,
as they were unpredictable in advance.

According to St. Thomas, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are infused directly by God, and only by Him. But also moral and intellectual virtues which, under natural circumstances, can be acquired separately by human efforts, can be infused by God, so that they are “caused in us by God without any action on our part, but not without our consent.”

The acquired virtues function, so to speak, each for itself and without reaching the personal center. Their infused versions, on the other hand, are concretely founded in the unity: first, the lower unity of the invisible sphere where, as we saw in II:1.4.2.i, various aspects cannot be meaningfully dissociated from each other and, eventually, in the unity of the existential center, where grace becomes “charity, which through an image in the mind exhibits what is absent as present to ourselves, through love unites what is divided, settles what is confused, associates things that are unequal, completes things that are imperfect! Rightly does the excellent preacher call it the bond of perfectness; since, though the other virtues indeed produce perfectness, yet still charity binds them together so that they can no longer be loosened from the heart of one who loves.”

Thus, even if for an outside observer, two kinds of virtues can seem indistinguishable (since patience is patience, temperance is temperance), the ones are as if added to the person while the others flow from the person. The concretely founded ones are only expressions of the unity of the person, the visible signs of Yes which do not veil nor confuse this unity but manifest it. Only this transcendent foundation gives them all their force and adds the invisible rest – continuity and unity – making all the difference.

4 The analogues of God

"Why dost thou praise of God? Whate
ever thou sayest of Him is untrue.”

Eckhart

154. Book I described the bareness of the one as the ontological origin. Concreteness of spirituality is still founded in this bare nothingness. But while in Book I we were concerned with the merely ontological meaning of the one, now we want to emphasize that also with respect to the spiritual presence and concrete foundation, equipping Godhead with all kinds of attributes, whether in essence, in fact or only in name is inappropriate whenever it may obscure the fact of his complete invisibility.

One has often emphasized the human need to speak about God. There may be such a need, and it may be very human, but this is exactly the question and not the answer. The need reflects the fundamental meaning of the divine in our life, the meaning which awaits if not an explanation nor even an account, so at least an expression. But “[b]e not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.” Speaking about God becomes harmful when it implies too specific attributes and dwells on His inaccessible essence. “We cannot approve of what those foolish persons do who are extravagant in praise, fluent and prolix in the prayers they compose, and in the hymns they make in the desire to approach the Creator.” For where is the border between praise and appraisal, and then between praise and self-complacency over praising the right God in the right way? The border may be marked by the extravagant exaggeration. Speaking about nothing we

320St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica. II:1.q55.a4.r6
322Eccl, V:2
323M. Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed. I:59
use distinctions and distinct words which means that we can only speak about ourselves, about our confrontation. “Everything which falls under a name is originated, whether [we] will or not.”\textsuperscript{324} And so, only ‘silence is praise to Thee.’\textsuperscript{325}

4.1 Proper names

No name is adequate for God, just like no name is adequate for a person. This is why language has proper names, for proper name is the only adequate name for a person. No other name, not to mention any predicate or more or less definite description, will even approach this adequacy. So is it with God – “God” is His only adequate name. Perhaps, it should be JHVH, for “God” may be used about lesser gods and idols, too. The fact that saying “God” one can mean various things does not make the name – when applied properly – less adequate, just like knowing two persons with the same name “Thomas” does not make any of its applications wrong or inadequate. They are both persons and each has a unique name (instead of two persons with the same name “Thomas”, one could rather speak of persons with the same names “Thomas”). It is only of secondary importance that their unique names have the same linguistic appearance. (The use of patronymics, of family names, middle names, etc. can be seen as an attempt to keep the linguistic appearances in accordance with the uniqueness of the named persons.)

The uniqueness of a proper name follows from the fact that the word used as a name is inseparable from the acts of naming. There is hardly any syntactically identifiable class of words which are names. Sure, “Thomas”, “Martha” and hundreds of other words are standard names. But they name exclusively by being so used, by being used for naming. Name is inseparable from the fact and act of naming, it is the sedimented epitome of the latter, while naming itself is a trans-linguistic, in fact, trans-phenomenal event of recognising uniqueness of this concrete existence. Unrepeatability and uniqueness of existence is the conceptual content of every proper name. The actual name, as well as the act of naming, is only an expression of the deep event of naming in which one recognises the unrepeatable character of a being, usually, of some existence. Getting a child, the parents have already named it, already long in advance, even if they still do not know what actual name it will get. The linguistic expression of this event, the actual naming, endows it with the immediately recognisable aspect of non-actuality, solidifies it into a lasting, also social, fact. One could say, proper name reflects the eternity of the named existence in the perpetual consistency of all different acts of naming.

Corresponding to the absolute uniqueness, a name does not capture any essence, it is, as often observed, conceptually empty. This conceptual emptiness makes proper names the most concrete among the linguistic signs – they are understood uniquely, or not at all. And this unique understanding involves only that, identification of the person named, identification which happens within the horizon of actuality, but which only reflects the utility beyond any concepts. This trans-conceptuality of names expresses the highest respect and recognition of the named – in general, we name humans. In a similar way, we express some amount of recognition and respect naming other living beings, pets, etc. But if one started naming one’s pencils or pieces of furniture, we would react with uneasiness to enduring such disposable things with the metaphysical quality of trans-conceptual being.

\textsuperscript{324}St. Clement of Alexandria, \textit{Miscellanies}. V:13
\textsuperscript{325}Ps. LXV:2. Maimonides’ interpretation is the same as St. Jerome’s, cf. II:footnote 242. In KJV, however, the whole verse reads: “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come”.
(But as usual – where is the border…?) Names like “Sitting Bull” or “Crazy Horse”, or usual nicknames, do intend to express some essential aspects, one might perhaps say, some concept. But they are proper names only in virtue of the uniqueness of their reference. Proper name does not capture any essence but only indicates the site of its possibility, the unique individuality. It indicates the ultimate limit of distinctions, beyond which not only no more distinctions are made but were no distinctions could possibly be made.

4.2 Names

The decisive issue is, just as with “Sitting Bull” and the like, what one intends when using a name. One can endow “Sitting Bull” with derogatory content by simply reducing it to the mere description, that is, ignoring the fact that it is a proper name. Likewise, forgetting that “God” is a proper name, one tends to reduce its meaning. The traditional discussion is concerned with the admissible, if any, ways of such a reduction; not with the proper names but with the names understood as possible predicates about God.

157. “All creatures have existed eternally in the divine essence, as in their exemplar. So far as they conform to the divine idea, all beings were, before their creation, one thing with the essence of God.”326 “That which is perfect is a Being, who hath comprehended and included all things in Himself and His own Substance, and without whom, and beside whom, there is no true Substance, and in whom all things have their Substance. For He is the Substance of all things, and is in Himself unchangeable and immovable, and changeth and moveth all things else.”327 Much interpretation (and even misinterpretation) would be needed to make such fragments acceptable.328 The language of Platonic exemplars, combined with the need to emphasise God’s goodness and other positive qualities, have made it almost impossible to think of Godhead otherwise than as a collection of some definite, yet always mysterious, attributes which in an equally mysterious way are meshed into one essence. On the other hand, it was precisely the image of the highest somewhat ‘containing’ everything lower, as a box contains sand or as genus contains species, that forced one to double things with exemplary ideas and, eventually, to make Godhead responsible for all the details of the visible world. But virtuality does not contain all the distinctions which flow from it, except as their indistinct origin. Substantiality of self-identical, independent entities has been discussed earlier in, hopefully, sufficient detail. Application of this category to the invisibles leads unavoidably to antinomies. But such an application is by no means necessary, even though similar examples of modeling invisibility of the origin on the Platonic ideas superimposed on the Christian intuitions, could be multiplied ad nauseam.

4.3 Two faces of the one

“God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this;”
Ps. LXII:11

158. Any doctrine starting with deus absconditus who, somehow, influences or at least remains present in the world, needs the distinction between the hidden and inaccessible on the one

326 Henry of Suso
327 Theologia Germanica. I
328 E.g., to “comprehend and include all things in Himself” must not be taken in the Platonic sense of the pre-existing, ready-made archetypes; one should carefully distinguish “His own Substance” from all the other “Substances” (“Substance” is actually understood by the author “not as a work fulfilled, but as well-spring” [Theologia Germanica. XXXII] which we could interpret in terms of virtuality) etc., etc.
4.3. Two faces of the one

side and its action and manifest influence on the other. When viewed as indistinct, the fact that “the Godhead is nameless, and all naming is alien to Him” becomes an analytical statement. It is ultimately invisible and nothing can be said about it. What, then, is it one is actually speaking about, and what is it one is actually saying?

“God [deus] and Godhead [deitas] are as different as heaven and earth. But heaven is still thousand miles higher. And so is Godhead above God. God becomes and passes by.”

“The Godhead gave all things up to God. The Godhead is poor, naked and empty as though it were not; it has not, wills not, wants not, works not, gets not. It is God who has the treasure and the bride in him, the Godhead is as void as though it were not.” In our terms, God, the incarnated Godhead, is the spirit already involved in the existential confrontation. The attributes and names are not predicated about the indistinct but about the first levels of differentiation, the highest stages of existential confrontation. As Maimonides puts it: “Every attribute that is found in the books of the deity [...is...] an attribute of His action and not an attribute of His essence” and “these attributes too are not to be considered in reference to His essence, but in reference to the things that are created.”

The divine nature operates only through human soul, first, in the process of ontological founding and, eventually, through the existential confrontation saying Yes. We would thus identify the actions of God with the deepest aspects of experience. All names (or else, all names suggesting more than nothing) refer only to the character of the existential confrontation; the names apply to God’s actions only. Considered in abstracto, these actions amount to the deepest layers of the ontological and epistemic foundation, as described in Books I and II. But concretely, it is the sphere of the constant tension between Yes and No, of the constant foundation of actuality on the one side of this invisible distinction.

As Godhead incarnates only in the human soul, God’s concrete presence is determined by the spiritual dimension of man’s being, by the Yes or No of the spiritual choice. The one as the ontological origin is but the indistinct nothingness, remote, ineffable and indifferent. The spiritual choice affects this nothingness in the most fundamental way. Love experiences it as the origin and generous fullness, while attached self-centeredness as a mere void, at best, an indifferent principle of ultimate transcendence. These are experienced aspects of life, world, various situations, but aspects which cannot be ascribed to any particulars. Being founded in the spiritual choice, they emerge as aspects of... nothingness. But nothingness has no aspects! Here – between the nothingness of the origin and the nothingness of self, between the naked self of Godhead and its image, the naked self of an existence, in the tension of the spiritual choice which gives the flavor to one’s whole existence – here the Godhead gives all things up to God.

In I:5.2.3.i-5.2.3.ii, we have discussed the traditional doubling of the indistinct as, on the one hand, the formless matter under all beings and, on the other hand, the ineffable divinity above all beings. We have objected to this doubling viewing both as an unfortunate opposition posited between two symbols of one ontological foundation, the indistinct...

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329 This distinction is present not only in all mystical and many religious traditions, Plato refused to discuss certain things, yet the Demiurge from Timaeus seems to be an active symbol of the One, “the father and maker of all this universe [who] is past finding out” and who “committed to the younger gods the Fashioning of [...] mortal bodies”. In the sixth letter Plato asks a friend to swear “in the name of the God who is captain of all things present and to come, and of the Father of that captain and cause.” [Plato, Letters. VI:323.D] Neoplatonism could be almost defined as an elaboration of this very distinction.


331 Eckhart [B. McGinn, ed., Meister Eckhart...A:13.e]

nothingness. But now our concern is not only the ontological but the concrete foundation and here we can discern the opposition. It is, however, not the opposition between matter and spirit but between two faces which one shows to Yes, respectively No. The indistinct nothingness can be stated, to some extent described and ... left for itself. But leaving it for itself is only an illusion because its presence is perpetually reflected, if in nothing else then in the thirst, perhaps even in the search for a foundation, for the origin. The foundation is concretely present in life, but this presence may assume one of the opposite forms, depending on the spiritual choice: “if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.”

One might be tempted to understand here by the “attitudes” any actual behaviors and acts. Although this is, to some extent, possible, it is primarily the spiritual attitude which makes God show different face. One never appears, it is never object of any experience, yet it is experienced. It is experienced in the rest of all the acts we perform and all the actual situations we encounter. The spiritual choice gives this ontological omnipresence a concrete form of the analogues which, when brought down to the level of actuality, may become objects of actual experiences appearing as direct signs of God.

160. No encounters emptiness – apparently indifferent but eventually terrifying – not as a demonic fear, perhaps as Kierkegaardian Angst, but then also, as underneath the emptiness it starts to suspect its illusion, as the specifically numinotic, awe and terror inspiring tremendum sacrum, im deorum. It is tremendum aroused often by the God of the Old Testament, by the nothingness turned into emptiness by the disobedient pride which, having denied it any power, confronts suddenly its ultimate strength and majestas. “As roaring torrents of waters rush forward into the ocean, so do these heroes of our mortal world rush into thy flaming mouths. And so as moths swiftly rushing enter a burning flame and die, so all these men rush to thy fire, rush fast to their own destruction.”

There is also a more subtle sense of the dread of God which does not arise from the actual disobedience but from the mere possibility of damnation, woven into the understanding that I am not the master and into the awe of God’s invisible power. “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. […] the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy.” Such a fear is an aspect of another form of confrontation, for which God’s face emerges “as a sacred fire that gives light and life to the whole universe in the splendour of a vast offering.” For Yes, nothingness emerges with the ultimate goodness, majestic and sacred augustum. The attracting force of the sacrum, called by Otto “fascinans”, may found more actual experiences of exaltation or mystical joy and completeness. But it is primarily the non-actual force of constant inspiration which has delivered one from the threatening emptiness and alienation.

So God may be revengeful and merciless or else merciful and generous. “I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.”

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333 P. Tillich, The Question about the Unconditional. I:4. Biblical religion and quest of being. 4:1
334 One distinguishes, of course, this tremendum arising awe and trembling from any fear of things, people, demons or the world itself. Cf. R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy, IV.a.
335 The Bhagavad-Gita. XI:28-29
336 Ps. II:11/XXXIII:18
337 The Bhagavad-Gita. XI:19. Krishna answers the reverent invocations of Arjuna: “Thou hast seen the tremendous form of my greatness, but fear not, and be not bewildered. Free from fear and with a glad heart see my friendly form again.” [Ibid. XI:49]
338 Is. XIV:7
4.3. Two faces of the one

He remains the same God for that – the two are only faces of the one. The two – let us say, ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’ – do not represent opposite ontological poles. Ontologically, they are the same nothingness. ‘Evil’ is not just the last, lowest level of emanations from the ‘Good’, or perhaps only a lack of some aspect of a full emanation. In a much more Christian way, ‘Evil’ has its site at the very beginning, it emerges from paradise with the first human: it is very close to Godhead. But this closeness to the origin does not mean that ‘Evil’ follows from it. It only means that human existence reaches all the way to the border of nothingness – only therefore ‘Evil’ can corrupt it so deeply, even if never completely. The two represent only the characteristics of the meeting with God, the extreme and opposite possibilities of the existential confrontation: the No seeing only emptiness and void, and the Yes, likewise seeing only nothing, but nothing which is the invisible origin. The negative emptiness, in particular, is not an ontological opposite of the one, but only an epistemic mistake in one’s experience. It is despair – and, most generally, evil – which alienating existence from its origin, makes the latter appear as empty nothingness, total lack. This total lack, this ultimate void of emptiness is the substantialisation of thirst effected by the No.\footnote{Considering the biblical personalism, Paul Tillich remarks “There is no sense to ask if the holiness itself is personal or if its carriers are persons. [...] The question is: What do they become as the elements of a religious meeting?” [P. Tillich, The Question about the Unconditional. I.4.Biblical religion and quest of being.3.]} 339

The need to speak about God may arise from the reflective attitude. Enscribed within the horizon of actuality, it cannot escape the spell of objective way of speaking, inscribed within the circle of its actions and voluntary choices, it cannot escape from deciding for or against. Indeed, speaking about God may be helpful as an admonition that visibility of this world does not exhaust the field of existence; as a suggestion of the quality of the confrontation; as a reminder that what seems impossible may nevertheless happen, that the reality of thirst overcomes the actuality of all facts. God has “set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”\footnote{Deut. XXX:19} 340

Speaking about God may help in such a choice for, as Bacchylides quoted by Clement says, “one becomes wise from another, both in past times and at present, for it is not very easy to find the portals of unutterable words. [...] We speak not as supplying His name; but [...] we use good names, in order that the mind may have these as points of support, so as not to err in other respects.”\footnote{St. Clement of Alexandria, Miscellanea. V:11/12.} 341

The simplistic contradiction – “God is” vs. “There is no God” – is possible only after one has reduced the supposed ‘being of God’ to the level of actual experience, to the level of ‘being a thing’. It helps little to claim that this is not the intention when this is the result. When the results are clear, the intentions matter very little. Assuming that such an alternative is at all possible, one has already falsified the meaning of the possible positive answer. A better question would be “What does “God” mean?”, or even “What does God mean?”, though this, obviously, involves one in the matters on which even the most prominent theologians (or, perhaps, especially they) can not agree. Any precise answer can be accused of arbitrariness. The advantage of this form of the question is that the previous alternative (“He is not” vs. “He is”) becomes now “He means nothing” vs. “He means something”. The former will quickly declare Him to be non-existent but this denial will now involve some uneasy awareness of rejecting more than one intended. No matter the declared choice, one feels that the question has now much more relevance, that it addresses not only the universal order of the objective world but also one’s existence.
And it does because it also makes more clear the underlying element of choice which is not dictated merely by objective ‘being’ or ‘non-being’ of something, but by the way one meets whatever one meets.

At the very beginning, I.§4, we likened existence to an image of nothingness, not in the sense of a similitude but of a reflection, like one player reflects moves of another. The asymmetry of confrontation can be likened to the fact that one player has a winning strategy, in fact, is bound to win. But as the game admits the win-win situations, the other player can win, too. The names of God indicate the winning strategy. Men call God “good” and not “evil”, “omnipotent” and not “impotent”, and “in saying that God lives, they assuredly mean more than to say the He is the cause of our life, or that He differs from inanimate bodies.”

The names attributed to God are expressions of Yes, and as such are not arbitrary predicates ascribed to nothingness which cannot be ascribed any. They tell the story of a possible experience – not of God but of the confrontation with the divine. For “the form of God is itself the joy with which it is recognised.”

162. Just like commands leave us free to accept or ignore them, so God’s face reflects only the spiritual choice made in the soul’s depth. As we saw, spiritual choice founds concretely the quality of the world and its experience which become permeated by the aspects reflecting the underlying Yes or No. Yes establishes a relation between the contents of all the levels, founding thus also concrete ways of encounter and experience. The traces – down to the level of the most actual reflections – of the spiritual choice, the sign of the absolute, are what we call the “analogues”.

The term “analogy” is used in the way St. Thomas would only partly accept. Love, humility, etc. are not only genuine aspects of spirit – they are also adequately, absolutely and not analogically predicated about it. This is possible because spiritual relation to nothingness is not something absolutely foreign to human experience but, on the contrary, the most intimately present, whether concretely or not, aspect of experience. The impossibility to specify precisely their meaning does not, in any way, diminish its concreteness. On the other hand, they not only belong merely analogically to the aspects of visible experience, but are also predicated analogically about it. For this experience, even if prior with respect to the reflective knowledge, is actually founded in the invisibles. It is from there that words like “love”, “humility”, “presence”, etc. obtain their genuine meaning, which is only analogically applied to the visible analogues of the spiritual love. The fact that we cannot define precisely what they mean, does not mean that we do not know that. Even if spiritual love has not been our share, so thirst is an ever present reminder of what it could mean. Aquinas would say: “as regards what these names signify, they are applied primarily to God but as regards the imposition of the names, they are primarily applied to creatures which we know first – hence they have a mode of signification which belongs to creatures.”

This looks almost the same, but in our case not even the mode of signification belongs to creatures – with respect to particulars we never know precisely what “love” or “humility” mean, we are seldom entirely certain if the use of such names is perfectly adequate, if the actual sign, the act, is true with respect to the invisible truth which it seems to manifest. This uncertainty, however, does not prove that we do not know what they mean, but at most that we do not know it precisely. We are uneasy with applying them to all too particular situations because, as a matter of fact, they do not quite apply

342St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica. I.q13.a2
343Viswanatha [after A. Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy. VII]
344St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica. [after I.q13.a6.ans.]
there. To some extent – but only to some extent – we can recognise particular acts of love or humility, but they arise as such only from their concrete foundation in love and humility. There is no act of love without love, and we do not learn what “love” means by collecting examples of particular (kinds of) acts, by taking a course.

Most probably, we learn it before we learn anything else. In any case, it is not so that we know “creatures first”, unless we let “knowledge” mean nothing more then the reflective episteme, §55. The analogues, these traces of the deepest and most concrete aspects of experience, are not any actual signs, are not any misnomers misunderstood as properties of some actual objects. (Although, of course, there is also such possibility.) They reside primarily in the rest of any actuality and are also known – consciously and reflectively – to reside there. Reflection takes recourse to the ‘analogical way of speaking’, in which the aspects of the spiritual dimension of Being find reflections as sedimented, actual properties, as the analogues predicated about ‘Something’. What this ‘Something’ is remains forever hidden in the nothingness of its conception, and the best name we have is “God”. These properties and predicates are but expressions of the experience starting in the spiritual center of Being, of the aspects which defy any objectification and remain forever in the background, in the rest. From this invisible depth they affect all the actual experiences in a most significant way. If God is good, omnipotent, forgiving, loving, etc., one may imagine that all the problems are solved or, as the case may be, posed. But such analogues neither create nor answer any problems. They only express aspects of the spiritual dimension of existence which, living Yes, confronts the same particular problems as any other existence – different is only the form, the quality of this confrontation.

4.3.1. The analogues of Yes

The analogues of each choice are only expressions of various aspects of the respective nexus. We list only a few standard examples.

4.3.1.i. Omnipotence

The humility of love means recognition that I am not the master, recognition of the origin as the ultimate power which is the power of the source. Even if nothing actually is the way it was at the beginning, when it emerged in illo tempore from the virtuality of the origin, so without this source, there would be nothing at all. This simple indispensability – not the ability to determine every minute detail of this world – is the omnipotence of God. Without Him there would be nothing, which is very different from saying that everything is the way He has made it. “Without Me, ye can do nothing.”345 – is very different from “You do everything the way I want”.

His indispensability as the first condition accounts also for the misused label of “necessary being”. Once we have reduced necessity to logical necessity, even to an appropriately interpreted unary sentential operator □, there isn’t much left... But we have objected to the linguistic reductions. God is certainly not necessary in the sense of being a particular agent whose absence would entail a logical self-contradiction.346 He is necessary in the above sense of omnipotence, that without Him there would be (not only nothing but) ab-

345Jh. XV:5
346One could, however, attempt the proof of the form: if there were nothing indistinct, nothing to distinguish, there could be nothing distinguished.
solutes nothing. “If one is not, then nothing is.” He is the necessary condition, not the necessary cause, of everything that is. The cosmological argument claims well-foundedness of the order of causality, but we would recast it in terms of the order of founding. It becomes then an expression of the intuition that this ordering has the origin, the indispensable condition. The indistinct nothingness is, indeed, the first cause, but not in any sense of actual causality – it is the first cause being the first and necessary condition of everything. The necessity of the one is here, almost analytically, the same as the indispensability of the foundation in its original indistinctness. If we take the label “cause” in this deeper sense of foundation then one, remaining indistinct above and before all distinctions, is not only the cause of everything but is also ‘self-caused’: indistinct needs no distinctions, I:6.1.3. This uncaused or self-caused being of God used to be a way of formulating His necessity. Eventually, it is the same as His omnipotence – not the ability to do everything but to create, to bring something out of nothing, without which nothing else would be possible.

164. In a much less genuine sense, involving a possible objectification, one speaks analogically about ‘His will’. But the “Godhead is poor, naked and empty as though it were not; it has not, willed not, wanst not, works not, gets not”. Only existence can will. “God’s will” is but an expression conveying what I should will – nothing or, to give it a positive appearance, to say Yes. There is no more content in ‘God’s will’ than the salvation through love. “Sin is nothing else than that the creature willeth otherwise than God willeth, and contrary to Him.” Indeed, but this ‘will of God’, for which confusion looks only in visible signs, is nothing else than that I do not sin, that I do not make idols of this world. Obedience – if one insists, to God’s will – is nothing more (nor less) than directedness towards Yes. Such an obedience is humility which does not try to reach for the invisible – forbidden – fruits. For the striving in which “[w]e strive always for the forbidden, and we desire things denied,” expresses only a misunderstanding of thirst. Renouncing it may be rightly called the “fear of God”. Although it need not involve any actual fear, it expresses God’s omnipotence – origin founding everything that is.

4.3.1.ii. Omnipresence

165. The description of omnipotence might have left some taste of deism in which Godhead, giving only the initial impulse to the creative differentiation, withdraws from the world leaving it to the secondary causes, that is, to itself. In a sense, this is what we are saying, for God is never any actual efficient cause of anything, He never interferes directly into the course of actual events: He remains transcendent, stays above all visible and invisible things. But at the same time, He is always present, as the deepest aspect of every situation, as the eventual limit where actuality dissolves in the invisible horizon of its foundation.

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347 Plato, Parmenides.
348 This was expressed, for instance, as the distinction between the productive and the conserving causes, I:§115. Ockham pointed out that the order of productive causes with Duns Scotus could actually be continued ad infinitum (in time), and to avoid this possibility he ‘modified’ the argument (for God’s existence) by introducing conserving causes. The modification can be disputed for Scotus, too, observed the simultaneity of the essential causes which do not produce a thing but maintain it in its being and thus are co-present with the thing itself. (Actual infinity seemed absurd to all, and so the conclusion about the first cause followed.) This form of ‘causation’ corresponds to our founding co-presence of all levels, which nevertheless coincides with the generative order of productive causes. (Ockham’s ‘proof’ figures in W. Ockham, Quaestiones in lib. I Physicorum q.82-86.)
349 Theologia Germanica. XXXVI
350 Ovid, Amores. III:4.17
And as this horizon surrounds every situation, it not only provides all its actual and visible elements but can also bring the completely new and unexpected ones. It is like the presence of a quiet person who apparently does not contribute to the situation, does not influence the events but, by the very presence, makes the situation into something completely different than what it would be without this person. And as it later turns out, this was the person who invited all the others, created and maintained the situation. We have just recalled the distinction between the creative, efficient causes and the conserving ones that do not produce but sustain and perpetuate the effects. Again, replacing the former with the latter, “cause” with foundation, we recognise such a constant sustaining presence of the origin as the invisible horizon of actuality and, eventually, of all visibility and differentiation.

Openness is openness of the heart for all gifts of the origin. In more actual terms, it can denote preparedness to meet with the open heart everything and everybody but, for the moment, we are relating it only to the understanding of the (role of the) one. Openness means that we recognise it as omnipresent, that everything is encountered with the fundamental, only implicit rather than explicit understanding of its being a gift of the origin, of its being a hierophany and, hence, of the origin being present behind it. In the most actualised form, openness, this recognition of omnipresence, can find expression as the wonder and joy, a calm intoxication with the world which at every moment unveils new events whose freshness lends them the character of miracles. It is not the intensity of such a joy which makes it the analogue, but its constancy – as Eckhart puts it “Who is joyful all the time, he is joyful above the time, liberated from time.” The same analogue may be discerned in the wonder owing to which, according to Aristotle, “men both now begin and at first began to philosophize.” Psychological and emotional differences notwithstanding, this famous philosophical wonder expresses the same openness to the world which is experienced as a gift, if not miraculous, so in any case generous and wonderful, even in its most wicked appearances. Just like man who is thankfully open thinks himself undeservedly rewarded, so “a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant”. Being ignorant of everything and wondering at everything, being like a child, is to recognise the generous presence in every actuality, to experience omnipresence.

Self-awareness is an aspect of every actual encounter which makes one always, even if only implicitly, aware not only of the actual situation one is confronting, but also of the fact of this confrontation, of its anchoring in the field of experience transcending the limits of actuality. Although formally we can say that it is one’s self-awareness, yet it does not ‘belong’ to one, it is not something one influences and controls. It accompanies one as an associate, as a witness, not as an attribute; it is an aspect of every experience, never its object. In one’s focusing on the actual contents of experience, it witnesses to the presence of something that transcends it. Feeble and dependent on one’s recognition, on one’s acceptance of its voice, in the context of love it founds the analogue we might call “God’s omniscience”. This is the omniscience of which also those not recognising it are warned: “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth?” “There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” It may take the form of a voice of conscience which discloses the spiritual context of one’s action, it may be a mere awareness of the

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352 Aristotle, Metaphysics. II
353 Jer. XXIII:24
354 Job XXXIV:22
presence which transcends actuality and also, in the most figurative sense, modified by the reflective attention directed towards it, it may appear as the feeling of ‘somebody looking at me’. The lower such a form, the more common it is. But the presence of its higher forms, and particularly of conscience, is indeed dependent on the concrete foundation in Yes. The better a person, the more conscience he has and, in fact, the more guilt he can feel – criminals seldom feel unclean conscience. For conscience is yet another aspect of openness which, opening us for others, opens the communion with others to us.

4.3.1.iii. Goodness

168. Thankfulness amounts to the acceptance of the origin and acceptance means: recognition of its goodness or being the source of goodness. This goodness, if taken in itself, is empty and impossible to characterise. It does not mean anything else except the attitude of thankfulness and acceptance, nothing except the recognition of the value of everything one encounters and willingness to accept it with the underlying love. Goodness is the experience of thankfulness rendered in terms of actuality, is an analogue of the latter. Nobody, who does not know this thankfulness can ever experience, let alone understand, the goodness of God.

Again, in a less genuine sense, one speaks about ‘God’s love’, ‘God’s benevolence’, etc. Misleading as such expressions may be, they stand for the purity of thankfulness which is its own reward. It “is not chosen in order to serve any end, or to get anything by it, but for the love of its nobleness, and because God loveth and esteemeth it so greatly.”\(^{355}\) There is no being, no non-being, no being – if one insists, no God – sitting there and loving or esteeming anything. This love and esteem are first of all the value and nobleness such a love and thankfulness have in themselves, opening one to the transcendent gift which gives the ultimate value to life. Certainly, the ineradicable possibility of grace, the fact that it may be given irrespectively of the earlier circumstances (and sins), irrespectively of how deep one has plunged into the hell and despair, so that even “they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined”\(^{356}\) – this can be taken as an expression of God’s loving forgiveness in an anthropopathic, almost mundane sense.

169. A yet more specific analogue of thankfulness is the goodness of the world, with perhaps the most powerful expression in the idea of the best possible world. It is impossible to agree concerning what is the exact acceptable ‘amount of evil in the world’ and whether it is greater or smaller than the total ‘amount of goodness’. Likewise it is impossible to specify exactly the laws which make it impossible to improve this world. But the impossibility lies not in our inability to see or think, but only in the fact that, except for the visible details which do not affect that much, there is nothing to improve for nothing else is under our full control. One may become very indignant at such a dictum, just like one may deny any necessary laws which cannot be transgressed in constructions of the new brave worlds and then in elimination of some evils. For, indeed, whenever we can point at some specific failure or ‘evil’, we can also design schemes to combat it. But strong indignation, with an associated moralism, arise when one is no longer able to see only various, lesser or bigger sufferings and failures, but begins to recognise The Evil, the unjust, unfair, inequitable world which offends one’s human dignity, in short, when visible evils acquire monstrous dimensions of social or even metaphysical principles. The evils in

\(^{355}\) Theologia Germanica. XXXVIII

\(^{356}\) Isa. IX.2
the world may be innumerable, but the conclusion that the world is evil is a clearest sign of alienation. The idea of the best possible world is the most charming conceptual reflection of the understanding that neither God nor even the world owes us anything—least of all any reasons and explanations.  

The world is good in the trivial sense that salvation is always possible. In this respect, it needs no improvements. All the detailed improvements of the world can be needed for making the society more comfortable or more just, but that has nothing to do with God, for He is getting involved when, and only when, personal salvation is at stake. Actual things and events may have their positive values but never become thoroughly good unless seen in the light of the goodness underlying the whole world. The performances of teleevangelists praying for most specific items are certainly close to the peak of vulgarity. But they are only extreme examples of turning God into a mere guarantor of the goodness of the world and its visible particulars. God who figures as a mere postulate of a sheer faith that all my good deeds and my good life will be eventually rewarded with equally good items according to a principle of justice, not to say, of just payment—such a god is reduced to an honest clerk matching the list of my deeds against the list of visible wishes and goods. “Happiness is the condition of a rational being in the world with whom everything goes according to his wish and will; it rests, therefore, on the harmony of physical nature with his whole end and likewise with the essential determining principle of his will” calls indeed for somebody who might guarantee at least some, and at best ultimate harmony, who might dose “happiness proportioned to morality.” Unfortunately, such a guarantor of justice is not much better than one who...

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357 The reservation made by Timaeus in the myth of creation contains the essence of this idea: “God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, so far as this was attainable.” [Plato, Timaeus.] Teodicy only elaborates this reservation in ever longer passages. “Evils, then, if those be meant which are properly so called, were not created by God; but some, although few in comparison with the order of the whole world, have resulted from His principal works, as there follow from the chief works of the carpenter such things as spiral shavings and sawdust, or as architects might appear to be the cause of the rubbish which lies around their buildings in the form of the filth which drops from the stones and the plaster.” [Origen, Against Celsus. VI:55]

The idea involves two elements: 1. the totality of the world—it is its goodness and perfection which is maximal, even if it does not appear so to individuals within it; and 2. some inviolable laws which even God must obey—these are responsible for the individual ‘evils’ but they can be only unproductively opposed if they are not resolutely accepted. One might be tempted to discern the idea whenever these two elements are present. Thus one might ascribe it to Spinoza as much as one observes it in Leibniz. None of these elements appeals to our anthropology. Although we can recognise its underlying value, the motivating force of acceptance, it appears, however, a bit like saying, in a resigned and moralising tone, “Do not argue, things won’t get better anyway”. It hardly comes close to the genuine openness which recognises, equally in the moments of happiness and of suffering, not only something one has to put up with but goodness deserving thankfulness.

358 I. Kant, Critique of Practical Reason. II:22:5 [K224]

359 Ibid. I:1.1.33

360 As nature becomes thus completely dissociated from the spirit, and desires from morality, such a warrantor “must contain the principle of the harmony of nature, not merely with a law of the will of rational beings, but with the conception of this law, in so far as they make it the supreme determining principle of the will, and consequently not merely with the form of morals, but with their morality as their motive, that is, with their moral character.” [Ibid. K225] One might probably look here for an attempt to go beyond purely formal ethics, although the attempt is left to God. The hypothesis of God is needed, as usual, to make the dissociated needs meet; here, to make us believe that moral life can possibly pay off. This is the cornerstone of pietistic dualism, and its abhorrence of the senses from which it is unable to
can offer only an irrational hope of a new car or plastic surgery. Goodness of God, however, has nothing to do with any rewards, not to mention granting one a happy life “according to his wish and will”. God owes us nothing – not only no candies or feelings of pleasantness, but not even any just rewards. His goodness is, originally, only the gift of life and world. More concretely, it is the promise of salvation, the always present possibility of saying Yes – to God, and hence also to the gift of life in whatever form it meets one.

4.3.1.iv. Person

170. Like description of any nexus, this one could continue indefinitely. Let us only mention one more aspect constitutive for the experience of God as transcending all the more particular experiences of analogical kind. The analogues like those described above can enter any experience finding the most actual expression (as the actually felt wonder, thankfulness, presence, look from above). In no such actual experiences, however, one meets a person.

What makes one a person is the capacity to enter personal relations (as nexus precedes its dissociated aspects, so here the relation precedes its poles.) Personal relation is one which reaches the very center of Being, which is a true communion, sharing of the origin. This communion is possible in its deepest form only between persons. Only one person can reach the personal center of another, only one being open to the origin can meet another in the same openness. Only one person can tell the name of another, for telling the name is exactly the sign of recognising the unique value of the person, which is but another side of recognising the shared origin. A personal meeting is a meeting in the face of the origin, is a meeting where nothing is left outside, that is closed, for what is being shared is the absolute beginning, opening on nothing, that is, everything.

There is a habit (going back to Locke and Hobbes, if not all the way to Aristotle) of insisting on more definite aspects which would constitute a person, e.g., responsibility, self-consciousness, rationality, freedom. But the only reason for it seems to be the forensic need for a more definite concept, allowing us to distinguish persons from non-persons (sic!). Saying “He is not a (mature) person for he lacks the basic sense of responsibility” or “He is not a (legally responsible) person for he lacks elementary rationality” may sound quite reasonable, unlike, for instance, “He is not a person for he is not rational”. The parenthetical adjectives press themselves into the formulations, for being a person comes before and stays above being anything else. Such ‘definitions’ do not define person but special kinds of person or persona. No attribute nor its lack can ever account for a human not being a person. We have described in Section 3.3 the meaning of ‘becoming what one is’, becoming through the concrete foundation, so to speak, a complete person, but even this concerned only the kind of person one might become and not being a person.

Ontological foundation of human existence is equiprimordial with its personal character. This foundation accounts also for the uniqueness of every existence, but with respect to the aspect of personality, decisive is the fact of participation in the origin which, confronting existence, shares itself, §121. It is thus God who “makes of us a complete person and, liberate itself, so that “the moment the fool gives up concentration //And his other spiritual practices, //He falls prey to fancies and desires.” [The Ashtavaktra-Gita. XVIII:75] The reward one expects must be given not only in principle – and not only in the absolute dimension of life – but also in all particular wishes and projects which, for such a repressive consciousness, remain unfounded in and opposed to any spiritual truth. As if “virtue itself and the service of God were not happiness itself and the highest liberty.” [B. Spinoza, Ethics. II:49]
4.3. Two faces of the one

consequently, in a meeting with us is fully personal.\textsuperscript{361} This making a ‘complete person’ amounts to augmenting the merely ontological participation with the dialogue of concrete foundation. But primarily God makes us also a person, because existence is constituted by participation in the origin, emerges only in the face of Him, in a confrontation with Him.\textsuperscript{362} Strictly speaking, nothingness of Godhead has the non-personal, or trans-personal character of self. But this trans-personal character is at the bottom of the very being a person. It is itself non-personal, void of any ‘essence’, the mere purity of the distinction of birth, and yet it is the personal center, it founds the fact of being a person, the unity of existence stretching all the way to the most actual reflections. The center of personal being is not itself personal, and it is only by confronting something transcending one’s personality, something trans-personal, that one is a person. This confrontation is the context but also the eventual content of personal relation. In it God Himself emerges as a person; firstly, by the very definition, by being involved into the personal relation, by being the absolute pole of the spiritual tension. Spirit is a fully concrete person or it is not at all. More concretely, God is a person because He says your name, because “your names are written in heaven.”\textsuperscript{363} God uses quite some part of the book of Genesis for telling people what their names shall be: no more Abram, but Abraham, no longer Sarai but Sarah, and Isaac, and no longer Jacob but Israel, etc. All these names, given by God, represent the personal character of the relation: in the act of naming, God establishes the person as a person. From the very beginning, He is not a mere technician constructing only the mechanism of the world – He addresses a person, long before any consciousness can actually grasp the fact. “I have named thee, though thou hast not known me.”\textsuperscript{364} And He keeps addressing persons responding to the personal calls and prayers or, as we might also say, to the deepest need of a person: the need of reality, the need of help, the need of grace. He is a person because our only relation to Him is personal, in the depth where the center of our being meets the center of Being. Personality of God is the analogue of His omnipresence in the ultimate communion, sharing everything with everyone.

4.3.2. The analogues of No

It is the spiritual Yes which calls forth, from the abyss of Godhead, the generous and benevolent person of God. The No, on the other hand, encounters only its own negativity, emptiness. Self-centeredness, refusing to accept that I am not the master, does not lend its characteristics to possible descriptions of God. The primary analogue of this attitude amounts to the simple conflation of nothingness and void—a beyond the visible world, there is emptiness. Yet, the objectified characteristics of the respective aspects—of pride, ingratitude and closedness—carry a lot of strength, even if one is unable to say to what they possibly could be ascribed—a to the world? to the life? to my life? to the proclaimed void surrounding all that? A bit to this and a bit to that, eventually, to everything for No, even when it remains most consistent and agreeable, lacks the unity and finds its reflections only in scattered bits and pieces—“smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.”\textsuperscript{365}

\textsuperscript{361} P. Tillich, The Question about the Unconditional. I:4. Biblical religion and quest of being.3.2
\textsuperscript{362} This seems to be the source of the well known close connections between personalism and some form of (typically Christian or Judaic) theism.
\textsuperscript{363} Lk. X:20
\textsuperscript{364} Is. XLIV:4
\textsuperscript{365} Zech. XIII:7 [Mrk. XIV:27]
171. *Pride* is not necessarily a personal pride, an individual attitude of superiority over others. *Pride* is merely an attitude which does not *recognise* any higher power, any *origin* beyond *visibility*. The *analogues*, the objectified expressions of that embrace so many *idols* that one can hardly attempt to enumerate them all. The *objectivistic illusion* from 1:5.2.2, the assumption or conviction that everything consists of things, eventually, of *objects*, is an important example. It underlies all kinds of intellectual arrogance, naïve or sophisticated scientism, exclusive worship of causality and ‘hard facts’. As has been frequently observed, humanism is another field providing a host of examples. “But how can anyone judge or love what he does not know?” – this is, perhaps, the most concise summary of *The Oration*. The real question, however, is what one understands by “knowing” and what is there worth such “knowing”. In a sense, this text is an attempt to elucidate some fundamental issues of our life – it is humanistic. But the adjective rings wrongly because the human nature is not so plainly and *visibly* human as many ‘humanists’ would often like it to be.

The objectified *analogue of closedness* can be expressed by the statement “The world is as it is”. The facts are there, true, ‘objective’, irresistible, and the only thing we can do is to conform to them, possibly, to manipulate them so as to achieve our goals. The apparent activity of such an attitude of smartness towards the given is underlied by the fundamental, *spiritual* passivity, the resigned acceptance of given as given – the world is as it is. It becomes still and rigid, underlied the highest and only reality governed by the irresistible laws of necessity. Impossible as such laws may be to specify *precisely*, they are haunted behind all our failures and defeats which, certainly, must have some ‘objective’ reasons.

The objectified *analogue of ingratitude* is the image of life and world as to a large extent, if not basically, bad, mischievous, perhaps, even evil. In the world we meet many things and situations and most of them require an attitude of suspicion and scrutiny. Such a project can hardly fail; the field for Voltairean grimaces at Candide’s disasters and the naïveté of Pangloss’ optimism is inexhaustible – the grimaces are so obviously convincing, that they will always appeal to the adolescent ‘rationality’ of the Enlightened flavor. One will always find many serious examples which can be used as strong reasons justifying ungrateful attitude, indeed, ridiculing any idea of *gratefulness*. And, in fact, in many situations one better stay alert. But there is a great difference between seeing a danger in the particulars of a situation, and seeing danger everywhere, between being wary of a person who creates an impression of dishonesty and being wary of all people, perhaps, even of all people in general. The suspicious alertness is the fundamental modus of ungratefulness, reflecting and originating in the general idea of the world rendered in terms of harm and reward; the world which, moreover, unless one prevents it, will do one some harm. “Most are at odds with that with which they most constantly associate – the account which governs the universe – and … what they meet with every day seems foreign to them.”

4.3.3. Yes or No

172. All *aspects* of *No* express the opposition to the idea that it results from any choice, whether *spiritual* or not. There is nothing there, and so there has never been anything inviting to, not to say forcing, any fundamental *choice*. Lacking the *concrete foundation*, *No* is occupied with a constant search for *visible* reasons serving as its explanations –

367Heraclitus  DK 22B72
in the world, in life, in one's life... The lack of justification only increases thirst for it. But as no visible and objective foundation can be obtained, the spiritual Yes appears as a pure subjectivism, a mere projection. The answer to the accusation of projections, given in 3.2.2.ii, pointed out that since Yes accepts the absolute invisibility of the origin, it amounts exactly to not projecting anything into it. This might still leave some doubts concerning its subjectivism. Since there are no visible, objective, sufficient reasons for selecting one alternative rather than other, the choice seems arbitrary and subjective.

Every real choice can be accused of subjectivism, or rather voluntarism, in so far as it is not determined by other factors except the person making the choice. Choice means that there is no necessity in following one path rather than another. In this sense, the reflective choice of Yes is a voluntary act remaining at the discretion of every individual. This does not mean that it is subjective but only that it is a real choice.

As it seems, the accusation of subjectivism is actually not different from the claim that one does not choose between some objectively given alternatives but, so to speak, creates the result by making the choice. This is bound to appear so for the attachment which accepts only plain, visible explanations. For the choice is directed only towards nothing and it affects primarily only the sphere of invisibles which, to the extent it is at all recognised by the attachment, is considered purely subjective. We have seen the ambiguities involved in this concept which could be opposed to the external objectivity as much as to the internal, deeper sphere of vertical transcendence reaching beyond oneself towards self and nothingness. The personal dimension of this vertical transcendence does not, in any way, make it subjective. It only expresses the existential character of the absolute, the fact that "man infinitely transcends himself." Yes does not choose anything objective. It chooses the absolute which founds all objectivity.

Now, one can meet subjective attempts to view every situation in positive terms, to see only good side of things or other forms of, sometimes charming, sometimes irritating, naivety. The analogues of Yes can be only subjectively posited and then maintained and protected the more intensely, the weaker and shallower is the recognition of their truth. They remain subjective and unconvincing as long as they are not concretely founded, as long as they are not recognised as manifestations of the absolute but only posited as desirable expressions of unclear faith in some, perhaps objective, but subjectively inaccessible truth. They remain unconvincing and only subjective because nobody can voluntarily posit the object of one's faith. To believe, in the spiritual sense, is not to blindly accept an objective postulate, but to recognise the invisible foundation of existence. Only in this sense, of an existential openness to the invisible origin, is faith opposed to reason which occupies itself exclusively with the visible objectivities.

But subjective is as opposed to the objective as to the truly personal. Personal, or existential foundation transcends all subjectivity. It is, however, not objective but absolute. It is not the matter of mere subjective faith or wish but of the truth, conformance to the origin. Analogues of Yes, flowing thus from the personal center, that is, the center of Being, embrace all subjective acts and actual choices with the reminiscence of their origin. They witness to its eternal presence which, invisible as it is, waits to be found, though not seen. And whenever it is found, it is found as having been there all the time, waiting unmoved, unchanged, the same as millennia ago and as it will be in all the future. The ultimately certain – unchangeable, shared and objective – is the ultimately invisible: eternity, the presence of the origin.

368 B. Pascal, Pensées. VII:434
*Actual objectivity* – of things, events, theorems – borrows its characteristics – of constancy, independence, non-relativity, intersubjectivity – from this *foundation*. But when one starts looking for such characteristics, one quickly realises that, in the *absolute* form in which one would like to find them, they are not to be found among the *actual objectivities* where reflection naturally starts its search. For they are only borrowed by the *actual objects* from the *origin*. The choice of Yes is not an arbitrary, *subjective* decision. It does not create the object of its faith, for this object is the first *ontological* fundament of our *existence*. It simply recognises the relative character of all *actuality* and accepts its *invisible foundation*. It is the only choice which conforms to the *origin*, which is true.

The fact that there are no *objective*, forcing reasons to make just this, and not the opposite choice, does not mean that it is *subjective* but only that it is a real choice. It is only a relativistic seduction to think that wherever there is a real choice, the actual one must be left to the privacy of every person, since no alternative can be more true than any other. The truth of a mathematical theorem does not depend on anybody personally understanding it or not – it is usually announced by the more able to the less able ones. When announced, it remains as a possibility for anybody interested to figure out its meaning and proof. The fact that most of us never do, does not take any truth away from it. But you know that, once you sit down and study, it will emerge with the sense and meaning which others have discovered before. It is there, waiting with the indifferent patience and unchangeable form for anybody willing and able to recognise it. Is there any more *absolute* sense of truth? Can there be anything more objective, more certain?
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