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## A SARTREAN TYPOLOGY OF VIOLENT AGENTS

Ciprian JELER<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This paper provides a classification of violent agents according to the manner in which they relate to their own goals. By interpreting Jean-Paul Sartre's discussion of violence in *Notebooks for an Ethics*, I show that violent agents may be classified into four categories that I call "defenders of the given order," "instruments of a higher power," "mineralized subjects" and, finally, "unchained subjects." I also show how each of these four categories of violent subjects represents a particular manner of, in Sartre's words, "refusing time" or, in other terms, of refusing to change or to adjust to the situation one finds oneself in.

**Keywords:** violence, typology, violent agent, Jean-Paul Sartre

### 1. Introduction

In this paper, I propose a classification of violent agents based on Jean-Paul Sartre's discussion of violence in his *Notebooks for an Ethics*.<sup>2</sup> Unlike those of other existing typologies (e.g. those of Michel Wieviorka<sup>3</sup>), the categories I propose here do not refer to the status that a person must have in order for them to *subsequently* be likely to *turn to violence*<sup>4</sup>. What I am interested in is classifying violent agents

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, translated by David Pellauer, Chicago University Press, 1992, especially pp. 170-215. Henceforth abbreviated as *Notebooks*.

<sup>3</sup> See Michel Wieviorka, "Violence and the Subject," in *Thesis Eleven*, 73/2003, Sage, 42-50; Michel Wieviorka, *Violence. A New Approach*, translated by David Macey, Sage, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Let me add that Sartre's discussions of violence in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* are also focused especially on the preconditions or antecedents of violence.





according to their attitude during the violent act itself, and more particularly, according to the manner in which they relate to their goals. Though extremely rich in both theoretical content and powerful examples, Sartre's analysis of violence in the *Notebooks* is not aimed at providing a typology of violence agents and, moreover, it is fragmentary and unsystematic. Therefore, my attempt to provide a Sartrean typology of violent agents will use as guide a systematization of Sartre's discussion that I provided elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

According to this systematization, the main insight of Sartre's discussion is that we should adopt a non-instrumental view of violence, one undergirded by the idea that violent behavior does not fit neatly into the means/ends logic of pragmatic behavior. More specifically, by mostly focusing on Sartre's examples and on Sartre's own analyses of these examples, Jeler (2020) has shown that, when compared to pragmatic behavior, violent behavior implies a modification of the agent's attitude towards their goals. Jeler (2020) also identified four types of such modifications, and these will provide the theoretical basis for the four categories of violent agents I will detail below.

The typology I propose here is directly linked to a recurrent theme in Sartre's discussion of violence in the *Notebooks*. Sartre repeatedly asserts that violence implies a "refusal of time." By this, he does not mean to say that the violent agent refuses to admit the existence of time in general or that it rejects socially objective time in some way. Rather, this "refusal of time" is, for Sartre, a plastic way of saying that the violent agents refuse to change. However, in Sartre's text, there is a whole variety of manners in which this "refusal of time" or refusal of change is linked to violence. Indeed, violent agents are sometimes said to refuse time by denying that their goals might change along with the means employed for reaching them ("if the end is something to be *rejoined*, if in some sense it has a sufficiency of being, then it is independent of the means. So here one can choose any means for attaining it" — *Notebooks*, 183); in other places, violent agents seem to refuse time by wanting to immediately get to the sought end (the violent person, Sartre says, "wants everything and wants it immediately, like Anouilh's *Antigone*" — *Notebooks*, 173); or by choosing to live in the short term ("In a word, violence is the choice to live in the short term, and to do so in terms of the instantaneous and eternal nature of the end" — *Notebooks*, 179); or by creating the irremediable, one of the most constant elements of violence being, in Sartre's words, "a need to fight time by the creation of the irremediable, generally by means of destruction (because every

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<sup>5</sup> Ciprian Jeler, "Beyond an Instrumental View of Violence: On Sartre's Discussion of Violence in *Notebooks for an Ethics*," in *Human Studies*, 43/2020, Springer, 237-255. For brevity, this article will be henceforth referred to as Jeler (2020).

construction is *destroyable*, whereas destruction cannot be wiped out)” (*Notebooks*, 189); or, finally, this refusal of time is most straightforwardly a refusal to change, in the sense that violent agents refuse to adjust to the given situation (“I’m taking an *oath*. Whatever happens, I will not change” — *Notebooks*, 214, translation slightly modified). In what follows, I will not claim that all of these manners of refusing time/refusing to change are reducible to a single one. Instead, I intend to point out that, just like the typology proposed here may help put some order among the various figures of violent agents depicted in Sartre’s text, it would likely be helpful — at least from an exegetical point of view — to show that each of these figures is compatible with a particular manner of “refusing time,” i.e. of the refusal, by the subject, to change or to adjust to the given situation.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, I will argue that, according to Sartre, one of the characteristics of violent agents is that of refusing to recognize that the situation they find themselves in requires any adjusting or any change on their part or, in any case, of denying the legitimacy of such a requirement.<sup>7</sup> Thus, for each of the four categories of violent agents presented below, I will briefly indicate the manner in which the violent behavior implies a refusal to adjust to the situation at hand.

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, this is what sets apart my interpretation of the connection between violence and the “refusal of time” from that provided by James Dodd, *Violence and Phenomenology*, Routledge, 2009, 66-69.

<sup>7</sup> My insistence to spell out the refusal of time implied in violent behavior along the lines of the refusal of the agent to change or to adjust to their situation is based on the conviction that Sartre’s discussion of violence in the *Notebooks* is heavily influenced by his previous presentation of the “passionate anti-Semite” in *Réflexions sur la question juive*. I am taking the liberty of quoting a long and beautiful fragment from this book here because it shows in what sense the “passionate anti-Semite” refuses to change: “The rational man groans as he gropes for the truth; he knows that his reasoning is no more than tentative, that other considerations may supervene to cast doubt on it. He never sees very clearly where he is going; he is “open”; he may even appear to be hesitant. But there are people who are attracted by the durability of a stone. They wish to be massive and impenetrable; they wish not to change. Where, indeed, would change take them? We have here a basic fear of oneself and of truth. What frightens them is not the content of truth, of which they have no conception, but the form itself of truth, that thing of indefinite approximation. It is as if their own existence were in continual suspension. But they wish to exist all at once and right away. They do not want any acquired opinions; they want them to be innate. Since they are afraid of reasoning, they wish to wad the kind of life wherein reasoning and research play only a subordinate role, wherein one seeks only what he has already found, wherein one becomes only what he already was” (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, translated by George J. Becker, with a new preface by Michael Walzer, Schocken Books, 1995, 12-13). Note the similarity between how the anti-Semites “wish to exist all at once and right away” and the fragment quoted above about how the violent person “wants everything and wants it immediately.”

## 2. Four categories of violent agents

Four types of modifications of the manner in which the violent agents relate to their own goals are identified by Jeler (2020, 243-254). In the first type, the violent agent no longer sees the goal as something to be produced, but as something that is already there, already present, and therefore the agent only needs to eliminate the obstacles that tend to conceal this already present goal. In the second type, the violent agent sees the goal as something to be produced, but this goal is not produced by means that are at our disposal; rather, they are produced by means that exceed human means of production, namely by a deeper — usually metaphysical — causality. (Though clearly distinct, for reasons that I will not reproduce here, both of these types of relationship between agent and goals may be subsumed under the same category of “non-productive attitude.”) The third type of relationship between violent agent and goals involves the exacerbation of a proximate goal at the expense of more distant goals of the agent: this is called the “counter-productive attitude” because, by the means chosen in order to reach a proximal goal, the violent agent actually renders impossible the realization of their more distant goals. Finally, the fourth type is called “anti-productive attitude” because it involves the active refusal of the goal one had previously set for oneself: the agent does not only abandon the previously set goal, but also makes sure that this abandoning is irremediable (e.g. by destroying the very means that would be needed for reaching that particular goal).

It is on this quadripartite distinction that the typology of violent agents proposed here is based. We will now move on to discuss, in turn, the four categories of violent agents, namely violent agents as “defenders of the given order,” as “instruments of a higher power,” as “mineralized subjects” and, finally, as “unchained subjects.” What each of these categories refers to will become clear as the discussion progresses.

### 2.1. The violent agent as defender of the given order

The first type of violence identified in Jeler (2020, 243-247) refers to the combination of two assumptions made by the violent agent: a) that their goal is not a future state of affairs that needs to be produced, but an already-present, already-given state of affairs; and b) that certain obstacles are concealing or risk to conceal this already-given state of affairs and, consequently, that the violent agent needs to eliminate these obstacles that stand in the way of the full disclosure of the already-present state of affairs. The violent act itself fulfills this second role of pushing aside or obliterating of the concealing obstacles.

With the help of certain indications from Sartre's *Notebooks*, we can state that the figure of the violent agent that corresponds to this type of violence is that of the "defender of the given order," where, as I will try to emphasize below, the term "given" must be taken to refer both to something that is already present and to the intrinsic "givenness," the disclosing character of truth. Let us see how, for Sartre, the first of these two meanings leads to the second:

Violence is Manichean. It believes in an order of the world that is given yet concealed by bad wills. It suffices to destroy the obstacle for this order to appear, and this applies to the anti-Semitism that would liberate the order of the world by destroying the Jew, as well as to the surrealist who would make the surreal appear at the horizon of his destructions. (*Notebooks*, 174)

The "order of the world" that the violent agent strives for is not something that is yet to be realized or produced, but something that is presupposed by the violent agent as being already there, already given; and whatever seems to contest or to conceal this given order needs to be destroyed. Obviously, this latter assumption might be doubly false: on one hand, against appearances, the others may, in fact, not contest in any way the given order; on the other hand, even if the others do indeed contest the given order, they may have very good reasons to do so. But the important point is that, for my analysis here, it does not matter whether the assumption made by the violent agent is true or false: to enquire about the truth or falsity of this assumption boils down to asking questions about the antecedents of violence (about how the violent act in question has come about) or about the legitimacy of that violent act. But this enquiry would go beyond the scope of this paper: as already emphasized, my interest here lies in classifying the attitudes of agents during the violent act itself (and especially their attitude with respect to their goals), and not with enquiring about the antecedents or legitimacy of violence.

One might remark that, up until this point, I have only talked about the reaction of a subject when the order they defend is contested by someone else. But this seems to be a far cry from the idea that, in this kind of violence, the assumed already-present goal is or risks being concealed by certain obstacles and that it is against this concealment that the violent behavior reacts (on the assumption that, in Sartre's words from the above quotation, "it suffices to destroy the obstacle for this order to appear"). In other words, there seems to be a significant distance between *contesting* an "order of the world" and *concealing* it. This difficulty is only apparent. Indeed, once the violent subject has presupposed that an "order of the world" is already given, any manner of contesting this order is *nothing more than a mystification*. When one assumes that that particular "order of the world" is given, one is implicitly assuming that it is given once and for all, that it is not subject to change. It cannot be denied or altered in any way, except by tricking the others into

not seeing that it is there or into seeing it in a different, falsifying light. Therefore, the only way in which this alleged order may be altered is by mystification, by falsifying it in the eyes of the others. Any contestant of the given order is thus implicitly a falsifier, a forger. This is why the defender of the given order is also, at the same time and inextricably, a defender of truth.<sup>8</sup> The “givenness” of the order defended by the violent agent inevitably denotes its intrinsic truthfulness.

We may call “conservative” violence the kind of violence that is characteristic of the subjects belonging to the “defender of the given order” category. Offensive wars that take a past order as the benchmark provide examples of conservative violence because their aim is that of restoring the “real” territory of a country. Violent repressions of worker strikes are another example in which actors assume the figure of the defender of the given order. Among the many instances of conservative violence, we may also list acts of terrorism making claims of independence or self-determination of historical provinces.

Before we move on, let us briefly indicate in what way the violent agents belonging to this category may be said to “refuse time.” The “defenders of the given order” do not adjust to the situation they are in because *they see no reason why they should do so*. For them, the situation appears entirely clear: the order that regulates the situation is already given and this order only needs to be uncovered; the resistance that the agent encounters in that situation is nothing more than an attempt to conceal or to give a false image of that underlying order and, in the violent agent’s view, such falsifying attempts need to be crushed. The defenders of the given order thus refuse to adjust because, in their eyes, the situation does not require any adjustment.

## 2.2. The violent agent as instrument of a higher power

The second type of modification of the violent agent’s manner of relating to their goal identified in Jeler (2020, 247-249) consists in assuming that the goal is something to be produced, but not by the violent agent; rather, it is to be produced by a deeper causality, one that differs from ordinary human means of production. The role played by the agent’s violent act here is that of “paving the way” for the coming into effect of this deeper causality.

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<sup>8</sup> This point is highlighted by one of Sartre’s examples. Suppose I am debating a subject with someone but, even though I am certain that I am right in this discussion, the interlocutor seems to be more intelligent or is more skilled at defending their point. In such a case, Sartre states, the other’s arguments will appear to me as “only ruses, misleading appearances” and I feel that I am “mystified” (*Notebooks*, 213).

Because it constitutes the prime exemplification for this type of violence, I will briefly look here at one of Sartre's examples that has also been discussed in Jeler (2020), namely the case of a well-known moment of the Albigensian Crusade. As the town of Béziers — that harbored both heretics and Catholics — was being taken by the besieging crusaders, the leader of the crusade reportedly endorsed the indiscriminate killings of the people of Béziers, the reason being that "God will recognize his own." Sartre comments on this case as follows:

One counts on God to make the choice, to carry things through. Hence man has only to destroy. The principle of *human* justice is: allow ten guilty men to escape rather than destroy one innocent person. That of a justice that has confidence in Providence is: destroy ten innocent victims rather than allow one guilty person to escape. The innocent person will get his reward because God *will make amends* (he will give him eternal life) (*Notebooks*, 183).

As has been shown in Jeler (2020, 247-248), in this case violence marks the abandoning of any human means of doing justice (as these human means — based on enquiries, testimonies, proofs etc. — would have risked leaving some heretics unpunished). Instead, by doing away with all human means of doing justice, the Crusaders allegedly set the conditions for the appearance of divine justice, that would recognize the Catholics from the heretics and reward them accordingly. This kind of violence is thus characterized by the refusal or the abandoning of all human means of producing a given goal (justice, in the Béziers case) in order to pave the way for a different type of causality, one beyond our control (here, a divine one), by which the sought end is produced.

The violent subjects that accomplish this sort of violence thus act as if they were mere instruments of a higher power. But it is important to stress that violent agents as "instruments of a higher power" should not be confused with utterly submissive agents, i.e. agents that are essentially devoid of initiative insofar as they only enforce the will of the higher authority they are representing. To instantiate the latter category, it might be argued — though this is far from certain — that the soldiers of the Third Reich that ruthlessly killed civilians while belonging to the *Einsatzgruppen* of the Eastern front only did what the chain of command ordered them to or that Eichmann only enforced the *Führer's* will (in the juridical system of the Third Reich, the *Führer's* will — even when expressed only in an oral manner — had the status of law). But in such cases (if, indeed, there is any validity in interpreting them in this way), the goal set by the higher authority was reached by the action of Eichmann or of the soldiers of the *Einsatzgruppen*. In contrast, by their refusal of human means of production, the violent agents belonging to the category of "instruments of a higher power" do not properly enact or enforce the will of a higher

authority; rather, they *invoke* or *conjure* a higher power that will carry the act through. It is this different power — one that is beyond their control — that sees the goal produced. By their violent acts, the “instruments of the higher power” merely set the stage or prepare the conditions so that this higher power may come into effect — this is, indeed, very different from merely executing orders received from a higher authority.

This sort of violence usually appears when, in a given situation, no clear path for reaching the sought end is available for the subject. For example, in the Béziers massacre, no clear manner in which one could have punished *all* and *only* the heretics was readily available because the ordinary human enquiries for finding out who was and who was not a heretic would likely have led to at least some misidentifications. Faced with this shortage of means for reaching the sought end, the leader of the crusade turns to God who — and this is his hope, or rather his faith — will unfailingly succeed in punishing all and only the heretics. This sort of violence may be termed “strategic violence,” given that it is meant to forge a path towards the desired end in a situation in which all paths seem to be blocked, i.e. in which no ordinary human means for reaching that goal seem to be available; thus, by turning violent, one *hopes* that some sort of intervention beyond our control will end up realizing the goal we are seeking, even though the situation at hand does not give any hints as to the manner in which the goal might be attained.<sup>9</sup> The violent act thus turns a blind eye towards the evidence that the path towards the goal is blocked and invokes some sort of deeper forces that, even though they are not visible in the given situation, will hopefully end up realizing the goal. The hope therefore is that the goal will be produced not because of the means available in the situation, but *despite* these means:<sup>10</sup> by explicitly destroying these means (e.g. by killing the witnesses from Béziers that could have been questioned about the religious beliefs of other inhabitants), one invokes some unseen force or element that might come into play and see the goal produced.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to emphasize that violent agents as “instruments of a higher power” do not necessarily require an explicit representation of the higher authority they invoke in their behavior, nor of the manner in which this authority would

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<sup>9</sup> “I do not count on what is known but on what is unknown, there is *hope* in violence and *certitude* in a lawful operation. Recourse to magic” (*Notebooks*, 172). This recourse — albeit a non-explicit one — to a non-human power is what distinguishes this form of violence from another one which consists in pursuing the sought end at all costs. For the latter, see the “mineralized subject” category below.

<sup>10</sup> I paraphrase here a remark made by Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*, translated by Nils F. Schott, Duke University Press, 2015, 138, about Bergson’s theory of the organ-obstacle presented in his *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell, Dover Publications, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> “But here again, I am confident about something behind what I have destroyed, a Me behind me” (*Notebooks*, 183).

allegedly reach the desired goal. In the case of the Béziers massacre, such an explicit representation exists (with God being the higher authority, and his unflinching judgment being the mechanism by which justice is achieved); but an explicit representation of this sort is not a necessary requirement for this type of violence. Indeed, cases involving such an explicit representation of the higher power and cases in which the agents exhibit a complete ignorance of the nature and manner of acting of this higher power should be seen as the two ends of a continuum. Many concrete cases probably fall somewhere between these two extremes: for example, many acts of religious terrorism may arguably be placed on the line between these two extremes.

But what about the manner in which this kind of agent may be said to refuse to change? The “instruments of a higher power” do not adjust to the given situation because, in their view of the situation, *any adjusting would entail missing the pursued goal*. If the besiegers of Béziers had tried to employ human means of making justice, some heretics would certainly have gone unpunished; as noted, in cases of “strategic” violence, all ordinary human means of reaching the pursued goal seem blocked. Any attempt to adjust to the situation — i.e. any attempt to try to keep using ordinary, pragmatic means for reaching the pursued goal — seems to be doomed from the start.

The violent act thus puts an end to any potential attempt to adjust to the situation and tries to forge a new path, one that is not available to human means of producing the sought end and that the violent agent is no longer in control of. The “instruments of the higher power” thus refuse to adjust to the situation because, in their view, instead of getting them closer to the goal, any such adjustment seems to actually prevent them from reaching it.

### **2.3. The mineralized subject**

The third kind of modification of the violent agents’ attitude with respect to their goal identified in Jeler (2020, 250-253) bears the name of “counter-productive attitude” and it consists in the exacerbation of a proximate goal to the point that it hinders or renders impossible the reaching of other — more distant or existentially more important — goals of the agent.

In this kind of violence, the agents present themselves as being guided by the following unyielding decision: “I will reach this (proximate) goal even if it is the last thing I do.” This might be called “obsessive” violence insofar as it involves the fixation of the agent on one particular goal at the expense of others. Imagine, for example, a man that is about to go with his wife at the opera. But he gets so intent on leaving the house at a particular hour so as not to be late for the show, that he snaps at his wife for taking too long to get ready to leave. And he has his nervous



outburst even though he knows that it might well spoil the entire evening; therefore, his fixation on a proximate goal (leaving the house on time) hinders the grander goal (having a pleasant evening). His conduct may be described as: "I will leave the house at the right hour even if it is the last thing I do this evening (i.e. even if this means that the rest of the evening gets ruined)." This hypothetical man thus loses perspective and no longer takes into account the fact that the proximate goal is itself just a means for a more distant or more important goal.

I call this type of violent subject a "mineralized subject," following an indication of Sartre's from his *Réflexions sur la question juive*, where he states that the passionate anti-Semite chooses "for his personality the permanence of rock [*la permanence minérale*]." <sup>12</sup> Once the violent agent's proximate goal is set, they are determined to reach it at any cost, even if it means ruining the higher goals in view of which that proximate goal has been set in the first place. As shown by my hypothetical example above, the man is determined that, with respect to his proximate goal, he will not change his mind no matter what. It is this inflexibility, this pledge not to change one's mind that the expression "mineralized subject" is meant to denote. The mineralized subject may sacrifice their more distant and more important goals for the sake of a proximate one only if for them the necessity of reaching this proximate goal has become an undisputable fact, i.e. only if they have become determined that, with respect to that proximate goal, they are no longer free to change their minds. In other words, only if, as far as reaching the proximate goal is concerned, the subject has acquired the unchangeable nature or the permanence of stone.

Rape might exemplify this type of violence, as Sartre indicates (*Notebooks*, 180). In certain (but surely not all) cases of rape, by fixating on the proximate goal (possessing the victim), the rapist is giving up on all the other goals he may have had with respect to the victim (a longer term relationship with mutual affection, potentially marriage etc.). In this sort of cases, the rapist possesses the victim even if this implies cutting all subsequent ties with her (i.e. even if, with regard to that person, this is "the last thing" he ever does). Other cases of obsessive violence involving "mineralized subjects" are the violence or killings committed *in order to make a* (social or political) *point*. In such cases the "even if it's the last thing I do" sometimes takes a definitive meaning, for example when killings intending to make a point are followed by the suicide of the killer.

Let me add that a limiting-case here is constituted by violent acts committed in order to protect one's very survival. In cases in which one is protecting one's very survival, many distant or higher goals may be renounced precisely because, if one fails to reach the proximate goal (i.e. surviving), the distant goals become out of the

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<sup>12</sup> Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Schocken Books, 1995, 19.

question. Here, the cost of success in reaching the proximate goal of surviving is usually smaller than the cost of failure. (But, let us state, this is not always the case: had Socrates saved his life by fleeing, his legacy might have been somewhat different.)

As for the manner in which they “refuse time” or refuse to change, the “mineralized subjects” do not adjust to the situation they are in because *they no longer see themselves as being free to do so*. They are absolutely determined not to change their mind with respect to the proximate goal pursued. They “took an oath” to reach this proximate goal, even if this means sacrificing their more distant or higher goals. The proximate goal is thus exacerbated to the point that adjusting becomes out of the question.

#### 2.4. The unchained subject

The final kind of modification of the violent agents’ attitude outlined in Jeler (2020, 253-254) consists in the active refusal, by the agents, of their previously set goal. This attitude — termed “anti-productive” — may not be reduced to the abandoning of a previous goal in favor of new goals; rather, it consists in rendering the previously set goal unreachable. The example on which the analysis of this attitude is based comes from Sartre’s *Notebooks* and it refers to someone who wants to obtain sweet water by mixing water and sugar in a glass; however, after losing patience, this person throws the glass and breaks it, thus not only giving up on the previously set goal, but also making sure that the goal is not obtained.

The important point is that here one *destroys* one’s goal. This attitude thus consists in the subject’s refusal to be determined by that goal or to be subjected to the limitations imposed by that determination (e.g. by the necessity of *waiting* for the sugar to dissolve in the above example). By this active refusal of being identified with or determined by their goal, the subjects are actually refusing their own facticity (*Notebooks*, 175). The destruction of one’s previously set goal is the manifestation of one’s desire to become a pure subjectivity, a pure subject unlimited by concrete goals and by the means required for reaching them, i.e. unlimited by concrete determinations. I will call this type of subject the “unchained subject” both because it is a subject that wants to be liberated from concrete goals and the means required for reaching them, and because this desire to become a pure subjectivity is marked by a destructive and uncontrolled behavior towards the very means by which the previously set goal was to be attained. This unchained subject corresponds to the type of violence involved in Hegel’s Master/Slave dialectic, at least if we take

seriously the idea<sup>13</sup> that in fighting for recognition the Master rises above all determinations of life:

the *exhibition* of itself as the pure abstraction of selfconsciousness consists in showing itself to be the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is fettered to no determinate *existence*, that it is not at all bound to the universal singularity of existence, that it is not shackled to life.<sup>14</sup>

However, it must be noted that rendering one's goal unreachable may be done not only by destroying the means that are necessary for reaching the goal, but also by performing acts that greatly exceed the given goal. To put it otherwise, one may also annihilate one's goal through excess, by going so much further than one's goal that the latter becomes utterly irrelevant or bygone. This is the case, for example, in killing sprees in which pure violence replaces any goals that one might initially have had. Completely unnecessary and unrestrained massacres of civilians or prisoners during wartime operations thus fall into this category of uncontrolled violence performed by unchained subjects (see, e.g., the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War). But such cases should not be seen merely as acts of cruelty. Cruel acts may be said to be done for the perpetrator's pleasure, whereas, in the acts of the unchained subject, violence is done for the sake of violence. This uncontrolled violence does not seem to aim at anything or, to put it otherwise, it is done for the sake of *nothing*, it only marks the refusal of the perpetrators to be defined by any determinate goals or, to borrow Hegel's terms, their refusal to be fettered to a "determinate existence" or "shackled to life."

Of course, it has to be admitted that it may often be difficult — or even impossible — to determine when particular acts of violence have become entirely dissociated from any goals that the perpetrator may initially have had. I thus completely agree with Wieviorka that "it is not always easy to strike a balance between the meaning, which may be distorted, partly lost or reduced, for example, to an ideological form as it may be, that is expressed through violence, and the savagery and cruelty of the violence itself, which can appear to have nothing to do with its meaning."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, edited by Allan Bloom, translated by James H. Nichols Jr., Cornell University Press, 1980; James Mensch, "Violence and Selfhood," in *Human Studies*, 36/2013, Springer, 25-41.

<sup>14</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, edited and translated by Terry Pinkard and Michael Baur, Cambridge University Press, 2018, 111.

<sup>15</sup> Wieviorka, *Violence A New Approach*, Sage, 2009, 125.

As for their manner of refusing time or of refusing to change, the “unchained subjects” do not adjust to the situation they are in because *they have nothing to adjust to anymore*. Once they revoked their goal, what could they adjust to? The concrete destruction of their goals marks the supreme form of refusal to adjust, i.e. the refusal to “put up” with any limitation imposed by the world to the unchained subject. In the previous three cases, we were dealing with situations that did not seem to require adjusting or that seemed to present a shortage of means for reaching a goal or seemed to require sacrificing distant goals for the sake of proximate ones; here, along with the concrete annihilation of our goal, the world itself loses its ability to demand adjusting from the subjects’ part. Thus, the world itself gets reduced to the status of a correlate of purely destructive acts.

### **3. Conclusion**

Based on some of Sartre’s examples of violence in the *Notebooks* and on the systematization done in Jeler (2020) of four kinds of modifications of one’s manner of relating to one’s goal in violent behavior, this paper identified four types of violence, namely conservative, strategic, obsessive and uncontrolled violence. But the core of the paper consisted in showing that the subjects that perform these acts may be grouped into the four categories of defenders of the given order, instruments of a higher power, mineralized and, finally, unchained subjects. Moreover, I have also attempted to render more precise Sartre’s repeated claim that violence implies a “refusal of time” by showing that, in their respective ways, the agents of each of these four categories are characterized by a refusal to change or to adjust to the situation at hand.

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# MUSICAL RELATIONSHIPS: TOWARDS A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF EARLY MOTHER-INFANT INTERACTIONS

David-Augustin MÂNDRUȚ<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This paper investigates musical relationships in the case of the early mother-infant dyadic interactions. To accomplish this task, it is first needed to come back to some important authors from the tradition of both phenomenology and psychoanalysis. The theories of Husserl, Schutz and Taipale will prove themselves to be useful. Secondly, I shall deepen the investigation of the early mother-infant interactions through the prism of theories coming from Winnicott, Stern and Thomas Fuchs. My main task will be to demonstrate that these early interactions have a musical quality, similar to Colwyn Trevarthen's thematization of communicative musicality. To prove my point, I have to first establish the features that make these early interactions be musical-like. Winnicott's potential space and the example of babbling will follow my argumentation. I will also stress on the importance of the face-to-face interaction through affect attunement and mutual tuning-in. All these interactions are modes of being-with-another (Stern). An example will be found throughout this paper, namely a specific mode of being-with-another, which was called by Winnicott the primary maternal preoccupation.

**Keywords:** musical relationships, babbling, potential space, face-to-face interaction, mutual tuning-in, affect attunement, primary maternal preoccupation, synchronization, rhythm, being-with.

## Introduction

There has been a lot of recent talk about the so-called musical relationships, or even of relationships which have a musical feature. Here we could recall Daniel Stern and Colwyn Trevarthen's thematization of the early life of the infant, but also

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the entire tradition of phenomenology starting from Edmund Husserl's texts on time and consciousness. The phrase "musical relationships" was first introduced by Martin Buber, in a psychotherapeutic context, namely when he wanted to emphasize that therapeutical relationships must be seen as an unfolding, and not as an imposing<sup>2</sup> or prescription. Unfolding would be the way in which music presents to us, while imposing would be an idiosyncratically attempt at convincing the other that we are right (in some manner or another)<sup>3</sup>. Unfortunately, this phrase was never developed by Buber in a unitary theory, but nonetheless certain phenomenologists and developmental psychologists elaborated this idea. These authors will be the ones who we are going to use in our present paper.

In his lectures on the internal time-consciousness, Husserl invokes the case of the melody<sup>4</sup>, so that he can facilitate the understanding of his theories with certain examples, while Alfred Schutz explicitly uses the metaphor of "Making Music Together", in order to demonstrate how communication between persons might arise<sup>5</sup>. The term mutual tuning-in relationships will become recurrent in later discussions. This concept simply means that two streams of consciousness, two durations, might be synchronized by virtue of music. The Finnish phenomenologist Joonas Taipale will be also present in our article, with his very interesting ideas about the nature of empathy and the melodic unity of the other. Taipale claims that empathy is structured in the same way as the experience of listening to a musical piece, and this argument shall strengthen our understanding of the phenomenon of musical relationships.

Regarding developmental psychology and historically speaking, Donald Winnicott will be our starting point, even though he does not elaborate a psychology of music per se, but because his concept of potential space appears very useful for explaining certain early phenomena from the life of the infant, such as babbling and the early use of musical notes. Daniel Stern puts forth the theory of affect attunement, of which I will try to see how it works in conjunction with Winnicott's primary maternal preoccupation, which is also a way of tuning-in and being-with. Fuchs' theories will be also recalled, especially his ideas concerning synchronization and desynchronization, ideas about which I want to link to the issue of the primary maternal preoccupation.

In this paper, the main perspective will be drawn from Thomas Fuchs' theory of desynchronization. The early mother-infant relationship is usually seen through the prism of the "in-sync" theory, whereas we propose that explicit temporality, namely

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Schutz, "Making Music Together", In: *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 159.

the thematic and even reflective form of temporality, arises out of the desynchronization between mother and infant. Fuchs suggests that the implicit temporality of synchronization is the infant's primordial way of being with his or her mother, whereas desynchronization would indicate the beginning of explicit temporality. This would mean that both infant and mother acknowledge the presence of each other as independent beings. The initial state of the mother-infant merger will be called "rhythmical coupling", and desynchronization would mean exactly the fading-away of the primary maternal preoccupation.

### Face-to-face with music

Schutz states from the beginning that I, the subject, experience my fellow-man by sharing the same sector of time and space. Sharing the same segment of time, me and my fellow-men grow older together. On the other hand, the sharing of the same sector of space means that my fellow-man appears to me as himself and not as someone else. Schutz rightly claims that the body is implicated in this process of recognizing otherness, namely when he tells us that the other's body appears to us as a unified field of expression, that is, of concrete symptoms through which his conscious life manifests itself to us vividly. Here we could recall two adjacent theories, namely Mead's theory of gestures as the *sine qua non* of social communication<sup>6</sup> and Heidegger's conceptualization of gestures as unified compartments of the other person<sup>7</sup>, more exactly, of the other's being-in-the-world. This temporal and spatial immediacy is what Schutz calls the face-to-face relation<sup>8</sup>.

The phenomenologist continues to explain that, if attention is paid to the other, we might engage in a face-to-face relation, by means of the Thou-orientation, which has to be reciprocal. Of course, this relation can be one-sided. If this face-to-face relation is a reciprocal one, then we might speak of the We-relation. Stressing the importance of attention and of this turning to the other<sup>9</sup>, Schutz recalls the theories of Bergson (especially the attention to life<sup>10</sup>) and of Martin Buber<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols-Conversations-Letters*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001, pp. 90-91.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, New York: Zone Books, 1991, pp. 172-173.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 27.



In the beginning of his chapter dedicated to the experience of musical communication, Schutz claims that music is a meaningful context which is not bound to a conceptual scheme, yet this meaningful context can be communicated. The aim of Schutz's essay is to prove that social relationships have a musical quality. Schutz also criticizes Mead's attempts to explain social interactions through gestures or even through language. The author describes this prejudice by virtue of the way in which communication in a certain society is mediated by language.

The first chapter of Alfred Schutz's text is intended to be a critique of certain sociological conceptions of how people come to interact in a social situation. Scheler and Sartre are mentioned among others, and Schutz's main critique is that all the theories of these authors lacked the essential aspect of every social, and one could add, interhuman relation. This essential feature of virtually every face-to-face relation is what the author calls the mutual tuning-in relationship. Upon this mutual tuning-in, every communication is founded. Recalling Martin Buber's famous *I and Thou*<sup>12</sup>, Schutz insists that this mutual tuning-in is the ground of the authentic We-relation.

The mutual tuning-in relationship has a certain dimension connected to time. By virtue of it, people come to live together simultaneously. The author also hopes that his analysis of music will shed light on the matters which are concerned when talking about communication.

Next, there comes the definition of music, which for Schutz is a meaningful arrangement of tones in inner time, and here Bergson's notion of duration is addressed<sup>13</sup>. Recollections, retentions, protentions and anticipations are also involved in this process, first described by Husserl<sup>14</sup>. Duration, therefore, becomes the very form of existence of music<sup>15</sup>. The beholder and the composer are united by a time dimension common to both, which is nothing other than a derived form of the vivid present shared by the partners in a genuine face-to-face relation, such as prevails between speaker and listener. This simultaneity between the flow of consciousness of the beholder and that of the composer is made possible by the ongoing flux of the musical process. The mutual tuning-in relationship is the experience of the We, upon which all communication is then built. The performer and the listener are tuned-in to one another, are living together through the same flux, and they are also growing older together as the musical process lasts<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, London: Dover Publications, 2001, pp. 73-74.

<sup>14</sup> Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, pp. 170-171.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 174-175.

The participants involved in making music together do not only share the same segment of time, but also the same segment of space. The unified comportment of the other is very meaningful in this musical and communicative process. The mutual tuning-in relationship means, before all other aspects, sharing the other's flux of experiences in inner time, by living through a vivid present together, more exactly, by experiencing this togetherness as a genuine We<sup>17</sup>.

In short, Schutz was trying to tell us that music is a meaningful context, which is bound to objective time, and which could allow for two streams of consciousness to be synchronized. The composer/listener relation becomes the paradigmatic case for face-to-face interaction, or even vice-versa. Recalling the synchronization theory, the inner duration of the I and the inner duration of the Thou become simultaneous, which allows communication to arise. Thus, I and Thou grow older together by virtue of the mutual tuning-in relation. This idea of the synchronization of the two streams of consciousness will be taken up again in the essay "Mozart and the Philosophers"<sup>18</sup>.

### **The quest for affect attunement**

Before reaching our division dedicated to Winnicott's theory, Daniel Stern's notions of affect attunement and vitality forms<sup>19</sup> must be considered, both being related to one another in a very subtle way.

In *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, Stern stresses the importance of affective experience in the mother-infant dyad. This affective experience will be the ground for virtually every intersubjective relatedness. We can now recall Schutz's mutual tuning-in relationship which was the condition for every type of possible communication. Schutz's theory lacks the affective dimension, whereas Stern does not focus that much on the experience of time, although we could insist that affect attunement implies some sort of synchronization, or even resonance.

For Stern, interaffectivity is a concept mainly designed for the situation when one speaks about mirroring or emphatic responsiveness. Therefore, the problem of sharing affective states is closely related to the mirroring function. Winnicott took some time to talk about it in his most famous work, *Playing and Reality*<sup>20</sup>. In his theory of justice, Shaun Gallagher emphasizes that social justice should not first be

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<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 177.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 179.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel N. Stern, *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 149.

conceived necessarily in terms of mutual recognition, as in Honneth's thematization, but in terms of responsiveness to the other<sup>21</sup>. Here we could recall Buber's saying that every responsibility is ultimately build out of the capacity to respond to otherness<sup>22</sup>.

Daniel Stern insists that affect attunement should be clearly differentiated from imitation, even in the Piagetian sense, where exists different types of imitation<sup>23</sup>. If imitation implies that two people share the same modality, affect attunement must be understood ultimately as a cross-modal experience. We are going to come back to this aspect later, but for now we are going to follow Stern's conceptualization which implicates three steps.

First, the mother has to read the baby's feelings from his/her bodily behavior, so here we could also address Trevarthen's and Gallagher's thematizations of primary and secondary intersubjectivity<sup>24</sup>. Second, the parent must perform a behavior which is not a mere imitation, but it nonetheless corresponds in some way to the infant's behavior. Third, the infant must be able to read this corresponding response as having to do with his/her own feelings<sup>25</sup>.

Affect attunements give an impression of a kind of imitation, but this sort of match is largely cross-modal. What is being matched is not the other's behavior per se, but rather an aspect of the behavior that reflects the other's feeling state. We are now coming close to Stern's definition, where he tells us that affect attunement is the performance of behaviors that express the quality of feeling of a shared affect state without imitating the exact behavioral expression of the inner state.<sup>26</sup>

The advantage of affect attunement in face of mere imitation is that the first tells us something about the inner feeling state of the other person. As Stern puts it, imitation renders form; attunement renders feeling.<sup>27</sup> Attunements and imitations must not be considered to form a dichotomy, rather they seem to occupy two ends of a spectrum.

Now Stern will wonder about the core components which make affect attunement possible. He identifies six of them, namely absolute intensity, intensity contour, temporal beat, rhythm, duration, and shape. The level of intensity of the mother's behavior has to match that of the infant. For example, her vocalization might have the same intensity or force as the infant's hand movement. The mother and the infant's effort both showed an acceleration in intensity, followed by a sudden decrease<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Shaun Gallagher, *Action and Interaction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 203.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Shaun Gallagher, *Action and Interaction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, 101.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, London: Karnac Books, 1998, p. 139.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 142.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 142.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 146.

Stern goes on to differentiate categorical affects, such as joy or sadness from vitality affects. In the case of affect attunement, we usually speak of vitality affects. The vitality affects are connected to the matter of being alive, and those dynamic, kinetic qualities of feeling distinguish the animate from the inanimate. Vitality affects are experienced as dynamic shifts within us or the others. Attuning with vitality affects is essential for the process of being-with-another, as described by the developmental psychologist. Now attunement becomes the means by which the feeling of connectedness might emerge<sup>29</sup>.

We also have to consider Taipale's further argumentation about the functions of affect attunement. The Finnish phenomenologist claims that affect attunement comports two different, but related phenomena, which are essential for the development of the child. These are the mirroring function, and the regulating one. By tuning-in to her infant, the mother gives the child a sort of self-understanding, because if this attunement is good-enough, namely it does not represent a mere imitation, the infant feels that he or she is not alone in that specific interaction. For Taipale, mere imitation might even insult the child and anger him or her, because the infant might feel mocked by the mother's gesture, whereas if genuine attunement takes place, both mother and infant learn something very important about each other<sup>30</sup>.

### **The primary maternal preoccupation**

Jan Abram correctly observes that the experience of mutuality between mother and infant, which is made possible by the mother's identification with her infant, namely what Winnicott calls the primary maternal preoccupation is akin to Daniel Stern's affect attunement<sup>31</sup>. We need to insist on this last point, in order to see what it does actually mean. We could ask ourselves if the primary maternal preoccupation is the condition of possibility for virtually every affect attunement, or we could as well wonder if affect attunement is met only in behaviors related to this preoccupation. I now wish to describe this possible relation between affect attunement and primary maternal preoccupation. To accomplish this, a certain analysis of the main features of this specific behavior, as it was described by Winnicott, is needed. I have already ventured in the domain of Stern's affect attunement, so our task is partly accomplished. Nevertheless, we must not forget Schutz's mutual tuning-in relationship, a concept which we took somehow as the ground for our discussion. In the next divisions we

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 157.

<sup>30</sup> Joonas Taipale, Self-regulation and Beyond: Affect Regulation and the Infant-Caregiver Dyad, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7: 889, 2016, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Jan Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, London: Karnac Books, 2007, pp. 81-82.

will also try to demonstrate that the early musical interactions between mother and infant will build up, via the potential space, the later artistic creativity. The most telling example will be that of babbling, a phenomenon which was described by Marc Richir as a kind of proto-musicality<sup>32</sup>.

From the start of his article, Winnicott insists on the fundamental role played by the holding environment in early infancy. We will find out, that this initial holding environment is made possible by the mother's primary preoccupation. Furthermore, Winnicott is addressing Mahler's theory of symbiosis<sup>33</sup>, suggesting that the matter with the merged state, or the fusion state is not primarily a biological issue, but a psychological one. So Winnicott introduces the concept of identification in order to explain the mother's readiness to her infant's needs<sup>34</sup>.

The mother identifies with her baby, but her baby does not identify with her. With the infant, the matter belongs more to the state of dependence, even the absolute one. Winnicott tries to explain this situation by giving us everyday examples, such as the mother who was also a child some time ago, or the way in which her parents took care of her, or even the manner in which she played, as a child, the mother role. On the other hand, the child has never before had the chance of being involved in these kinds of situations. Concluding, we must acknowledge the fundamental asymmetry between the mother's perspective and that of the infant, this asymmetry being provided by the examples cited above. Time is involved in all these situations. The mother is obviously older than her child, so she had time to go through all these sorts of experiences and interactions, while her child is just beginning to know what it means to be a human being<sup>35</sup>.

The mother found in the state of primary preoccupation has first to meet the child's needs. All real life is meeting, as Buber's saying goes<sup>36</sup>. The fundamental feature of this state of which we are talking about would be exactly this meeting, of the child's needs. Of course, this is not the entire discussion. In a letter from Winnicott's correspondence, the British psychoanalyst insists on the importance of the way in which the mother (most probably the one found in the primary preoccupation) meets the infant's spontaneous gesture<sup>37</sup>. More about this spontaneous gesture later.

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<sup>32</sup> Marc Richir, *Variations sur le sublime et le soi*, Grenoble: Jerome Millon, 2010, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> Margaret S. Mahler, Fred Pine, Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, London: Karnac Books, 2002, p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, London: Tavistock, 1958, pp. 300-301.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 301.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *The Spontaneous Gesture*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 43.

Biologically speaking, this state, namely the primary maternal preoccupation, starts to develop towards the end of the pregnancy period, and it implies a heightened sensitivity towards the infant. It lasts for a few weeks after the birth, and it is not easily remembered by mothers who have recovered from it, because the mothers' memories of this period become repressed<sup>38</sup>.

The mother who is in this primary maternal preoccupation provides the setting for the infant's constitution, so this constitution might begin to unfold. The mother, by meeting the child's spontaneous gestures, helps the infant master these spontaneous movements, so that the child might become the owner of them<sup>39</sup>. Summarizing, the mother has to take care of the child's going-on-being, this state of coherence, which is similar in some key aspects with Bergson's duration<sup>40</sup>. Going-on-being is ultimately a temporal process, and the key term, which Winnicott uses somewhere else regarding the time factor in development is integration.

There it is established ego-relatedness between mother and infant, and this allows the child to recognize his or her mother as a human being. A good enough environmental provision in the earliest phases of development enables the child to exist, and here we can recall Richir's theory of the process of humanization, which begins with the exchange of gazes between mother and infant<sup>41</sup>.

Recent studies on enactive cognition have shown how the presence (of the mother in our case), and the early corporal interactions in the case of the mother-infant dyad essentially shape the way we perceive the We-relation. This phenomenon was called by Zebrowski, who draws on Merleau-Ponty, mutual incorporation. Therefore, what we will call in a later section of this paper "rhythmical coupling", is somehow related to the notion of embodied resonance. Thus, participatory sense-making can unfold<sup>42</sup>.

### **The primary maternal attunement**

We now must move towards our comparison of the two phenomena, respectively affect attunement and the primary maternal preoccupation. As Jan Abram pointed out, these two types of behavior comport similar characteristics. Maybe the key term to be used here is what Daniel Stern called the implicit relational

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<sup>38</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, London: Tavistock, 1958, p. 302.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 303.

<sup>40</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, London: Dover Publications, 2001, pp. 73-74.

<sup>41</sup> Marc Richir, *Variations sur le sublime et le soi*, Grenoble: Jerome Millon, 2010, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> Robin L. Zebrowski, Mutual Incorporation, Intercorporeality, and the Problem of Mediating Systems, *Studia UBB. Philosophia*, 67:3, 2022, p. 33.

knowings<sup>43</sup>. These implicit relational knowings are the way we understand and react intuitively towards the other's behavior. These implicit relational knowings bear a certain embodied dimension, such as in Richir's transcendental interfactivity<sup>44</sup>. In the case of the primary maternal preoccupation, the mother feels and detects intuitively the child's needs and desires, and once more intuitively she goes on to meet those needs and desires. Intuition, in the case of this phenomenon, might be said to be always also a corporeal phenomenon, which denounces our embodied selves. The child's bodily behaviors might indicate to the mother that she has to start handling her infant. We can think just of crying, and the way in which somehow the mother also feels what the child is feeling. Or we could just think of the agitated child, this being a sign that the mother has to intervene, for example, to rock him or her etc.

This phenomenon was called by Daniel Stern the motherhood constellation<sup>45</sup>. In the case of the mother actually feeling what the child's feels, we might speak of a symmetry which bears certain asymmetrical features, such as the age and experience difference between the mother and the infant. This way of being-with-the-other, and feeling what the other is feeling, while keeping distance<sup>46</sup> from him or her (in Buber's sense), might also be called a moment of meeting (in Stern's terms)<sup>47</sup>. Very often, Stern uses the example of two persons knowing what each other want and desire, such as in the example of "I know that you know that I know". This is also a sort of symmetry, which indicates towards a more profound asymmetry, because here we are not talking about mind-reading, but of embodied practices, which give us only symptoms about the other's behavior. Now we might have a certain talk about affect attunement.

For Stern, the mother attunes to her baby, similar in the way described by Schutz, even though the mother-infant relation is not mentioned by the latter. Whereas, for Schutz, music was an objective meaningful context (which allowed the meeting between two or more embodied minds), for Stern music is embedded in our behaviors. Recalling the implicit relational knowings and the primary maternal preoccupation, we might argue that the mother feels intuitively and knows what the child's needs and desires in an embodied fashion. Furthermore, when the child is gesticulating, even spontaneously, in a meaningful way, the mother will know what to do, also in an embodied and intuitive manner.

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<sup>43</sup> Nadia Bruschweiler-Stern, *The Music of Dan's Life*, *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 37:4, 2017, p. 222.

<sup>44</sup> Marc Richir, *Phantasia, Imagination, Affectivité*, Grenoble: Jerome Millon, 2004, p. 526.

<sup>45</sup> Daniel N. Stern, *The Motherhood Constellation*, London: Karnac Books, 1998, p. 171.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965, p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel N. Stern, *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, p. 135.

We must nevertheless add that affectivity plays a major role in this process, as it was described by Stern. Therefore, the mother will know what she has to do, because of the state in which she finds herself attuned to her baby. Joonas Taipale again pointed out that affect attunement implicates two main features, namely the mirroring function and the regulating function (which was discussed above). In the case of Winnicott's spontaneous gesture, meeting the gesture, i.e. mirroring it in a confirmative manner, will help the child develop a self-understanding about his or her self, and about the mother as well, because the child will learn that he or she is not alone in that specific situation. The regulating function is far more complicated, so we will leave aside this issue for further research, but for now, we might resume our discussion in the following way: The mother, who finds herself in the state of primary maternal preoccupation, will know in an intuitive and affectively-embodied manner about what her child is feeling, needing and desiring, and she will act accordingly when it comes to spontaneous gestures, such as hand movements, or even smiles and babbling (of which we are going to talk later). Answering her child in a cross-modal manner, the mother intuitively confirms the infant's gesture, and contributes to his or her awakening (in Husserl's terms<sup>48</sup>). Music was associated by Stern and Taipale with vitality forms, which bear certain features, such as movement and the temporal contour etc., which enable these forms to unfold. Music or musical behaviors might as well be seen as the infant's earliest forms of vitality, which allows him or her to communicate with her mother. As Nadia Bruschiweiler-Stern would add, for the infant, music comes before the lyrics<sup>49</sup>, because these early forms of vitality represent a non-verbal way of communicating with the other. As we have been analyzing the points of view coming from Schutz and Stern, we found out that music maintains and first established communication between two subjects.

The infant's psychological life is seen as somehow cyclical, but also in a timeless manner, meaning that the child does not yet possess a sense of time, namely he or she does not know how to read a clock, for example. Furthermore, he or she lives somehow at the mercy of desires and needs, which are cyclical. The going-on-being of which we spoke earlier needs to be provided by the mother, in order that the three temporal dimensions might be integrated<sup>50</sup>. We could assume that this integration is made possible by certain narrative functions, which enable the so-called narrative identity<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Band XV. Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Dritter Teil*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973, p. 604.

<sup>49</sup> Nadia Bruschiweiler-Stern, *The Music of Dan's Life, Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 37:4, 2017, p. 223.

<sup>50</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Talking about Children*, London: Da Capo Press, 1996, p. 233.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume I*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 52.



I added this discussion concerning the early cyclical and timeless life of the infant, because there needs to be emphasized that via the process which should be called “rhythmical coupling”, the good-enough mother synchronizes her own rhythm with the child’s, so that she might feel when the child is needing or desiring something. This cyclical life of the infant, despite being timeless, is seen to comport a certain rhythm. We borrowed this term, namely the “rhythmical coupling” from Fuchs’ theory of melancholia<sup>52</sup>, and also the emphasize he had put on the issue of desynchronization. But we were not the first ones who linked the mother-infant dyadic relation with the problem of rhythm. Henri Maldiney suggested that via the rhythm, the “here” and the “there” are instituted<sup>53</sup>, in the phenomenological sense. Moreover, Richir spoke about the rhythmical and cyclical way in which the infant hungers and destroys the breast, in a rather psychoanalytical fashion<sup>54</sup>. The term “coupling” was, of course, first introduced by Edmund Husserl in his theory of intersubjectivity<sup>55</sup>, but even though Husserl describes the early life of the infant in a later text, he nevertheless does not mention the rhythmical way in which the mother is coupled to her infant, namely the way in which the infant’s needs and desires become somehow a certainty for the mother, an imperative. Only by virtue of the primary maternal preoccupation, can the rhythmical coupling take place. In this way, the child’s rhythm of life becomes a certainty and an imperative for the mother, meaning that she will know how and when to take care of her infant in the most appropriate, good-enough manner.

This synchronization, which we have called the rhythmical coupling will progressively fade away, at the same time with the primary maternal preoccupation. This process will involve somehow the issue of desynchronization. Winnicott and Taipale explain very elegantly the way in which the mother’s fading primary maternal preoccupation will result in her failure to meet the child’s immediate needs, so delay and frustration from the child’s part will enter the scene. Nevertheless, if this frustration does not transform itself into trauma, because of the mother’s absence, the infant will gain trust in her mother, via the potential space. Moreover, the process of the self-other differentiation will emerge, as Taipale pointed out<sup>56</sup>. Here we could

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Fuchs, *Melancholia as Desynchronization: Towards a Psychopathology of Personal Time*, *Psychopathology*, 34, 2001, p. 182.

<sup>53</sup> Henri Maldiney, *Regard, Parole, Espace*, France: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2012, p. 203.

<sup>54</sup> Marc Richir, *Phantasia, Imagination, Affectivité*, Grenoble: Jerome Millon, 2004, p. 508.

<sup>55</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982, p. 112.

<sup>56</sup> Joona Taipale, *The Pain of Granting Otherness: Interoception and the Differentiation of the Object*, *Gestalt Theory*, 39, No.2/3, 2017, pp. 166-167.

recall Freud's argumentation about the passage from the pleasure principle to the reality one<sup>57</sup>.

### **Babbling: an exemplification of the potential space**

From the beginning of his book, *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott introduces, alongside the early use of musical notes, the mysterious presence of babbling in the guise of a transitional phenomenon<sup>58</sup>. We have already mentioned Richir's idea that babbling could be considered a form of proto-musicality, a thought which was already present in Kierkegaard's writings on music from the first division of *Either/Or*<sup>59</sup>. We so far established that babbling is a form of proto-musicality, and this proto-musicality has to be met by the mother's validation/confirmation. Mirroring the child, the infant gathers knowledge about his or herself and the mother. By this act of validation/confirmation, we might suspect that the potential space is already at place, playing its fundamental role. Before elaborating our theory, I want to turn towards some main features of this potential space.

In the first chapter of *Playing and Reality*, this concept is not yet named as it will be in the next chapters, but it is only addressed as the third area of experience. This area of experience separates and at the same time unites (and this is the paradox), that which is subjectively conceived with that which is objectively perceived. Therefore, the potential space will also involve the relationship between the mother and the infant, a relationship which might seem to separate both of them, by uniting. The good-enough mother's care has the role of disillusioning the child and at the same time to introduce exteriority to the infant. The potential space is also the space where phantasy and reality play and interact with each other in various combinations, which give rise to marvelous contents of experience<sup>60</sup>. This potential space is also the place for playing and of cultural experience<sup>61</sup>, and having said all of these, I can now come back to our hypothetical discussion of babbling.

From a psychoanalytical point of view, drawing mostly on Winnicott's theory, we could emphasize that babbling, via the validation and confirmation which comes from the mother or mother-figure, might transform itself into actual creative musical

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<sup>57</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XII*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1958, p. 218.

<sup>58</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: Part I*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 69.

<sup>60</sup> Joonas Taipale, Being Carried Away. Fink and Winnicott on the Locus of Playing, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 52, 2021, p. 202.

<sup>61</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 128.

impulses. As Winnicott puts it, the mother's failure to adapt to the infant's needs (given a specific task) will be the means by which the child comes to trust the mother, but also to trust his or herself. We could also draw here from Richir's theory of the moment of the sublime, which is a hyper-condensation of affectivity, which might give rise to more elaborate forms of activity or experience. What I wanted to explain is that there exists proto-forms of experience and more elaborate forms of experience.

The transitional phenomena are situated exactly at the middle of the road between the two abovementioned. Winnicott's starts his discussion with the experience of thumb-sucking, which from the start is invested with phantasy contents that will enhance this experience into a playing-type of activity. Babbling comes next, which for Winnicott, is also linked with the contents of our imagination. Next, there comes the presence of the mother or the mother-figure which must meet the child's spontaneous gesture, in order that the child might begin to trust the mother and his or herself, and even start enjoying the babbling activity. This babbling, might even transform itself, via this playful potential space, into cultural activity, such a singing etc. Maybe this is the reason why Winnicott places babbling alongside the early use of musical notes in his description of transitional phenomena.

I emphasized the role played by babbling in the early development of the child in order to point towards our main thesis, which is the innate musicality of interhuman relationships. We hoped that through Stern's theory of affect attunement we revealed the mirroring function of the mother, and the way in which she gives her child back a part of his or her Self (Winnicott). This would be Winnicott's theory of the mirror-role in a summarized version. Babbling seems to be a means of communication from the beginning, because just as in language, babbling is addressed to someone. We can believe that the child babbles more often in the presence of the mother than when he or she is alone and when he or she just wants to auto-affect his or herself, which, of course, would be pleasurable.

So, if I were to subscribe to Trevarthen's communicative musicality theory, babbling, alongside these forms of vitality (which also involve the body via movement) which were discussed above, would be the first means by which human communication is established. Moreover, taking a dialogical-relational stance, such as in Vygotsky's thematization, we could insist that via the *Zone of Proximal Development*, the caregiver enhances the child's experiences and actualizes his or her possibilities of action<sup>62</sup>. If Vygotsky insisted on the role played by the caregiver for the child's development of more mature capabilities, Winnicott is emphasizing the affective dimension, without naming it as such, because in this early affect attunement, which is made possible

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<sup>62</sup> Sandra Smidt, *Introducing Vygotsky*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 121.

by the primary maternal preoccupation, the mother mirrors and regulates the infant's Self. Again, the main verb which we have to use here is "to meet", because from this meeting of the mother and infant, all the rest proceeds harmoniously. The mother is there to receive the child's spontaneous gesture (babbling, as in our example), then she mirrors and regulates the child's Self, and this gives the infant's knowledge of his or her being-with-the-other and being-with-oneself. All of these might result in the development of cultural capabilities via the playful potential space. Babbling was considered by us a truly transitional phenomenon, because it is also a musical one, and this very aspect helped us in arguing that the early mother-infant relationship is ultimately a musical one. I might add that not only do the mother and infant communicate via music, but also the mother, via the mirroring function, has the potential of enhancing the child's musical experiences, and even the communicative ones. We must nonetheless emphasize again the fundamental role played by the face-to-face relationship, such as it was described by Schutz's metaphor of "growing older together".

### **Back to Husserl: Time and music**

Before concluding our essay, I would like to make a few observations in light of Husserl's theory of the internal time-consciousness. These observations are possible by virtue of Joona Taipale's article concerning the melodic unity of the other<sup>63</sup>. I will also borrow some key elements from Buber's late philosophical anthropology.

The internal time-consciousness can be divided, hypothetically, into three main components. We have first the primal impression, the retention and the protention. The primal impression could be considered as a now-point, but nonetheless, a now-point which is not an isolated instant, but a present which implies two temporal horizons, that being those of the retention (the immediate past) and that of the protention (the immediate future)<sup>64</sup>. All these combined give us the experience of a melody, for example.

For now, we must remember Husserl's notions used in *Experience and Judgement*, namely those of satisfaction (of the object grasped) and that of the synthetic unity<sup>65</sup>. These two concepts do not seem to exist in a very close relationship, but our argumentation will try to combine them and see what the actual interaction between

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<sup>63</sup> Joona Taipale, Empathy and the Melodic Unity of the Other, *Human Studies*, 38, 2015, p. 476.

<sup>64</sup> Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991, p. 34.

<sup>65</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgement*, London and New York: Routledge, 1973, p. 105.

them is. Husserl insists that when we come to have a complete grasp upon the object, we somehow feel satisfied (by the wholeness of the grasping act). We can interpret this “total grasp” in terms of the synthetic unity, a concept which first appeared in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*<sup>66</sup>. Buber spoke of the synthetic apperception in connection to the unitary grasp of otherness, a process which involved the movement, or the acts of distance and relation<sup>67</sup>.

Following Taipale’s argumentation but trying to insist at the same time on the Husserlian dimension of it, we want to argue that when we grasp the other as a unity, namely as a totality, the experience is similar to that of grasping and understanding a musical piece. The other, roughly speaking, is given in the now, in the present, but this experience is always transcendent, meaning that it implies more than that, namely the two temporal horizons, which were discussed above, namely those being that of the immediate past (retention) and that of the immediate future (protention). By virtue of the synthetic unity, or the synthetic apperception, we come to grasp the other as a wholeness, as a unity and totality, similar with the way in which we grasp the musical piece (the non-simultaneous notes) of which I spoke above. Both experiences of this specific grasp provide satisfaction, in the first case that of grasping the other as a whole, and the second being the way in which we grasp the melody, for example, as a continuum and a unity. Unfortunately, Buber did not see this musical feature of grasping the other, but nonetheless, he provided us with the concept of synthetic apperception, which would mean the same thing as in Kant, but applied to alterity, namely to the other person. Therefore, when Kant spoke of the manifold of experience, in Buber’s sense we could speak as well about the manifold of the other’s way of appearing to us.

Linking the abovementioned talk with our thesis, we could argue that what we have called the “rhythmical coupling” is made possible only by virtue of this musical grasp of otherness. For example, when the mother attunes to the child’s cyclical rhythm (of life), she understands her infant in the way we intuitively grasp a piece of music of our likes.

Recalling Thomas Fuchs’ discussion concerning implicit and explicit temporality<sup>68</sup>, we could suppose that this gradual decrease of the rhythmical coupling (between mother and infant), will result in the experience of explicit temporality. For the mother, it means coming back to the explicit temporality, whereas in the case of the mother who finds herself in the primary maternal preoccupation we would talk mostly

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<sup>66</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 250.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965, p. 62.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Fuchs, Implicit and Explicit Temporality, *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology*, 12, No.3, 2005, p. 195.

about implicit temporality. Somehow, we come back to Freud's opinion that time appears for the child in the case of a certain discontinuity of the psychic system<sup>69</sup>. When the child moves towards independence, the mother will fail (a specific task which involves good-enough caring), as Winnicott stated many times, and this will grant the infant trust in his or her mother. The mother, whose primary maternal preoccupation fades will experience once again the explicit temporality, before this state of being (the primary maternal preoccupation). For the child, the movement towards independence might seem to coincide with that towards explicit temporality.

If we consider the merged-state theory of Winnicott and Mahler, the child is merged with her mother, so the end of this merged-like period will result in the experience of explicit temporality. In our words, the decrease, or even the end of this rhythmical coupling will result in both the mother's and the infant's experience of explicit temporality. The end of this rhythmical coupling, namely of the synchronization between mother and infant goes hand in hand with the child's experience of independence, because from now on, he or she might somehow handle himself or herself without the help of the mother. I could as well suppose, as Fazakas and Goze did<sup>70</sup>, that the child introjects the mother's good-enough holding, which later transforms itself (through the process of introjection), in the transcendental soil. This soil grants the independence of the child, because the infant has now trust in the world. A metaphor might be useful, namely the moment when the child actually manages to walk on his or her own feet. Now it makes sense why Winnicott emphasized the rhythmical dimension of separation<sup>71</sup>. Our argumentation follows that this desynchronization of the infant with his or her mother is not a sign of pathology, but of independence. I must clarify one more aspect. For us, rhythmical coupling might be an effect of the initial merging-state between infant and mother, as it was thematized by Winnicott and Mahler.

### Concluding remarks

Concluding, I want to state that my primordial attempt was to bring together theories from philosophy/phenomenology and developmental psychology/psychoanalysis, in order to show that the nature of the relationships we live through our everydayness is utterly a musical one. Perhaps the main benefit which this

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<sup>69</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XIX*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1986, p. 227.

<sup>70</sup> Istvan Fazakas & Tudi Goze, *The Promise of the World: Towards a Transcendental History of Trust*, *Husserl Studies*, 36, 2020, p. 185.

<sup>71</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 149-150.

article might bring along is the introduction of the concept of rhythmical coupling, which might be useful in explaining the early mother-infant dyadic interactions, but also the process of primary maternal preoccupation and the attunement that follows. Furthermore, there was an attempt to talk about a topic from Winnicott's theory, which was not elaborated by many, which is exactly that of babbling. I saw babbling as a truly transitional phenomenon, in the sense that through a good-enough interaction via the potential space, this babbling might transform itself into creative musical experience. Another topic on which I insisted was the similarity between Schutz's mutual tuning-in relationship and Daniel Stern's affect attunement. Whereas the first insists mostly on the temporal dimension of synchronization, the latter describes very carefully the affective feature of this process.

These discussions of the early mother-infant dyadic interactions led us to the phrase "primary maternal attunement", because in the case of this attunement there resonates a certain "tune", which we find in this specific word. What I wanted to emphasize is that the mother who finds herself in this preoccupation will intuitively, but also in an embodied fashion, know what the child needs, wants, and desires. Moreover, she will know how to respond in a manner which will trigger the affect attunement, namely not through mere imitation, but through cross-modal interactions.

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# THE STUDY OF NOTES AND NOTEBOOKS: SOME EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL ISSUES\*

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**ABSTRACT.** The aim of the present paper is to situate the recent attempts devoted to the study of the phenomena of knowledge management in a larger epistemological context. More precisely, I intend to ascertain the entire affair from the perspective of the philosophy of the humanities. This involves understanding it as an endeavor concerned with the search for regularities. As a result, key notions figuring in the repertoire of this kind of undertaking, primarily those of notes and notebooks, are scrutinized for the purpose of revealing their theoretical function. This points towards some ontological issues, such as the idea of taking notes as cultural kinds, namely something analogous to the idea of natural kinds.

**Keywords:** notes, notebooks, cultural kind, cultural artefact, pattern, commonplace-book

## Introduction

The aim of the present paper is to connect several developments that have occurred across multiple fields of study in order to sketch the contours of an epistemological reflection on the humanities. I contend that a good place to start would be the recent undertakings devoted to the study of notes in various contexts. This is the investigation of knowledge management procedures, with a special emphasis on scholarly knowledge in the early modern period. It is mostly done by historians and, as such it would be useful to situate it under the umbrella of intellectual

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history. A great advantage is that the field in question is quite homogenous, it is recent yet quite vast and prone to theoretical reflections. Knowledge management is carried out via certain patterns that are exhibited by different note-taking technologies and it is the mission of the intellectual historian to reveal this underlying structure. It is the job of the philosopher of the humanities to assess what this entails. I claim that the term “note” designates a kind that figures within the hypotheses that are propounded as explanations of the way knowledge is managed. The production of new knowledge from previous knowledge is a form of knowledge management and it is inextricably tied with notebooks and note-taking strategies. I will argue that a note is a cultural kind, and that it exists as a theoretical term postulated by intellectual historians who are seeking to uncover the underlying patterns of the process of knowledge management. From what one can gather, most historians are inclined to accept the existence of the abstract term “note” and to assign to it a classificatory role.

### **The new field of the history of the humanities and its epistemological implications**

Historians have recently reassessed the way we should think about the status of humanities as knowledge-engaging endeavors. The upshot of these reconsiderations consists primarily in the idea that the once sharp contrast between the natural sciences and the humanities is to be abandoned in favor of a more nuanced approach. I propose to call this view the Revision Thesis and to attribute to it the following content: in light of several considerations including, but not restricted to, direct historical arguments the nature of the difference between the natural sciences and the humanities is to be reconsidered<sup>2</sup>.

I will focus here on a variant of the Revision Thesis, namely the one put forward by Rens Bod. According to Bod, the familiar separation between the sciences and the humanities is to a large extent interpreted as, on the one hand, the mission of pursuing the general (something synonymous with the investigation of laws and

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<sup>2</sup> An indirect approach would be to challenge the opposition on what I loosely characterize as ideological grounds. So, one could study the reasons that were invoked for the divide on various occasions, situate them relatively to some interest or simply contextualize them to reduce their exemplarity. A direct approach is one that strives to amass historical evidence to undermine the opposition with little or no attention to any specific formulation of the divide. For example, Bouterse and Karstens have argued that pressures exerted by the emerging social sciences and their urgent need to establish an epistemic status in the second half of the nineteenth century have put the traditional humanities under scrutiny. See Bouterse & Karstens 2015.

patterns), and on the other hand the attempt to seize the unique (something that translates as a disregard towards laws and patterns) (Bod 2018, 15). Bod's argumentative strategy is to show that, from a historical point of view, it becomes clear that both methodological outlooks have appeared from within the territory of what we nowadays designate as the humanities. It follows that one cannot invoke the methodological difference in question as a basis for an argument in favor of an essential antithesis between science and the humanities (Bod 2018, 16).

Admittedly, Bod offers an unsatisfactory definition for his key notion, namely that of "pattern". According to his proposal the concept in question would apply equally well to "inexact trends" and "exact laws" as well as to anything in between (Bod 2018, 16). So, the notion envelops a rather large, unfinished and unspecified spectrum presumably open towards possible new entries for which no pre-established criteria of acceptance are in play. More research into the epistemic procedures of the humanities could add further elements to the spectrum, one can safely assume, as a matter of simple intuition, that "exact trends" and "inexact laws" would constitute obvious candidates. The challenge here would be to cite sufficient cases where the concepts in question successfully capture actual humanistic phenomena. However, Bod's account strikes me as having an initial plausibility and that his notion of pattern can be a gateway towards a better understanding of the *modus operandi* of the humanities and of their purported opposition to the sciences. Since, the main pillar supporting the idea of a fundamental contrast between the sciences and the humanities has been seriously undermined, we are able to reassess the entire issue and claim that rather than to accept a difference in kind one is better suited to entrain a difference in degree<sup>3</sup>.

This has important consequences. For instance, Bod emphasizes that the humanities might serve a multitude of functions but what is relevant for the Revision Thesis is the existence of a research dimension that one can ascribe to them: "In addition to all this, the humanities have a research function by asking questions and posing hypotheses regarding humanistic artefacts" (Bod 2013, 2). Unlike the natural sciences that concern themselves not with the study of a realm that bears the mark of the exercise of the human creative and productive capacities, the humanities, on the contrary, do concentrate on the outcome of such endeavors, or as Bod puts it the "expressions of the human mind" (Bod 2013, 2). This is to embrace the idea that one can attribute an empirical facet to the human sciences, but a caveat is in order. Strictly speaking, the objects examined by the humanities can be traced back to their origin, which is undoubtedly the human mind. This is synonymous with saying that the humanities do not deal with a mind-independent external domain. However, it is also true that those same objects are able to instantiate themselves in manners

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<sup>3</sup> Another way to challenge the division is by indicating that the humanities and the sciences are united in the pursuit of the same set of epistemic values. See Peels 2018.

that do make them suitable for a kind of approach that can convincingly be called empirical. Bod is referring to what can fall under the umbrella term cultural artefacts (Bod 2013, 2).

These are things like those one can find in museums or libraries, for instance, manuscripts or works of art. They can also be things one can enjoy in the privacy of one's home or in concert halls, for instance literary or musical creations (Bod 2013, 2). Bod calls them "humanistic material" or "humanistic artefacts", I will prefer the more general term "cultural artefacts". A crucial distinction made clear by Bod is that between what can be called a history of the humanistic domain, roughly the history of the production of said artefacts with the history of literature being a case in point, and a history of empirical humanistic research, namely something along the lines of a history of the study of art or a history of literary theory (Bod 2013, 2).

I contend that this is a fertile terrain for a philosophical account of the humanities since it is the place where all the major epistemic strategies for dealing with cultural artefacts are discussed in the sense proposed by Bod and accepted in this paper, namely as attempts to uncover underlying regularities with respect to cultural artefacts. Now, *prima facie*, most people would accept that there is a difference between a philologist and a writer and equate the former with the scientist. The scientist-philologist produces theoretical/scientific texts in which he formulates hypotheses with respect to regularities that he claims characterize literary forms of expression. I believe that from a philosophical standpoint it is best to start (in line with good old logical empiricism) with these results, which is to examine the language and the theoretical style in which these hypotheses are delivered. The level is conceptual so, what we are doing is to reveal the conceptual structure of the human sciences. It is not an investigation of the accuracy of these hypotheses or even of the correctness of their historical reconstruction. What is important is that there is an appetite for generalization in the humanities with a historical pedigree. The extent to which this amounts to reification or an excessive or ill-suited positivism remains to be seen.

Significantly then, going after patterns seems to accompany the humanist scholar for quite some time. Bod's argument only works if one accepts the premise that the division in question is equated with that between the search of patterns and comprehending the unique by the majority of those who accept it, or to the very least that this is a crucial aspect for anybody who accepts the divide. If it turns out that the division is held on different grounds, then Bod's argument is in trouble. Bod assumes that this is the case. My contention is that even if Bod's arguments are rejected one can still use some of his remarks with the aim of providing an epistemological account of what is going on in the humanities. One can accept, on pragmatic and methodological grounds, that the same kind of debate that aims at

clarifying issues in the sciences can be employed to clarify issues in the humanities. So, a good starting point would be to employ the traditional conceptual arsenal developed within the philosophy of science and to measure what results it would yield for the humanities. So, one such question would be: if there are theoretical terms that figure in the explanations of cultural phenomena, what exactly is their status and what are the ontological commitments of the researchers involved with regard to the entities that they posit<sup>4</sup>? The following section will do just this sort of thing but with respect to a more heterogeneous and interdisciplinary humanistic domain, namely the recent interest in studying notes and practices of note-taking as means of knowledge management and knowledge transmission.

### **Ontological commitments in the study of notes and notebooks**

I consider that a good place to start an examination of the procedures employed by humanist researchers when dealing with notes and notebooks is to address the manner in which they introduce and accept the use of certain key explanatory terms. More precisely, my purpose hereafter is to ascertain whether one can retrieve from within the works devoted to the study of notes the idea of cultural kinds. This would have to be something analogous to the idea of natural kinds, a notion familiar to philosophers of science. Simply put, I intend to find out whether one can speak about notes as cultural kinds.

Muhammad Ali Khalidi defines natural kinds as “entities that are neither individuals nor properties but kinds of individuals that share a number of distinct properties” (Khalidi 2014, 397). The point here is that the usage of terms like “proton” or “gold”, namely terms designating natural kinds, is a proof in the direction of some sort of ontological commitment towards the entities in question from the part of the scientist. As such, individual entities belong to a certain class, namely the natural kind, in virtue of the fact that they hold the relevant features, namely the kind-specific features (Khalidi 2014, 397). There are numerous complications regarding the issue of natural kinds, such as the question of whether it is sensible to adhere to

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<sup>4</sup> Leezenberg & de Vries 2017 adopt a similar approach. The authors develop a sort of analog philosophy of the humanities modeled on the philosophy of the natural sciences. The idea is that philosophy of science has two main coordinates. On the one hand, there is the normative dimension that requires the philosopher of science to be able to isolate the specific kind of rational procedures that ensure scientific knowledge’s special epistemic status. On the other hand, there is the descriptive dimension that demands that the philosopher of science calibrate the picture of science in accordance with what historical data disclosed about it. The philosophy of the humanities should do the same. One could also deploy the details of a specific philosophical tradition and built a philosophy of the humanities from that vantage point. For an example of this kind of endeavor see Pihlström 2022.

a realist stance and portray natural kinds as fully existing abstract entities or to embrace a nominalist position and to allow only the existence of particular entities (Khalidi 2014, 398)<sup>5</sup>. I am convinced that these are important clarifications, but as far as the philosophy of the humanities is concerned, we are yet at an incipient stage and as a first step we need to find out whether the simple idea of a kind, understood along the lines of the definition provided by Khalidi as something that “stands for a collection of properties that tend to be co-instantiated” (Khalidi 2014, 398) is present within humanist theorizing at all. My contention is that “note” is a theoretical term posited by the humanist researcher in order to capture the stable features of some empirical reality, i.e., individual entities or individual occurrences, that they are investigating. This is also a classificatory undertaking, not everything is a note, at least not to the same degree or in the same sense. There are some co-instantiated attributes that these individual occurrences (specific notes) hold, and this licenses us to integrate them into the class called the cultural kind note.

Some clues as to what an ontology of notes and note-taking would amount to can be found in Caroline A. Jones’s observations on the matter. According to Jones, note-taking is essentially a deliberately created technology, the mastering of which requires proper initiation, more or less standardized training and engaged repetition. It is not a natural operation or an extension of some natural propensities that one might manifest, of course excluding the trivial sense in which all human activities rely ultimately on the functioning of some natural ability (Jones 2016, 234). Notice that this is compatible with saying that even in circumstances where one is confronted with deeply personal note-taking exercises (keeping a personal diary for instance) one can still assert that this requires some sort of training since no one journals in a void, at the very minimum one has read other journals (perhaps some written by famous persons) so one has been initiated in the art of journaling. It is an empirical question what motivates people to keep a diary, but my philosophical intuition tells me that whatever the internal (i.e., affective) impetus might be, it is recognized and put into motion only after one has been familiarized with the practice itself.

So, the technique in question presupposes, according to Jones’s analysis, the workings of “unfamiliar disciplines that involve specific rational systems for taking, archiving and retrieving notes” (Jones 2016, 235). I propose that we isolate the first property attributable to notes in order to delimitate an ontology of notes: a note is a product of some artificially engendered and culturally reinforced procedure of dealing with units of recorded content. As such, it follows that it is a cultural artefact, it has the status that Rens Bod awards to the kind of objects that fall under the purview of the humanities. In short, we can treat notes as scientific objects pertaining to the

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<sup>5</sup> More on these aspects in Ellis 2008, 139 – 148 and Bird 1998, 64 – 79.

humanities. Notice, however, that from the perspective of those engaged in studying notes more must be said. In order to properly identify these objects and provide hypotheses regarding their nature and use one needs to have an instrument that would point towards the intended target. So, a note is also a classificatory term, a theoretical tool employed by the humanist researcher to execute his mission.

Jones mentions the mnemonic role attributed to notes<sup>6</sup>. The idea here is not just that of simply recording something as an antidote against failings of memory. It is also an admission of the essential forgetfulness of the human being, and it implies the idea of the projective character of the human predicament. One registers something with the background assumption that the information will serve for a future endeavor. We do not clearly perceive at the present moment what this subsequent project entails, but we do have some image of what we are pursuing and aspire to reusing a particular piece of information when the opportunity arises<sup>7</sup>. When Jones introduces the phrase “future technologies of the self” (Jones 2016, 236), I believe that this is what she has in mind. Not just envisaged future work of some kind but also our future self as subject to the practice of note-taking. Given the projective character of the human being and its essential forgetfulness the practice of note-taking becomes an optimal technique for the fortification of the self as an entity essentially concerned with what is to come<sup>8</sup>.

So, a second feature of notes that I propose we can extract from Jones’s reflections, is something related to their status of being transitional entities with an essential exteriority and a future oriented function. By essential exteriority, I mean the capacity of being reused because of being selected in virtue of a harvesting mechanism that is successful in preserving a kind of intrinsic intelligibility. The future oriented function comes as a consequence. A note, in the sense accepted here, can maintain a latent meaningfulness and await subsequent integration into an unfinished project: “The note promises to be extractable and combinable with other notes to form something massively coherent” (Jones 2016, 236). The meaning that notes carry is not exhausted by their integration into some articulated whole, they are compatible

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the relation between note-taking and memory see Yeo 2007.

<sup>7</sup> This is also the case for medieval note-takers such as Étienne Gaudet who, in a note to himself, is especially concerned with the integration of his notes in future endeavors: “See what can be applied to your thesis so that the labor of the past not be in vain”, Paris, BnF, lat. 16408, f. 222v. For more on this see Baneu 2024 forthcoming. I would like to thank Alexandra Baneu for drawing my attention to this aspect.

<sup>8</sup> The relationship between forgetfulness and postponed enjoyment in connection with note-taking is masterfully discussed by Alberto Cevolini: “When usefulness (i.e., the future) is valued more than pleasure (i.e., the present) a new temporal structure arises: the principle of delayed gratification, which represents a pillar of modern society” (Cevolini 2016, 156).



and amenable to a variety of styles of writing and inquiry because of their constitutive exteriority. Jones uses the phrase “pattern of characteristic concerns”, that, to me, captures the nature of the relationship between scholarly production and notes, namely the instauration and perfecting of a system of working with notes as units of recorded content (Jones 2016, 238). The connection to the future is instigated in virtue of an anticipatory quality, notes partially contain what the future project should be about: “Filled away (mentally and physically) for the later time when I will re-member the note, I imagine adding limbs (*membres*) to this fragment so that it can stand before me in some re-cognizable form, embodied once again, to remind me of the use I wanted to make of it in this future I was hoping would come” (Jones 2016, 238). This is obvious in the case of notes that are released posthumously, where all their latent potential is simply lost, or as Jones puts it “posthumous publication annihilates the note as such, by taming its mutable promise” (Jones 2016, 238).

In the absence of the efficacy of the selection mechanism the traits that transform a simple jotting into a note are lost, herein lies the difference between a note and a random amassing of information. The humanist researcher looks for notes, this is the sense in which notes are artefacts that are discovered by an undertaking that is to some extent empirical. They are to be identified in virtue of these properties. This is what makes them suitable for becoming the target of pattern searching.

To recapitulate, a note is characterized as a small textual unit yanked from some structured and coagulated textual situation in virtue of a collecting mechanism (“a system of notation”, as Jones calls it) that both safeguards its intrinsic intelligibility and empowers its compatible integration into a differently structured and coagulated textual situation: “That is the note’s *raison d’être*: to be so modular that it can be gathered up for shuffling into any number of alternative orders, but to retain sufficient ties to its original context to maintain a basic legibility” (Jones 2016, 236). This brings us to the last distinguishing feature of notes, perhaps the most obvious one, their brevity. One can argue that brevity is a necessary condition for something to be a note, but not a sufficient one. A note is a small unit of recorded content that is the product of a specialized cultural technology (harvesting mechanism) that ensures its status as a transitional entity (something characterized by an intrinsic intelligibility and a future oriented function). Only then, the supposedly simple fact of a note’s brevity can become a proper object of delight: “Its status as a fragment or bit is precisely what is so delicious about it” (Jones 2016, 236)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> I must add that “brevity” is something that differs from one age to another. For instance, in the Middle Ages, a note could cover several folios, but since it only represented a fraction of the original it can still be considered a note. One must keep in mind that the atomic parts that were reused in

To turn for a moment our focus to the note-taker, one can speak about an ability, namely the ability to harvest notes. The note-taker cultivates this ability to get better notes, notes that better fit the essential characteristics described above, features that enhance the chances of obtaining high-quality notes. So, a superior note-taker has a note-selection-ability, one might even call it using contemporary parlance an epistemic virtue of the reliabilist sort<sup>10</sup>. All is done in light of the existence of a virtual epistemic community (one that is characterized by an effective history where principles are handed down to future generations) that reproduces its intellectual goals through the material incarnations of its writing principles, or as Anke te Heesen has emphasized: “One is a member of a paper-community, which has dedicated itself to formats and filling systems, where the organization of bound paper pages decides what will be written on them” (Heesen 2005, 584). I will rely on Heesen’s remarks to further clarify what I am after. The idea of note-taking as a deliberately created technology that is culturally reinforced is present in Heesen as well, since the claim here is that writing is a public gesture with a proper staging that is available to all who share a similar epistemic choreography, or in Heesen’s words to those who “follow and understand the *mise-en-scène* of work” (Heesen 2005, 584)<sup>11</sup>.

Etymology can be helpful in clarifying the more subtle aspects of note-taking as a cognitive undertaking. The Latin *notare* does indeed capture the main, yet obvious meaning of what the entire discussion surrounding the issue of notes implies, namely the idea of jotting down something. But, as Heesen remarks, the term *notitia* refers to an entirely different thing, a special type of cognitive process that is inherent to note-taking, namely catching sight of something: “Therefore, apart from the actual act of writing, noting also describes a particular kind of perception; *taking notice of something*” (Heesen 2005, 584). By design, the technique of note-taking affects the agent (i.e., note-taker), which is tantamount to something like the “habitual forming of a person” (Heesen 2005, 584). This in turn leaves the material traces of note-taking, that is of “a praxis with paper that requires certain gestures, performed acts, rituals and tools” (Heesen 2005, 584). I believe that, among other things, what one notices is the compatibility between extant material and one’s future projects. To make this explicit, first and foremost to oneself, one must engage in note-taking.

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the creation of new knowledge were much larger in the Middle Ages, when one freely reused large textual units from the works of others. I would like to thank Alexandra Baneu for this useful comment.

<sup>10</sup> See Battaly 2019, p. 269 – 287.

<sup>11</sup> Another instance in which one can see this aspect is in the continual game between the individual and the communal in the case of medieval notebooks. Although containing notes which serve an individual in his university work, some notebooks also contain indications meant to help others navigate them. Often, these notebooks were donated to the community to which their collector belonged. I thank Alexandra Baneu for pointing this out.

What this means is that one relates to one's intellectual endeavors primarily through notes. The idea of small units of knowledge incapsulated in notes is characteristic of the early modern period as Heesen correctly remarks: "In that era, the notes and small pieces of paper were the smallest material text-units of intellectual work" (Heesen 2005, 585).

By now, the methods of note-taking and organization of notes with regard to the early modern period have been extensively studied<sup>12</sup>. The case of Conrad Gesner, mentioned by Hessen, is well known in the literature<sup>13</sup>, but it is worth mentioning that Hessen emphasizes the role of note-taking for large, collective projects, as well as for the ordered storage of information: "The notebook was a unifying collecting point" (Heesen 2005, 586). Specific advice on how to take notes, organize and store information in commonplace books, as well as instructions on how to retrieve information were all put forward, hence the idea of a culturally reinforced technology.

I contend that the transitional dimension with both its exteriority and its future-orientedness is therefore theorized by Heesen as well: "The commonplace book thus refers a quotation noted down to its original context (its origin, the book) and, at the same time, is a stock to draw on for the memory, the speech to be given or the text to be written" (Heesen 2005, 586). This is an observation made in connection to Locke's advice on note-taking, the point was that the procedure in question was meant to "pre-structure" future endeavors: "The notebook was a technique in the service of discipline" (Heesen 2005, 587).

Importantly, in the case of jotting down observations and experiments, brevity was again considered necessary in addition to order. The case of Robert Hooke, mentioned by Heesen, is telling since he advised that observations are to be written on small pieces of paper and then glued into a bound notebook: "The notebook served as a record, a protocol" (Heesen 2005, 587). Usually, observations were taken on site and then transferred to a more permanent and static record, they were archived. So, the archive is here the secondary textual context that notes were supposed to be compatible with. The role of the archive was that of assembling a massive body of facts that were to be used in scientific explanation, as historians of science have recently shown<sup>14</sup>. The term used in connection with this kind of processing of information is that of "paper-machine", signaling the idea of a regulatory system. Hessen unequivocally describes the main protagonist, namely the commonplace-book, as such a "cultural technique" functioning across multiple domains (Heesen 2005, 589). In the following section I will home in on the features of

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<sup>12</sup> See Blair 2010, Yeo 2014.

<sup>13</sup> See Kraemer & Zedelmaier 2014.

<sup>14</sup> See Daston 2011, p. 82 – 113.

the commonplace book as they are theorized by research done in the humanities. I will show how they are used in the endeavor of proposing regularities with respect to humanistic phenomena, namely the phenomena of knowledge management. I will also claim that notes as I have described them, are a crucial aspect of this undertaking.

### **Cases: patterns and notes in the study of early modern knowledge management instruments**

One extensively studied form of knowledge management is the one developed around what intellectual historians have designated as the “commonplace book”: “In this method (which I will call the method of commonplaces) one selects passages of interest for the rhetorical turns of phrase, the dialectical arguments, or the factual information they contain; one then copies them into a notebook, the commonplace book, kept handy for the purpose, grouping them under appropriate headings to facilitate later retrieval and use, notably in composing prose of one’s own” (Blair 1992, 541)<sup>15</sup>. So, I contend that the type of material described by Blair satisfies the definition of a note that I proposed earlier, namely as the product of an artificially created technology. The protagonist of this epistemic strategy, namely the commonplace book, was according to Blair, a tool created by humanist intellectuals primarily for rhetorical and pedagogical purposes. Note-taking practices (and especially the epistemic conduct with respect to commonplace books) during the Renaissance are to be understood, according to Blair, as socially promoted and educationally enforced cultural practices (Blair 1992, 541). Furthermore, the common-place book incorporates the kind of harvesting mechanism that ensures the efficacy of those features that I attributed to notes, their essential exteriority and their future oriented function via the system of “subject headings according to the topics to be addressed” (Blair 1992, 542). Placing notes under a specific heading contributes to maintaining what I have called their intrinsic intelligibility because some connection to the original textual context is guaranteed. Since, usually, under a certain heading more information from the same informational pool was amassed, this connection is reinforced by the establishment of an informational web that preserves the intelligibility of each note. This way, the notes are kept viable for future undertakings that involve their recombination, an operation that, however, does not exhaust their potential, precisely because of the harvesting mechanism that is inherent to the commonplace-book.

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<sup>15</sup> The literature on the historical significance of commonplace books is extensive, for a useful taxonomy of commonplace books see Stolberg 2014, p. 449 – 452.

An interesting twist is that in addition to being extensively used for literary matters, commonplace books were also successfully deployed by those engaged in the study of nature<sup>16</sup>. Blair discusses the case of Jean Bodin, the author of a 1596 work entitled *Theater of all nature* (Blair 1992, 542). With Bodin, as presented by Blair, we are in the territory of scholarly activities. More precisely, we are dealing with an example of the way natural philosophy was generated from material previously existing within works devoted to natural history. Bodin was attempting to account for certain natural phenomena by furnishing some kind of hypothesis regarding casual factors. The commonplace book, according to Blair, makes this process possible by facilitating the construction of the explanandum as well as the aggregation of the arguments supporting the explanans (Blair 1992, 544).

The explananda are harvested from books dedicated to natural history, relocated and kept viable within commonplace books by being hosted under topical headings. This maneuver transforms them, it bestows upon them the epistemic dignity of a thing in need of scientific explanation, or as Blair puts it, they are upgraded to the status of “self-evident truths” (Blair 1994, 544). These “factoids” or “tidbits of knowledge”, as Blair calls them, are the main constituents of the “why questions” that form the explanandum, one such question mentioned by Blair is: “Why is a smaller seed more potent than a larger one?” (Blair 1992, 544). The actual explanatory work is done by proposing some general principle that accounts for the factoid under consideration. Now, it is true that these principles are never explicitly asserted by Bodin, but rather some intimations regarding their content are provided (Blair 1992, 546). However, what is important for the current discussion, is that in order to at least draw the contours of such an explanatory principle Bodin mobilizes his arsenal of notes which consists of material excerpted from books, observations recorded by the author himself or the testimony of other inquirers. Those entities that are not notes in the usual sense, namely information copied from a written source, gain note-like characteristics since by integrating them into a commonplace book one “treats each entry independently of its source, as potentially useful knowledge equivalent to every other entry” (Blair 1992, 547).

Every concretization of note-taking becomes an opportunity for others to exercise their own note-taking abilities and Bodin is no exception since his results were introduced into “the mental networks of the contemporary readers” (Blair 1992, 548). According to Blair, there are at least three extant copies of Bodin’s work

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<sup>16</sup> This is yet another way of challenging the divide between the sciences and the humanities by pointing to the so-called phenomena of “learned empiricism”, the thesis that in the early modern period the mechanisms of textual processing and those of scientific activity overlap in an interesting way, see Pomata & Siraisi 2005, p. 1 – 38.

that bear the mark of a preliminary excerpting operation, namely the selection of material by inserting certain headings to signal a specific interest in some piece of information. Marginal annotations reveal that, in addition to mining the text in search of factoids of all kinds, yet another cognitive procedure was articulated by employing notes. Material from Bodin is connected to material from other authors on similar issues or to different material from Bodin himself in order to highlight inconsistencies or illuminate coherence and commonality. On some occasions readers add their own input, that is, they correct or supplement Bodin with their own empirical findings (Blair 1992, 548). I submit that all this is proof of what I have been saying about notes and their general features as both empirical realities and theoretical tools used by humanist researchers in order to look for patterns with respect to cultural artefacts.

To make this point clearer I have to say that in the example discussed by Blair the crucial fact is that there is no extant commonplace book to be analyzed. All the research is done by looking at the finished work and inferring the existence and proper use of the commonplace method of knowledge management, or as Blair puts it “as if through a commonplace book” (Blair 1992, 548). This cannot be done without a background theoretical framework in which note-taking is defined along the lines that I have suggested. So, my contention is that intellectual historians engaged in the study of knowledge management reveal an underlying cyclical pattern of the process in question. It starts when the finished work goes through notebooks and ends up in another finished work. What is important is the specific nature of note-taking, since this is what explains the pattern, because commonplace books as artefacts are the instantiations of note-taking as a cognitive strategy. Without a proper understanding of the features of notes, the work done by Blair would not have been possible given the fact that the actual object is absent. One must be able to identify in the finished work that one is studying the traces left by notes, and one can do so, only if one knows those features and accepts that the term note designates a kind with those co-instantiated traits. So, one can hypothesize that such and such work was done by using notes. Here a note is a theoretical term, a cultural kind that one deploys in order to present a hypothesis about a cultural artefact. As such, the note as a theoretical term enters into the attempt of revealing a pattern, namely the cyclical pattern of the knowledge management phenomena.

Another example worth discussing, to further illustrate what I have said thus far, is Fabian Kraemer’s account of knowledge management in the case of Ulisse Aldrovandi. This is another case of the commonplace book type of knowledge management, or as Kraemer calls it the “humanist jack-of-all-trades” (Kraemer 2014, 389). Here we can closely observe an extant commonplace book and notice how it contributes to the finished work, as well as familiarize ourselves with Aldrovandi’s

reflections on working with notebooks and notes (Kraemer 2014, 401). The interesting aspect regarding Aldrovandi is his innovative approach towards the structure of a commonplace book by integrating features pertaining to other forms of information and knowledge management, such as those stemming from bookkeeping and administrative environments. Kraemer's thesis is that the use of commonplace books at such a large scale cannot but generate some lasting epistemic effects (Kraemer 2014, 402).

For instance, they determined the anatomy of the material that they were hosting, thus producing a homogenous patrimony of "short, de-contextualized factoids" (here following Blair, Kraemer 2014, 399). In addition, the anatomy of the finished work is influenced by the forms of organizational composition typically associated with the commonplace book, as for example the topical model (Kraemer 2014, 400).

The artefact that constitutes the object of Kraemer's study is the *Pandechion epistemonicon*, an encyclopedic notebook of natural history designed on the skeleton of a commonplace book. As in the case of Bodin we are dealing here with the use of a philological instrument for empirical purposes. According to Kraemer, investigators into natural matters frequently adapted these instruments to their parochial needs, in the case of Aldrovandi the commonplace book was supposed to accommodate and allow for the processing of an "unknown, potentially endless number of reading notes" (Kraemer 2014, 401). I claim that the commonplace book as a temporary storage speaks to what I have called the essential exteriority/intrinsic intelligibility and future-oriented character of notes. It is a place that conserves the viability of the note by preserving its features. Once extracted, the note is placed under headings, and this means that the thematic universe to which it belongs is kept in place, but the note is also compatible with other notes on the same topic. An illuminating, although somewhat gruesome, analogy is with an organ that is harvested and kept viable by specific maneuvers in special containers until its future use. Furthermore, the commonplace book is a tool that helps future endeavors. According to Kramer, Aldrovandi's ambition was to produce an extensive encyclopedia of zoology. The outcome was that he succeeded in publishing only four volumes during his life. The rest of the envisaged thirteen volumes appeared posthumously (Kraemer 2014, 402).

## Conclusion

My purpose in this paper was to gesture towards a philosophical account of the humanities. As a consequence, I started with the idea put forward by Rens Bod that, at their core, the humanities are just as much knowledge-engaging disciplines as the natural sciences. This is because they attempt to formulate and defend regularities

with respect to their objects, namely cultural artefacts. I have shown that in the recent field of the interdisciplinary study of knowledge and information management a certain cyclical pattern is put forward, one that goes from finished work through notes and notebooks to another finished work. I have argued that in order to understand how the formulation of this pattern can be defended we must look at notebooks and notes as means of achieving the goal of knowledge management. More precisely, their special features are responsible for that. I have isolated three features of notes: first, I portrayed them as products of some artificially engendered and culturally reinforced procedure of dealing with units of recorded content, second, I pinpointed their nature as transitional entities with an essential exteriority and a future oriented function, and finally I revealed how their brevity is to be understood in light of the other two characteristics. I have also asserted that notebooks are material instantiations of these features of notes. Lastly, I have contended that notes are cultural kinds, namely something analogous to natural kinds. Humanist researchers posit them to refer to empirical reality and to hypothesize about cultural phenomena.

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## RÉFLEXIONS SUR LA LIBERTÉ ET MOUVEMENT DANS LES PREMIERS SIÈCLES CHRÉTIENS\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *Reflections on Freedom and Movement During the First Christian Centuries.* Freedom and movement are two concepts that appear to have a shared destiny. Common sense tells us that freedom means being able to move freely and at will. Philosophers have long been interested in the concept of movement, as evidenced by Aristotle's *Physics*. Freedom, on the other hand, is thought to be a later concern by some scholars. The ancient Greeks exercised freedom in the public sphere without thinking about it. However, over time, Early Christian authors, influenced by Stoics, have radically changed the ancient paradigm regarding freedom and movement.

**Keywords:** movement, freedom, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Christianity, Christology

Hannah Arendt affirme que la question de la liberté n'a fait qu'assez tard l'objet de l'intérêt des penseurs occidentaux<sup>2</sup>. Les Grecs anciens ne pensaient pas à la liberté, et ils n'en ont fait pas un thème de réflexion, car ils l'exerçaient dans l'espace public<sup>3</sup>. Autrement dit, la signification initiale de la liberté, qui était indissolublement liée

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<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Qu'est-ce que la liberté ?*, dans Idem, *La crise de la culture*, trad. P. Lévy, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 189. Le plus probablement, cette manière de comprendre les choses subit l'influence de K. Jaspers, pour lequel « aucun philosophe avant Augustin ne connaît les problèmes que pose la liberté » (Karl Jaspers, *Les grands philosophes*, t. 2 : *Platon, saint Augustin*, trad. G. Floquet et alii, Paris, Plon, 1989, p. 246).

<sup>3</sup> A ce propos, É. Gilson affirme que, lorsqu'Aristote « emploie le mot *eleutheria*, par lequel nous traduisons volontiers cette idée [de liberté], c'est un sens politique qu'il lui donne. La liberté



à la sphère de la *praxis*, l'a protégée contre la spéculation métaphysique. Ce n'est qu'avec l'essor du christianisme que les données du problème allaient changer radicalement. Cette perspective fait de la liberté un thème éminemment chrétien. Par conséquent, conformément à ces interprétations, on comprend que, même si le terme existe et qu'une certaine préoccupation se manifeste dans l'Antiquité classique<sup>4</sup>, la réflexion solide à propos de ce sujet ne commence qu'avec le christianisme<sup>5</sup>.

Si quelqu'un voudrait comprendre la problématique de la liberté dans toute sa complexité, il ne faudrait pourtant tout jouer sur Augustine, comme le font K. Jaspers et H. Arendt, mais considérer également des auteurs tels Origène (env. 185-253), les Cappadociens – Grégoire de Nysse (330/ 335-394) en particulier – et, surtout, Maxime le Confesseur (580-662), chez lequel on rencontre une approche au moins intéressante de la liberté (ἐλευθερία), étroitement liée à la doctrine aristotélicienne sur le mouvement (κίνησις).

I. Quand on parle des premiers siècles du christianisme, Origène est un auteur incontournable. Son influence sur la tradition chrétienne est immense, difficile à évaluer dans toutes ses ramifications. Bien que le terme ἐλευθερία n'apparaisse que très rarement dans les écrits qui nous sont parvenus d'Origène<sup>6</sup>, le problème de la liberté a suscité lui aussi l'intérêt de l'Alexandrin. A ce sujet, les exégètes se réfèrent, en général, à deux de ses ouvrages : *De principiis* et *De oratione*. On peut y identifier deux niveaux qui séparent, du moins de point de vue méthodologique, la discussion sur la liberté. A un premier niveau, l'Alexandrin traite de cette problématique à partir des κοινὰ ἔννοια (« notions communes »), et le type de liberté obtenue dans cette première étape ne serait-elle qu'une « liberté de l'indifférence morale [...],

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aristotélicienne est avant tout l'indépendance, l'état d'une personne qui ne dépend politiquement ou socialement d'aucune autre [...]. Cette notion, que nous considérons comme éminemment psychologique et métaphysique, n'a d'abord été qu'une notion politique et sociale » (Étienne Gilson, *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, Paris, Vrin, 2008, p. 296). D'autre part, il y a des auteurs qui affirment que, dans l'Athènes de Périclès, « la liberté commence à prendre le visage de la culture : être libre c'est être cultivé » (Adrian Muraru, *Libertate și liber arbitru la Origen*, Iași, UAIC, 2006, p. 231).

<sup>4</sup> R. Müller, *La doctrine platonicienne de la liberté*, Paris, Vrin, 1997, notamment pp. 45-51. D'autre part, Rémi Brague parle des « Biblical Roots of the Western Idea of Liberty » (Rémi Brague, « God and Freedom: Biblical Roots of the Western Idea of Liberty », in Timothy Samuel Shah and Allen D. Hertzke (eds.), *Christianity and Freedom*, vol. 1: *Historical Perspectives*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 391-402).

<sup>5</sup> « La notion de volonté libre, tout compte fait marginale dans la pensée classique, est devenue la catégorie centrale de la théologie chrétienne » (Giorgio Agamben, *Le règne et la gloire : pour une généalogie théologique de l'économie et du gouvernement*, *Homo sacer*, II, 2, traduit par Joël Gayraud et Martin Rueff, Paris, Seuil, 2008, p. 95).

<sup>6</sup> A. Muraru, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

la liberté est indétermination, car elle n'offre pas du sens »<sup>7</sup>. C'est pour cette raison que l'explication donnée par l'Alexandrin ne peut pas rester à ce niveau, mais elle doit faire un pas en avant vers le vrai critère du savoir, qui, dans son cas, ne pourrait être que la révélation<sup>8</sup>. Ce qui signifie que « la doctrine origénienne de la liberté est en réalité un commentaire à cette révélation, la seule qui confère une raison »<sup>9</sup>. On voit donc que l'Alexandrin jette son filet herméneutique sur la question de la liberté aussi. Il est possible que les exégètes<sup>10</sup> qui ont souligné cela aient raison, en quelque mesure, mais le sens commun nous conduit à formuler une interrogation simple : est-ce que les interprètes expérimentés deviennent-ils de plus en plus libres, tandis que les interprètes incapables de comprendre un texte, soit-il sacré, sont dépourvus de toute liberté ? Or, comment est-elle différente la liberté, entendue comme problématique herméneutique, de son sens culturel, qu'on peut identifier déjà dès l'Athènes de Périclès ?

Des Pères grecs, c'est Grégoire de Nysse qui a accordé une attention supérieure à la liberté humaine, en affirmant qu'elle a été donnée à l'homme lorsqu'il a été créé à l'image de Dieu<sup>11</sup>. En préfigurant en quelque sorte la distinction maximienne entre *la volonté naturelle* (θέλημα φυσικόν) et *la volonté gnomique* (γνώμη)<sup>12</sup>, Grégoire de Nysse soutient que la liberté de Dieu (ἐλευθερία)<sup>13</sup> ne saurait contenir en elle-même

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 325. (Traduit par nous)

<sup>8</sup> Des exégètes tel Albrecht Dihle ont affirmé qu'Origène avait-il emprunté des stoïciens la perspective/doctrine sur la liberté qu'il a appliqué aux Écritures (Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, California, University of California Press (*Sather Classical Lectures*), 1982, pp. 110-111; A. Muraru, *op. cit.*, pp. 264 et 294).

<sup>9</sup> A. Muraru, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 344-345.

<sup>11</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Homélie sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, Tome I (Homélie I-V), II ; GNO VI, 55 (SC 613, pp. 196-197). « L'Homélie II explicite la différence qui sépare la liberté originelle de l'homme (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον) de la liberté de choix (προαίρεσις) dont il jouit après le péché d'Adam » (SC 613, p. 52)

<sup>12</sup> La distinction entre *la volonté naturelle* et *la volonté gnomique* est argumentée par Maxime à partir de la différence suivante : « la volonté de celui qui veut et l'objet voulu ne sont pas identiques, pas plus que la vue de celui qui voit et l'objet vu ; car la première lui revient d'une manière substantielle, le second se trouve en dehors » (*Dispute de Maxime le Confesseur avec Pyrrhus*. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes, éd. Marcel Doucet, Thèse présentée en vue de l'obtention du grade de Philosophiae Doctor (Sciences Médiévales), Université de Montréal, 1972, p. 626). En conclusion, pour Maxime, la volonté naturelle est liée à l'être, et la volonté gnomique de l'hypostase. La distinction entre la volonté naturelle et la volonté gnomique est à retrouver *in nuce* chez Némésius d'Émèse, qui écrit : « What then is choice? Is it the intentional, since everything chosen is also intentional? But they are not convertible, as would be the case if choice and the intentional were the same. But as it is we find that the extension of the intentional is greater. For every choice is intentional, but not everything intentional involves choice » (*De natura hominis* XXXIII, translated with an introduction and notes by R.W. Sharples and P.J. Van Der Eijk, 2008, p. 176).

<sup>13</sup> Sur la liberté divine, voir Grégoire de Nysse, *Homélie X*, GNO VI, pp. 396-402.

aucun choix, parce ce qu'il n'y a pas de mal en Lui. C'est de cette liberté que dépend exclusivement la liberté humaine, parce que, progressivement, l'homme est appelé à devenir libre (ἐλευθερος)<sup>14</sup>. C'est ainsi que s'explique pourquoi, plus qu'une fois, on voit dans les écrits patristiques la liberté s'associer à la libération des passions. L'homme a été créé libre, mais ces passions ont assombri le sens initial de la liberté et, à cause de cela, un effort est nécessaire pour regagner ce sens initial. La liberté est entendue comme une libération des passions<sup>15</sup>, car elle est donnée depuis le moment même de la création, avec la raison, il faut « nettoyer » ce chemin de temps à autre, dans un but clairement défini : la déification de l'homme. Maxime le Confesseur parle explicitement de « la liberté de l'âme » de « l'esclave de ses passions »<sup>16</sup>. Il faut mener ce combat jusqu'à la fin, parce que seulement « in Christ we might enjoy a Sabbath-rest from sins »<sup>17</sup>. En effet, la liberté entendue comme libération des péchés est un desideratum qu'on pourrait ne pas réaliser, car c'est la liberté d'une créature qui ne réussit pas toujours à se libérer des péchés.

L'idée que la liberté a été donnée à l'homme au moment même de sa création apparaît clairement formulée chez Maxime le Confesseur<sup>18</sup> aussi, notamment dans les *Ambigua ad Iohannem*, où il soutient fermement l'unité qui existe entre le corps et l'âme depuis le moment même de la conception<sup>19</sup>, position qui représentait une réaction assez dure à l'adresse des origénistes, qui défendaient la thèse de la

<sup>14</sup> SC 613, p. 53 ; pp. 234-235. Chez Maxime aussi, « freedom is a sign of the image, which is to be used to acquire a divine good intended for a man: spiritual sonship (*Ambigua* 42; PG 91, 1345C) » (Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Chicago & La Salle, Open Court, 1995, p. 119).

<sup>15</sup> La liberté est entendue par Maxime aussi bien comme libération de passions (*Ep. I*, trad. E. Ponsoye, p. 80 et *passim*), mais il s'agit de la liberté d'une créature, qui ne peut se manifester que par rapport aux choses qui dépendent de nous, qui sont en notre pouvoir.

<sup>16</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Ambiguum* 6, trad. par E. Ponsoye, p. 127. « L'Écriture n'appelle pas l'action humaine une action « libre » [...] Le Nouveau Testament n'emploie pas ἐλευθερος et les mots apparentés au sens de liberté de choix, de libre arbitre ; il s'agit de la liberté sociale ou politique ou surtout d'une liberté spécifique qu'on a appelée « liberté des enfants de Dieu ». L'homme est « esclave du péché » ; Le Fils le libère. Grâce à lui, nous sommes libres du péché, de la loi, de la mort » (M. Doucet, Introduction à la *Dispute de Maxime le Confesseur avec Pyrrhus*, pp. 171-172).

<sup>17</sup> The *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis, book I (Sect 1-46), Translated by Frank Williams, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Ici, une source possible c'est Némésius d'Émèse, pour lequel la liberté est introduite < dans l'homme > avec la raison (*De natura hominis* XXXI, trad. cit., pp. 200-201). D'autre part, la liberté entendue comme principe de l'existence est à trouver, à l'opinion de certains exégètes, dans les œuvres d'Épictète (M. Pohlenz, *op. cit.*, p. 187; A. Muraru, *op. cit.*, p. 240).

<sup>19</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Ambiguum* 42, trad. cit., pp. 307-308 : « car il en est, je l'ai dit, qui assurent que les âmes pré-existent aux corps, d'autres à l'inverse que les corps pré-existent aux âmes. Quant à nous, suivant la route royale de nos Pères, nous ne disons ni la pré ni la post, mais la co-existence de l'âme et du corps, nous gardant d'incliner à droite ou à gauche, comme dit l'Écriture ».

préexistence des âmes. C'est dans *Ambiguum 7* que Maxime se détache le plus nettement du paradigme origéniste, construit sur la triade platonicienne : *στάσις - γένεσις - κίνησις*. Évidemment, ce point de départ est de nature cosmologique, mais les conséquences qui s'en dégagent excèdent bien ce cadre. Maxime transforme cette triade de la manière suivante : *γένεσις - κίνησις - στάσις*<sup>20</sup>. Généralement, les exégètes s'appuient sur le texte de *Ambiguum 7* lorsqu'ils discutent sur le mouvement et sur la manière dont Maxime s'est écarté de la tradition origéniste-évagrienne. L'épisode est archiconnu et il a été tourné et retourné de tous les côtés par les chercheurs qui se sont penchés sur les écrits maximiens.

La problématique du mouvement acquiert toutefois des valences poly-sémantiques<sup>21</sup>. On trouve, par exemple, dans les textes de Maxime une étrange association entre la question du *mouvement* et celle de la *liberté* qui, apparemment, appartiennent à des registres différents : *le mouvement* est lié au *corps*, tandis que *la liberté* est associée plutôt à l'esprit. Quand même, dans l'Antiquité déjà, les philosophes ont observé que les choses sont plus compliquées que ça, et que les deux registres s'interpénètrent, *le mouvement* et *la liberté* étant souvent définis ensemble, dans un conditionnement réciproque.

Nous avons pris comme point de départ les textes de Maxime le Confesseur, où l'on rencontre l'idée que la liberté (ἐλευθερία) ne serait rien d'autre que le mouvement (κίνησις) de la vie douée d'intelligence<sup>22</sup>. En vue d'une meilleure mise en contexte de cette thèse, reproduisons le fragment plus ample de l'ouvrage maximien, où l'on fait référence à trois types de vie : la vie végétale, la vie sensitive et la vie spirituelle<sup>23</sup>. Puis,

<sup>20</sup> Un exégète apprécie que « the Maximian triad of creation-movement-rest is equivalent with his triad of procession-conversion-rest » (Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, « Causality and Mouvement in St. Maximus' *Ambiguum 7* », *Studia Patristica*, 54, 2010, pp. 85-93, ici p. 86). A ce sujet, voir aussi Polycarp Sherwood, *The earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and his refutation of Origenism*, *Studia Anselmiana* (36), Centro Studi Sant'Anselmo, Roma, 1955, pp. 92-116 ; Ladislav Chvátal, « "Mouvement circulaire, rectiligne et spiral". Une contribution à la recherche des sources philosophiques de Maxime le Confesseur », *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 54, 2007, pp. 195-197 ; Idem, « Maxime le Confesseur et la tradition philosophique : à propos d'une définition de la *kinêsis* », *Studia Patristica*, 48, 2010, 117-122 ; Vladimir Cvetkovic, « St Maximus on Πάθος and Κίνησις in *Ambiguum 7* », *Studia Patristica*, 54, 2010, pp. 95-104.

<sup>21</sup> La liberté ne s'entend pas d'une seule manière, « mais comme homonyme » (Maxime le Confesseur, *Dispute avec Pyrrhus*, trad. cit., 664). A ce que les textes maximiens l'illustrent, le problème de la liberté ne se rapporte pas exclusivement à la moralité – comme certains exégètes l'affirment : « il faut affirmer la liberté car elle conditionne la moralité » (A. Muraru, *op. cit.*, 239) (traduit par nous) –, mais il revêt plusieurs formes. Les perspectives exégétiques sur la liberté peuvent être extrêmement diverses : éthiques, métaphysiques, physiques, anthropologiques, etc.

<sup>22</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Dispute avec Pyrrhus*, PG 91, 301 B; éd. M. Doucet, p. 558 et p. 638.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, trad. cit., 638.

le Confesseur précise : « Le propre de la vie végétale, ce sont les mouvements de nutrition, d'augmentation et de génération ; celui de la vie sensitive, c'est le mouvement de tendance ; celui de la vie spirituelle, c'est le mouvement auto-déterminé, la liberté »<sup>24</sup>. L'idée continue : « Si donc, selon la nature, revient aux êtres spirituels le mouvement auto-déterminé, tout être spirituel, par conséquent, est aussi par nature doué de la volonté. Le bienheureux Diadoque de Photice, en effet, a défini que l'auto-détermination est la volonté »<sup>25</sup>. En effet, on ne peut plus appeler volonté une volonté qui n'est pas libre, bien qu'on voie chaque jour des situations qui contredisent cette thèse. Chez Maxime intervient pourtant une distinction importante, entre la volonté naturelle et la volonté gnomique, vu que la volonté humaine qui se meut par imitation vers le bien ne peut être identique à la bonne volonté par nature<sup>26</sup>. Donc, la première relève de la nature humaine et elle est toujours inclinée vers le bien, ce qui signifie qu'elle n'est aucunement liée à la liberté, tandis que la seconde, gnomique, qui relève de la personne, est une disposition qui peut se pencher vers le bien aussi bien que vers le mal. Cette dernière est indissolublement liée à la liberté, qui symbolise une définition négative : l'absence de toute contrainte.

Comme des exégètes le soulignent, l'interprétation qui a le plus influencé l'époque pré-moderne est à trouver dans *Etymologicum magnum*, qui reprend aussi d'autres sujets des écrits maximiens<sup>27</sup>, et qui définit ἐλευθερία comme « aller où l'on veut ».

Selon l'observation de Max Pohlenz, cette définition saisit la dimension négative du terme ἐλευθερία, entendue comme absence des contraintes : la racine ἐλευθ ne désigne pas tout simplement la marche comme acte physique, mais toujours un mouvement orienté vers un but (τέλος), effet donc d'un acte de volonté. Il la lie en particulier de la manière dont Lucrèce l'a définie en tant que « potestas per quam progredimur quo ducit quemque voluntas »<sup>28</sup> et de la description faite par Épictète dans les *Entretiens*: « l'homme libre est celui qui vit comme il le veut; qu'on ne peut

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 638. Il est évident que cette tripartition, de manière soit directe, soit indirecte – par l'intermédiaire d'un commentateur –, est prise d'Aristote, qui dans *De anima* II, 4 et *passim* parle de : « la <faculté> intellectuelle, sensible ou nutritive ». Ce qui est certain c'est que, chez les Grecs, le mouvement (kinésis) a un sens beaucoup plus large que le mouvement tel que nous le comprenons (pour plus de détails, voir Donald J. Allan, *Aristote le philosophe*, trad. C. Lefèvre, Louvain, Editions Nauwelaerts / Paris, Beatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1962, p. 49).

<sup>25</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Dispute avec Pyrrhus*, trad. cit., 639. En effet, « l'auto-détermination, selon les Pères, est la volonté » (*ibidem*, p. 641).

<sup>26</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Op. I*, trad. Ponsoye, p. 120.

<sup>27</sup> Florin Crîșmăreanu, « *Gastrimargia*: animalul *margos* și pelicanul în scrierea maximiană *Quaestiones et dubia* », *Classica & Christiana*, 14, 2019, pp. 43-73.

<sup>28</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura* II, 257.

ni contraindre à faire une chose, ni empêcher de la faire; à qui l'on ne peut rien imposer de force »<sup>29</sup>. Donc, au cours de l'Antiquité, l'opposé le plus fréquent de la notion de ἐλευθερία c'est la présence des obstacles empêchant la liberté de mouvement<sup>30</sup>.

II. En ce qui concerne la signification que Maxime accorde à la liberté, ses sources notamment nous apparaissent comme très intéressantes. Les exégètes n'ont pourtant accordé trop d'attention à cet aspect. Par exemple, Lars Thunberg, dans son fameux ouvrage consacré à l'anthropologie de Maxime (*Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*), alloue moins de deux pages à ce sujet, en corrélant la question de la liberté – sans se rapporter à la définition adoptée par Maxime dans la *Dispute avec Pyrrhus* – avec le problème de l'image (εἰκόν). A ce propos, il ne faudrait pas négliger le terme que Maxime utilise quand il parle de la création de l'homme : « Car Dieu, en créant dans sa bonté toute âme à son image, lui donne le mouvement (αὐτοκίνητος) qui la mène à l'être »<sup>31</sup>. En conclusion, l'autodétermination humaine n'est que le noyau de l'acquisition par l'homme d'une image<sup>32</sup>. Par cet acte de libre volonté l'homme peut aller vers son but, l'acquisition du salut. La problématique téléologique présente dans les écrits des Pères, avec les modifications de rigueur, se revendiquent toujours des œuvres des philosophes grecs. Ce que Maxime affirme ici est bien similaire à ce qu'Aristote disait dans *l'Étique à Nicomaque*: « la pensée par elle-même cependant n'imprime aucun mouvement, mais seulement la pensée dirigée vers une fin et d'ordre pratique »<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Épictète, *Entretiens*, IV, 1, 1 (trad. V. Courdaveaux, p. 266). Ce qui est intéressant c'est que, en hébreu, pour l'homme libre on utilisait le terme *ḥpofšī* – qui proviendrait du canaanite – dont le sens initial était celui d'« esclave » (William Foxwell Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*, New York, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957, p. 285).

<sup>30</sup> Max Pohlenz, *La liberté grecque. Nature et évolution d'un idéal de vie*, trad. J.-F. Goffinet, Paris, Payot, 1956, 181, n. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Centurie sur la théologie I*, 11 ; trad. J. Touraille, dans *Philocalie de Pères neptiques*, Vol. III, Tome A, 2004, p. 422.

<sup>32</sup> Cependant, Maxime fait une distinction entre l'image (l'humain) et l'Archétype (le Christ). Marcel Doucet note à cet égard que « Maxime (ni dans la *Dispute* ni ailleurs) ne s'attache pas à l'expression scripturaire faisant du Christ l'image de Dieu (2 Cor. 4, 4 ; Col. 1, 15), retenue, pendant la période de l'élaboration de la doctrine trinitaire, par Origène et Athanase, par exemple, pour exprimer la relation intra-trinitaire du Verbe et du Père. L'image réside, pour Maxime, dans le *noûs* humain (*Thal* 65, PG 90, 741B). Dieu le Verbe, considéré dans l'identité indivise de la nature divine, n'est qu'archétype (Dieu est lumière par essence, archétype ; l'homme est lumière par participation, image. Le Fils comme Dieu est, comme l'Esprit, archétype, non image – *Thal* 8, PG 90, 285A), Maxime ne suit pas ceux qui, comme Évagre, avaient parlé de l'esprit comme image de l'Image (Évagre, *Cent. III*, éd. Guillaumont, p. 111). C'est, comme les autres hommes, en sa seule humanité, que le Christ est dit image » (Marcel Doucet, « La volonté humaine du Christ, spécialement en son agonie. Maxime le Confesseur, interprète de l'Écriture », *Science et Esprit*, 37/2, 1985, pp. 123-159, ici p. 130).

<sup>33</sup> Aristote, *Étique à Nicomaque*, VI, II ; trad. J. Tricot, 2017, pp. 289-299.



Qui plus est, on ne saurait pas parler de κίνησις (définissant la liberté et le temps chez Maxime)<sup>34</sup> sans invoquer Aristote, qui semble influencer Maxime à ce propos, surtout par sa *Physique* et son *Étique à Nicomaque*. Par exemple, le Stagirite, dans l'*Étique à Nicomaque*, VI, II, parle du principe de l'activité, qui est le choix délibéré successif au mouvement<sup>35</sup>. Pourtant, chez Aristote, le κίνησις n'est pas défini exclusivement selon la structure triadique de la temporalité : passé, présent et avenir, mais il est aussi bien défini comme mouvement d'une action, c'est-à-dire au moment où une action transformatrice se produit.

Le IIIe Livre de la *Physique* (200b) s'ouvre par la question du mouvement, que le philosophe doit étudier. En fait, les premiers livres de la *Physique* plaident pour entendre la nature comme étant l'alternance du mouvement et du repos, en se positionnant ainsi contre ceux qui affirmaient soit le mouvement exclusif, les adeptes d'Héraclite, soit qui militaient pour le repos total, comme les Éléates. Aristote montre que notre esprit se heurte à des difficultés quand il se propose de comprendre le mouvement, parce qu'on est enclin à penser toujours des actes complets, et le mouvement est par excellence incomplet (« le possible auquel incombe l'acte est quelque chose d'incomplet »). Toutefois, notre esprit pensera les actes incomplets, soumis au mouvement, comme étant complets.

Pour Maxime, « toute vie des êtres créés se montre en ce qu'elle se meut ; se mouvant, elle opère aussi, car toute motion se manifeste par une opération [...]. Il ne se peut en effet qu'il y ait vie sans une motion inhérente »<sup>36</sup>. Le mouvement est inné, « mouvement selon la nature » (*Ep.* II), nature créée par Dieu. En termes presque aristotéliens, le Confesseur distingue des choses mues Celui qui meut, qui est « toujours leur cause »<sup>37</sup>. Toutefois, on retrouve la même idée chez Origène, qui dans *De Principiis* (III, 1, 2) fait la distinction entre ce qui a en soi la cause du mouvement et ce qui a cette cause en dehors de soi. A. Muraru considère qu'Origène aurait été

<sup>34</sup> A côté de la liberté, entendue comme mouvement indépendant de la vie douée d'intelligence, dans *Questiones ad Thalassium* Maxime définit le temps en relation avec le mouvement : « le temps est le mouvement fini – χρόνος περιφομενη κίνησις ». Sur la problématique du temps chez Maxime, voir Sotiris Mitralaxis, *Ever-Moving Repose: The notion of time in Maximus the Confessor's philosophy through the perspective of a relational ontology* (Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin, PhD diss., 2014); voir aussi Idem, « A Note on the Definition of χρόνος and αἰών in St. Maximus the Confessor through Aristotle », in Maxim Vasiljević (ed.), *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection – Proceedings of the Symposium on St Maximus the Confessor, October 18-21 2012*, California, Sebastian Press, 2013, pp. 419-426.

<sup>35</sup> Ce qui est intéressant c'est qu'en parallèle avec cette tradition aristotélienne, « ce que Origène offre comme "genre" de la liberté c'est <toujours> la liberté » (A. Muraru, *op. cit.*, 305) (traduit par nous).

<sup>36</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Ep.* VII, trad. Ponsoye, p. 106.

<sup>37</sup> Idem, *Ep.* VI, trad. Ponsoye, p. 100.

influencé à ce propos par la doctrine stoïcienne : « qui a proposé elle aussi l'assimilation de la liberté avec le mouvement »<sup>38</sup>. A la différence pourtant du stoïcisme, Origène fonde sa liberté sur le λόγος, qui nous offre la possibilité de choisir<sup>39</sup>. Origène affirme donc que « seulement ce λόγος donne la possibilité de la liberté »<sup>40</sup>. En outre, Maxime affirme – en empruntant une expression consacrée par le stoïcisme, mais dont les origines sont toujours aristotéliennes – que « nous délibérons des choses qui sont de notre ressort et dans nos possibilités, dont la fin n'est pas évidente. On parle de "ce qui est de notre ressort", parce qu'on ne délibère »<sup>41</sup>. Dans *l'Opuscule I*, Maxime définit la liberté dans un sens qui se retrouve dans la philosophie de l'Antiquité : « car par libre autorité nous délibérons, jugeons, désirons, nous nous mettons à agir et nous nous servons de ce qui dépend de nous »<sup>42</sup>. En d'autres termes, ce qui ne dépend pas de nous appartient à la nature, or, Maxime affirme que ce qui relève de la nature, dans ce cas la volonté naturelle elle aussi, ne s'enseigne pas : « les choses naturelles ne s'enseignent pas, et si nous avons le vouloir sans qu'il nous soit enseigne, car jamais on n'apprend à personne à vouloir, c'est donc par nature que l'homme est doué de la volonté »<sup>43</sup>. Et la volonté n'est rien d'autre que la liberté, accordée à l'homme dès le moment même de la conception, au ventre de sa mère : « si l'homme se détermine lui-même par nature, il est donc par nature doué de la volonté »<sup>44</sup>. La conclusion qui nous

<sup>38</sup> A. Muraru, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 309-311.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 312-313.

<sup>41</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Op. 1*, trad. cit., pp. 114-115.

<sup>42</sup> Idem, *Op. I*, trad. cit., p. 116. La première source qui nous vient à l'esprit à propos de cette idée est la philosophie stoïcienne, et en particulier *Épictète, Manuel* 1.1-3 : « des choses les unes dépendent de nous, les autres ne dépendent pas de nous ». Toutefois, avant les stoïciens, on rencontre la distinction entre « les choses qui dépendent de nous » (à savoir des vices et des vertus) et « les choses qui ne dépendent pas de nous » chez Aristote : « Il n'y a pas de choix, en effet, des choses impossibles (...) le choix porte, selon toute apparence, sur les choses qui dépendent de nous » (*Ethique à Nicomaque*, III, 4 ; ou « Nous ne délibérons que sur les choses qui sont en notre pouvoir ; et ces choses-là sont précisément toutes celles dont nous n'avons pas parlé jusqu'ici. Ainsi, la nature, la nécessité, le hasard, paraissent être les causes de bien des choses ; mais il faut compter de plus l'intellect, et tout ce qui est produit par l'homme. Les hommes délibèrent, chacun en ce qui le concerne, sur les choses qu'ils se croient en pouvoir de faire » (*ibidem*, III, 4). Un auteur que Maxime a sans doute lu est Némésius d'Émèse, qui, dans la bonne lignée aristotélienne, parle de choses qui dépendent de nous et d'autres qui ne sont pas de notre ressort : « But it is shown that they are neither intentional nor unintentional: for the intentional and the unintentional are both up to us, but digestion and growth are not up to us » (*De natura hominis* XXXII, trad. cit., p. 175; voir et XXXIX, XXXX et *passim*.).

<sup>43</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Dispute avec Pyrrhus*, trad. cit., p. 641.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 642. Pour Maxime, le modèle de cette liberté humaine c'est la liberté divine : « si l'homme est fait à l'image de la divinité bienheureuse qui dépasse toute substance, et si la nature divine se détermine elle-même par nature, l'homme donc, lui aussi, parce qu'il est vraiment imagé, se détermine lui-même par nature » (*ibidem*). L'homme est, donc, libre de par sa nature, et la liberté, parce que naturelle, ne peut pas être acquise ou apprise.

intéresse ici est que l'homme est, par nature, libre, la liberté n'étant pas une acquisition culturelle ou obtenue par éducation. Il existe une forte tradition qui affirme que la liberté est la caractéristique fondamentale de l'homme. Rémi Brague invoque, en ce sens, Alexandre d'Aphrodisie (*De anima liber*), Grégoire de Nysse (*Oratio catechetica magna*), Bernard de Clairvaux (*De gratia et libero arbitrio tractatus*) et Pierre de Jean Olivi (*Quaestiones in secundum librum Sententiarum*)<sup>45</sup>. H. Bergson, lui aussi attentif à la problématique de la liberté, affirmait quelque part qu'un acte libre est quelque chose de rarissime. En général, on se meut sur les routes les mieux connues. C'est-à-dire que l'on fait presque tout par habitude, par routine. Pour R. Brague, « Real freedom is a choice that arises from the whole of our being, not from a faculty that could weigh two possibilities against one another and tip the scales in favor of one of them »<sup>46</sup>. En conclusion, pour citer le même auteur, « The most common view of freedom as realizing itself in choice is not sufficient »<sup>47</sup>.

Bien que l'influence des idées d'Aristote sur les écrits de Maxime soit évidente, idées assimilées, le plus probablement, par l'intermédiaire de Némésius d'Émèse<sup>48</sup>, le nom du Stagirite n'a que très peu d'occurrences dans l'œuvre maximien. A ce que nous savons, le Αριστοτέλης apparaît trois fois dans les textes de Maxime qui se sont conservés : *Quaestiones et dubia* (q. 126), scolies aux textes de Denys l'Aréopagite, DN 377, 7 sqq<sup>49</sup> – où Aristote est cité avec son traité *De generatione animalium* – et dans *Epistola VII*, à Jean Presbytère (*Ep. VII*), où l'on trouve le philosophe grec cité une fois de plus, associé à Épicure, et non d'une manière élogieuse, tout

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<sup>45</sup> Rémi Brague, *Curing Mad Truths: Medieval Wisdom for the Modern Age*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2019, p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69.

<sup>48</sup> « Maxime a fait des études très soignées, qui embrassaient à la fois la théologie aussi bien que les disciplines libérales. Ainsi, il est clair que, soit directement, soit indirectement – notamment par l'intermédiaire de l'œuvre *De natura hominis* de Némésius d'Émèse -, il a pris connaissance de la philosophie antique païenne ; en effet, le vocabulaire technique dont il se sert, en particulier les termes qu'il emploie pour décrire l'agir humain et la volonté humaine, sont tributaires de ceux qu'on trouve chez les philosophes grecs » (Bram Roosen et Peter van Deun, *Les collections de définitions philosophico-théologiques appartenant à la tradition de Maxime le Confesseur : le recueil centré sur δηωνυμον, συνώνυμον, παρώνυμον, ἑτερόνυμον*, dans M. Cacouros, M.-H. Congourdeau (éds.), *Philosophie et sciences à Byzance de 1204 à 1453. Les textes, les doctrines et leur transmission. Actes de la Table Ronde organisée au XXe Congrès International d'Études Byzantines (Paris, 2001)*, Leuven, Peeters, 2006, 53 ; voir aussi R.-A. Gauthier, « Saint Maxime le Confesseur et la psychologie de l'acte humaine », *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 21, 1954, pp. 71-77).

<sup>49</sup> Beate R. Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum IV/1. Ioannis Scythopolitani prologus et scholia in Dionysii Areopagitae librum De divinis nominibus cum additamentis interpretum aliorum* (Patristische Texte und Studien 62), Berlin, Walter De Gruyter, 2011, p. 405.

au contraire. Le nombre réduit de références à un auteur ne représente pourtant un argument solide pour affirmer que Maxime le Confesseur n'avait pas lu directement les œuvres d'Aristote.

Même si Aristote considère que le mouvement est toujours parmi les choses et qu'il est immortel (*Physique*), en même temps il croit que l'âme humaine est mortelle, donc – selon cette perspective – il ne saurait s'agir d'aucun mouvement post-mortem. Bien qu'utilisant des idées d'Aristote, Maxime s'oppose nettement, sans pourtant le nommer de façon explicite, à la conception du Stagirite, qui affirmait l'éternité du monde et de la matière<sup>50</sup>. La conclusion de Maxime est évidente : l'éternité de la matière est une doctrine absurde, car, s'il en était ainsi, « on existerait selon des réalités différentes : Dieu et la matière », ce qui n'est pas possible. Pour l'auteur byzantin, le monde a un commencement temporel : « Dieu qui, de toute éternité, est Créateur, créé lorsqu'il le veut, par le Verbe consubstantiel et par l'Esprit, dans sa bonté infinie. Et ne me demande pas pour quelle raison il a créé à ce moment-là, alors qu'il est bon éternellement. Car je te dis que la sagesse insondable de l'essence divine échappe à la connaissance humaine »<sup>51</sup>.

Aristote ne peut plus désormais aider Maxime, qui force les limites du langage, en faisant appel à des expressions oxymoroniques telles : « stabilité fluctuante et changeante, ou plutôt pour mieux dire sa stable fluctuation »<sup>52</sup>. Pour Maxime, l'*eon*, l'éternité, est le/ la même avec le *repos*, et l'amour n'est rien d'autre que le repos (στάσις), une fin du mouvement qui produit une joie (ἀπόλαυσις) complète (*Ep.* 2). Pour Maxime donc, l'*amour*, le *repos* et la *joie* sont intimement liées et interdépendantes. Dans *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 59 (CCSG 22, 53), Maxime identifie la « stabilité fluctuante » (ἀεικίνητος στάσις) avec la (ἀπόλαυσις). Autrement dit, il s'agit du Huitième Jour dont Maxime parle dans *Quaestiones et dubia*, qui est en réalité le royaume de Dieu. Or, ce Huitième Jour, le Sabbat, n'est que « l'impassibilité (ἐλευθερία) de l'âme douée de raison »<sup>53</sup>.

III. Si l'on analyse la transition du registre philosophique vers le registre théologique, comprendre les volontés et la liberté chez Maxime suscite une série de problèmes. Ils viennent comme en cascade, et le premier, à notre avis, en est le

<sup>50</sup> Voir, en particulier, Maxime le Confesseur, *Ambiguum* 10.

<sup>51</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Capita de caritate* 4, 3 ; trad. J. Touraille, dans *Philocalie de Pères neptiques*, Vol. III, Tome A, 2004, p. 410.

<sup>52</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Ambiguum* 71, trad. cit., p. 368.

<sup>53</sup> Idem, *Capita theologica et oeconomica* I, 37 ; trad. J. Touraille, dans *Philocalie de Pères neptiques*, Vol. III, Tome A, 2004, p. 427.

suisant : il n’y a pas de volonté gnomique dans le Christ<sup>54</sup>, parce que « le vouloir humain de Dieu n’est pas mû comme pour nous par le choix, opérant par conseil et jugement pour discriminer des opposés contradictoires, pour qu’on n’aille pas le juger de nature versatile selon le choix ; mais prenant son être au moment de l’union avec le Dieu Verbe, Il possède une motion sans équivoque, ou plutôt stable selon son appétence naturelle, soit la volonté »<sup>55</sup>.

A ce point, essentiel pour comprendre la liberté du Sauveur<sup>56</sup> et implicitement notre liberté, est l’épisode de l’agonie de Christ dans le Jardin de Ghetsémani<sup>57</sup>. Pour Maxime, l’enjeu était immense : si l’on admettait en Christ une volonté unique, celle divine (comme les monothélites le voulaient), comment pourrait-on alors accepter le rejet de la coupe par Christ ? Par conséquent, il faut corroborer la péricope évangélique « *Eli, Eli, lema sabaqthani* » c’est-à-dire « Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, pourquoi m’as-tu abandonné ? » (*Matthieu 27, 46*) avec « Mon Père, s’il est possible, que cette coupe passe loin de moi ! Pourtant, non pas comme je veux, mais comme tu veux ! » (*Matthieu*

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<sup>54</sup> Maxime prétend qu’il n’y a pas de volonté gnomique en Christ : « en parlant aussi de gnomè à propos du Christ, comme l’a montré l’examen qui en a été fait, ils en font un pur homme, dont la disposition est liée à une délibération comme chez nous, qui est en proie à l’ignorance et au doute, et qui a en lui des contraires. Puisque c’est au sujet des questions douteuses, et non de celles qui ne le sont pas, que l’on délibère. Car nous, c’est l’appétit du simple bien naturel que nous avons naturellement ; quant au bien déterminé, nous en faisons le discernement par une recherche et une délibération. Voilà pourquoi il est approprié de parler aussi de gnomè en nous, vu qu’elle est un mode du passage à l’acte et non un élément essentiel de la nature, puisque la nature aussi subirait une infinité de mutation. Dans l’humanité du Seigneur, qui n’avait pas comme nous une pure subsistance d’homme, mais une subsistance divine – car il était Dieu celui qui est apparu dans la chair, pour nous, semble à nous, issu de nous -, on ne peut parler de gnome. Grâce à son être même, c’est-à-dire à sa subsistance divine, il avait par nature et l’affinité pour le bien et l’aversion pour le mal » (Maxime le Confesseur, *Dispute avec Pyrrhus*, trad. cit., 646-647). Dans l’interprétation d’un exégète, « sans doute, il n’y a pas, selon Maxime, de délibération dans le Christ ; mais les deux “moments” (dans le cas de l’agonie : l’instance de refus, puis celle d’acceptation) dans l’exercice d’une même puissance volitive ne sont pas absents chez le Christ, le second comportant, même sans délibération, la mise en relation, œuvre de raison, d’un moyen (la Passion) et d’une fin (le salut voulu par le Père) » (M. Doucet, *op. cit.*, p. 72).

<sup>55</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Op. l.*, trad. cit., pp. 123-124.

<sup>56</sup> La problématique relative à la liberté de Christ est totalement justifiée pour l’exégèse contemporaine, vu que « le problème débattu au 7<sup>e</sup> siècle n’était pas de savoir si le Christ comme homme était libre ou non : il était de savoir s’il avait ou non une faculté de volonté comme partie de sa nature humaine. Si l’on admettait qu’il en avait une, il allait de soi pour tous que le Christ jouissait d’une liberté humaine, ou plus précisément, d’un pouvoir humain d’auto-détermination » (M. Doucet, *op. cit.*, 78).

<sup>57</sup> A ce sujet, voir François-Marie Léthel, *Théologie de l’agonie du Christ. La liberté humaine du Fils de Dieu et son importance sotériologique mises en lumière par saint Maxime Confesseur*, préface de M.-J. Le Guillou, Paris, Beauchesne (coll. « Théologie historique », 52), 1979. Une critique extrêmement fondée de cet ouvrage est à trouver dans M. Doucet, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-83.

26, 39; 26, 42)<sup>58</sup>. Selon Maxime, « le Verbe incarné a donc cette capacité de vouloir en tant qu'homme, mue et informée par Son vouloir de divin »<sup>59</sup>. L'apparente contradiction entre les deux épisodes est expliquée par un exégète de la manière suivante : « même dans la solution de Maxime, le mouvement naturel de rejet de la Coupe dans le Christ est annulé dans la volonté humaine par une décision rationnelle, en sorte qu'il n'y a pas de contrariété entre la volonté humaine et la volonté divine d'un même sujet voulant »<sup>60</sup>.

D'autre part, la réponse la plus confortable que l'on saurait formuler impliquerait sortir de la sphère de la liberté humaine et accepter la liberté humaine, au-delà de notre pouvoir de compréhension. En ce sens, il existe au moins un argument biblique, à savoir celui dans la *Genèse* (1, 26) : « Faisons l'homme à notre image, selon notre ressemblance », d'où l'on peut tirer la conclusion que l'acte libre de la création est constitutif à la création de l'homme, lui précède en quelque mesure. Maxime ne se contente pourtant de réponses faciles, confortables, mais il approfondit le sujet en introduisant une distinction qui clarifie presque entièrement le problème : la différence entre λόγος (raison) et τρόπος (manière), qu'il applique également dans le cas de Christ : « de là qu'en Lui l'humain diffère »<sup>61</sup>. En conclusion, « si la capacité naturelle de vouloir et le vouloir ne sont pas la même chose (l'un, je l'ai dit, est de l'essence, l'autre du conseil de celui qui veut), le Verbe incarné a donc cette capacité de vouloir en tant qu'homme, mue et informée par Son vouloir divin »<sup>62</sup>.

Une seconde distinction que Maxime introduit au centre de la volonté humaine sépare la « raison de la faculté » propre à la nature et la « manière de mouvoir » (*Op. XX*) propre à chaque liberté en action, qui met en relief une différence apparemment insurmontable entre le *tropos* pécheur des hommes, qui reste tel même si le *logos* de leur nature est toujours orienté vers le bien. La question est la suivante : peut-il Christ sauver le *tropos* pécheur des hommes ?

On comprend, des écrits maximiens, que le mode pécheur (le *tropos*) de la liberté humaine est converti par un double acte libre du Verbe, d'abord du côté de la nature divine vers celle humaine, ensuite du côté de la nature humaine vers celle divine. Donc, d'une part, l'acte par lequel „Il a assumé”, ou accepté comme Sien, ce qui est humain (« sans pécher » – Ev. 4, 15) par Son incarnation même. D'autre part,

<sup>58</sup> Pour Maxime, « ces mots : "Non comme moi Je veux, mais comme Toi..." , ne montrent qu'une chose : qu'il a véritablement revêtu la chair qui redoute la mort, c'est son lot de redouter la mort » (*Op. XXIV*, trad. cit., p. 263) ; voir intégralement *Op. VI* : « Sur "Père, s'il est possible, que cette coupe s'éloigne de Moi" (*Mt* 26, 39) ».

<sup>59</sup> Idem, *Op. III*, trad. cit., 132.

<sup>60</sup> M. Doucet, *op. cit.* p. 59.

<sup>61</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Op. IV*, trad. cit., p. 139.

<sup>62</sup> Idem, *Op. III*, trad. cit., p. 132.

toujours en conséquence de l'acte volontiers et gratuit d'assumer notre nature, Christ consomme tout ce qui est notre (les passions), comme le feu la cire. Dans les mots de Maxime, « c'est par appropriation seulement, par compassion comme la tête avec tout le corps, et aussi bien le médecin avec les maux de ces patients, jusqu'à ce que le Dieu qui pour nous S'est fait homme nous en libère. Sauf que c'est par la vertu du corps qu'Il a assumé qu'Il les épuise et les fait disparaître complètement pour nous. Car le verbe concernant la passion est double : l'un caractérise notre nature, l'autre la falsifie tout entière. C'est celui-là qu'en tant qu'homme Il assumé pour nous volontairement et essentiellement, à la fois en affirmant Sa nature [humaine] et en dissolvant la condamnation dressée contre nous. Celui-ci, en tant qu'ami de l'homme, Il Se l'est approprié – lui que l'on reconnaît chez nous à notre façon de ne pas nous soumettre –, en sorte que, comme le feu la cire, le soleil les vapeurs de la terre, Il le dissolvait complètement pour nous, il nous fasse partager les biens qui Lui sont propres et nous rende sans passion et incorruptibles selon la promesse »<sup>63</sup>. Ainsi, par Sa mort, notre mode (*tropos*) non-guéri est « complètement dissolu » en sorte qu'Il « nous rende », par Sa résurrection, « sans passion et incorruptibles selon la promesse ».

En étroite relation avec ce sujet, un autre problème se pose, encore plus difficile, à notre avis : si la nature est et qu'elle reste inaltérée – notre volonté « est simple et n'est nullement hors du péché à cause de son inclination ici ou là. La nature ne change pas à cause d'elle, mais sa motion s'inverse, ou à parler plus vrai, est altérée »<sup>64</sup> –, quoi que nous délibérions et décidions à un moment donné, pourquoi serait-il besoin d'une déification de la nature, comme des exégètes le répètent à maintes reprises?<sup>65</sup> Pour obtenir une réponse satisfaisante, une analyse rigoureuse des textes maximiens s'impose – analyse que nous allons réaliser une autre fois.

Lorsqu'on essaie de formuler la conclusion de la présente étude, il faut admettre que, bien que le terme ἐλευθερία apparaisse dans les œuvres des philosophes anciens, il n'en est moins difficile de savoir ce que les Grecs entendaient par liberté. L'obstacle épistémologique ou herméneutique consiste dans la tendance inévitable de projeter, rétrospectivement, sur un concept, des plis de sens que celui-ci n'avait pas acquis en réalité que beaucoup plus tard. En fait, autrement dit, c'est précisément l'avertissement que Max Pohlenz formule dès le début de son ouvrage consacré au problème de la liberté en Grèce ancienne. Mais, ne se place-t-on, par de pareilles affirmations, dans un registre du desideratum ? Est-il possible que l'exégèse moderne ne soit-elle point affectée par ces *Wirkungsgeschichte* des thèses antiques sur la liberté ?

<sup>63</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Op. XX*, trad. cit., p. 245.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 244.

<sup>65</sup> Voir, par exemple, Jean-Claude Larchet, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur (580-662)*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2003.

En même temps, contre certains exégètes, nous avons souligné le fait que la problématique de la liberté n'est pas identifiable seulement avec les écrits augustinien, sans doute importants, mais qu'il faut tenir compte également de la tradition grecque du christianisme des premiers siècles, représentée dans cet article par quelques auteurs significatifs. Il convient également de ne pas négliger que des auteurs tels Maxime le Confesseur valorisent les idées sur la liberté, tirées des écrits du Stagirite, soit de manière directe soit, le plus probablement, par intermédiaire. Le problème de la liberté n'était pas d'ordre secondaire, illustré uniquement dans sa dimension pratique, quotidienne, mais il constituait aussi une préoccupation théorique, comme il résulte des écrits des auteurs de langue grecque mentionnés. Pour Maxime, dans la bonne tradition aristotélicienne-stoïcienne, la liberté « est une [sorte de] souveraineté autonome dans les affaires de notre ressort, ou non empêchée dans l'usage de ce dont nous disposons, ou une appétence, non soumise à autrui, de ce qui dépend de nous »<sup>66</sup>.

Outre le fait que les écrits d'Aristote où l'on traite du problème du mouvement, du temps et de la liberté, pourraient constituer pour Maxime une source assez certaine, on peut constater également les limites de ces sujets de souche aristotélicienne. Le mouvement, tel que le Stagirite le comprend, n'est pas utile à un auteur chrétien que jusqu'à un point. Au-delà de ce point, où le mouvement immortel d'Aristote s'arrête, peut-on parler encore de liberté ? *In Patria* la liberté, conditionnée du mouvement, a-t-elle encore quelque sens ?

Avec « la fin du mouvement »<sup>67</sup>, un autre type de liberté entre en scène, une liberté offerte par Christ, qu'on ne peut pas penser dans les catégories de l'esprit humain, parce qu'il fait tout au-dessus de nous. L'idéal serait qu'à la liberté de Dieu de se faire homme, l'homme réponde avec sa liberté en Christ, Dieu-Homme.

Paradoxalement, là où la liberté aristotélicienne s'arrête, conditionnée par le mouvement, naît la liberté en Christ. La mort qui, chez Aristote, ne conduit à aucun « au-delà » apporte, dans le christianisme, la liberté totale en Christ, par Sa Mort même. Encore plus succinctement, Saint Jean l'Évangéliste nous dit que seulement « la vérité fera de vous des hommes libres » (*Jean* 8, 32). Par conséquent, ayant sans cesse la Vérité à côté de nous « jusqu'à la fin des temps » (*Matthieu* 28, 20), nous devons vivre toujours en tant qu'« hommes libres » (1 *Pierre* 2, 16).

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<sup>66</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Op.* I, trad. cit., 275.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 118 : « la limite [et la fin], pour nous, de la motion raisonnée ».



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## SAINT ANSELM AND GAUNILO ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD\*

P. Alpár GERGELY<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The best-known version of the ontological argument was formulated by Saint Anselm of Canterbury. With his argument Anselm tried to prove the existence of God. In my paper I restate all the propositions of Anselm's argument, and also present Gaunilo's counter-arguments. Finally, I raise some problems that further analysis of the argument could benefit from.

**Keywords:** Saint Anselm, Gaunilo, existence, God, ontological argument

### Saint Anselm and Gaunilo on the Existence of God

In my short paper I will attempt to formulate and present the claims of the argument known in the history of philosophy as the ontological argument. After formulating the claims of the ontological argument, I will present some criticism of the argument, which were raised against the ontological argument at the time of its formulation. After that, I will make some observations on the argument, along which the question is worth further reflection.

The ontological argument was first formulated by Saint Anselm of Canterbury. Anselm formulated the argument in chapters 2 and 3 of his work *Proslogion*.<sup>2</sup> Some say that the argument presented in the two chapters are two different arguments, others say that the very same argument is presented in chapter 3 also. This question

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. The relevant extract of St. Anselm's *Proslogion* in Plantinga, Alvin (ed.), *The Ontological Argument*, Macmillan, 1968, 3–5.



is irrelevant here, however for the sake of simplicity I will refer to the arguments as the first and second one. Let us see St. Anselm's argument for the existence of God presented in chapter 2 of the *Proslogion*. St. Anselm states the following:

- (1) God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.
- (2) The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God'.
- (3) When the fool hears the phrase 'than which nothing greater can be conceived', he understands what he hears.
- (4) That which the fool understands is present in his understanding, even if he does not admit that it exists.
- (5) That which is present in the understanding and that which exists are two different things; they are not identical.
- (6) Before the painter paints a picture, the picture already exists in the painter's understanding, but he does not yet perceive it as a real being.
- (7) After the painter has painted the picture, the picture exists in the painter's understanding, and it also exists in reality because the painter knows he has painted it.
- (8) The fool knows that something than which nothing greater can be conceived exists at least in his understanding. (That than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the fool's understanding, because when the fool hears this expression he understands it, and the thing that we understand is in our understanding.)
- (9) It is not possible that than which nothing greater can be conceived should be found only in our understanding.
- (10) If that than which nothing greater can be conceived exists only in the understanding, it is conceivable that it also exists in reality.
- (11) That which exists in reality (not only in the understanding) is greater than that which exists only in the understanding.
- (12) If that than which nothing greater can be conceived exists only in the understanding, then that than which nothing greater can be conceived is also something than which something greater can be conceived. (This is a contradiction.)
- (13) It is not possible for something than which nothing greater can be conceived to be something than which something greater can be conceived.
- (14) That than which nothing greater can be conceived (without any doubt) exists both in the understanding and in reality.

In contrast to chapter 2, in chapter 3 of the *Proslogion* Anselm proves the existence of God by proving the impossibility of his non-existence. Here too, let us list the arguments in detail!

(1) That thing (than which nothing greater can be conceived) is so real that its non-existence cannot be conceived.

(2) It is conceivable that something exists of which non-existence cannot be conceived.

(3) Tacit claim: something of which non-existence cannot be conceived can be conceived.

(4) Something of which non-existence cannot be conceived is greater than something of which non-existence can be conceived.

(5) If non-existence could be conceived of something of which non-existence could not be conceived, then that would not be something than which nothing greater can be conceived. (This is a contradiction.)

(6) That than which nothing greater can be conceived is so real that its non-existence cannot be conceived.

Here are some comments and criticisms of Saint Anselm's arguments. Let us begin by questioning one of the arguments presented in chapter 3 of the *Proslogion*. The argument was formulated by Anselm's fellow monk, Gaunilo in his treatise *On Behalf of the Fool*. Before presenting it, it is worth noting that Gaunilo, like Anselm, was himself a Christian, who believed in the existence of God, and thus did not criticise Anselm's arguments out of conviction, but merely pointed out the logical flaws in the ontological argument and drew attention on its weakness. The conclusion of St. Anselm's second argument, a thesis that needs to be proved, is stated at the very beginning of the argument: 'And it assuredly exists [God] so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist.'<sup>3</sup> According to Anselm, the existence of God is so real that it is inconceivable that God does not exist. So be it, says Gaunilo; if this is so, then it is inconceivable why Anselm should bother to prove the existence of God at all. For, if the non-existence of God cannot be conceived, it would not be conceivable to the fool either. And if the non-existence of God were not conceivable for the fool, then it would not even occur to him to question the existence of God, in which case there would be no need for Anselm's ontological argument: because it would be clear to everyone that God exists.<sup>4</sup> The moment the question of God's existence arises, however, we cannot claim that we cannot conceive of God's non-existence. We can conceive it. In fact, it is not only the fool who can conceive the non-existence of God, and who says in his heart that 'there is no God', but also Gaunilo himself. Therefore, Anselm is not right when he says of God that his non-existence cannot be conceived.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gaunilo's *In Behalf of the Fool* in Plantinga, Alvin (ed.), *The Ontological Argument*, Macmillan, 1968, 8.

In the history of philosophy, the argument of Saint Anselm, as presented in chapter 3 of the *Proslogion*, has reappeared again and again at different times. Gyula Klima reports in one of his studies that an argument very similar to that of Anselm was formulated by Descartes.<sup>5</sup> Descartes, of course, was unaware of this, and one of Descartes' debating partners, a certain priest named Caterus, merely pointed out to Descartes that Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* makes a very similar point: that God is such a perfect being that his perfection implies existence, so that God cannot be thought not to exist. But with this remark we return to Anselm's first ontological argument, and we also find ourselves confronted with a host of problems.

St. Anselm assumes, and we have seen that later St. Thomas and Descartes also claimed, that the perfection of God implies the concept of existence. This means that whenever we deal with or think of the term 'God', we also think of existence, since existence is an essential property of God: if we think of God, we must also think of God's existence. But, as we have seen, this position is not universally accepted. Gaunilo, for example, disputes this: he says that it is possible to think of God without thinking of his existence.

But Gaunilo also disputes something else. On the first argument, he formulates the following objection: if we follow Anselm's idea, we must accept not only the existence of God, but also of other entities that are not empirically experienced, but are conceivable. Imagine, says Gaunilo, that some people tell us about an island, let us call it *the lost island*, which is impossible to find; no one inhabits it, but they claim that it is richer than any other land on earth. When we hear this, we understand what we are told without any difficulty. And by Anselm's logic, we should conclude that the island we have heard about really exists. Our reasoning would go as follows:

- (1) We understand what we are being told when someone talks about the lost island.
- (2) The lost island is the richest island in the world.
- (3) If the lost island existed only in our understanding, it could not be the richest island, for if it also existed in reality, it would be richer than the island existing only in our understanding.
- (4) But the lost island is the richest island.
- (5) To be the richest island, the lost island must exist in reality.
- (6) So the lost island exists in reality.

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<sup>5</sup> Klima Gyula, "Szent Anzelm és az ontológiai istenérv", in *Világosság*, Supplementary Volume to 12/1983, 5.

According to György Geréby, Gaunilo's argument can also be interpreted as saying that Saint Anselm's argument is wrong, because it proves the real existence of fictional entities. Geréby, however, argues that this is not the case, but that the argument is too good, and thus 'cannot stop at proving the real existence of God.'<sup>6</sup>

And, indeed, Anselm's argument would lead to a proliferation of entities in our world. One might even say, perhaps, that the argument is so good that it is bad; but it is bad precisely because it cannot limit the postulation of fictional entities as real ones. Geréby says that the argument is based on a pattern. And this pattern shows us that if we can identify an individual object within a given set for which we say that there is no greater/richer/etc. among the conceivable things, then we must accept its real existence with respect to this thing. Thus, our world will be populated by richest islands, best mashed zucchinis, wooden shoes, bogeymen, etc.<sup>7</sup>

There is another aspect of Anselm's first argument which is worth examining, and which Gaunilo has also reflected on. Gaunilo distinguishes between the mere existence of a thing in the understanding and the existence of the same thing in reality; and in his view, Anselm makes the mistake in the first argument of inferring from the existence of a thing in the understanding to the existence of that thing in reality. He thinks this is wrong. If this were so, then we should accept the real existence of the lost island. But not only that; we should also accept the real existence of any other thing that is present in our understanding: the real existence of perfect elephants speaking in human language, the real existence of perfect unicorns, etc. For, if we hear about these entities, we understand the terms, and if we understand the terms, these entities are in our understanding. But if they were only in our understanding, they could not be the best; however, since we have said that they are the best, they must exist in reality.

But Gaunilo disagrees with this argument. He disagrees with this argument precisely because he takes it seriously that if an entity were to exist only in his understanding, it couldn't be the greatest/best/etc. If it were, he says, then the entity that exists in reality would be smaller or lesser than that which exists in his understanding. And this is impossible. It is precisely the case, Gaunilo argues, that first we must be convinced that a thing exists in reality, and only then can we assert that something greater than that does not exist. In Gaunilo's thinking, the reality of things takes precedence over the assertion that nothing greater than them is possible. To illustrate Gaunilo's idea with an example: we can say that the pencil with which I am writing is in my understanding as the greatest pencil (with which I am writing) because this

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<sup>6</sup> Geréby György, "Amit Anselmus és Gaunilo mondtak egymásnak", in *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle*, 6/1996, 659.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 659.



pencil exists in reality (and, if you like, in the sense that I am writing with it, it has no greater degree of existence than its actual existence). The very reality of this pencil, and the fact that I am writing with it, leads me to think of this pencil (in terms of its degree of existence) as the greatest/best pencil in my understanding that I am writing with. And it is not because there is no pencil greater than this pencil in my understanding with which I am writing that this pencil must exist in reality. And now, applying this idea onto the existence of God: it seems that Gaunilo is saying that Anselm can claim that God is that than nothing greater can be conceived because for Anselm, God exists in reality. This is why Anselm claims that it is not possible to conceive non-existence about God. But for a person who does not have the same basic thesis as Anselm does, i.e. that 'God exists', the non-existence of God is conceivable, and, to that extent, questionable. The question is, then, does God exist in reality? Or: does God really exist?

Far be it from me to accuse St. Anselm of anything, but it seems to me that his first argument is a case of the *petitio principii* fallacy, but even if it is not, it bears a strong resemblance to it. Accordingly, the argument seems circular. On the one hand, Anselm is convinced that God exists in reality – and in this respect satisfies the requirement of Gaunilo that we must first be convinced of the real existence of a thing and only then can we assert that no greater thing than that is conceivable; and on the other hand, he claims that since this thing is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, it therefore exists, or must exist. If we do not take into consideration the thing that is in the understanding, we can rephrase Anselm's argument as follows: God exists in reality (premise), therefore God exists in reality, or: God really exists. This is a tautology. Or we can say: God really exists (starting point), therefore God must exist. This is partly a noninformative statement like the first one, and partly a stronger statement. For the conclusion does not merely state a factual situation as it stands, but implies that it could not be otherwise. This would be a strong modal reading of the conclusion; at the same time, it would highlight why, in the case of the second argument, Anselm claims that the non-existence of God is inconceivable.

Of course, the problem is not that simple. It is quite easy to construct examples where we would be reluctant to say that the existence of a thing is necessary, regardless of the fact that the thing actually exists. It trivially follows from the fact that my pencil (actually) exists that my pencil (actually) exists, but we would be reluctant to conclude from the fact that my pencil (actually) exists that my pencil must exist, by which we mean that the existence of my pencil is necessary, or: the non-existence of it is inconceivable. Few of us think that we could not imagine a world in which my pencil does not (actually) exist. Not so with God, say some philosophers. We have

seen that Saint Anselm claimed that the non-existence of God is inconceivable. But a very similar argument was made by Descartes, when he argued that existence cannot be separated from God. Existence belongs to God just as necessarily as it is necessary that the sum of the three angles of a triangle is equal to the sum of two right angles. Just as it is an essential property of a triangle that the sum of its three angles is equal to the sum of two right angles, so it is an essential property of God that he exists: for the concept of a perfect being includes existence as a property.<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, however, analysing the ontological argument, formulated and advocated the position that existence is not a real predicate.<sup>9</sup>

Kant argues that the idea of God, which reason seems to need, in no way proves that the being corresponding to the idea exists in reality. (It is worth emphasizing here the similarity of Kant's idea to that formulated by Gaunilo, i.e. that the existence of a thing in the understanding does not entail the existence of that thing in reality.) It does, of course, if we take existence as a predicate. But according to Kant, this is precisely where Descartes and Leibniz, and all the other philosophers – including St. Anselm, the one who formulated the ontological argument for the first time – were wrong. Those philosophers who thought that existence, like every other property of a thing, was a predicate, were wrong. If that were the case, then those with whom Kant takes issue would be right: for these thinkers claim that we would be contradicting ourselves if we denied the existence of God, that is, if we asserted that 'God does not exist'. The root of the contradiction, says Kant, is that if we were to think of existence as part of the concept of God, as a property, then whenever we uttered that 'God does not exist' we would in fact be saying, 'God, who exists, does not exist', which is like saying that a triangle does not have three angles. For in case of both statements we find that the subject of the statement contradicts the predicate.

Except, that existential propositions, or existential statements do not have a subject–predicate structure. If they did, no predicate of any existential proposition would say anything about the subject of the proposition that we would have not thought of in conjunction with the subject. To put the point in Kantian terms: existential propositions would be analytic judgments;<sup>10</sup> to put it in more modern terms, we might say that existential propositions would be referential tautologies. If this were so, the statements denying existence would be referential contradictions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Altrichter Ferenc, "Fogalom és lét: logikai út Istenhez?", in Altrichter Ferenc, *Észérvek az európai filozófiai hagyományban*, Atlantisz, 1993, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 563–569. (B 620 – B 630.)

<sup>10</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 16.

<sup>11</sup> Klima Gyula, "Szent Anzelm és az ontológiai istenérv", in *Világosság*, Supplementary Volume to 12/1983, 5.

But this contradicts our experience. The argument is that if existential propositions were referential tautologies, this would mean that these claims must always be true, but we would like to think that our existential propositions can be sometimes true and sometimes false: for example, if we stated that 'Australia exists'. It is true that Australia exists, but it could also be the case that it does not exist, just as there is a similar case if we claim that 'Atlantis exists'.

From all these aspects, Kant concludes that statements asserting existence are synthetic; which means that if we assert the existence of some individual thing, we must justify the truth of the assertion on the basis of possible experience. By applying this Kantian point to Anselm's argument, we get that in order to assert the existence of God, we must first be able to justify it on the basis of experience. I think both Gaunilo and the fool would agree with this: if we could prove God's existence by experience, then we could rightly say God exists.

In one case, the error of reasoning proving the existence of God, lays in inferring from the existence of a thing in the understanding that the thing really existed. As Kant pointed out, however, there is another case of error, which seems to be justified by the development of modern logic. The error in this case lies in inferring the necessity of things from the necessity of propositions. Of course, even in this case, we assume that God exists, and then conclude that God must necessarily exist. In a sense, the statements 'The triangle has three angles' and 'God exists' are very similar. If we take both statements to be analytic judgments, then the subject of both statements already implies the predicate, so that 'triangle' implies that the given shape has three angles, and 'God' implies that the being exists. Nevertheless – however strange it may sound –, in neither version of the examples are we committed to the real existence of the triangle or the real existence of God.

In this case, Kant is talking about conditional necessity: he says that the absolute necessity of propositions in relation to things and predicates of things implies only conditional necessity. The examples in these cases would be: 'If triangles existed, they would necessarily have three angles', and 'If God existed, he would necessarily have to have existence as a property.' Thus, even if in the case of God existence as a property of God were a real predicate (which Kant has shown it is not), existence would not be an absolute necessary property of God, since the existence of this potentially absolute property would be conditional on the actual existence of the subject. Which is absurd, of course, since our task is precisely to prove that God exists in reality. I don't think it would be difficult for the fool to accept a statement that says that if God really existed, he would necessarily have the property of existence. I think he would have no difficulty accepting the statement in question, because in

the context of the real world, the failure of the only condition, i.e., the real existence of God, would render the further implications of the statement irrelevant, since it would be a counterfactual statement.

It is a common view in classical logic that, in the case of universal propositions, we do not necessarily think that the entities we name by the referring expression – which would roughly correspond to the subject term in classical logic – exist. Thus, if we assert that ‘Every triangle has three angles’, we do not take it for granted that triangles exist. This of course leads to oddities. For example, since we assume that the statements we utter are true, therefore if one wants to prove that we are not right when we say ‘All triangles have three angles’ one must show that a particular triangle does not have three angles. But he will be unable to do so. Since we have not established that there are triangles, our interlocutor will not find a single triangle in the universe of discourse, i.e. the set of things assumed or implied in the discussion, that he can show does not have three angles. He will therefore not find a single counterexample to our statement. But the burden of proof is on him; and since he cannot prove that we are not right, we assume that we are right. To use the analogy of triangles, this phenomenon is perhaps not so surprising, since we assume that everyone intuitively believes that triangles exist. But if we were to say something about pink centaurs or talking trees, the problem would be immediately obvious. In short, on the basis of the idea just presented, whatever we claim about fictional entities would be true, since they could not be disproved.

The situation of existential statements is very similar to that of universal statements, despite the fact that in the case of existential statements the quantifier in the statement is read as ‘there is such a...’ or ‘there is at least one such...’. Yet the situation is similar because, in the case of these statements, we are not committed to the real existence of the things in question. We only make ourselves look like committing to the real existence of certain entities, but this is not the case. To claim that ‘The pink centaur flies’ does not mean that we believe that there is at least one pink centaur, nor do we have to believe in the existence of talking trees to claim ‘The talking tree is sometimes sad’.

In the history of logic and philosophy one of the most famous examples of existential statements is Bertrand Russell’s statement ‘The present king of France is bald’. But even in the Frege–Russell–Strawson debate, the debate was not about whether the present king of France existed in reality. Everyone accepted that he did not exist because they knew he did not exist; they did not believe he did.

But St. Anselm and Gaunilo, who held the position of the fool, do not agree on the existence of God. Anselm believes that God exists, which is why he cannot pretend its contrary; he cannot even imagine the possibility of God’s nonexistence. Gaunilo, on the other hand, representing the fool’s position, claims only that if he

understands the expression ‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived’, he can conceive of this being. At the same time, however, he believes that there is an unbridgeable gulf between imagination and reality, so that imagination has no necessary consequences as regards reality and things that really exist.

Of course, one could argue – as is the solution of classical logic to eliminate the oddities presented above – that our universe of discourse cannot be an empty set. We could therefore force ourselves to assume the existence of the things about which our statements are made, whether or not the entities in question exist in reality.

This would artificially eliminate the empty terms, but it would still not be enough to definitively prove the existence of God in reality. We would either assume the existence of God (‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived’) ex hypothesis, that is independently of reality – however this would have no compelling force with regard to the real existence of God –, or we would take the existence of God to be real, but then the Anselmian attempt would become pointless. Either way, the solution would not be reassuring.

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## BOOK REVIEW

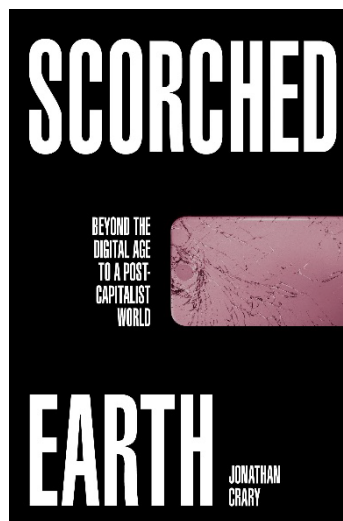
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### **Jonathan CRARY, *What does climate change have to do with the Internet? Scorched Earth – Beyond the Digital Age to a Post-Capitalist World*, 2022**

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Among those who agree to become active in the face of the real catastrophe that is global warming, reducing one's carbon footprint is the most sensible thing to do, and there are several guides on how to do it more effectively. Activism to force political commitment to environmental protection measures is increasingly visible after the pandemic: demonstrations, protests and strikes are being organized in cities around the world, and anyone can follow these actions on social media. Sustainability must be ensured for any new development, often combined with new opportunities for economic growth through investment in green industries. But degrowth is also becoming a more popular concept, even though it has yet to find its way outside the academic discourse and into economic practice. However, people everywhere in the world have experienced ecological catastrophes caused by rapid forced industrialization, the destruction of

arable land, the replacement of traditional agriculture with large monocultures, the immense pollution in so-called industrial cities, and the failure of nuclear power plants. From this perspective, one might think that the new global "we" today is on a good



path. In this scenario, too, the Internet and the rapid exchange on social media would be the ideal basis for organizing and acting together. In order to stop this social engagement, all oppressive regimes would attack this very medium, restrict user access, shut down websites, or delete information aimed at revealing facts hidden from the public. Especially after the revelations that shook the world, not only through the media but also through the Internet's

capacity for rapid dissemination, it seemed clear that in the future nothing could be kept secret and that a "free Internet" was once again the guarantee of open communication, human solidarity and social cohesion. But, as Jonathan Crary argues in



his essay "Scorched Earth - Beyond the Digital Age to a Post-Capitalist World", this is a false belief.

"Any possible path to a survivable planet will be far more wrenching than most recognize or will openly admit. ... This means rejecting our digital isolation, reclaiming time as lived time, rediscovering collective needs and resisting mounting levels of barbarism, including the cruelty and hatred that emanate from online." (p. 4)

But when and how did the Internet become the enemy? To look for a turning point where the benefits of the "knowledge economy" were suddenly outweighed by its harmful effects on society (such as online criminal activity or the failure to guarantee privacy), or where an initially neutral or egalitarian project became an instrument of propaganda and manipulation, would again miss the point. Crary argues that the dream of the "digital commons" (p. 10) was never meant to be realized: it was the processes of financializing of all online activity that gradually took place. From the beginning, the strange combination of isolation and exchange would have tended to fragment society and produce factions rather than an organized majority. Although it has proved effective in terms of short-term mobilization, as Crary surely admits, the Internet would prevent long-term anti-systemic action. ("Demonstrations, marches take place but simultaneously, there is a re-immersion in the atomizing separation of digital life." p. 13) As a counterexample, Crary recalls the "far larger mass mobilizations ...in the 1960s and '70s without any fetishization of the material means used for organizing" (p. 11). And on page 14, in this same pointedness, the very hard thesis: "The truth is irrefutable:

there are no revolutionary subjects on the Internet". At least, not subjects of revolutions that everyone could join, as Crary goes on to explain:

"Edward Snowden's spurious claim that network technology is "the great equalizer" perpetuates an elitist hacker fantasy of covert empowerment that has little relevance to most people's lives or to the building of mass movements and new communities. (...) To suggest that the internet is where indigenous peoples, stateless immigrants, the unemployed and impoverished and the incarcerated should contest their marginalization and disposability is not just wrong but malevolently irresponsible. (...) When the availability of images and information is infinite, there is a fatal scattering of anything held in common and the relationships that make possible a society are dissolved." (p. 23).

This dissipation, as well as the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between what is authentic and what is fake, which also leads to increasing social injustice, addictive behavior, misinformation, and manipulation, has been widely noted and makes the use of the Internet and social media a subject of criticism. Crary also refers to the range of materials and books that teach constructive use of digital technology, and notes ironically that no permanent damage resulting from it needs to be made obvious, that any potential damage needs to be presented as "remediable" (p. 83). What runs throughout the essay are frightening and detailed descriptions of how the Internet is being used as a means of destroying "non-financializable forms of social interaction" (p. 42).

The determined and continuous evolution of the Internet into this powerful tool of repression is what Crary presents in his

essay in parallel with shocking testimonies of environmental damage, especially in the Global South (deforestation and land clearing for monocultures, the search for precious metals for the construction of digital tools through violent extraction methods, and more). The conclusion:

“The Internet is the digital counterpart of the vast, rapidly expanding garbage patch in the Pacific Ocean. (...) One of the foremost achievements of the so-called knowledge economy is the mass production of ignorance, stupidity and hatefulness” (42).

From the outset of his essay, Crary argues that it would be a mistake not to recognize the correlation between the climate and social crises, which are linked to a socio-economic structure he terms *Scorched Earth-Capitalism*. Furthermore, digitalization has the potential to become the ultimate extensive appropriation of personal and societal existence. Referring to Jean-Paul de Gaudemar’s 1980 analysis of capitalism needing to expand within the social body to “reconquer the entire social space” (p. 9), Crary argues that this objective has now been realized with the internet complex serving as the all-encompassing global tool. The firmly supported assertion suggests that any economic policy promoting degrowth (i.e., “eco-socialism or no-growth post-capitalism” p.4) in the interest of averting a climate disaster must also take into account the social and environmental effects of the internet and the global digitalization. As amplifiers of consumerism, they are accelerators of the energy crisis:

“The many digital devices and services we use now are made possible through unending exacerbation of economic inequality and the accelerating disfiguring of the earth

biosphere by resource extraction and needless energy consumption” (p. 5).

During the undeniable climate change crisis, when resources have become scarce and long-term strategies cannot sustain the idea of infinite growth, Crary accuses that “one, last, mad spree of plunder is now ongoing all over the planet. Fracking, mountain-top removal mining, rainforest clear-cutting for biofuel farming, offshore drilling (...), the expropriation of the remaining fragments of a commons (...)” (p. 27). While the main objectives of stopping global warming are often assumed to be attainable through the ending of the carbon era and nuclear phase-out, Crary argues for another extreme measure. Instead of thinking about new means for “growth” and fetishization of a politicized “science” as producer of new technologies, there is need for a radical stop:

“these minerals have to stay in the ground and the urgent task is the radical scaling down of a need for unlimited 24/7 energy and for all the unnecessary, disposable products and services that warp our lives and poison the earth (p. 31)”.

This refusal would include the Internet, insofar as it has evolved into a machine for producing false needs, demanding 24/7 availability, and transforming individuals into non-empathic consumers in a disintegrating and non-creative, increasingly violent society that is unlikely to produce authentic forms of resistance. In other words, we must recognize that in the same way that *Scorched Earth-capitalism* claims planetary resources, the main resources of the human soul, imagination, empathy, creativity, and social engagement, are threatened by online uniformity (Crary speaks of an “atomized crowd” p. 119), which is not equalizing but



equally harmful to any kind of profound affiliation.

In a tone reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche's second Untimely Meditation, Cray lists the disadvantages of an existence that revolves around the Internet: The assault on youth (p. 38), digital uprootedness (p. 47, following the phenomenon described by Simone Weil), uniformized speech (following Hanna Arendt, p. 40) and its continued and exacerbated "expropriation and depletion" (p. 118), the tendency to "neutralize" the future (p. 54), the degradation of human finitude (p. 68), and the alienating disembodiment of online existence (quoting the framework of David Abram and other authors: "we have lost our bodily understanding of the world..." p. 108).

At the end of his essay, Cray turns to one of his main themes, human seeing, the human eye and attention. We read about the colonization of this very last bastion of human uniqueness (there are poetic phrases about the iris), for example, through eye tracking as the main focus of user experience design (UXD). And it is also the face, the smile and the voice that are being subjected to studies of consumer response.

In order to return with all of our senses to an animate world of real face-to-face encounters (Cray cites Buber, Agamben and Sartre) the essay ends with an impassioned plea to "reconceiving the bonds between humans and animals, salvaging what remains of biodiversity and recovering the spirit of festival and arts defined by group participation" p. 123.

It is a strong point of this essay not to see the climate crisis as something to be solved by technical means, and also to see ecology, economy, and social developments within the historical framework that includes the technologies that produce them. All of this is undoubtedly the better way to approach a much more complex phenomenon than most of us can fully grasp. It remains to be seen whether the core of the problem can be identified in the Internet or the digitalization of social life as the last form of Scorched-Earth capitalism to be left behind, or whether it will only be followed by more violent forms of colonization (of more and more of the body itself), because we still don't know the real name of the danger that threatens us from within.

*„Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst  
Das Rettende auch“. (Fr. Hölderlin)*

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