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Body as a Performing Experiment:
Steps Towards Practical Knowledge as a Philosophical Issue

VARIA

BOOK REVIEW

Editorial:
Body as a Performing Experiment:
Steps Towards Practical Knowledge as a Philosophical Issue

Alina NOVEANU[*], Ion COPOERU[**]

This thematic dossier contains a selection of lectures given by teaching participants at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj during the Blended Intensive Program "Practical Knowledge in Philosophy: Affectivity, Skills, and Knowing-How," which took place in April and May 2023 and 2024.

The program aimed to highlight a kind of philosophy that, beyond its theoretical impulses, is born out of the need to respond to immediate problems before reflecting on complex structures of reality; it prefers to describe concrete relations to things and everyday activities before theorizing about the validity of some universal laws. Practical knowledge is nonetheless a type of knowledge that can account for its foundation and relate to theoretical discourse. But at its core, practical knowledge remains a mystery of the body situated in the world. The irreducibility of practical knowledge situates the agent in the world, illuminating its embodied dimensions and coordinates. Understanding practical knowledge requires combining different approaches: phenomenological, analytical, and historical-philosophical.

The first paper, entitled "Saying Farewell to the Body and its Comeback. Cartesian Dualism in the *Discourse* and the *Meditationes* together with a Sketch of a Phenomenological Continuation of the Body-Soul Problem" (***Alina Noveanu***) outlines a historical-philosophical incursion into the problem of the distinction between body and soul as it unfolds in the philosophies of Descartes and of those philosophers who recovered the Cartesian idea of *evidence as bodily lived truth*, as Schopenhauer and the phenomenologists. The emphasis is nevertheless not oriented towards the dualism of substance on which the *Meditations* and the *Discourse* have to insist to provide an argument for the immortality of the soul, but on the ontological meaning of epistemic investigations for Descartes as standing in a Platonic (and mathematic) tradition.

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Giuliana Gregorio focuses in her paper "*gnóthi seautón/epiméleia heautoú*: Michel Foucault and the Two Paths of Western Thought" on an apparent opposition that Foucault strongly represents when he assumes a radical change in philosophical attitude between the Ancient (Socratic) quest for wisdom linked to the (ethical) imperative of caring for one's soul and the Cartesian reduction of this extensive understanding to an epistemological point of view. Concerning the dialogues *Alcibiades*, *Laches,* and *Apology*, the Socratic coherence between speech, thinking, and a philosophical life becomes evident, as well as the spiritual dimension that Foucault sees as an alternative discourse to the strictly philosophical (gnoseological) approach in Descartes' *Meditations*. Still, as Gregorio shows, starting with the *Sixth Meditation* another possible way for an interpretation of Descartes' philosophical intentions is possible. In the *Meditations,* one cannot ignore the dimension of practical exercise, which is also a central focus in the *Passions*, showing that Descartes was no stranger to philosophy's existential meaning and practical dimension.

Cristina Vendra explores the relationship between affectivity and imagination and the interplay between the dimensions of the voluntary and the involuntary as they appear throughout the work of Ricœur, but with focus on his *Lectures on Imagination 1975/2024*. Vendra begins by reconstructing Ricœur's phenomenological inquiry into the will and his rejection of naturalism, highlighting his focus on the affective dynamics between the body and the world. In his comprehensive project of recovery of the Cogito, rationality and affectivity are not opposed, but, as Vendra argues with Ricœur, they are essentially connected. In this context, imagination plays an important part, as it does not consist in the pale residues of an encounter with reality but, as she quotes from the *Lectures*…, "an intention towards an affective-kinesthetic presence that is embodied in it". The paper emphasizes the continuum between affectivity and imagination and the mediating part of the body in internalizing the experience of the world to value it properly and act on it.

In her contribution, *Elena Theodoropoulou* gives an account of her project "Philosophical Objects" in which she explores new possibilities of encountering and expressing under the premise that a Philosophical Object is any concept that a philosopher creates or elaborates in a deliberate philosophical way. The objects are considered as *unfinished areas of experimenting* regardless of the distinction of an inside - outside, a never-ending process, a performance requesting the interaction of a comprehensively involved performing subject beyond his intentional conscience. In this context, Theodoropoulou aims to rethink the role and means of philosophy itself, of the philosopher and his methods. By questioning "philosophical objects," the project does not pursue the reinforcement of a particular philosophical tradition or idea (although there is an unmistakable link to phenomenology and structuralism); instead, it targets becoming "a vehicle of philosophical thought" and thus represents a "movement of practical philosophy."

Die Verabschiedung des Leibes und seine Wiederkehr.
Der cartesische Dualismus in dem *Discours* und
den *Meditationes* nebst der Skizze einer phänomenologischen
Weiterführung der Leib-Seele-Problematik

Alina NOVEANU[*]

ABSTRACT. Saying Farewell to the Body and its Comeback. **Cartesian Dualism in the *Discourse* and the *Meditationes* together with a Sketch of a Phenomenological Continuation of the Body-Soul Problem.** There is no independent concept of the soul in Descartes' *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, nor is there any other argument for its immortality than the possibility of its continued existence after death, thanks to its distinction from the body. This is why the soul and the body must remain in opposition: either thinking or extended, indivisible or divisible substances, ontologically necessary, mathematically ideal or merely confused accidentals suspended on geometrically constructed skeletons. It sems that the division between body and mind has never been so great as in Descartes. However, it is precisely the continuity of his unquestioned knowledge of the ideas/forms and the eternally unchanging nature of mathematical objects, untouched by his methodological doubt, that finds its expression in the idea of evidence: For Descartes, seeing with the eye of the mind is not only possible, but remains the most reliable way of "seeing". It is precisely evidence that Schopenhauer recovers to restore the world not only as (Cartesian) representation but also as a non-mediated, bodily lived truth: the world as will. It is also evidence that Husserl chose as a methodological starting- and also connecting point to Descartes' philosophy. With his evidence-based method, one could conclude that Descartes not only remained at the entrance door to transcendental subjectivity (as Husserl stated at the beginning of his *Cartesian Meditations*) but also locked himself out of examining corporeality: the phenomenologically evident re-entrance for the thinker as a solipsist back to the intersubjectivity of the living world.

Keywords: soul, body, idea, cogito, image, evidence, Descartes, Schopenhauer, Husserl, Heidegger

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1. Schnelle Denkschritte im *Discours*: das Dreieck des einsamen Descartes, die Ziege mit dem Löwenkopf und die Möglichkeiten des Seins unfehlbarer Wahrheiten

Im vierten Abschnitt des *Discours de la Méthode*[1] fasst Descartes den Gedankengang seiner Meditationsübungen zusammen, die er zugegebenermaßen als so *„Métaphysiques et si peu communes"*[2] empfindet, dass er Bedenken äußert, sie könnten nicht jedermanns Sache sein. Dennoch fließt die Erzählung von seinem philosophischen Werdegang mit beeindruckender Leichtigkeit weiter, die er dem Französisch sprechenden Publikum als ersten anonym veröffentlichten Versuch der Darstellung seiner Philosophie 1637 in Form einer autofiktionalen (würde man heute sagen) Schrift vorlegt. Seine Denktechnik basiert, wie der Leser bald erfährt, auf einsamen, in voller Aufmerksamkeit und Muße auf das Wesentliche konzentrierten Denkübungen, da ihn die Enttäuschung angesichts der Unordnung und Unübersichtlichkeit der bisherigen Ergebnisse der Forschungsgemeinschaft zu dem radikalen Schritt bewegt hat, die Sachen selbst in die Hand zu nehmen. Anders ausgedrückt: Descartes entscheidet sich zum Totalabriss seines Wissensgebäudes, dessen wackelige Fundamente auf nicht genug durchdachten fremden Prinzipien, Meinungen und Überzeugungen beruhten. Es ist für die damit die Neuzeit einleitende Figur Descartes bezeichnend, darauf Wert zu legen, dass seine Geste (anders als die fast hundertfünfzig Jahre spätere „kopernikanische Wende" Kants), als einsamer Entschluss vernommen wird und durchaus nicht von allen Geistern nachgeahmt werden konnte oder sollte („kann kein Beispiel sein, dem alle folgen sollten"[3]). Wenig sinnvoll erscheint es ihm, dass eine „Privatperson" den Staat zu reformieren unternähme oder das Gebäude der Wissenschaften bzw. die Lehrpläne zu ändern gedenke.[4] Es scheint dennoch mehr als allein eine politische Vorsichtsmaßnahme zu sein, wenn Descartes ausdrücklich behauptet, keine konzertierte Aufklärungsaktion, sondern lediglich eine innere Reform seiner selbst zu beabsichtigen, während er den Leser von der ihm durchaus bewussten innovativen Sprengkraft seiner Methode und ihrer fachübergreifenden Effizienz unterrichtet. Der im Dreißigjährigen Krieg gedient habende und überhaupt viel umhergereiste Descartes scheint aber tatsächlich von der menschlichen Gesellschaft als Kollektiv wenig überzeugt zu sein:

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[1] Die folgenden Angaben beziehen sich wenn nicht anders vermerkt auf Descartes, R., *Discours de la Méthode*, Französisch-Deutsch, übers. v. C. Wohlers, Hamburg 2011. Von jetzt an DM und Descartes, R., *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia/Meditationen über die Erste Philosophie*, Lateinisch/Deutsch, übers. v. A. Schmidt, Stuttgart 2020. Von jetzt an M.

[2] DM, 56.

[3] DM, 27.

[4] Vgl. ebd.

„(…) so daß uns viel mehr Gewohnheit und Beispiel als irgendeine gewisse Erkenntnis überzeugen. Gleichwohl ist Stimmenmehrheit kein Beweis, der für schwerer zu entdeckende Wahrheiten irgendeinen Wert hätte; denn es ist viel wahrscheinlicher, dass ein Mensch allein die Wahrheit antrifft als ein ganzes Volk. Deshalb konnte ich niemanden wählen, dessen Meinungen meiner Ansicht nach denen der anderen hätten vorgezogen werden müssen, und ich fand mich gewissermaßen gezwungen, es für mich selbst zu unternehmen, mich zu leiten."[5]

Dass Descartes von der Gemeinschaft Einzelner dennoch viel hielt, bezeugt der Austausch mit den wissenschaftlichen Eliten der Zeit und sein umfangreicher Briefwechsel. Und dennoch liegt dem genialen Mathematiker nichts ferner, als einen undemokratischen „Mystagogen" und „Klubbisten"[6] zu verkörpern, der dem gemeinen Volk die Wissenschaft vorenthalten oder nicht zumuten möchte. Jenseits der realen Gefahr, die eine wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung in der Epoche darstellte, hat die Entscheidung zur einsamen Suche nach der Wahrheit vielmehr etwas mit der Bereitschaft zu tun, sich einer ursprünglichen Denk*erfahrung* auszusetzen: eine, über die zwar zu berichten möglich sei, die aber nicht tradierbar oder nachzuahmen wäre, und die nur im stillen Selbstgespräch mit sich selbst, als das nicht weiter zu erforschende Fundament notwendige Anerkennung finden muss. Die cartesische Entscheidung zu einsamer Arbeit und Askese wird bald belohnt[7]: Descartes findet bereits 1619 in Neuburg an der Donau seine Methode, deren vier Vorschriften er dann auf systematische Weise anwendet und deren erste Resultate auf verschiedene Gebiete er anschließend präsentiert.

Was die Metaphysik angeht, werden schnell hintereinander die wichtigsten Schritte des Denkweges genannt, die er in den vier Jahre später auf Lateinisch publizierten *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* mit besonderem Bedacht auf das akademische Milieu sorgfältig erläutern wird: der Zweifel, die Traumhypothese bzw. die „verrücktesten Voraussetzungen der Skeptiker" (die später zur Hypothese vom bösen Betrüger ausgebaut wird), der Substanzdualismus, die Wahrheitsregel, die These von der Existenz Gottes und die zwei Gottesbeweise. Was den in Analogie an

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[5] DM, 29.

[6] Diese Ausdrücke Kants beziehen sich auf Platon den „Briefsteller" (387), den er einführt als „eben so gut Mathematiker als Philosoph" (379) in: Kant, I. *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*, Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik 2, Werkausgabe Band VI, Frankfurt am Main 1996, 377-397.

[7] Dabei handelt sich angeblich um drei bedeutenden Träume s. Wohlers,C., Einleitung zu DM, XVII ff. Zu der Frage, ob die Träume tatsächlich in Neuburg oder Ulm stattgefunden haben s. ders., DM, Anmerkungen des Herausgebers, 189-191.

die mathematische Gewissheit konzipierten ontologischen (zweiten) Gottesbeweis angeht, bekommt das Dreiecksbeispiel der 5. Untersuchung der *Meditationen* einen verhältnismäßig kurzen Auftritt, das einen gewagteren Gedankensprung erfordert. Denn nachdem innerhalb der ersten Beweisführung des kosmologischen Argumentes erfolgreich dargestellt wurde, dass der Idee eines vollkommenen Seins eine ‚Natur‘ zugrunde liegen müsse, die ihrerseits vollkommener sei als das weniger vollkommene Sein, das diese Idee vorfindet (und somit auch kausal abhängig von dieser sei, um denkend zu existieren), macht sich der Denker des *Diskurses* auf die Suche „nach anderen Wahrheiten"[8] dieser Art und kommt sofort und ausgerechnet auf die Gegenstände der Geometrie und ihre axiomatische Wahrheit. Doch verpflichten alle erdenklichen Wahrheiten in irgendeiner Weise zur Existenz? Müssten die gemäß der Wahrheitsregel, die besagt, „daß alle Dinge, die wir sehr klar und sehr deutlich verstehen, wahr sind"[9] als evident aufgefassten Dinge über ihren Wahrheitsanspruch d.h. objektive Gültigkeit auch einen gewissen Anspruch auf konkrete Existenz erheben? Wenn die tatsächliche Existenz des Denkers der Vollkommenheit auch den Beweis der Wirksamkeit und somit Existenz dieser vollkommenen Natur liefert, so können umgekehrt die klar und deutlich erkannten Wahrheiten (und für Descartes gibt es dergleichen keine schöneren, als die der einfachsten Beweise der Geometriker) auch irgendeine Form der Gewissheit behaupten, die aber, und Descartes sagt es ganz deutlich, in keiner Weise für die Existenz ihrer Objekte eine Versicherung sein könnte. Dennoch bietet die Analogie mit der Geometrie die Grundlage des ontologischen Gottesbeweises.

> „Denn ich sah zum Beispiel sehr wohl, daß, wenn man ein Dreieck voraussetzt, seine drei Winkel zwei rechten Winkeln entsprechen mußten; deswegen aber sah ich noch nichts, das mich versicherte, daß es in der Welt irgendein Dreieck gäbe. Kehrte ich dagegen dazu zurück die Idee zu prüfen, die ich von einem vollkommenen Sein hatte, fand ich, daß die Existenz (orig. *l'existence*) in ihm in derselben Weise – oder sogar noch evidenter – enthalten war wie es in der Idee eines Dreiecks enthalten ist, daß seine drei Winkel zwei rechten Winkel entsprechen (…) Folglich ist es ebenso gewiß, daß es Gott, der dieses vollkommene Sein ist, gibt oder existiert, wie es irgendein Beweis der Geometrie sein kann."[10]

Was noch an dieser Stelle wenig deutlich ist, aber in den *Meditationes* dann doch teilweise nachgeholt wird, ist die eigenartige Natur der Evidenz und der Existenzstatus

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8   DM, 63.
9   DM, 59.
10   DM, 65.

dieser mathematischen Gegenständlichkeiten,[11] auf die sich Descartes beruft. Selbst wenn die Beweise der Geometrie für die Existenz ihre Gegenstände nicht bürgen können, so liefern sie *als Gedankenprodukt* im Falle, dass sie richtig von den Axiomen und Lemmata ausgehen, unfehlbare Wahrheiten, die durch die denkende Existenz (Sein) ausgewiesen werden, die sie produziert hat, und dies unabhängig von der Natur ihrer Gegenstände, die auch unter Umständen geträumte sein könnten. Die einzige für Descartes apodiktisch gültige Evidenz kommt von der Vernunft:

> „Denn ob wir nun wachen oder schlafen, wir dürfen uns schließlich nur von der Evidenz unserer Vernunft überzeugen lassen. Und es ist zu beachten, daß ich sage „von unserer Vernunft" und keineswegs „von unserer Anschauung" (orig. *imagination*) oder „von unseren Sinnen." [12]

Die cartesische Verknüpfung von Existenz und Denken geht auf Kosten der sinnlich-körperlichen Natur: Als räumliche Substanz unterliegt ihre Existenzberechtigung dem methodologischen Zweifel. Noch im *Discours* scheint der *Existenz d.h. dem Sein des Denkenden* eine besondere Würde zuzukommen.

> „Ich hatte bemerkt, daß es in dieser Proposition *Ich denke, also bin ich*, nur eines gab, das mich versicherte, die Wahrheit zu sagen, nämlich daß ich sehr deutlich sah, *daß es nötig ist zu sein (orig. être), um denken zu können*. Ich urteilte deshalb, ich könnte es als allgemeine Regel nehmen, daß alle Dinge, die wir sehr klar und sehr deutlich verstehen, wahr sind (…)" [13]

Die Übertragung der Wahrheit des eigenen Seins auf die Wahrheit des Denkens und zurück auf die Wahrheit der Dinge (die Dinge, die für uns als verstehend-denkend Seiende klar und deutlich *sind*, sind ihrerseits wahr) hat ihre ‚Notwendigkeit' aus einer eigenartigen und nicht parmenideischen Identifizierung von Sein und Denken (und keinesfalls aus dem als Begründung lediglich getarnten Satz *„je pense, donc je sui"*[14]). Diese Identifizierung, die über das Ich als Subjekt und tragende Denksubstanz

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[11] Vorausgreifend: Die mathematische Evidenz wird in dem Sinne verstanden, dass selbst nicht existenten idealen Gebilden ein von dem Geist (*mens*) des Denkenden unabhängiger Seinsstatus anerkannt wird: „Ich finde in mir unzählige Ideen gewisser Dinge, von denen man, auch wenn sie außerhalb meiner vielleicht nirgendwo existieren, dennoch nicht sagen kann, sie seien nichts (…) sondern haben ihre eigenen wahren und unveränderlichen Naturen (orig. *veras & immutabiles naturas*). Vgl. M, 181. Wir kommen darauf zurück.

[12] DM 69.

[13] DM 59, meine Hervorhebung.

[14] In der abweichenden Formulierung der *Meditationen* im Kontext der Hypothese der Täuschung durch einen bösen Betrüger heißt es: „daß dieser Satz: *Ich denke, ich existiere*, so oft er von mir

geschieht, fußt aber auf einem problematischen Begriff des Seins bzw. der Existenz, der auch bald Gegenstand vielfacher Kritiken und Auseinandersetzungen werden sollte. Die Notwendigkeit des Seins für das Denken hat indessen nichts mit der Notwendigkeit einer körperlichen Existenz zu tun, deshalb kann dieses Sein auch unabhängig davon bestehen. Descartes sieht das

> „Ich, d.h. die Seele durch die ich das bin, was ich bin, vollkommen unterschieden vom Körper (…), so daß sie nicht aufhören würde, alles zu sein, was sie ist, selbst wenn es ihn überhaupt nicht gäbe."[15]

Doch folgt aus dieser deutlichen Unterscheidbarkeit seitens des Ichs auch eine reale Unabhängigkeit von Seele und Körper und womöglich auch Unsterblichkeit der Seele, die *nur* als Denksubstanz[16], als notwendigerweise existent, aufgefasst wird? Dass der Denkende umgekehrt aufhören würde zu existieren, falls er mit dem Denken aufhören würde, ist eine Verschärfung dieses Gedankens der Nichtidentität des Körperlichen und Seelischen im Ich, bzw. die Begründung der eigenen Existenzgewissheit im Denken, die die zweite der Meditationen *Über die Natur des menschlichen Geistes, daß er bekannter ist als der Körper*, an einer berühmt gewordenen Stelle anführt:

> „Ich bin, ich existiere, das ist gewiss. Wie lange aber? Offenbar, solange ich denke; denn vielleicht könnte es auch geschehen, dass ich, wenn ich mit jedem Denken aufhörte, sofort ganz und gar aufhörte zu sein. Ich gebe jetzt nichts zu als das, was notwendigerweise wahr ist; ich bin also genau nur eine Sache, die denkt, das heißt Geist, Seele, Verstand oder Vernunft (orig. *mens, sive animus, sive intellectus, sive ratio*) – Worte deren Bedeutungen mir früher unbekannt waren. Ich bin aber eine wahre und wahrhaftig existierende Sache. Was für eine Sache? Ich sagte es: eine denkende."[17]

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ausgesprochen oder vom Geist begriffen wird, notwendigerweise wahr ist", M, 75-77. Zum Argumentationsgang der Zweiten Meditation s. Betz 2011, 74: „So gesehen handelt es sich bei den Cogito-Argumenten aber keineswegs um voraussetzungslose Begründungen der Gewissheit der eigenen Existenz; stattdessen machen sie schlicht eine ganz elementare Voraussetzung der Perspektive der höherstufigen Reflexion, die Descartes einnimmt, explizit." Betz, G., *Descartes' »Meditationen« Ein systematischer Kommentar*, Stuttgart 2011.

[15] DM, 59.

[16] Vgl. Descartes Erwiderung in den *Meditationen* auf den ersten Einwand, in: Vorwort an den Leser, M, 33-35.

[17] M, 81

Die etwas dramatische Formulierung (aufhören zu denken ist aufhören zu sein) lässt die Gewissheit der eigenen Existenz in die Notwendigkeit eines Denkens gründen, das plötzlich ein neues Verständnis der bisher „unbekannten" scheinbar synonym verwendeten Worte Geist, Seele, Verstand oder Vernunft erlaubt. Die einzige zulässige und neue Bedeutung, die all diese Ausdrücke mit Notwendigkeit durchquert, ist, dass sie als *notwendig gedachte* (und ‚nur' so!) selbst wahr und wahrhaftig werden, und zwar wahrhaftig *existierend*, wie die res cogitans, die sie begreift und ausspricht. Und diese Wahrheit *ist* unfehlbar. Allerdings nur als so begriffene und ausgesprochene Evidenz einer ontologischen Notwendigkeit in der Ordnung der denkenden Selbstwahrnehmung, denn einer Begründung der realen Unterscheidung von Körper und Geist bleibt Descartes an dieser Stelle dem Leser noch schuldig.[18]

Doch kehren wir an dieser Stelle zurück zum *Discours*. Die Wahrheitsregel, die durch die Notwendigkeit der eigenen Existenz begründet wurde, wird in einem zweiten Anlauf nur unter der Voraussetzung der Existenz und Vollkommenheit Gottes[19], die ihrerseits erst durch die Wahrheitsregel unterstützt wurde, als sicher (orig: *assuré*[20]) erklärt. Jenseits des zirkulären Momentes, das ein epistemologisches Kriterium mit einer (ihrerseits gedoppelten) ontologischen Gewissheit vermengt, geht es Descartes hier um die Grundbegriffe oder Ideen *(ideés ou notions*[21]*),* die unfehlbar und evident sind, weil sie „reale Dinge sind und von Gott herkommen, [und] in allem, worin sie deutlich sind, nicht anders als wahr sein können"[22]. Die Unmöglichkeit der Täuschung angesichts der Ideen, die durch einen vollkommenen Gott garantiert werden („selbst wenn man im Schlaf irgendeine sehr deutliche Idee hätte, wie wenn zum Beispiel ein Geometriker irgendeinen neuen Beweis erfände, hinderte sein Schlaf sie nicht daran, wahr zu sein"[23]), bietet aber noch nicht genug Schutz gegen Irrtümer. Es ist der Körper, der weiterhin täuschen kann und auch täuscht, und den Descartes gerade im Traum als allmächtig empfindet, selbst wenn es noch Ideen gibt, die im trügerischen Gefüge sinnlicher Bilder, Anschauungen und Vorstellungen weiterhin ihren Wahrheitsstatus verteidigen.

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[18] S. Betz, 2011: „Die wohlwollendste Interpretation der zweiten Meditation lautet, hier gar keine Begründung der These der realen Unterscheidung zu suchen. Betz, G., *Descartes' »Meditationen« Ein systematischer Kommentar*, Stuttgart 2011, 109.

[19] DM, 61: „Ich nahm mir deshalb vor, zu untersuchen, woher ich gelernt hatte, etwas Vollkommeneres zu denken als ich selbst war; und ich erkannte evident, daß ich dies von irgendeiner Natur gelernt haben mußte, die wirklich vollkommener war."

[20] DM, 67.

[21] DM, 66.

[22] DM, 67.

[23] DM, 69.

Die befremdliche Deutlichkeit mancher Vorstellungsbilder ist der wahre Feind der Evidenz, der Vernunfteinsicht, des geistigen Blicks, dem einzigen, den Descartes als gewiss gelten lassen möchte. Und diese Klarheit bedarf keinerlei sinnlicher Anschauung. Vor dem Denken als Vorstellen hatte Descartes bereits gewarnt: Es sei den meisten so sehr zur Gewohnheit geworden, dass „alles, was nicht vorstellbar ist, ihnen als nicht einsehbar (*intelligible*) erscheint".[24] Doch gibt es ein objektives Kriterium, das das durchaus als deutlich zu erscheinen vermögende Vorstellungsbild von der wahren und gewissen Idee unterscheiden könnte, da es nie die körperliche Materialität der Vorstellung („was die besondere Weise ist, materielle Dinge zu denken"[25]) sein kann, die über Träumen und Wachen entscheidet? Angesichts der Tatsache, dass Körperliches bis zur Rehabilitierung am Ende der Argumentationskette tendenziell dem Bereich des Anzuzweifelnden angehört, also eher einer Existenz als Traum (unabhängig des Schlafzustandes) als dem potentiell immer unfehlbaren, wachen (da durch die göttlichen Ideen getragenen) Geist oder der Seele, kann es letztlich nur – in Anbetracht dieser göttlichen Garantie – eine Vernunftentscheidung sein, die ein Kohärenz bzw. Vollständigkeitskriterium liefern kann:

> „Außerdem können wir uns sehr deutlich einen Löwenkopf auf dem Körper einer Ziege vorstellen (*imaginer distinctement*), ohne daß sich daraus schließen ließe, daß es auf der Welt eine Chimäre gibt. Denn die Vernunft diktiert uns nicht, daß es das, was wir so sehen oder vorstellen, tatsächlich gibt; aber es diktiert uns sehr wohl, daß alle unsere Ideen oder Grundbegriffe irgendein Fundament von Wahrheit (*quelque fondemment de vérité*) haben müssen […] Und weil unsere Gedankengänge im Schlaf niemals so evident und vollständig sind wie im Wachzustand […] diktiert die Vernunft uns auch […] daß Gedanken, die Wahrheit enthalten, unfehlbar eher bei den Gedanken angetroffen werden müssen, die wir haben, wenn wir wach sind, als bei denen in unseren Träumen."[26]

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[24] DM, 65.
[25] ebd.
[26] DM, 71.

2. *Was heißt Denken?* Vom Denken des Ich zum geistigen Blick auf die Sache selbst (Die langsameren Schritte der *Meditationes*)

Der im *Discours* schnell vollzogene Übergang zwischen den beiden Gottesbeweisen (der Leitfaden bietet die Wahrheitsregel[27]) erfährt in den *Meditationes* einen Einschnitt. Descartes führt zwischen dem kosmologischen („ideentheoretischen"[28]) Gottesbeweis der dritten Meditation und dem ontologischen Gottesbeweis der fünften einen Zwischenschritt ein, eine Meditation die über Wahres und Falsches traktiert. Die Wahrheitsregel bedarf eines klärenden Zusatzes, um im Kontext des ontologischen Gottesbeweises zu funktionieren. Doch dieser Zusatz ist entscheidend: Es geht um die Freiheit des Einzelnen als Bedingung für die Erkenntnis der Notwendigkeit des eigenen Seins als Bild oder Gleichnis Gottes.[29] Dafür muss aber das Verhältnis von Verstand und Wille für das Erkennen geklärt werden. Das als klar und deutlich *gemeint* Erkannte kann nämlich eine falsche Vorstellung sein, eine Idee, die am Nichts teilnimmt (nicht nur eine undeutliche und verworrene Einbildung oder Sinneseindruck). Aber der Denkende leistet selbst seinen Beitrag zur Täuschung: Er hat nicht abwarten können, sein Wille zu urteilen war größer als seine Geduld. Als *nur* denkende (lediglich, *tantum*) Sache wäre die res cogitans, diese Art zu irren (aus dem Wollen heraus) aber nicht möglich gewesen. Descartes kündet in der Einleitung der Meditationen an, dass er den Beweis dafür liefern würde, dass das Ich, der Geist oder die Seele *nur* als denkende, als res cogitans aufzufassen wäre (und nichts sonst!). Doch gerade in der zweiten Meditation, die die Unterscheidung von Körper und Seele deutlich machen musste, funktioniert bekanntlich seine Argumentation nicht bis zum Ende: Der Dualismus bleibt eine starke These. Der Leser muss sich durch die Widerlegung der Hypothese vom bösen Betrüger, die in der ersten Meditation aufgestellt wurde, und durch den Beweis der vollkommenen Ursache in der dritten hindurch gedulden, bis dann in der sechsten Meditation der Grund für die reale Unterscheidung nachgetragen wird.

Wir haben also in den *Meditationen* – im Kontext des großen, „hyperbolischen"[30] Zweifels, der den Bogen zwischen der ersten bis zu dem endgültigen Beweis der Existenz der Außenwelt bzw. der materiellen Dinge in der letzten bildet – eine eigentümliche

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[27] Wir fassen zusammen: Von der Formulierung der Wahrheitsregel über das Zweifeln als Unvollkommenheit kommt Descartes auf die Notwendigkeit der Existenz einer vollkommenen Ursache für die Idee der Vollkommenheit in einem unvollkommenen Wesen (kosmologischer Gottesbeweis). Daraufhin findet er unmittelbar in Analogie zu den Beweisen der Geometriker die andere Wahrheit, nämlich die Gewissheit der Existenz Gottes „wie es irgendein Beweis der Geometrie sein kann". DM, 65.

[28] Vgl. Betz, 2011 ff.

[29] Darüber weiter unten unter Punkt 3.

[30] M, 247.

Struktur, die einem umarmenden Reim ähnelt: die zweite und sechste Meditation verhandeln den Leib-Seelendualismus, die dritte und die fünfte die Gottesbeweise; die vierte Meditation indessen steht allein vor dem Problem des Irrtums. Und dies ist in der Tat eine große Bedrohung für das Kriterium der Gewissheit und der Wahrheitsregel, auch wenn der große Betrüger ausbleibt und die Gefahr eines Traumzustandes des Geistes in Körpergefangenschaft weitgehend durchblickt wurde. Warum wird das aber, anders als im *Discours*, akut?

Ein Grundproblem stellt die Weise dar, wie Descartes in der zweiten Meditation zu zeigen versucht, dass die These, die Seele sei *nichts als Denken*, sich an der Selbstwahrnehmung der Verfasstheit des Ich prüfen ließe. Diese Behauptung zwingt ihn angesichts des phänomenologischen Befundes der Selbstprüfung zu einem ziemlich weiten Verständnis all dessen, was ‚nichts als Denken' sei:

> „Aber was bin ich also? Ein denkendes Ding. Was ist das? Offenbar ein Ding, das zweifelt, versteht, behauptet, verneint, will, nicht will, und das sich auch etwas einbildet und empfindet. Das ist in der Tat nicht wenig, wenn mir das alles zukommt."[31]

Doch das „nicht Wenige", das an dieser Stelle sogar noch weitergeführt wird:

> „Bin ich es nicht selbst, der … sich wünscht, mehr zu wissen, nicht getäuscht werden will, sich vieles einbildet, sogar unfreiwillig, und auch viele Dinge bemerkt, als ob sie von den Sinnen kämen?"[32]

ist noch lange nicht genug, denn wirklich alles, was das Ich ausmacht, wird zum ‚Denken'. Alles wird darin aufgelöst, auch das Vorstellungsvermögen, der Schlaf, die Täuschung, selbst das körperliche Empfinden dieses Ich:

> „Schließlich bin ich derselbe, der empfindet oder der körperliche Dinge gleichsam durch die Sinne bemerkt. Ich sehe offenbar jetzt ein Licht, höre ein Geräusch, empfinde Wärme. Das ist falsch, denn ich schlafe. Aber gewiss scheine ich zu sehen, zu hören, mich zu erwärmen. Das kann nicht falsch sein: Das ist es eigentlich, was in mir Empfinden genannt wird; und das ist, genau so verstanden, nichts anderes als Denken."[33]

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[31] M. 85.
[32] ebd.
[33] M, 87.

Das vermeintlich dadurch Gewonnene, dass die Seele „nichts als Denken" sei und dieses wiederum sei alles, was dem Ich bewusst wird, verwässert Descartes mit einem so weit gefassten Begriff von Denken, dass er zu keiner Systematik oder epistemischen Zwecken mehr zu gebrauchen ist, geschweige denn, dass es geeignet wäre, ein brauchbares Kriterium für die reale Unterscheidung von Körperlichem und Geistigen zu liefern. Trotz der zuversichtlichen Schlussfolgerung nach der Aufzählung all dessen, was das Denken ausmache, dass es sich „dadurch besser verstehen ließe, wer dieses ich sei"[34], lässt sich dadurch nicht beweisen, wieso dieses Ich Anspruch auf irgendeine Wahrheit hätte, wenn selbst das offensichtlich Falsche von der Ichperspektive aus nicht falsch sein kann. (Die Tatsache, dass sich der Geist selbst betrügt, indem er sein Gedachtes nicht reflektiert und ihm Verworrenes klar zu sein scheint, und umgekehrt, das eigentlich Klare verworren, stellt Descartes beiläufig fest: Er sähe es, der Geist erfreue sich abzuirren und ertrüge es noch nicht, innerhalb der „Grenzen von Wahrheit"[35] abgeschlossen zu werden.) Deshalb muss das Problem des (punktuellen und objektiven) Irrtums, unabhängig von der Hypothese des Traumes oder des großen Betrügers, der graduellen Verworrenheit der Sinneseindrücke bis hin zu dem klaren und deutlichen Erkennen durch den Geist (denn das Wesen des Irrtums besteht eben darin, dass er klar und deutlich zu sein scheint) neu gestellt werden. Davor aber bemüht sich Descartes doch um die Rehabilitierung, innerhalb dieses allumfassenden Denkens des Ich, des Verstehens durch den Geist oder Verstand allein (*sola mens*). Anders gesagt geht es um das Recht der *Sache selbst*, gegenüber einer bloßen Wahrnehmung oder auch Einbildung von materieller Dinglichkeit. Am Ende des berühmten Beispiels mit dem Wachs[36], dessen wechselnde Eigenschaften es niemals zulassen würden, dass der Wahrnehmende es als dieses Wachs selbst erfasst, argumentiert Descartes zugunsten eines geistigen Blickes auf die Sache selbst, der unabhängig von der Einbildungskraft des Ich (denn imaginativ könne man die unzähligen Veränderungen ebenso wenig durchlaufen[37]) Zuverlässiges berichten kann:

> „Es bleibt mir also nichts übrig als zuzugeben, dass ich mir in keiner Weise einbilde, was das Wachs ist, sondern es durch den Geist allein wahrnehme (*sed sola mens percipere*) – [...] Und doch, und das ist zu bemerken, seine Wahrnehmung ist nicht ein Sehen, ein Berühren, ein Einbilden – noch war es das je, obwohl es vorher so schien – sondern ein Blick des Geistes allein,

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34 ebd.
35 M, 89.
36 vgl. M, 89 ff.
37 vgl. ebd.

der entweder unvollkommen und verworren sein kann, wie er vorher war, oder klar und deutlich, wie er jetzt ist; je nachdem, ob ich mehr oder weniger auf das, woraus er besteht, Acht gebe (*attendo*)."[38]

Es geht hier um eine Änderung der Einstellung in der Betrachtung, die Descartes in der Achtsamkeit von der noch verworrenen Sinneswahrnehmung zur rein geistigen Einsicht, klar und deutlich, und letztlich dahinführt, „wohin er ursprünglich wollte"[39]. Unter Ausschluss der Wahrnehmung und Einbildung bleibt nur die („offenkundige") Feststellung, dass der Geist allein „viel leichter oder evidenter" wahrgenommen werden könne[40]. Anders gesagt: Ohne das Problem der realen Unterscheidung gelöst zu haben, wurde festgestellt, dass der unmittelbaren Berührung des Geistes durch sein eigenes, durch *mens* oder Verstand im Sichrichten und Verbleiben bei sich, durchaus zu trauen ist.

3. Bild, Ebenbild und Gleichnis Gottes. Über die analoge Kraft der Ideen gegen das Denken als Einbildung/Vorstellung[41]

Auch wenn Ideen, unabhängig von ihrer Herkunft[42], unter sich selbst bleiben würden, wären sie, wie der Blick des Geistes auf sich selbst, nicht falsch (als „Modis meines Denkens" gelten die „eingebildeten" Ideen, die Ziege und die Chimäre wie die Affekte und der Wille als wahr[43], Die Falschheit entsteht durch das Setzen von Verhältnissen zwischen Ideen und der Wirklichkeit materieller Dinge, die der Denkende nicht achtsam genug geprüft hat, und zwar davon ausgehend, dass die eigenen Ideen uneingeschränkt den äußeren Dingen korrespondieren würden. Nein, erwidert Descartes, selbst wenn die Ideen nicht von einem selbst herstammen, sondern von verschiedenen Dinge, so folgt daraus nicht, dass eine Ähnlichkeit zu diesen Dingen bestehen müsse.[44]

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[38] M, 93.

[39] Vgl. M, 99.

[40] M, 101.

[41] Die Terminologie Descartes' wechselt, dementsprechend wird *imaginer* kontextabhängig übersetzt in dem *Discours* durch vorstellen, anschauen, und in den *Meditationes* entsprechen *imaginatio* auch die Ausdrücke einbilden, Einbildung.

[42] So M, 111: „Von diesen Ideen aber scheinen mir die einen eingeboren *innatae*, andere von außen hinzukommend *adventitiae* und andere von mir selbst gemacht *a me ipso factae*." Außerdem besteht der Verdacht auf „irgendein anderes Vermögen, daß mir noch nicht genügend bekannt ist und das diese Ideen hervorbringt, während ich träume" M, 115.

[43] Vgl. M, 111.

[44] M, 117, Vgl. dazu das Beispiel mit der Sonne: „die Vernunft überzeugt mich, dass jene Idee ihr am meisten unähnlich ist, die am unmittelbarsten von ihr herzukommen scheint. M, ebd.

Die Wahrheitsregel gilt uneingeschränkt nur innerhalb und unter den Denkmodi. Zentral für der Ideenlehre der dritten Meditation ist in dem Kontext die Unterscheidung zwischen der formalen und der objektiven Realität von Ideen, als Grundlage einer Ursache-Wirkung Beziehung die das Denken der res cogitans transzendiert: Die angesichts ihres Grades an objektiver Realität unterschiedlichen Ideen (Substanzen stellen „Größeres" dar als Akzidentien) sind auf Ursachen angewiesen, die zumindest so viel formale Realität besitzen wie das objektiv Reale.[45]Aber wie entscheidet sich der ontologische Status der Idee bzw. ihre objektive Realität? (Die Ideen ‚in mir' seien immerhin, gewisse Bilder, *quasdam imagines*[46]). Descartes untersucht dies anhand der sorgfältigen Prüfung des eigenen Seins („Von wem hätte ich wohl mein Sein?"[47]), und nach Ausschließung aller Alternativen schlussfolgert er, dass es nichts anderes als Gott selbst sein könne. Außerdem: Bei der Idee Gottes in einem selbst, die alles an Sein, Würde und somit auch Realität überragt, kann es sich nicht um ein einfaches Bild handeln, sondern um ein Eben-Bild, ein Gleichnis. Und so konstruiert Descartes seinen Gottesbeweis auf der Basis eines reinen Bezuges zwischen Ideen, dessen analoge Verfasstheit unbeeinträchtigt durch die Materialität der res cogitans, dem geistigen Blick des Verstandes auf sich selbst (der unfehlbar ist), offenbar wird:

> „(…) sondern aus diesem einen, dass Gott mich erschaffen hat, wird es sehr glaubhaft, dass ich auf irgendeine Weise zu dessen Bild und Gleichnis erschaffen worden bin und dass jenes Gleichnis, in dem die Idee Gottes enthalten ist durch dasselbe Vermögen von mir wahrgenommen wird durch das ich selbst von mir wahrgenommen werde. *Das heißt, wenn ich den Blick meines Geistes auf mich selbst richte*, dann verstehe ich nicht nur, dass ich eine Sache bin die unvollständig ist und abhängig von anderem, eine Sache, die auf indefinite Weise nach immer größeren und besseren Dingen strebt, sondern ich verstehe zugleich auch, dass jener, von dem ich abhänge, alle diese größeren Dinge in sich hat, nicht nur auf indefinite und potentielle, sondern wirklich und auf infinite Weise, und dass er also Gott ist. Und die ganze Kraft des Argumentes liegt darin, dass ich erkenne, *dass es nicht möglich ist zu existieren, mit einer solchen Natur, wie ich sie habe, nämlich mit der Idee Gottes in mir, wenn nicht auch Gott wirklich existierte*; Gott, sage ich, eben jener, dessen Idee in mir ist, d.h. derjenige, der alle jene Vollkommenheiten hat, die ich nicht begreifen, aber doch auf irgendeine Weise mit dem Denken berühren kann (…)"[48]

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[45] Vgl. M, 119-121.
[46] Vgl. M, 123.
[47] M, 139, ff.
[48] M, 149-151. Meine Hervorhebung.

Der reine Bezug zwischen Ideen sei somit bestimmt als „Bild und Gleichnis". Was jedoch trotz des so formulierten Beweises[49] als Frage bleibt, ist, wie eine solche Notwendigkeit bzw. Unmöglichkeit der Nichtexistenz der Ideen prinzipiell gegen die Kraft des Bildes bzw. der Vorstellung verteidigt werden kann: Denn trotz der Wahrheitsregel und der Vollkommenheit Gottes ist das Faktum des Irrens gegeben. Gibt es denn außer derjenigen Substanz, die qua Definition „unendlich, unabhängig, in höchstem Maße intelligent und in höchstem Maße mächtig"[50] und daher auch wahr und wirklich existent sein muss, auch Möglichkeiten, innerhalb der Ideen, die selbst auch verworren oder deutlich sein können, unter Wahrheit und Irrtum zu unterscheiden? Haben die Verhältnisse unter den Denkmodi auch Anspruch auf Wahrheit in Bezug auf die wirkliche Existenz? Kann der Mechanismus des Irrtums erklärt und gemieden werden? Was ist wahr und was ist falsch? Wann, anders ausgedrückt, ist das Bild keine bloße Vorstellung?

4. Zwischenschritt: Die Willensfreiheit als Denkerfahrung und die ontologische Tragweite epistemischer Untersuchungen.

Überraschenderweise enthüllt sich gerade die gemeine Ursache des Irrens auch als Quelle der Gewissheit. Das Zauberwort der *Vierten Meditation* lautet Freiheit, und der Wille stellt sich als die Instanz heraus, die über die Wahrheit der Erkenntnis – und zwar der wichtigsten! – entscheidet: erst als Bestätigung des Erkannten und dann als Zurückhaltung gegenüber dem vorschnellen Urteil. Nachdem Descartes seine Meditationspraxis wiederaufnimmt und seine Erfolge in der Abwendung von Dingen der Einbildung vermeldet (*ut iam absque ulla difficultate cogitationem a rebus imaginabilibus ad intelligibles tantum…convertam*,[51]), versichert er, dass ein Irrtum nie in Anbetracht Gottes möglich sei, sondern eher in der Zuwendung zu sich (*ad me reversus*[52]). Also richtet er seine Aufmerksamkeit auf sich selbst und auf die Natur des Irrtums, der als Mangel und nicht als reine Negation (Teilhabe am Nichts) in seiner Positivität der menschlich unvollkommenen und nicht der göttlich vollkommenen Natur zuzugehören scheint. Die Ursache für die Irrtümer des am Anfang erfahrenen und für Falschheit allein in Frage kommenden „Urteilsvermögens"[53] erweist sich als eine doppelte: nämlich das Zusammenspiel von Verstand und Wille bzw. Erkenntnisvermögen

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[49] Vgl. Betz, 2011, *Der klassische Cartesische Zirkel*, 153 ff.

[50] M, 131.

[51] M, 152.

[52] M, 157.

[53] Vgl. M, 155.

und Vermögen der Wahl oder Entscheidungsfreiheit.[54] Weder der Verstand allein noch die Kraft des Wollens, beides Vermögen, die durch die nichtbetrügerische Natur Gottes garantiert sind, sind verantwortlich für das Irren, sondern

> „allein daraus, dass ich – da der Wille sich weiter erstreckt als der Verstand – den Willen nicht innerhalb derselben Grenzen halte, sondern ihn auch bis zu den Dingen ausdehne, die ich nicht verstehe. Und da der Wille bei diesen Dingen unentschieden ist, wendet er sich leicht vom Wahren und Guten ab, und so irre und sündige ich."[55]

Es ist eine Diskrepanz zwischen dem grenzenlosen göttlichen Intellekt der alles zeitgleich erfasst und dem langsam aufbauenden Urteilen des menschlichen Verstandes, wenn er nicht nur bei sich selbst, bzw seinen Ideen bleibt (bzw. wenn das weit gefasste „Denken" sich dann doch beständig nach der Anschauung d.h. nach Empfindung und Einbildung richtet). Zugleich aber ist es der Wille, seine unendliche Kraft, göttergleich, seine Freiheit, als höchste Auszeichnung des Menschen als Ebenbild Gottes:

> „Es ist allein der Wille oder die Freiheit der Entscheidung, die ich in mir als so groß erfahre, dass ich die Idee keines größeren erfasse (*quam tantam in me experior, ut nullius maioris ideam apprehendam)*; so sehr, dass es vor allem die Freiheit ist, aufgrund deren ich verstehe (*intelligo*), dass ich ein gewisses Bild und ein Gleichnis Gottes darstelle." [56]

Das grenzt an einen dritten Gottesbeweis. Im Willen bzw. der Entscheidungsfreiheit findet sich eine neues Argument für das Selbstverständnis des Denkers und implizit ein Beweis der wirkenden Kraft Gottes. Nun, mit der gleichen Einschränkung: Der Wille (oder die Freiheit) des Denkenden könnte als so groß erfahren werden, dass nichts Größeres möglich wäre, ohne dass diese Erfahrung sich notwendigerweise durch die Wirklichkeit bestätigen ließe. Immerhin handelt es sich hier um eine echte (Denk-) Erfahrung, oder eine dem Denken durch den Willen übertragene, nämlich die Apprehension der größten Idee anhand der Freiheit des Wollens. Und, ein weiterer raffinierter Gedanke Descartes: Charakteristisch für die unausweichliche Gewissheit dieser Erfahrung ist die Entschlossenheit. Es geht um eine mit der Freiheit durchaus kompatible innere Notwendigkeit, also eine, die hier nicht primär auf Argumente und Urteile zurückgreifen kann, sondern auf die

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[54] Vgl. M, 151.
[55] M, 167.
[56] M, 165.

freie, d.h. klare und deutliche Ausweisung durch die Erfahrung, in Abwesenheit eines immer klaren und deutlich erfassenden Intellektes. Letzterer würde auch seinerseits keinen Zwang auf den Denkenden ausüben, sondern ihn lediglich von dem Gegenteil der Freiheit, der Unentschlossenheit, befreien:

> „…und in der Tat verringern weder die göttliche Gnade noch die natürliche Erkenntnis jemals die Freiheit, sondern vermehren und stärken sie eher. Jene Unentschiedenheit aber, die ich erfahre, wenn kein Grund mich eher in die eine als in die andere Richtung drängt, ist der geringste Grad der Freiheit (…) sondern ein Zeichen des Mangels an Erkenntnis (…), denn wenn ich immer klar sehen würde, was wahr und gut ist, dann würde ich niemals nachdenken darüber, was für ein Urteil ich zu fällen oder welche Wahl ich zu treffen habe; und so könnte ich, obwohl ich völlig frei wäre, dennoch niemals unentschieden sein." [57]

Doch ist es nicht nur der Wille, bzw. die Freiheit, soweit wir diesem Gedanken Descartes folgen, was so eine plötzliche Erfahrung im Denken bewirken kann: Gerade die Evidenz des im Denken Erfasste übt umgekehrt auch auf den Willen den Einfluss, der notwendig zur Entschlossenheit (Gewissheit) führt. Und so auch angesichts der hier als Beispiel aufgeführten Wahrheitsregel: In Abwesenheit irgendeines Zwanges oder „äußerer Kraft" kann der Denker nicht anders urteilen, als dass „jenes, dass ich so klar verstand, wahr sei". Und zwar ist es – analog der Erfahrung von Freiheit – die Erfahrung eines „großen Lichtes im Verstand", aus dem sich „eine große Neigung im Willen ergab"[58]. Je entschlossener der Denker dadurch wurde, umso freier wurde er, d.h. weniger unentschieden angesichts der Richtigkeit seines Urteils.

Die epistemologische Konsequenz dieser Umkehr des Verhältnisses von „so groß" erfahrenem Willen und dem langsam voranschreitenden Urteilen lautet, so besehen: Abwarten. Auch wenn nicht immer die Erfahrung eines plötzlichen „großen Lichtes im Verstand" als nichtdiskursives Erlebnis von Wahrheit (oder Evidenz) dem Verstand eine klare und deutliche Wahrnehmung vermitteln kann, so können Irrtümer auf eine zweite Weise, so Descartes, vermieden werden. Man erinnere sich „des Urteils zu enthalten, so oft über die Klarheit einer Sache keine Klarheit herrscht".[59]

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[57] M, 167.
[58] vgl. ebd.
[59] M, 175.

5. Klärung der Verhältnisse zwischen Ideen und Dingen. Die Würde der Idee und die mathematische Notwendigkeit des Seins

Der Frage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen den materiellen Dingen „außerhalb" und den Ideen „innerhalb" des Denkenden (deren Ähnlichkeit nicht verifiziert werden kann: es kann sich um bloße Einbildungen handeln) führt Descartes erneut zur Notwendigkeit der Annahme einer besonderen Idee, deren paradigmatische Funktion und deren Status unter Umständen auf eine Form der Existenz („Realität": Sachhaltigkeit) verweise, deren Effektivität von dem Geist als unfehlbar wahr erfasst werden könnte. Doch jetzt sind angesichts der Wahrnehmung von Wahrheit einige Elemente hinzugefügt worden, (am wichtigsten dabei, die Mitwirkung des Willens in der Gestalt der Freiheit zur Entschlossenheit). Dieser Zusatz wird im zweiten ontologischen Gottesbeweis auch mit Bezug auf die *Discours*-Variante entscheidend sein: Das Dreieck Descartes' bekommt eine wichtige Unterstützung, um die mathematische Analogie noch lebendiger und zwingender zu gestalten. Als erstes aber werden Ideen („Gestalten, die Zahl, die Bewegung und Ähnliches") aufgezählt, deren „Wahrheit so offenkundig" sei, dass sie, auf fast platonische Weise, sobald erfahren, nicht als neu Erlerntes, sondern als Erinnerungen an Bekanntes wahrgenommen werden: „d.h. als ob ich zum ersten Mal auf Dinge achtete, die schon lange in mir waren, wenn ich auch meinen geistigen Blick nicht früher auf sie gerichtet hatte."[60] Mehr als das, dieses früher Bekannte hätte trotz des Beliebens (oder der Freiheit) dessen, der sie denken oder auch nicht denken kann, eine nicht von diesem erfundene, „eigene wahre und unveränderliche Natur (*natura, sive essentia, sive forma, immutabilis e aeterna, quae a me non effica est, nec a me mente dependet*)"[61].

So geht es auch bei den Eigenschaften des Dreiecks, die nicht aus sinnlicher Erfahrung geschöpft wurden, um klare, rein geistige, aber vom Geiste des Denkers unabhängige Wesenheiten (ob das Wesen des Dreiecks, unveränderlich und ewig, eine Korrespondenz in die sinnliche Welt fand oder nicht, ändert nichts an der rein intelligiblen Qualität seiner Eigenschaften), die der Denker „ob ich will oder nicht"[62], notwendig anerkennen muss.

Und eben diese Bestätigung der mathematischen Klarheit der Erkenntnis durch das „ob ich will oder nicht" des Denkers, die „Willensneigung", die keine Unentschiedenheit, sondern höchste Entschlossenheit fordert und sich als Freiheit zur Wahl auswirkt und Gewissheit schafft, wird hier zusätzlich zu der Dreiecksanalogie

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[60] M, 181.
[61] M, 180-181.
[62] M, 183.

(die Existenz kann ebenso wenig vom Wesen Gottes getrennt werden, wie vom Wesen des Dreiecks seine Eigenschaften) zum Argument für die ontologische Dringlichkeit Gottes. Es ist *die Sache selbst*, die vom Denkenden die Anerkennung verlangt, so, dass dessen Willkür gebrochen und seine Freiheit sich in der unerschütterlichen Entschlossenheit zur Sache manifestiert und keine Möglichkeit der Einbildung mehr zulässt. Als Erwiderung auf die vermuteten Sophismen[63] angesichts der Trennbarkeit der Existenz vom Wesen Gottes versichert Descartes:

> „Nicht, dass mein Denken das bewirkte, d.h. irgendeiner Sache irgendeine Notwendigkeit auferlegte, sondern im Gegenteil, weil die Notwendigkeit der Sache selbst, nämlich der Existenz Gottes, dazu bestimmt, das zu denken: denn es steht mir nicht frei, Gott ohne Existenz zu denken (…) wie es mir freisteht, mir ein Pferd mit oder ohne Flügel einzubilden".[64]

Das Scheidungskriterium zwischen Einbildung und dem mit geistigem Blick klar erkannte Paradigma lässt sich vom Denker jeweils erfahren: nämlich in der Doppelung zwischen Verstand und Wille, als epistemische und ontologische Nötigung durch die Sache selbst.

6. Gewissheit durch Differenz? Dualismus. Fazit der *Meditationen* zur Unterscheidung von Körperlichem und Geistigem und der Unsterblichkeit der Seele

Der letzte Schritt der fünften Meditation stellte die völlige Bejahung dessen dar, was früher als Wahrheitsregel – ausgehend von dem unerschütterlichen Fundament des *Ich denke, ich existiere* innerhalb der Denkmodi – zwar galt, aber nicht uneingeschränkt auf die ausgedehnte Natur angewendet werden konnte. Dass sich zwangsläufig immer wieder ergebe, „dass nur die Dinge überzeugen, die ich klar und deutlich wahrnehme (*percipio*)"[65], „dass ich mich in Dingen, die ich auf transparente Weise verstehe (*perspicuo intelligo*), nicht irren kann" [66], führt sogar zur vom *Discours* her wiederholten, aber deutlich mutiger formulierten Behauptung: „denn auch wenn ich träume – wenn etwas für meinen Verstand evident ist, dann ist es gewiss ganz und gar wahr".[67] Deshalb kann auch der letzte argumentative

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[63] M, 185-187.
[64] M, 189.
[65] M, 193.
[66] M, 197.
[67] M, 199.

Durchgang durch die Existenz materieller Dinge (einschießend des eigenen Körpers) ausgeführt werden, deren Gewissheit nun nicht mehr zu hinterfragen ist – zumindest was ihren intelligiblen Charakter betrifft, bzw. inwieweit sie Objekte der reinen Mathematik sein könnten.

Dabei bleibt nur noch zu klären, was der Einbildung qua „gewisse Anwendung des Erkenntnisvermögens auf den Körper"[68] im Vergleich zu dem zu Klarheit und Deutlichkeit verpflichteten Verstand zugemutet werden kann und auch was in Bezug auf die Sinneswahrnehmung mit Sicherheit zu behaupten wäre. Die ersten Ergebnisse zeigen deutlich, dass Einbildung nicht notwendig sei für „das Wesen meines selbst d.h. meines Geistes, denn auch wenn ich sie nicht hätte, bliebe ich ohne Zweifel nichtsdestoweniger derselbe, der ich jetzt bin".[69] Es folgt daraus, dass Einbildung zum Körper gehört und unter die Dinge fällt, die von der res cogitans durchaus verschieden sind. Der Mechanismus der Erkenntnis stellt sich demnach so dar: Solange sich der Geist auf sich selbst richtet, bezieht er sich auf seine Ideen. Wenn er sich hingegen auf den Körper bezieht, dann wäre sein Bezug (Anschauung) zu einem „etwas", was einer Idee irgendwie konform wäre. Dieses Etwas kann entweder ein vom Geist Verstandenes oder ein über die Sinne Wahrgenommenes sein. Dies aber sei letztlich ein Hinweis auf die Möglichkeit und nicht auf die Notwendigkeit der Existenz eines Körpers.[70] Die Untersuchung der Empfindung ergibt ähnlich, dass der Glaube an die Korrespondenz äußerer Eindrücke mit Ideen nicht aufrecht zu erhalten sei. Gegen die Hypothese eines unbekannten Vermögens, das die Ideen der Außerdinge ohne Rücksicht auf den Willen des Denkenden produziere, kann kein Einwand mit Hilfe der Prüfung von Anschauungen vorgebracht werden.[71] Was allein zuversichtlich bleibt, ist, wie wir aus der zweiten Meditation wissen, dort aber nur aus dem Zweifel heraus, der Geist. So wirkt es nicht überraschend, wenn Descartes nochmals als Argument seiner klaren und deutlichen und also wahren Erkenntnis, dass der Geist vom Körper unterschieden sei, den abermals bewiesenen Gott anführt. Aber seltsamerweise nur, um die Möglichkeit der Erkenntnis zu unterstützen und die Notwendigkeit seiner Mitwirkung bei dieser Unterscheidung zurückzunehmen:

> „Da ich ja weiß dass alles, was ich klar und deutlich verstehe, in der Weise von Gott geschaffen werden kann, wie ich es verstehe, ist es hinreichend, dass ich eine Sache klar und deutlich verstehen kann, um gewiss zu sein, dass die eine von der anderen verschieden ist, *weil sie wenigstens von Gott*

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[68] M, 201.
[69] M, 205.
[70] Vgl. ebd.
[71] Vgl. M, 215.

gesetzt werden kann; *und es kommt nicht darauf an, durch welche Macht dies geschehen könnte, um sie als verschieden zu beurteilen* (…) Und obwohl ich vielleicht (oder eher, wie ich gleich sagen werde, gewiss) einen Körper habe, der mit mir sehr verbunden ist, ist es – weil ich dennoch auf der einen Seite eine klare und deutliche Idee von mir selbst habe, sofern ich nur ein denkendes, nicht ausgedehntes Ding bin, und auf der anderen Seite die deutliche Idee eines Körpers, sofern es nur ein ausgedehntes, nicht denkendes Ding ist – gewiss, dass ich von meinem Körper wirklich unterschieden bin und ohne ihn existieren kann."[72]

Gewissheit durch Unterscheidung? Das Beurteilen des Unterschiedes (so lange dieser als möglicher, durch Gott garantiert ist) bedarf keiner höheren Macht als der Deutlichkeit der Erkenntnis der Idee. Wo die zweite Meditation noch durch das Zweifeln hindurch lediglich die leichtere Erkennbarkeit des Geistes durch sich selbst und nicht die reale Unterscheidung bewiesen hatte (und die Existenz des Körpers eine in Bezug auf den Geist eher negative war: der Leib hätte eine durch den großen Betrüger hervorgerufene Einbildung sein können), ist es jetzt soweit, dass die Würde der Idee sich gegen die körperliche Materialität des Bildes souverän behaupten lässt. Wenn Gott für die Möglichkeit der Erkenntnis garantiert und auch nicht durchgehend betrügt, ist es angesichts der Präsenz deutlicher Ideen immer gewiss, dass sie wahr sind, und die körperliche Welt ist auch gerettet. Teilweise zumindest:

„Und daher existieren körperliche Dinge. Sie existieren vielleicht nicht alle ganz so, wie ich sie mit dem Sinn erfasse, aber zumindest ist all jenes in ihnen, was ich klar und deutlich verstehe, d.h. alles, allgemein betrachtet, was im Objekt der reinen Mathematik enthalten ist."[73]

Und die Unsterblichkeit der Seele? Descartes hatte in seiner *Synopsis* als das „Erste und Wichtigste, was erforderlich ist zur Erkenntnis der Unsterblichkeit der Seele" angekündigt, „dass wir einen Begriff der Seele bilden, der möglichst transparent und von jedem Begriff des Körpers völlig verschieden ist".[74] Es gibt keinen eigenständigen Begriff von der Seele in Descartes *Meditationen*, die darauf bedacht sind, alles Körperliche von dem Geist fernzuhalten und somit *mens sive anima sive intellectus* auf das *cogito* zu reduzieren. Auch gibt es kein anderes Argument für die Unsterblichkeit, als das mögliche Weiterbestehen des Geistes nach dem Ableben, dank der Unterscheidung vom Körper. Sie sind verschiedene, gleichsam entgegengesetzte

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[72] M, 217. Meine Hervorhebung.
[73] M, 223.
[74] M, 45.

Substanzen: entweder denkend *oder* ausgedehnt, unteilbar *oder* teilbar, ontologisch-notwendig, mathematisch ideell *oder* lediglich verworrene, an geometrisch aufgebauten Skeletten aufgehängte Akzidentien. Noch nie war die Kluft so groß zwischen Körper und Geist[75].

7. *Descartes und das Leib-Seele-Problem…* Skizze einer phänomenologischen Weiterführung

> *„Cartesius gilt zu Recht für den Vater der neueren Philosophie, zunächst und im Allgemeinen, weil er die Vernunft angeleitet hat, auf eigenen Beinen zu stehen, indem er die Menschen lehrte, ihren eigenen Kopf zu gebrauchen, für welchen bis dahin die Bibel einerseits und der Aristoteles andererseits funktionierten" (…).*
>
> *Arthur Schopenhauer, Parerga und Paralipomena, SW IV, 11*

Platon war ebenso wenig Platoniker wie Aristoteles Scholastiker oder Kant ein Kantianer. Dass Descartes selbst nicht der Cartesianer war, für den er gehalten wurde, geht aus den Querelen mit seinen ersten Lesern hervor, und er hätte sich womöglich auch gewundert, wenn er die heutige Literatur zu seinem Werk lesen würde. Es ist eine Binsenweisheit: Die Wirkungsgeschichte entgleitet dem Denker und führt sein Gedachtes in die verschiedensten Richtungen, die mitunter weit weg voneinander und von den ursprünglichen Intentionen liegen können. So kann man in Aristoteles den Urahnen der Phänomenologie ebenso wie den ersten analytischen Impuls nachweisen; im Nachhinein finden alle Geschichten ihre Berechtigung. Oder, mit den Worten Heideggers: „Beweisen läßt sich alles."[76] Heidegger selbst hat Descartes verantwortlich gemacht für alle philosophischen Katastrophen: die Verfehlung der Interpretation von Welt, Seinsvergessenheit, die Metaphysik des Technisch-Funktionalen, das rechnende Denken, letztlich das Ge-Stell. Vor allem aber ist das vorstellende Denken der gefährliche Mechanismus, durch den das Sein verbildlicht, arretiert und das Seiende vergegenständlicht wird. So heißt es in *Die Zeit des Weltbildes*:

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[75] Auf eine dennoch bedeutende und positive Entwicklung der Auffassung über die Leiblichkeit macht Lehel Markó aufmerksam: über die Identifizierung des Körpers mit der Person wird der persönliche Leib zum Ausdrucks eines homogenen Selbst. Siehe dazu Lehel Markó, *Corps et individualite chez Descartes*, in Studia universitatis Babes Bolyai Philosophia No.1/2009, pp.111-122.

[76] Heidegger, M. *Zürcher Seminar*, Aussprache mit Martin Heidegger am 6. November 1951, Gesamtausgabe Band (von nun an GA)15, 425-439, 425.

> „Diese Vergegenständlichung des Seienden vollzieht sich in einem Vorstellen, das darauf zielt, jegliches Seiende so vor sich zu bringen, daß der rechnende Mensch des Seienden sicher und d.h. gewiß sein kann. Zur Wissenschaft als Forschung kommt es erst dann, und nur dann, wenn die Wahrheit zur Gewißheit des Vorstellens sich gewandelt hat. Erstmals wird das Seiende als Gegenständlichkeit des Vorstellens und die Wahrheit als Gewißheit des Vorstellens in der Metaphysik des Descartes bestimmt."[77]

Descartes selbst scheint von dem Vorstellen bzw. dem Einbilden nicht viel gehalten zu haben. Mehrmals weist er darauf hin, dass er, um zu denken, keine Bilder braucht. Der Verstand erblickt zwar, doch die Figuren, Formen und Ideen haben eine eigene Existenz, unabhängig vom Denkenden. Aber Heidegger hat wirkungsgeschichtlich recht, denn der große Denker des Vorstellens Arthur Schopenhauer (den übrigens Heidegger verachtet) hält Descartes für einen Vorreiter seines eigenen Werkes und sieht in ihm die zentrale Wende der Neuzeit, den absoluten Traditionsbruch:„Genau betrachtet ist sein berühmter Satz das Äquivalent dessen, von welchem ich ausgegangen bin: >Die Welt ist meine Vorstellung<."[78]

Das Vorstellen ist für Schopenhauer das Gefängnis, wo das Erkennen – abschätzig „Charakter der Tierheit"[79] genannt –, unterworfen dem Satz vom Grund, seine Argumentationsnetze spinnt. Gefangen bliebe der Wissenschaftler, „geflügelter Engelskopf ohne Leib"[80], und ebenfalls bodenlos seine erklärende Wissenschaft, gäbe es nicht die ganz andere Erkenntnis[81], die *„toto genere"* von der des Verstandes verschieden wäre: die Erkenntnis durch den Leib, die unmittelbare Manifestation des Willens, des Dinges an sich[82].

Die von Descartes scharf gezogene Trennungslinie zwischen Seele und Leib, Geist und Körper verschiebt sich bei Schopenhauer zwischen den zwei Weisen des Erkennens, um sich aber in den „Weltknoten", dem Wunder *kat'exochen*, den Leib, zu verknoten, zu einem einzigen in sich gedoppelten (von einer Differenz durchzogenen)

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[77] Heidegger, M. *Die Zeit des Weltbildes*, in: *Holzwege*, Gesamtausgabe Band 5, Frankfurt am Main 1977, 75-113, hier GA 5, 87.

[78] Schopenhauer, A., *Parerga und Paralipomena* I, Sämtliche Werke Band IV, Hg. W.Frhr. von Löhneysen, Stuttgart/Frankfurt am Main, 1986, 12-13.

[79] Schopenhauer, A., *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Sämtliche Werke Band I, Hg. W.Frhr. von Löhneysen, Stuttgart/Frankfurt am Main, 1986, 53.

[80] Schopenhauer, A., *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Sämtliche Werke Band I, Hg. W.Frhr. von Löhneysen, Stuttgart/Frankfurt am Main, 1986, 156.

[81] Vgl. Noveanu, A., *Erkenntnis, doppelte* in: Schubbe, D, Lemanski, J. (Hg.) *Schopenhauer-Lexikon*, Paderborn 2021, 96-97.

[82] Schopenhauer, A., *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Sämtliche Werke Band I, Hg. W.Frhr. von Löhneysen, Stuttgart/Frankfurt am Main, 1986, 170.

Erkenntnis- und Willenssubjekt, in dem, die beiden „Hälften" der Welt, die Welt als Wille und die Welt als Vorstellung zusammenfinden können.

Von Descartes lernt Schopenhauer aber vor allem den Ausgangspunkt der Wissenschaft: Evidenz. Was Descartes als „geistigen Blick" von der sinnlichen Anschauung scharf getrennt hatte und in den Rationalismus als intellektuelle Anschauung[83] eingeht, wird von Schopenhauer auch unter der Bedingung, dass „alle Anschauung intellektuell"[84] sei, folgendermaßen aufgenommen:

> „Da alle Beweise Schlüsse sind, so ist für eine neue Wahrheit nicht zuerst ein Beweis, sondern unmittelbare Evidenz zu suchen, und nur so lange es an dieser gebricht, der Beweis einstweilen aufzustellen. Durch und durch beweisbar kann keine Wissenschaft seyn; so wenig als ein Gebäude in der Luft stehn kann: alle ihre Beweise müssen auf ein Anschauliches und daher nicht mehr Beweisbares zurückführen. Denn die ganze Welt der Reflexion ruht und wurzelt auf der anschaulichen Welt. Alle letzte, d.h. ursprüngliche Evidenz ist eine anschauliche: dies verräth schon das Wort."[85]

Schopenhauer kennt aber neben der Unmittelbarkeit der anschaulichen Evidenz auch die Unmittelbarkeit des Leibes, eine grauenvolle Unmöglichkeit für Descartes. Diese unmittelbare Gewissheit der im Leib verspürten Willensregung hat von der Sache her eine andere Form von Evidenz: Dies, ohne den Willen jemals mit dem Leib zu identifizieren, hatte Descartes bereits gespürt, als er das Zusammenwirken von Verstand und Wille im Urteil erörtert hatte. Für Schopenhauer bleibt die Evidenz zwar anschaulich und daher (mit Ausnahme der „rein-sinnlichen, mathematischen Anschauung"!) intellektuell, sie berührt aber unmittelbar das Individuum kurz vor seinem Auseinanderfallen in Argumentationsketten, in dem Schema von „Subjekt" und „Objekt", um sofort, in Vorstellung umgewandelt, zu zerfallen. Es gibt keine leibliche Evidenz, außer der mathematischen, die sich jemals dem Verstand übersetzen ließe, ohne dabei ihr Eigenstes zu verlieren. Diese Unterscheidung bzw. Doppelung im Erkennen folgt aber nur bedingt der cartesischen Trennung des Intellektuellen vom Körperlichen, denn Schopenhauers Leib ist alles andere als eine Maschine: Er begehrt, er verfolgt seine blinden Ziele. Der Wille, d.h. der Leib, wird für Schopenhauer zur Wahrheit schlechthin: ein Abgrund. Jeder Versuch, diesen intellektuell zu überqueren,

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[83] Hagmann, M., *Descartes in der Auffassung durch die Historiker der Philosophie-Zur Geschichte der neuzeitlichen Philosophiegeschichte*, Winterthur, 1955, hier insbesondere Descartes in der deutschen Philosophiehistorie vor Kant, 57 ff.

[84] Das gehört zu Schopenhauers Kant-Kritik. Mit einer sehr wichtigen Ausnahme, nämlich der „rein-sinnlichen, mathematischen Anschauung" In: *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung,* 108.

[85] *Schopenhauer, Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung,* 113.

versetzt den Denkenden in eine Traumwelt: die intellektuelle Welt, die Welt der Vorstellungen, die der Kausalität gehorchen, sind „Maja", sind für Schopenhauer Verschleierungen des Seins und, sobald diese zerrissen, ein Nichts.

Es ist bemerkenswert, wie stark die Evidenzproblematik, d.h. die eines unmittelbaren Wissens, die Geister in der Philosophiegeschichte geschieden hat: von Platons Berühren der ‚Sache selbst' (auto, *αὐτὸ, monoeides, μονοειδὲς*), über Kants Empörung angesichts jeder Form intellektueller Anschauung oder Eingebung in seiner Schrift *Von dem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*[86] bis zum Skandal einer evidenzbasierten strengen Wissenschaft, der Phänomenologie Husserls. Dass der Moment der unmittelbaren Erkenntnis von nicht weiter zu begründenden Elementarteilchen, den *stoicheia, στοιχεῖα*, etwas von einem „Traum" enthält, bezeugt Sokrates Erzählung im *Theaithetos*, der ersten epistemologischen Auseinandersetzung der Philosophiegeschichte. Und es ist auch kein Zufall, dass die erste These des Mathematikers Theaitetos lautet: Wissen ist Wahrnehmung.[87] Dass die klare und deutliche Wahrnehmung zugleich intellektuelle Anschaulichkeit vermittelt, bleibt der Traum des Mathematikers. Descartes zieht es vor, das Schauen dem Intellekt vorzubehalten und die sinnliche Anschauung nur so lange zu dulden, als ein gütiger Gott und die Mathematik es zulassen.

Umso wichtiger, wenn ein weiterer von der Mathematik herkommender Denker, Edmund Husserl, auch ein interessierter Leser Schopenhauers[88], die Evidenz wieder in die Philosophie einführt: dass eben diese von Descartes verworfene, von Schopenhauer von jeder Dursichtigkeit ausgeschlossene Leiblichkeit dabei zentral wird und wie sie sich – gerade in ihrer Räumlichkeit – auf das Denken auswirkt, ist bleibende Beschäftigung der Phänomenologie.[89] Descartes Leistung besteht dabei vor allem darin, der phänomenologischen Reduktion durch seinen Zweifel den Weg zur „größten aller Entdeckungen"[90] zu bahnen: der transzendentalen Subjektivität. Allerdings, mit einer großen Einschränkung zugleich:

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[86] Kant, I. *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*, Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik 2, Werkausgabe Band VI, Frankfurt am Main 1996, 377-397.

[87] vgl *Theätet*, 151 e-186 e, Platon, *Theätet*, Griechisch-Deutsch, übers. v. E. Martens, Stuttgart 1981.

[88] vgl Alloa, E., Bedorf, T., Grüny, C., Klass, T.N. (Hg.), *Leiblichkeit*, Tübingen 2012, hier Emmanuel Alloa/Natalie Depraz*, Edmund Husserl- „Ein merkwürdig unvollkommen konstituiertes Ding"*, 13.

[89] vgl. Waldenfels, B. *Metamorphosen des Cogito. Stichproben französischer Descartes-Lektüre,* in: Niebel, W. F., Horn., A. Schnädelbach, H. (Hg.), *Descartes im Diskurs der Neuzeit*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, 345-368.

[90] Husserl, E. *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Hamburg 2012, 26.

> „Leider geht es so bei Descartes, mit der unscheinbaren, aber verhängnisvollen Wendung, die das Ego zur substantia cogitans, zur abgetrennten menschlichen mens sive animus und zum Ausgangsglied für Schlüsse nach dem Kausalprinzip, kurzum der Wendung, durch die er zum Vater des (…) widersinnigen transzendentalen Realismus geworden ist. All das bleibt uns fern, wenn wir dem Radikalismus der Selbstbesinnung und somit dem Prinzip reiner Intuition oder Evidenz getreu bleiben (…)“[91]

Dass die primordiale Sphäre der transzendentalen Subjektivität für Husserl keine solipsistische Denkkonstruktion darstellt, sondern von einer leiblich-lebendigen Urstiftung durchzogen wird, bezeugt die „immerfort lebendige“ Gegenwart des urstiftenden Originals[92]. Vor der eigentlichen Wahrnehmung des Anderen sind Ego und Alter Ego „immerzu und notwendig in ursprünglicher Paarung“[93] gegeben. Was für eine seltsame Verknotung im „Leib-Körper“[94], und für welche weiteren poetischen Ausdrücke und Beschreibungen[95] dieses schwer zu fassende Phänomen der Leiblichkeit noch sorgen würde!

So könnte man mit Husserl sagen, dass Descartes nicht nur vor der Eingangstür zur transzendentalen Subjektivität stand, die er mit seiner Reduktion der Außenwelt und dem Gedanken der Evidenz eröffnete, derer Sphäre aber nie betrat, sondern auch vor der Tür zur transzendentalen Leiblichkeit: die Tür des als *solus ipse* vorstellenden Denkers zurück zur lebendigen Welt.

Descartes mag wohl der Traditionsbrecher gewesen sein, für den ihn die Welt und er sich selbst hielt: Es meldet sich aber gerade in der Kontinuität des unhinterfragt gebliebenen Wissens um die wirkende Kraft des Ideenkosmos und der ewig unveränderlichen Natur der mathematischen Gegenstände ein Glaube, den er mit Platon als dem Mathematiker und dem Philosophen teilte und den Kant durchaus irritierte: dass das Sehen mit dem Auge des Geistes nicht nur möglich, sondern die einzig zuverlässige Weise des Sehens bleibe.

Dass der geistige Blick keineswegs eine bloße Metapher sei, weiß Heidegger selbst: „Das Denken ist ein Er-hören, das erblickt.“[96] Nichts lag Platon – und auch Descartes – ferner, als den Anblick von Ideen, Zahlen und andere *timiotera* τιμιότερα für bloße Bilder, Einbildungen oder Vorstellungen zu halten. Platons

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[91] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Husserliana I, 9.

[92] Husserl, E. *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Hamburg 2012, 111.

[93] ebd.

[94] ebd.

[95] Vgl. Merleau-Pontys *chair*, s. insbesondere *Die Verflechtung-der Chiasmus* in Merleau-Ponty, M. übers. v. Giuliani, R., Waldenfels, B. *Das Sichtbare und das Unsichtbare*, München 2004 172 ff.

[96] Heidegger, M. *Der Satz vom Grund,* Gesamtausgabe Band 10, Frankfurt am Main, 1997, 69.

Dialektik übte das Sehen von Ideen über Worte und Descartes' Dreieck durfte ein eigenes Sein unabhängig von der Existenz des Denkers zugesprochen werden. Heidegger war in seiner Destruktion der Geschichte der Metaphysik vielleicht zu voreilig, als er Platons Idee für das erste Zeichen des Verfalls des griechischen Denkens verantwortlich machte und als er, Descartes' Bemühungen der Idee gegenüber zum Trotz, ihm das Denken als bloßes Vorstellen unterstellte. Und noch ein drittes Mal: als er in Nietzsche, einem anderen großen Denker des Leibes, die Vollendung der bei Descartes ansetzenden Willensmetaphysik hineininterpretierte. Das aber ist nur eine Art, die Geschichte nach Descartes zu erzählen. Mit einer durchaus von Heidegger gelernten Geste plädiert Michel Henry für die Wiederholung, diesmal einer anderen, unsichtbaren, „unterirdischen" Geschichte, die von *idea* und *repraesentatio* getragen werden könnte.

> „Après tout ιδεα, repraesentatio, etc., sont les avatars de la vérité grecque; pour être sa déformation ou son occultation, ils procèdent d'elle – ils sont beaucoup plus proches d'elle peut-être en fin de compte que ce qu'avaient en vue ces penseurs d'un autre commencement que sont Descartes, Schopenhauer et Nietzsche, et quelques autres sans doute … "[97]

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[97] Henry, M., *Heidegger, Descartes, Nietzsche. Schopenhauer et le »courant souterrain« de la métaphysique*, in: Regehly, T., Schubbe, D. (Hg.), *Schopenhauer und die Deutung der Existenz*, Stuttgart 2016, 137-146.

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gnóthi seautón/*epiméleia heautoú*:
Michel Foucault and the Two Paths of Western Thought

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ABSTRACT. Although it is not possible to conceive of the history of Western thought as a continuous and linear (let alone progressive) process of development, some paths seem to have been historically dominant, while other possible developments, however potentially fruitful, seem to have turned out to be "interrupted paths". This paper is concerned with the interpretation offered by Foucault in the early 1980s, according to which Socrates on the one hand and Descartes on the other would have opened up two discordant paths to the key relationship between subjectivity and truth. In both cases, the starting point is the maxim *gnóthi seautón*. In Socrates, however, it is linked to (and subordinated to) the question of *epiméleia heautoú*, which in Descartes' case would disappear completely. The modern-Cartesian approach would thus lead to a purely theoretical-gnoseological-epistemological conception of philosophy, which would lose sight of the strong practical scope of Socratic discourse. Contrary to this interpretation, an attempt is made here to show that, in fact, even at the heart of Cartesian thought one can trace an all but secondary attention to the ethical-practical dimension of philosophy and, albeit in a modified form, to the principle of the necessary "care of the self".

Keywords: Foucault, Subjectivity, Truth, Socrates, Descartes

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Subjectivity and truth

In order to reflect on the role of practical knowledge in philosophy, I would like to refer to the precious interpretative suggestions offered by Michel Foucault in his last courses at the Collège de France in the early 1980s[1]. At the heart of these courses is the question of the relationship between subjectivity and truth, and the ways it has been developed in Western philosophy. Foucault sets out to reconstruct the "genealogy" of the modern subject[2], attempting to identify the various configurations assumed by the concept of the subject throughout the history of Western thought. In his view, the central stages of this historical evolution have by no means constituted a continuum, following a single, consequential, linear path. On the contrary, from time to time, possible paths have opened up, sometimes very different from each other, to the point of appearing, in extreme cases, almost incommensurable. Some of them were decisive for subsequent developments; others, instead, while being equally important, turned out to be, in a *wirkungsgeschichtlich* perspective (to use categories foreign to the Foucauldian lexicon), *Holzwege*, interrupted paths, while sometimes resurfacing, almost karstically – marginally and in changed forms –, throughout history.

Following Foucault's indications to a large extent – but not entirely –, I would like to focus on two key-figures of Western philosophy: Socrates and Descartes. These two thinkers represent precisely two radically different ways of understanding the subject in its constitutive relationship with truth; they opened up, respectively, two different lines of reflection, the second of which proved to be the winning one for the self-constitution of the modern subject, and, in part, still of the contemporary one.

Their discourses stand clearly on two distinct levels and are located within two entirely different theoretical-gnoseological contexts, indicated by Foucault through the fundamental distinction between two domains: that of "alethurgical practices"[3] and that of "epistemological structures". Nevertheless, both thinkers move from the same premise, they share a common starting point, of which they represent two different possible declinations, namely the famous Delphic precept

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[1] On Foucault's last courses see D. Lorenzini-A. Revel-A. Sforzini (dir.), *Michel Foucault: éthique et vérité (1980-1984)*, Vrin, Paris 2013.

[2] Cf. M. Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth*, in *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Lectures at Dartmouth College, 1980*, ed. by H.-P. Fruchard and D. Lorenzini, transl. by G. Burchell, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2016, pp. 19-51.

[3] By the word "alethurgy" he means "the production of truth, the act by which truth is manifested": M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège of France 1983-1984*, ed. by. F. Gros, transl. by G. Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p. 3.

gnóthi seautón. They represent two *philosophical* declinations of it, which go in the direction, respectively, of "spirituality" – i.e., roughly speaking, of the ethical-moral sphere –, and of a "scientific-epistemological" perspective, as will be discussed below. I emphasise the adjective "philosophical" because, as Foucault points out, in its proper and original sense, the precept *gnóthi seautón* was by no means a philosophical maxim: "The phrase – he says in the course *L'herméneutique du sujet* (1981-1982) – did not prescribe self-knowledge, neither as the basis of morality, nor as part of a relationship with the gods"[4]. Moreover, it was not a single, isolated principle.

As is well known, this very ancient precept was engraved on the stone of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, and this reveals its foundational importance for the Greek community. Delphi, the most important Greek religious centre for a very long time (for more than a thousand years, from the 8th century B.C. to the end of the 4th century A.D.), was considered by the Greeks the *ómphalos* of the world, its 'navel', its central point (which, as some myths relate, would have been determined by Zeus by sending two eagles from the two opposite ends of the earth's circumference, which met precisely at Delphi).

To understand the original meaning of the precept *gnóthi seautón*, however, it has to be remembered that it was part of a series of three precepts addressed to those who went to Delphi to consult Apollo's oracle. These precepts had first and foremost a religious-procedural function, a 'ritual' meaning, in that they regulated the behaviour of the postulants. The first of these precepts stated: *méden ágan* ("not too much"). These words would not express an ethical principle, a principle of measure for the human conduct. More simply, they prescribed that, when one addressed the oracle, one should not ask too many questions, but only those that were really useful and necessary. The second precept was: *eggúa pará d'áte*. The *eggúai* were the promises, the pledges, the vows made to the god. So the meaning of this precept was roughly: to pledge, to commit oneself brings bad luck, misfortune (*áte*); one had to be careful not to make vows that were too onerous, vows that one would then be unable to fulfil, thus drawing upon oneself the terrible wrath of the god. The third and final precept, *gnóthi seautón*, advised the postulants, before consulting the oracle, to carefully examine within themselves the questions they wished to ask – again, with the aim of submitting only the truly important ones to the oracle. A further meaning of this last precept was perhaps: remember that you are only a mortal being, and not a god[5].

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[4] M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*, ed. by F. Gros, transl. by G. Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2005, p. 3.

[5] See *ibid.*, pp. 3-4. Foucault refers to the following texts: W.H. Roscher, *Weiteres über die Bedeutung des E[ggua] zu Delphi und die übrigen grammata Delphika*, "Philologus", 60, 1901, pp. 81-101; J. Defradas, *Les thèmes de la propagande delphique*, Klincksieck, Paris 1954; and, in first place, to Plutarch, *Septem sapientium convivium*, 164b.

But when this third precept (*gnóthi seautón*) makes its entry, with Socrates-Plato, on the scene of philosophy, it appears very often – which has in Foucault's eyes an enormous significance – in relation to another fundamental principle: that of *epiméleia heautoú*, of the care of the self. In fact, the principle of *epiméleia heautoú*, i.e. the assertion "one ought to take care of oneself", had not, properly speaking, a philosophical origin either, but was traditionally known in Greece as a Lacedaemonian maxim. According to a late account by Plutarch, Anaxandridas, a Spartan, was asked one day why the Spartans, despite owning vast territories, did not cultivate them themselves, but entrusted them to helots. The answer was: so that we could take care of ourselves. The reference was clearly not to philosophy, but to a politically and socially privileged way of life. This principle, therefore, also undergoes a philosophical transformation in Socrates and Plato.

Socrates and the "entanglement" between *gnóthi seautón* and *epiméleia*

In Plato's dialogues knowing oneself is almost always connected to taking care of oneself, to caring and worrying about oneself. According to Foucault, however, the nature of the relationship that so closely links in Socratic-Platonic philosophy *gnóthi seautón* and *epiméleia heautoú* is not, as might appear obvious from a modern perspective, that of a theory/practice relationship. *Epiméleia heautoú* is by no means to be understood as a kind of practical – and, as such, secondary – application of the primary theoretical principle *gnóthi seautón*: on the contrary, *gnóthi seautón* is to be understood as forming part of the more general framework of *epiméleia heautoú*, as one of its consequences[6]. In order to grasp how Socrates understands the *gnóthi seautón*, what needs to be investigated is therefore the precise meaning that the expression *epiméleia heautoú* takes on in his teaching.

In his last course at the Collège de France, *Le courage de la verité* (February-March 1984), Foucault (who was to die a couple of months later) recalls how at the root of the word *epiméleia* there is the verb *mélo*, which is mostly found in the impersonal form *mélei moí* (I care about, or, better, it concerns me, this is very important to me). Linked to it are the verbs *epimélein* and *epimeleísthai* and the noun *epimelétes* (someone who cares for, who looks after, often in the specific sense of "supervisor" of something, also in an institutional sense). Corresponding to this are the negative forms: from the adjective *amelés* (negligent, careless), to the adverb *amelós* (negligently, carelessly), to a verb that we will return to later[7].

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[6] Cf. M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 4-5.
[7] Cf. M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, pp. 117 ff.

We can already anticipate that, if for Socrates the *epiméleia heautoú* is the primary element, to which the *gnóthi seautón* is linked as a secondary element, this is not the case in Descartes – and this seems to Foucault to be a central issue with regard to the history of truth. He speaks in this respect of a Cartesian "moment" (the physical-scientific sense of the term should not be ignored): with Descartes, the *gnóthi seautón* would be philosophically requalified and, on the other hand, the *epiméleia heautoú* would be totally disqualified and forgotten, and would thus be excluded from the field of modern philosophy.

What must first be highlighted is then the peculiar link that Socrates establishes between *gnóthi seautón* and *epiméleia heautoú*. Foucault attempts to reconstruct this link, this essential connection, through the analysis of three emblematic Platonic texts: the *Apology*, of course, but firstly *Alcibiades* and *Laches*.

In the first of these two dialogues, Alcibiades, Pericles' young pupil, intends to go into politics, he wants to govern the *pólis*. Socrates tries to dissuade him, saying it would be premature. Alcibiades is not yet ready to face the internal enemies (i.e. the possible rivals in the Athenian politic arena), much less the external ones (the Spartans and the Persians), who are far superior to him not only in wealth and power, but above all in education. In particular, Socrates reminds him that the Persian princes had as many as four teachers: the teacher of wisdom (*sophía*), the teacher of justice (*dikaiosýne*), the teacher of temperance (*sophrosýne*), and the teacher of courage (*andréia*)[8]. On the contrary, Alcibiades was raised by an ignorant slave. For this reason, before embarking on the political struggle, the young Alcibiades must reflect carefully on himself (which is part of the typical Socratic requirement of the *lógon didónai*, that is the need to give account for oneself, first and foremost to oneself). It is necessary for the boy to know himself (we find here the first reference to the *gnóthi seautón*), first recognising his inferiority and ignorance. Luckily it is not too late: Alcibiades is still very young, he has still time enough to start looking after himself, taking care of himself (*epimelethénai seautoú*). The *gnóthi seautón* is therefore clearly linked and subordinated to the *epiméleia heautoú*, and the need for this inseparable link is here connected to the exercise of power, to the government of the *pólis*.

The primary imperative is, therefore, the following one: it is necessary to look after oneself, to take care of oneself. Two questions arise. The first one is: what is this "self" that needs to be taken care of? It is the problem of the *subject*: if one is to take care of oneself (*epimeleísthai heautoú*), one must first know what this "self",

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[8] Cf. Plato, *Alcibiades*, 121e ff. For the English translation of Plato's passages quoted in this paper see Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. by J.M. Cooper, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1997. For the analysis of *Alcibiades*, see M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 31-78.

this *heautós*, is. To know this, says Socrates, one needs "to know oneself" (and this is the second reference to the *gnóthi seautón*). He states here that this "self" that one must know, in order to be able to take care of it, is the *psyché*, the soul.

The second question is: what is the care, the *epiméleia*? What does it mean taking care of oneself, looking after oneself? According to Socrates, this means (and we have here the third reference to the *gnóthi seautón*) knowing oneself, knowing one's own soul. The interweaving/intertwining between *epiméleia heautoú* and *gnóthi seautón*, care of the self and knowledge of the self, appears both inescapable and inextricable; between the two, Foucault observes, there is a "dynamic entanglement"[9]. But how does one get to know one's own soul, i.e. oneself? Socrates resorts to a metaphor, that of the eye and sight. He asks: how can an eye see itself? It can, of course, see itself in a mirror. But Socrates adds: the true way, the eminent way in which the eye sees itself is by reflecting-mirroring itself in the eye of the other, and, more specifically, in the pupil of the other's eye; this is the element where the act of vision is realised and which is, therefore, the *principle* of vision.

Similarly, the soul can only see itself (i.e. it can only know itself) by looking at itself in an element of its own nature, or rather in the *principle* that constitutes its nature, in its very source: thought and knowledge (*to phronéin*, *to eidénai*). And the element that secures thought and knowledge, Socrates says here, is the *divine*: "Just as true mirrors are clearer, purer and brighter than the mirror of the eye, so the god (*ho theós*) is purer and brighter than the best part of our soul. […] Looking then to the god, we would make use of the best mirror, the mirror of human things that are addressed to the virtue of the soul, and in this way we would see in the best way and know ourselves"[10]. Only by turning towards the divine can the soul see (know) itself. The knowledge of the divine is revealed here as the condition of self-knowledge. Only by ascending to the divine and thus acquiring wisdom (*sophrosýne*) can the soul then descend back into the world and, now knowing how to distinguish good from evil and right from wrong, be able to deal with justice (*dikaiosýne*) in the governance of the *pólis*.

The *Alcibiades* would thus open up, according to Foucault, a first possible way of the *epiméleia heautoú*, a first possible declination of it (that would be in truth more Platonic than Socratic): the way that leads to a philosophy as knowledge of the soul, or, in a stronger sense, to a "metaphysics of the soul"[11] (whose ultimate goal is the *psyché*).

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9   M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 69.

10 Plato, *Alcibiades*, 133c (there are actually some doubts about the authenticity of this passage, which might be spurious): see M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 70.

11 Cf. M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 161.

A second, more genuinely Socratic way, a second declination of the *epiméleia heautoú*, would emerge in the second dialogue, *Laches* (which Foucault analyses on several occasions)[12]. This second way points in the direction of a philosophy as "proof of life", as "aesthetics (or stylistics) of existence", whose ultimate goal is no longer the *psyché*, but the *bíos*, life[13]. This dialogue, *Laches*, also known by the title *Perí andréias* (*On Courage*), also has at its centre the topic of education, i.e. the issue of the care of young men, their training in political life. Here, however, this topic is explicitly connected with another major theme of the last Foucault, that of *parresía*. This term, which has a political origin and means free speech, *franc-parler* (*parresiázestai*, *pan réma*: to say everything, with no restrictions, as directly as possible), designates one of the four modalities of truth-telling (i.e. of alethurgic forms) which, as Foucault says in *The Courage of the Truth*, are peculiar to ancient Greece – the others are: the truth-telling of prophecy, that of wisdom, and the veridiction of the technician. All these forms of veridiction are opposed to rhetoric in that it deals with the verisimilar, not with truth, but this opposition is particularly sharp in the case of *parresía*.

In a lecture series held by Foucault at the University of Berkeley in 1983, *Discourse and Truth*, he succinctly defines *parresía* as follows:

> We could say that *parresía* is a certain verbal activity in which the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relation to himself through danger, a certain relation to law through freedom and duty, and a certain relation to other people through critique (self-critique or critique of other people). More precisely, it is a verbal activity in which the subject expresses his personal relation to truth and risks his life because he recognizes that telling the truth is his own duty, so as to improve or to help other people. In *parresía*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses truth instead of lies, death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and duty instead of interest and selfishness[14].

In *Laches* Socrates is shown as the one who holds the *parresía*, who has the right to make use of it, and as the one to whom his interlocutors (which is even more important) *recognise* the essential right to use it as he wishes, as he pleases. That's

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[12] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 121-153, and M. Foucault, *Discourse and Truth and* Parrēsia, ed. by H.-P. Fruchard and D. Lorenzini, transl. by N. Luxon, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2019, pp. 134 ff.

[13] See M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, pp. 160 ff.

[14] M. Foucault, *Discourse and Truth and* Parrēsia, pp. 45-46. On *parresía*, also see M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 371-411; *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège of France 1982-1983*, ed. by F. Gros, transl. by G. Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010; *The Courage of the Truth*.

why at the end of the dialogue it is agreed that he, and he alone, will have to take care of the young men and their education. If, in general, the *parresía* is connected whit the question of *truth*, its connection with the theme of *courage* is also particularly emphasised here. It is reminded how Socrates had been a brave soldier (*Laches* 181a-b)[15]. At the heart of *Laches* is therefore precisely the "courage of the truth".

The dialogue opens with a conversation between two pairs of characters: Lysimachus and Melesias, who belong to two eminent Athenians families, and Nicias und Laches, two famous generals and politicians. Lysimachus and Melesias admit that, despite their illustrious origins, they have not given great proof of themselves in their lives, and they turn to the two generals asking them to advise them in choosing a good teacher for their sons. All together they go to see the demonstration of a certain Stesilaus, a "teacher of *oplomachía*" – a "kind of sophist in military techniques", a "military sophist", says Foucault[16] –, who offers, for a fee, to educate and train young boys to the art of war.

But Stesilaus' demonstration does not entirely convince the observers, who then decide to turn to Socrates. At the end Socrates will be recognised by all them as the true (the only) teacher: through the parresiastic game in which the Socratic dialogue consists, the dialogue's partner is led (is compelled) to give an account (*lógon didónai*) of himself; but this means of "his own life", of his way of living, of conducting his own existence. Socrates' authority is precisely based on his peculiar way of life.

The *epiméleia heautoú* is therefore understood here as testing, questioning, examining and verifying life (one's own life), i.e. the *bíos* as object of the care, within a strong connection between care-examination of the *bíos*, on the one hand, and *parresía* (speaking frankly), on the other. It is precisely Socrates' peculiar way of life, with its parresiastic traits, that makes all the characters in the dialogue recognise him not only and not simply as *the* educator (education in courage, etc.), but more generally as the sieve, the criterion of measurement, the touchstone, the *básanos* (*Laches*, 188a)[17]. Socrates can sift and measure the degree of concordance, of consistence between a person's life and his words (or the rational principles that inspire it – that is between *bíos* and *lógos*), because in himself these two things harmonise perfectly, according to a "Dorian" harmony, "the only harmony that is

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[15] The praise of Socrates' courage, here put into Laches' mouth, clearly recalls the eulogy pronounced by Alcibiades in *Symposium*, 219e-221c, where he recalls Socrates' valiant behaviour in the campaign of Potidea.

[16] M. Foucault, *Discourse and Truth and* Parrēsia, p. 136.

[17] The *básanos* was a black stone used to test the authenticity of gold. Also in a passage of *Gorgias* (486d-487a) the figure of the touchstone is related to the theme of the *parresía*.

genuinely Greek" (*Laches*, 188d)[18]. What Socrates says – and Laches defines him "a person privileged to speak fair words (*lógon kalón*) and to indulge in every kind of frankness (*páses parresías*)» (*Laches*,189a) – fits perfectly with what he thinks, and what he thinks fits exactly with what he does. That is why he appears to everyone to be fully authorised to play the role of the *parresiastés*, thanks to the sym-phony, harmony, *homología*, that exists between his speeches and his actions, his frank manner of speaking and his way of living, his lifestyle.

It is precisely in this regard that Foucault speaks of "aesthetics of existence": in his opinion,

> through the emergence and foundation of Socratic *parresía*, existence (*bíos*) was constituted in Greek thought as an aesthetic object, as an object of aesthetic elaboration and perception; *bíos* as a beautiful work. This opens up an extremely rich historical field. There is, of course, a history of the metaphysics of the soul. There is also – which is, up to a point, the other side and also alternative – a history of the stylistics of existence, a history of life as possible beauty[19].

Socrates, for Foucault, thus represents the point at which

> a certain relationship is established between this no doubt archaic, ancient, and traditional concern in Greek culture for a beautiful, striking, and memorable existence, and the concern with truth-telling. More precisely, what I would like to recover is how truth-telling, in this ethical modality which appeared with Socrates right at the start of Western philosophy, interacted with the principle of existence as an œuvre to be fashioned in all its possible perfection, how the care of the self, which, in the Greek tradition long before Socrates, was governed by the principle of a brilliant and memorable existence, was not replaced but taken up, inflected, modified, and re-elaborated by the principle of truth-telling that has to be confronted courageously, how the objective of a beautiful existence and the task of giving an account of oneself in the game of truth were combined[20].

The way of living appears here as the essential correlate of the *practice* of saying-the-truth – but in this perspective this means: it appears as the eminent way for the

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[18] The Dorian harmony, says Plato in *Republic* III 398e ff., is a brave harmony, unlike the Lydian mode, which is too lamenting, the Phrygian mode, too pathetic, and the Ionian mode, too sweet and effeminate.

[19] M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 162.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

subject of *being in the truth*. The relationship between subject and truth clearly assumes a peculiar declination: Socrates shows that he has a privileged relationship with the truth not because he follows some epistemological criteria, but because he is *existentially* consistent-coherent in the way he thinks, speaks and lives. For this reason he emblematically embodies the figure of the *parresiastés*. This understanding, this sense of truth is thus inseparable from the concept (from the *practice*) of the care of the self, which is also expressed (and this is a constitutive, not accidental element) in caring for *others*. At the end of *Laches* Socrates states: "Let us join together in looking after both ourselves and the boys (*koiné hemón autón kái tón meirakíon epiméleian poiesómetha*)" (201b). And, turning to Lysimachus, he says: "I shall […] come to you tomorrow, God willing (*eán theós ethéle*)" (201c).

This final reference to the god is a clear allusion to the mission entrusted to Socrates by Apollo's oracle in Delphi. This leads us to the third Platonic text on which Foucault's interpretation is based: the *Apology.* Here, too, the theme of truth, of truth-telling (*parresía*) is closely linked to the question of the way of life, to the *bíos* – and, correlatively, to death, to *thánatos*. The exegesis of the *Apology*, developed by Foucault in particular in his last course at the Collège de France[21], focuses on the problem of truth, of telling the truth, even in the face of death (and here too *parresía* is opposed to the rhetoric way of speaking). In order to fulfil the task assigned to him by Apollo, Socrates will not hesitate to go through with it, heedless of the supreme risk. Once again, the emphasis on this conception of truth is constantly associated with the question of care, of oneself and of others.

From the very beginning, Socrates insistently and hammeringly repeats: my skilled accusers lie, I will tell the truth, and I will tell it without any rhetorical devices, in a crude, simple, direct manner, without affectation:

> I don't know, men of Athens, how my accusers affected you; as for me, I was almost carried away in spite of myself, so persuasively did they speak. And yet, hardly anything of what they say is true. Of the many lies they told, one in particular surprised me, namely that you should be careful not to be deceived by an accomplished speaker like me. That they were not ashamed to be immediately proved wrong by the facts, when I show myself not to be an accomplished speaker at all, that I thought was most shameless on their part – unless indeed they call an accomplished speaker the man who speaks the truth. If they mean that, I would agree that I am an orator, but not after their manner, for indeed, as I say, practically nothing they said was true. From me you will hear the whole truth, though not, by Zeus, gentlemen,

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[21] See *ibid*., pp. 73-91.

> expressed in embroidered and stylized phrases like theirs, but things spoken at random and expressed in the first words that come to mind, for I put my trust in the justice of what I said, and let none of you expecting anything else. [...] One thing I do ask and beg of you [...], to pay no attention to my manner of speech – be it better or worse – but to concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just or not, for the excellence of a judge lies in this, as that of a speaker lies in telling the truth (*Apology,* 17a-18a).

Something very similar he also says in a famous passage of the *Symposium*, i.e. in a very different context, where it is not death but love that hovers over the dialogue (though, according to Lacan, the constant background of the *Symposium* would actually be the *Phaedo* and thus, again, death[22]). Here, taking the floor after Agathon's highly elaborate but totally empty speech on Eros, Socrates says with his typical irony:

> How am I not going to be tongue-tied [...], after a speech delivered with such beauty and variety? [...] I would almost have run away and escaped, if there had been a place to go. [...] In my foolishness, I thought you should tell the truth about whatever you praise, that this should be your basis, and that from this a speaker should select the most beautiful truths and arrange them most suitably. I was quite vain, thinking that I would talk well and that I knew the truth about praising anything whatever. But now it appears that this is not what it is to praise anything whatever; rather, it is to apply to the object the grandest and the most beautiful qualities, whether he actually has them or not. And if they are false, that is no objection [...]. But, if you wish, I'd like to tell the truth my way. So look, Phaedrus, would a speech like this satisfy your requirement? You will hear the truth about Love, and the words and phrasing will take care of themselves» (*Symposium*, 198b-199b).

The (blasphemous) truth about Love revealed by Socrates in his truthful speech is, as is known, that the god Eros is actually not a god at all. Coming back to the *Apology*: why was Socrates accused and brought before the tribunal? What faults was he guilty of that aroused such aversion in his fellow citizens? Evidently he has done something "strange", something non-ordinary, something different from others. He says: I acquired this bad reputation because of a "certain kind of wisdom" (*sophía*), which is, however, a special kind of wisdom: it is an *anthropíne sophía*, a "human wisdom" (20d) (he thus distances himself from both the Sophists and Anaxagoras). But what kind of wisdom is this *anthropíne sophía* that Socrates admits he possesses?

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[22] See J. Lacan, *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*, ed. by J.-A. Miller, transl. by B. Fink, Polity Press, Cambridge-Oxford-Boston-New York 2017.

This admission seems in fact, at first glance, surprising, given his usual declarations of ignorance. This is where the famous account of the question asked by Cherephon to the Delphic oracle comes in: "Which Greek is wiser than Socrates?". The oracle's answer, enigmatic as always, sounds: "No one is wiser than he". Socrates, of course, does not understand this response and wonders about it, asking himself: "What on earth does the god want to say (*tí póte léghei ho theós*)?" (21b).

He, however, does not interrogate the response in the traditional manner, through the usual exegetical-interpretative approach (Foucault recalls that there were three traditional attitudes towards oracular responses: exegesis, waiting for their effects to be realised, or trying to avoid them if they were inauspicious)[23]. Socrates does not, namely, try to decipher the hidden meaning of the oracle's words. He does something else. He undertakes a search (*zétesis* vs. *exégesis*), which sets out to discover *whether* the oracle has spoken the truth. He puts it to the test, discusses its validity, tries to refute it (*élenchos*). So he goes around and carries out an enquiry, an investigation-examination (*exétasis*), testing the souls of his fellow citizens (in that order: politicians, poets, artisans), in order to check, to verify, what they really know about their activities, but, above all, about themselves. Underlying this is the implicit comparison between these souls and the soul of Socrates himself (as the *básanos* of the souls of others), who in the end truly appears as the wisest. But if this first result confirms the veracity of the oracle, the second result of the Socratic investigation is quite different: hatred, slander, envy, hostility and, finally, death.

However, Socrates insists: I cannot behave differently, I *must* serve the god, who has ordered me to do so. The fundamental principle of *homología* reappears here. Socrates defends his conduct in life, which he courageously upholds in the face of any risk or danger: a man "who is any good at all", he says, should not "take into account the risk of life or death" (28b). Foucault notes that a singular contradiction seems to emerge at this point. Indeed, Socrates admits to having avoided the risks of politics (of political *parresía*): if I had been in politics, he observes, I would have been dead long ago (31d-e). But this was because he had to preserve himself for another, more important mission: in fact, he did not avoid the risk of death associated with taking on the task of a higher form of *parresía*, of truth-telling, veridiction, entrusted to him by the god.

Here, once again, appears the theme of the *epiméleia heautoú*, the theme of care, which runs insistently through these pages, connected to the theme of truth (to the principle of the *gnóthi seautón*), i.e. to this *purely existential* truth that must be defended at the cost of death. The mission entrusted to Socrates by the god is, in fact, to permanently watch over others, to take care of others (like a father

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[23] See M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 83.

or an elder brother), to incite them, like a "gadfly" (30e), to take care not of riches, fame and honours, but of themselves. And this means: to care for their *phrónesis*, for truth (*alétheia*) and for their soul (*psyché*), which thus represent the three areas of deployment and articulation of the *epiméleia heautoú*.

For Foucault, therefore, the three moments of the *zétesis* (the search), of the *exétasis* (the examination of the soul or the test of souls) and of the *epiméleia* (the care of oneself, as the moment in which the first two culminate and legitimise themselves) represent a unitary whole, an "ensemble", that defines the Socratic *parresía*, Socrates' "courageous veridiction"[24]. Here a new form of *parresía* is inaugurated with respect to the traditional political *parresía* (the freedom of speech in the political field): namely a *parresía* "on the axis of ethics", in which we have "the foundation of *ethos* as the principle on the basis of which conduct can be defined as rational conduct in accordance with the very being of the soul"[25].

All this will lead Socrates to death, which he does not fear, while his accusers will be "condemned by the truth". Up until the end of the text, the link between truth and *epiméleia heautoú* is emphasised. In fact, the *Apology* closes with the prayer, addressed to the good judges, to *take care* of his children:

> This much I ask from them; when my sons grow up, avenge yourselves by causing them the same kind of grief that I caused you, if you think they care (*epimeléisthai*) for money or anything else more than they care for virtue (*areté*), or if they think they are somebody when they are nobody. Reproach them as I reproached you, that they do not care for (*ouk epimeloúntai*) the right things and think they are worthy when they are not worthy of anything. If you do this, I shall have been justly treated by you, and my sons also. Now the hour to part has come. I go to die, you go to live. Which of us goes to the better lot is known to no one, except the god (*Apology*, 41e-42a).

The *pendant* of these words, as Foucault underlines, are the famous – and highly enigmatic – last words of Socrates in the *Phaedo*: "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him, and do not forget (*mé amelésete*)" (*Phaedo*, 188a). Echoing Dumézil, Foucault challenges Nietzsche's famous interpretation of these words in the aphorism 340 of *The Gay Science* ("The Dying Socrates")[26], according to which they would mean: "Crito, life is a disease, a sickness". What would, on the

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[24] *Ibid*., p. 87.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 86.

[26] See F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. by B. Williams, transl. by J. Nauckhoff, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001.

contrary, be emphasised here is, once again, the theme of care, albeit *ex negativo*[27]: Socrates' *very last* word (and, let us remember it, Socrates is servant of Apollo and, thus, of the Delphic precept *gnóthi seautón*) would be an incitement to *epiméleia*.

Descartes: an absolutisation of *gnóthi seautón*?

According to Foucault, Descartes' revival in the modern age of the principle of *gnóthi seautón* would completely ignore its link – which is constitutive in the Socratic conception – with the principle of *epiméleia heautoú*; the latter would be completely set aside, disappearing from the horizon of philosophical-truthful discourse and, in particular, from the questioning of the relationship between the subject and truth.

> First – he writes –, the Cartesian moment requalified the *gnóthi seautón* (know yourself). Actually, and here things are very simple, the Cartesian approach, which can be read quite explicitly in the *Meditations* [*on First Philosophy*], placed self-evidence (*l'évidence*) at the origin, the point of departure of the philosophical approach – self-evidence as it appears, that is to say as it is given, as it is actually given to consciousness without any possible doubt. The Cartesian approach [therefore] refers to knowledge of the self, as a form of consciousness at least. What's more, by putting the self-evidence of the subject's own existence at the very source of access to being, this knowledge of oneself (no longer in the form of the test of self-evidence, but in the form of the impossibility of doubting my existence as a subject) made the "know yourself" into a fundamental means of access to truth[28].

This re-qualification of the *gnóthi seautón* would, however, go hand in hand with the exclusion of the related principle of *epiméleia heautoú* from the field of modern philosophical thought. To further demarcate the difference between the modern-Cartesian approach and the ancient-Socratic one, Foucault distinguishes, as already mentioned, two types of discourse: that of "philosophy" and that of "spirituality".

"Philosophy", he says, is "the form of thought that asks, not of course what is true and what is false, but what determines that there is and can be truth and falsehood and whether or not we can separate the true and the false"; philosophy

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[27] On the Foucauldian interpretation of Socrates' last words see M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, pp. 95-116.

[28] M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 14.

is "the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth"[29].

Instead, by the term "spirituality" (which he takes from Pierre Hadot[30]) he means

> the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary *transformations* of himself in order to have access to the truth. We call "spirituality" then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth[31].

"Spirituality", he adds, has, at least in Western culture, three main characteristics. The first one is that it "postulates that the truth is never given to the subject by right [...]. The truth is not given to the subject by a simple act of knowledge (*connaissance*), which would be founded and justified simply by the fact that he is the subject"; spirituality "postulates that for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself. The truth is only given to the subject at a price that brings the subject's being into play. [...] There can be no truth without a conversion or a transformation of the subject"[32].

The second characteristic of spirituality is that the transformation of the subject can take several forms. Foucault lists two of them: a) first of all, the conversion-transformation may take place as "a movement that removes the subject from his current status and conditions (either an ascending movement of the subject himself, or else a movement by which the truth comes to him and enlightens him)"[33]. This movement, both ascending and descending, is the movement of *eros*, of love. b) The second major form of the conversion-transformation of the subject is realised through "a kind of work", i.e. "a work of the self on the self, an elaboration of the self by the self, a progressive transformation of the self by the self for which one takes responsibility in a long labor of ascesis (*askesis*)"[34]. *Eros* and *askesis* would be,

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[29] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[30] See P. Hadot, *Exercises spirituels et philosophie antique* (1981), Albin Michel, Paris 2002.
[31] M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 15.
[32] *Ibid*.
[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

respectively, the most important forms in which Western spirituality conceptualized the manners through which the subject has to be transformed in order to become capable of truth.

The third characteristic of spirituality, finally, is that it postulates that "once access to truth has been opened up, it produces effects", namely feed-back effects, effects "de retour", of the truth on the subject. Here the truth "is not just what is given to the subject, as reward for the act of knowledge as it were, and to fulfil the act of knowledge. The truth enlightens the subject; the truth gives beatitude to the subject; the truth gives the subject tranquillity of the soul. In short, in the truth and in access to the truth, there is something that fulfils the subject himself, which fulfils or transfigures his very being"[35].

According to Foucault, throughout Antiquity the discourse of "philosophy" – which asks the question of how to access the truth – and that of "spirituality" – which instead asks what are, in the very being of the subject, the transformations necessary to make access to truth possible – have always been closely linked (with the sole exception, in his view, of Aristotle – not surprisingly, he says, he is the philosopher who has been recognised as the founder of philosophy in the modern sense of the term). The entry of the history of truth into the modern age, on the contrary, marked the sharp separation between the two approaches. Modernity is precisely characterised by the idea that "what gives access to the truth, the condition for the subject's access to the truth, is knowledge, and knowledge alone"[36], and not the whole of existence.

The modern conception of truth and the subject begins when the philosopher becomes capable of recognising truth – and accessing it – exclusively through his cognitive acts, without his (entire) "being as a subject" being called into play, and without requiring this to be modified or transformed. This does not mean that the truth can be obtained without conditions, but now it is only a question of the "internal conditions of the act of knowledge and of the rules [the subject] must obey to have access to the truth: formal conditions, objective conditions, formal rules of method, the structure of the object to be known"[37]. In the discourse of the philosophy of the modern age, definitively detached from that of spirituality, truth is no longer able to "save the subject"[38].

With Descartes, who inaugurates both modern philosophy *and* modern science, the subject (the *cogito*) becomes (exclusively, as it would seem) the locus

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[35] *Ibid*.
[36] *Ibid.,* p. 17.
[37] *Ibid*., p. 18.
[38] *Ibid*., p. 19.

of measurement of being, the locus of its *truth*; but this means, at the same time, that the subject becomes the locus of *domination* of being, what allows man to secure himself of being by means of rigorous methodical procedures, controlling and exploiting its manifestations. Man now constitutes himself, to use Heidegger's words, as the "primary and genuine *subjectum*", thus becoming "that being upon which every being, in its way of being and its truth, is founded. Man becomes the referential centre of being as such"[39]. But this is only possible because the being is reduced to representation and the world to picture, to an 'image' of the *ego*. Real (being, true) is now only that which is represented by the *ego*, i.e. by the subject. The *ego cogito*, the only residual certainty after the vertiginous dismantling operation carried out by hyperbolic doubt, becomes the *fundamentum inconcussum veritatis*. Starting from Descartes, the subject (i.e. man) "establishes himself as the measure of all measures with which whatever can count as certain, i.e., true, i.e., in being, is measured off and measured out"[40].

Which "subject" are we talking about here? It seems at first reduced by Descartes to a point-zero (albeit a "firm and immovable" point, as that required by Archimedes to "move the whole earth"[41]). In the extreme *epoché* enacted on the basis of the evil genius hypothesis, everything is suspended, everything that surrounds man and (almost) everything that man himself is – or believes himself to be. The procedure, as I have already said, is vertiginous.

This is how the end of the *First Meditation* sounds: "I will think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds, and all external things are no different from the illusions of our dreams […]. I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, and no senses"[42]. To be honest, it does not seem that Descartes is here expressing relief at being reduced to a pure *res cogitans*. On the contrary, the chilling feeling caused by this absolute suspension is further amplified at the beginning of the *Second Meditation*: "Yesterday's meditation has plunged me into so many doubts that I still cannot put them out of my mind, nor, on the other hand, can I see any way to resolve them; but, as if I had suddenly slipped into a deep whirlpool, I am in such difficulties that I can neither touch bottom with my foot nor swim back to the surface"[43] (and in fact he has no feet, body, arms or legs left to swim to the surface).

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[39] M. Heidegger, *The Age of the World Picture*, in *Off the Beaten Tracks*, transl. by J. Young and K. Haynes, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, pp. 57-85, here pp. 66-67.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 83, note 9.

[41] R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, transl. by M. Moriarty, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2008, p. 17.

[42] *Ibid*., p. 16.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 17.

But for Descartes, actually, what survives the process of doubt is not exactly a point-zero. With a remarkable logical-ontological leap (reproached by Nietzsche, among others), he is very quick to declare that it is a *res cogitans*. I would like to recall Nietzsche's famous criticism of this operation in aphorisms 16 and 17 of *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> There are still harmless self-observers who believe in the existence of "immediate certainties", such as "I think" […]. When I dissect the process expressed in the proposition 'I think', I get a whole set of bold claims that are difficult, perhaps impossible, to establish, – for instance, that *I* am the one who is thinking, that there must be something that is thinking in the first place, that thinking is an activity and the effect of a being who is considered the cause, that there is an 'I', and finally, that it has already been determined what is meant by thinking – that I *know* what thinking is. Because if I had not already made up my mind what thinking is, how could I tell whether what had just happened was not perhaps 'willing' or 'feeling'? Enough: this 'I think' presupposes that I *compare* my present state with other states that I have seen in myself, in order to determine what it is: and because of this retrospective comparison with other types of 'knowing', this present state has absolutely no 'immediate certainty' for me". – In place of this "immediate certainty" which may, in this case, win the faith of the people, the philosopher gets handed a whole assortment of metaphysical questions, genuinely probing intellectual questions of conscience, such as: "Where do I get the concept of thinking from? Why do I believe in causes and effects? What gives me the right to speak about an I, and, for that matter, about an I as cause, and, finally, about an I as the cause of thoughts?" […] It is, therefore, a *falsification* of the facts to say that the subject "I" is the condition of the predicate "think". *It* thinks [es *denkt*]: but to say the "it" is just that famous old "I" – well that is just an assumption or opinion, to put it mildly, and by no means an "immediate certainty"[44].

Descartes states: I think, I am; I know with certainty that I exist, even though all images and things referring to the nature of the body may be nothing more than dreams or chimeras. And – he adds promptly – I also know with certainty that I am a "thinking thing": "But what therefore I am? A thinking thing. What is that? I mean a thing that doubts, that understands, that affirms, that denies, that wishes to do this and does not wish to do that, and also that imagines and perceives by the

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[44] F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. by R.P. Horstmann, transl. by J. Norman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge-New York 2002, pp. 16-17.

senses [*Sed quid igitur sum? Res cogitans. Quid est hoc? Nempe dubitans, intelligens, affirmans, negans, volens, nolens, imaginans quoque et sentiens*]. Well, indeed, there is quite a lot there, if all these things really do belong to me"[45].

To the nature of the *cogito*, in short, belong "a lot" of things. Nor is it a purely abstract, theoretical subject, since the will is also included in it. And then, of course, Descartes also recovers the rest, the corporeal. The famous image of the pilot and the ship in the *Sixth Meditation* leads one to seriously doubt that one can really speak of a strict Cartesian 'dualism':

> Now there is nothing I am more emphatically taught by this nature of mine than that I have a body, with which there is something wrong when I feel pain, which needs food or drink, when I experience hunger or thirst, and so on and so forth. Hence I cannot doubt that there is some truth in all this. Nature likewise teaches me, through these very feelings of pain, hunger and thirst, and so forth, that I am not present in my body only as a pilot is present in a ship, but that I am very closely conjoined to it and, so to speak, fused with it [*sed illi arctissime esse conjunctum et quasi permixtum*], so as to form a single entity with it. For otherwise, when the body is injured, I, who am nothing other than a thinking thing, would not feel pain as a result, but would perceive the injury purely intellectually, as the pilot perceives by sight any damage occurring to his ship, and when the body lacks food or drink, I would understand this explicitly, instead of having confused feelings of hunger and thirst. For certainly, these feelings of thirst, hunger, pain, and so forth are nothing other than certain confused modes of thinking, arising from the union and, so to speak, fusion [*ab unione et quasi permixtione*] of the mind with the body[46].

We have here neither a purely theoretical subject, nor a dimidiated man, a man who would be split in half. According to Paul Ricoeur (who quotes François Azouvi), on the contrary, Descartes would have been "able to posit a phenomenology of subjective corporeal existence"[47]. But I would like to hazard an even more extreme hypothesis: not only is the *gnóthi seautón* taken up again in Descartes, in ways that are certainly different from the Socratic ones, but perhaps the theme of *epiméleia heautoú* is not absent in him either (although obviously declined in a very different way than in ancient philosophy).

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45 R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 20-21.

46 *Ibid*., p. 57.

47 J.-P. Changeux-P. Ricoeur, *What Makes Us Think?: A Neuroscientist and a Philosopher Argue about Ethics, Human Nature, and the Brain*, transl. by M.B. DeBevoise, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2000, p. 39.

For his *Meditations*, a work which is central to the establishment of his metaphysical system, Descartes chooses a strange title and adopts a strange style, actually referring to a precise philosophical-literary genre. As Pierre Hadot points out: "When Descartes chose to give one of his works the title *Meditations*, he knew perfectly well that the word designated an exercise of the soul within the tradition of ancient spirituality. Each *Meditation* is indeed a spiritual exercise – that is, work by oneself and upon oneself which must be finished before one can move to the next stage"[48].

It might be recalled, for example, how on several occasions Descartes repeats in the *Meditations* that, once the rigorous procedure of doubt has been set in motion (with the radical *epoché* that it entails and demands), one must continually strive not to fall back into the old opinions – or, as Husserl would say, into the natural attitude. I give only one example among many possible:

> I am forced to admit that there is nothing of all those things I once thought true, of which it is not legitimate to doubt […]; and therefore that, from these things as well, no less than from what is blatantly false, I must now carefully withhold my assent if I wish to discover any thing that is certain. But it is not enough to have realized all this, I must take care to remember it: for my accostumed opinions continually creep back into my mind, and take possession of my belief, which has, so to speak, been enslaved to them by long experience and familiarity, for the most part against my will. […] But to carry out this plan requires great effort, and there is a kind of indolence that drags me back to my customary way of life. Just as a prisoner, who was perhaps enjoying an imaginary freedom in his dreams, when he then begins to suspect that he is asleep is afraid of being woken up, and lets himself sink back into his soothing illusions; so I of my own accord slip back into my former opinions, and am scared to awake, for fear that tranquil sleep will give way to laborious hours of waking, which from now on I shall have to spend not in any kind of light, but in the unrelenting darkness of the difficulties just stirred up[49].

Indeed, many years before branding the "Cartesian moment" so negatively, Foucault himself had dwelt in precisely the same vein on this singular choice of title by Descartes. Disputing with Derrida about the interpretation of Descartes delivered in *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, he wrote: "We must keep in mind the very title of 'meditations'". Distinguishing between "demonstration" and "meditation",

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[48] P. Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, transl. by M. Chase, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London 2002, p. 264.

[49] R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 16-17.

he said that the utterances (the "discursive events") that make up any discourse appear in the case of the demonstration "as a series of events linked one to another according to a certain number of formal rules; as for the subject of the discourse, he is not implicated in the demonstration – he remains, in relation to it, fixed, invariable and as if neutralized"[50]. In the case of "meditation", on the contrary, the utterances produced lead to a series of modifications of the subject of the discourse:

> through what is said in meditation, the subject passes from darkness to light, from impurity to purity, from the constraint of passions to detachment, from uncertainty and disordered movements to the serenity of wisdom, and so on. In meditation, the subject is ceaselessly altered by his own movement; his discourse provokes effects within which he is caught; it exposes him to risks, makes him pass through trials or temptations, produced states in him, and confers on him a status or qualification he did not hold at the initial moment. In short, meditation implies a mobile subject modifiable through the effect of the discursive events that take place[51].

Descartes' text should therefore be seen as a "demonstrative meditation", i.e. as

> a set of discursive events which constitute at once groups of utterances linked one to another by formal rules of deduction, and series of modifications of the enunciating subject which follow continuously one from another. More precisely, in a demonstrative meditation the utterances, which are formally linked, modify the subject as they develop, liberating him from his convictions or on the contrary inducing systematic doubts, provoking illuminations or resolutions, freeing him from his attachments or immediate certainties, including new states. But, inversely, the decisions, fluctuations, displacements, primary or acquired qualifications of the subject make sets of new utterances possible, which are in their turn deduced regularly one from another. The *Meditations* require this double reading: a set of propositions forming a *system*, which each reader must follow through if he wishes to feel their truth, and a set of modifications forming an *exercise*, which each reader must effect, by which each reader must be affected, if he in turn wants to be the subject enunciating this truth on his own behalf[52].

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[50] M. Foucault, *My Body, This Paper, This Fire*, transl. by G. Bennington, in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. by J.D. Faubion, transl. by R. Hurley *et al.*, *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol. II, The New Press, New York 1998, pp. 393-417, here p. 405.

[51] *Ibid*., p. 406.

[52] *Ibid*.

But Descartes did not only write the *Meditations*, but also *The Passions of the Soul*, which is the central text not only for understanding how he seeks to investigate the subject as an inseparable union of soul and body, but also for understanding how he explores – certainly in his own way – the sphere designated by Foucault as that of "spirituality".

In such a perspective, this work should be read by dwelling precisely on the points where Descartes reflects on its fundamental purpose, which is that of self-government, of the search (à la Seneca) for a blissful life (*vita beata*)[53]. Descartes deals here – although he declares that he does not wish to do so either from a rhetorical point of view or as a moral philosopher, but only "en Physicien" – with the relationship between the subject and its passions; but the purpose of investigating passions, which involves a clash with their immediate opacity to philosophical inquiry, reveals his profound involvement with the "pathic universe", with its characteristics, its modes of action, and its effects on moral life.

How should the human subject behave in the face of the forces of Fortune or Chance, which are beyond his control? How is it possible to come to terms with one's passions, to face and dominate them – as far as possible – in order to achieve a balance, on which alone "all the good and evil of this life depends", as the title of the last article of the *Passions* states? Descartes writes here: "Now the soul may have her delights by herself, but for those which are common to her with the body, they absolutely depend on the passions, so that those men whom they move most may be apt to taste most sweetness in this life"[54]. Also in the letter of 1 November 1646 to Chanut he says that the only reason why our soul wants to remain united to the body is that it is only in this way that it can experience the passions. It is true that our passions can bring us the greatest bitterness, if we do not use them properly; but "wisdom is herein especially requisite, that it teaches us so to make ourselves master of them, and manage them with so much dexterity, that the evils they cause may be easily endured, and we may even extract joy from them all"[55].

How is it possible, however, to make oneself master of one's passions? "*Passions* of the soul" evidently means that with regard to them, the soul is in a condition of passivity, in which the role of the will is excluded (we do not choose to fall in love, we do not decide to be afraid, to despair; the passions invest us, they overwhelm us, whether we want them to or not).

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[53] On this regard see also *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, ed. and transl. by L. Shapiro, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2007.

[54] R. Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, https://TheVirtualLibrary.org, 212th Art.

[55] *Ibid*., 212th Art.

In short: in Descartes' mechanistic interpretation, the passions depend exclusively on the body, being "caused, fomented, and fortified by some motion of the [animal] spirits"[56] (an obscure notion that dates back to Galen but is still to be found in the medical treatises of the modern age[57]); these purely mechanical motions of the animal spirits ("these very subtle parts of the blood" which are "begotten in the brain"[58]) are then transmitted to the soul by the pineal gland. What power does the soul have over its own passions[59]? An only *indirect* power[60], which is exercised through "industry" and "habit", a term that should be understood in a double sense[61].

Already in the *Meditations*, speaking of the difficulty of maintaining, so to say, a rigorous attitude of *epoché*, Descartes had mentioned the possibility of erasing "the lifelong habit of confusing the things of the intellect with those of the body"[62] by means of a *contrary habit* acquired through the *exercise*: the old theme of *askesis* returns here, albeit in radically changed terms. Similarly, in the *Passions* he states that there is no soul so weak that it cannot, if well managed, acquire power over its own passions:

> Although every motion of the kernel [the pineal gland] seems to have been joined by nature to each of our thoughts even from the beginning of our life, they may yet be annexed to others by habits […]. Although the motions, as well of the kernel as the [animal] spirits and brain, which represent certain objects to the soul, be naturally joined with those that excite certain passions in her, yet they may by habit be separated, and annexed to others very different[63].

Even animals ("beasts"), though "they have no reason, nor it may be any thought", can be trained to perform actions far removed from what would be natural to them (he gives the example of hunting dogs). One must therefore have the "courage" to apply oneself to regulate one's passions: "For since with a little art the motions of the brain in beasts who are void of reason may be altered, it is evident they may

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[56] *Ibid*., 27th Art.

[57] Cf. M. Foucault, *History of Madness*, ed. by J. Khalfa, transl. by J. Murphy and J. Khalfa, Routledge, London and New York 2006, Part Two, Chapter II: "The transcendence of delirium".

[58] R. Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, 10th Art.

[59] See *ibid*., 41st and 45th Art.

[60] See *ibid*., 45th Art.

[61] See *ibid*., 44th Art.

[62] R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy (The Objections and Replies)*, p. 88.

[63] R. Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, 50th Art.

more easily in men and that even those who have the weakest souls, may acquire an […] empire over all their passions, if art and industry be used to manage and govern them"[64].

The habit, connected with exercise ("art and industry"), thus appears as an instrument of power of the soul, replacing the will that cannot act on the passions. The habit, which arises by association[65], can be changed by establishing a different association: through commitment and a long exercise it can be replaced by a contrary habit. Descartes suggests here, therefore, the possibility of educating and correcting the passions[66] – although always within certain limits, since it must always be remembered that the soul[67] can never entirely dispose of its passions.

In conclusion: is it really true, then, that in modern philosophy the link between knowledge and spirituality has been definitively severed, as Foucault suggests[68]? It would rather seem that especially in his last work, *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes has in mind a subject that can and must be modified, transformed, in its constitutive relationship with a truth that is other – but just as real and important for us, as the *most* important – than the purely theoretical-gnoseological one: namely the *existential* truth of the universe of passions, on which, as I would like to repeat once more, "all the good and evil of this life depends".

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[64] *Ibid*.

[65] See *ibid*., 42nd Art.

[66] See *ibid*., 211th Art.

[67] See *ibid*., 46th Art.

[68] He himself, actually, expresses *en passant* some doubts in this respect, at least with regard to a part of 19th century philosophy (Hegel, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche) and some 20th century philosophers (the late Husserl, Heidegger): see M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 28.

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Paul Ricœur's Recovery of Affectivity: Feeling at the Crossroads of Carnal Imagination and the Corporeal Condition[*]

Maria Cristina Clorinda VENDRA [**] [iD]

ABSTRACT. This article examines Paul Ricœur's conception of the relationship between the affective dimension of experience and imagination's reproductive force. Specifically, it focuses on Ricœur's recovery of the affective aspects of human being's incarnate existence and imagination modeled on representation of absent things based on our previous sensory experiences of the world, as dimensions playing a fundamental role in the generation of actions. Regarding Ricœur's early phenomenological analysis of the embodied nature of affectivity and imagination, developed in his work entitled Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary (1950/1960), I will first discuss his understanding of the unity of feeling, imagining, and thinking. More precisely, affectivity, imagination, and thought are mediated through the body's spontaneous experience as situated in time and space and as exercising a particular point of view about the world. Stemming from Ricœur's rejection of the naturalistic explanation of volition, these reflections will lead us to consider affectivity and imagination as inseparable from the corporeal limiting factors shaping our decisions. Therefore, the second part of this article will consider the

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affective and the imaginative components of our experience in the affirming spontaneity of the body in decision-making as involving the necessity to satisfy needs, the apprehension of motives, and the evaluation of objects in the world. The analysis of Ricœur's phenomenological account of affectivity and imagination will be enriched through the consideration of the resonances of his early ideas in his theory of imagination as presented in his recently published work Lectures on Imagination (1975/2024). Subjected to the rhythm of passivity and activity, closeness and openness, vulnerability and capability, affectivity and imagination configure the framework for our projects and actions, allowing us to foresee future possibilities.

Keywords: affectivity, imagination, embodiment, will, decision

Introduction: Paul Ricœur and the "Affective Turn"

"To feel is still to think."[1]
"Feeling expresses my belonging to this landscape that, in turn,
is the sign and cipher of my inwardness."[2]

Paul Ricœur devoted considerable attention to the topic of affectivity in his writings. Convinced about the relevance of interdisciplinary discussion not only between philosophy and the humanities, but also with the natural sciences, to the point of becoming known as the philosopher of all dialogues,[3] Ricœur explored the phenomenon of affectivity from different perspectives, by using various methods and in reference to the themes shaping the evolution of his thinking, e.g., the will, the body, fallibility, language, narrative, identity, justice, memory, and recognition. To use the words of his two famous hermeneutic maxims, we can affirm that the issue of affectivity "gives rise to thought"[4] and that it requires to be explained more in order to be understood better.[5] Undoubtedly, Ricœur offers a detailed analysis of affectivity, attracting increasing attention from philosophers, psychoanalysts, psychologists, cognitive scientists, neuroscientists, sociologists, and anthropologists. From a multitude of methodological approaches, Ricœurian scholars have recognized Ricœur's study of affectivity as highly illuminating. Specifically, his insights on

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[1] Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1966, p. 86.

[2] Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1986 [1960], p. 89.

[3] See Leovino Garcia, "On Paul Ricœur and the Translation-Interpretation of Cultures," *Thesis Eleven*, 94, no. 1, 2008, pp. 72-87.

[4] Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1969, p. 352.

[5] See Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Volume 1*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. x.

affectivity have been extended in different fields, including affect theory (Stephanie Arel), religious studies (Christina Gschwandtner, Ruth Rebecca Tietjen), philosophy of action (Emmanuel Nal), psychological theory (Vinicio Busacchi), hermeneutical ethics (Beatriz Contreras Tasso, Patricio Mena), feminism (Annemie Halsema), enactivism (Geoffrey Dierckxsens), and musicology (Roger Savage). Further, in fields such as emotion theory (Giovanni Stanghellini, René Rosfort), psychotherapy (Del Loewenthal), theology (Beata Toth), and environmental philosophy (Marjolein Oele), Ricœur's reflections on affectivity have been considered as a source of inspiration for the development of new lines of investigation concerning the affective dimension of human life as marked by the rhythm of openness and closedness, capability and vulnerability, and as exposed both to joy and suffering in relation to the world. In short, although Ricœur cannot be considered as an affect theorist per se,[6] his work provides us with a fruitful philosophical framework for the analysis of affectivity and the role of affect in shaping human experience, allowing us to bridge continental and analytic traditions concerned with the affective aspects of human existence.

Originating from the Latin verb *affectum*, past participle of *adficere*, compounded of *ad* and *facere*, affectivity is an umbrella term encompassing inner states, e.g., passions, emotions, sensations, feelings, moods, impulses, preferences, desires, and evaluations. Ricœur's interest in the issue of affectivity emerged slightly before the "affective turn" or "emotion revolution" in philosophy, which arose during the 1960s and 1970s as a "reaction to the rational emphasis of the twentieth-century linguistic turn."[7] More precisely, the "affective turn" consists in a renewed academic interest in the role of affects "in the texts of Hellenistic philosophers, Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, and Kant"[8] and in the study of "the passions and emotions through developing phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and post-structural accounts of the affects."[9] The "affective turn" is the expression of "a new configuration of bodies, technologies and matter"[10] that occurred across the humanities and the social sciences. Affect theorists fundamentally challenge the dichotomy between body and mind, and in explaining the reciprocity between these two dimensions, they focus on what a human body can do. This problem leads them "to consider

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[6] See Stephanie Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Ricœur and the Lived Body*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2020, p. 63.

[7] John Artos, *Hermeneutics After Ricœur*, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 55.

[8] Marguerite La Caze, Henry Martyn Lloyd, "Editor's Introduction: Philosophy and the Affective Turn," in *Parrhesia*, 13, No. 1, 2011, p. 2.

[9] Ibidem.

[10] Patricia Ticineto Clough, "Introduction," in Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (eds.), *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007, 2.

how bodies are always thoroughly entangled processes and importantly defined by their capacities to affect and be affected. These capacities are mediated and afforded by practices and technologies."[11] Ricœur's analysis of affectivity meets the vectors that Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seighworth identify as the distinctive traits of the "affective turn"[12]: phenomenological and post-phenomenological theories of embodiment, non-Cartesian traditions in philosophy, aspects of psychological and psychoanalytic theory, a collection of attempts to react to the linguistic turn, and aspects of science and neurology.[13] I do not intend here to provide an exhaustive treatment of Ricœur's understanding of affectivity with reference to the essential features of the affective turn. Even a monograph would be not enough to reflect a comprehensive grasp and articulation of Ricœur's considerations on affectivity in the light of the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences. Instead, my article has the more modest aim of examining Ricœur's understanding of the affective dimension of human experience as related to the carnal roots of imagination and the corporeal boundaries of human existence. It is in his early phenomenological project on the human will entitled *Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950/1966) that Ricœur focuses on the relation between affectivity, imagination, and embodiment in the context of the phenomenological description of the structures of the will, i.e., the voluntary and the involuntary. For him, the dialectical interplay between these two dimensions implies "the recognition of the central problem of embodiment, of *le corps propre*."[14] Therefore, the interlacing between the affectivity and the imagination will be addressed with reference to Ricœur's conception of the lived body as the "affective medium,"[15] i.e., as "the mediator between the intimacy of the self and the externality of the world."[16] The lived body enables, then, our experience of the world, our encounters with others, and our reception of reality and projection of future possibilities.[17] I will also argue that Ricœur's phenomenological analysis of the relation between affectivity

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[11] Lisa Blackman, Couze Venn, "Affect," in *Body and Society*, 16, No. 1, 2010, p. 9.

[12] Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Duram and London, Duke University Press, 2010.

[13] Ibidem, pp. 6-8. See also La Caze, Lloyd, op. cit., p. 2.

[14] Paul Ricœur, "From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language," in Charles E. Reagan, David Stewart (eds.), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur. An Anthology of his Work*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1978, p. 87.

[15] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 122.

[16] Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1992, p. 322.

[17] See Richard Kearney, Brian Treanor, "Introduction. Carnal Hermeneutics from Head to Foot," Richard Kearney, Brian Treanor (eds.), *Carnal Hermeneutics*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 1-14.

and imagination on the basis of human embodiment continues to resonate in his *Lectures on Imagination* (1975/2024).[18] In these, he develops five course lectures on phenomenology dedicated to Husserl's and Sartre's treatment of imagination. In discussing Husserl's and Sartre's perspectives, Ricœur sheds new light on how affect, imagination, and embodiment operate together not only in our experience of reality but also in the possibility to transform it.

This article is divided into two parts. In the first part, I will focus on affectivity in its relation with imagination and embodiment by taking as a starting point Ricœur's critical consideration of Edmund Husserl's and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories on consciousness and perception as inspiring the development of his philosophy of the will. Then, I will consider Ricœur's rejection of pure naturalism of experimental sciences (e.g., mechanistic psychology, biology, etc.). For him, the naturalistic approach offers a reductive account of consciousness understood in terms of "causal explanations that are drawn from the natural world."[19] Criticizing the naturalistic claims, Ricœur's phenomenological description of the interplay between the voluntary and the involuntary structures of the human volition will lead us to discuss the dynamics of the affective openness and closeness between the body and the world, the continuum between affectivity and thinking, as well as the interplay between affectivity and imagination. In this context, the body is not reduced to an anonymous empirical object, but it is considered as "the source of the somatic, from where affects emerge,"[20] and thus as the primal viewpoint and mediator of our being in the world as passive and active agents, affected by the world and capable of initiating actions in it. In the second part, affectivity will be discussed with reference to the body understood as a "mediating bridge between (i) our flesh and blood existence and (ii) the 'thinking' order of interpretation, evaluation and understanding."[21] In doing so, I will further explore affectivity in its relation to imagination as involved in what Ricœur considers the first moment of willing, i.e., decision, which includes the study of needs, motives, and values. Affectivity will be presented as a vital force involved in building, maintaining, or changing our projects. The affective and the imaginative dimensions of our existence are tied up with the dialectical relationship between activity and

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[18] Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2024.

[19] Scott Davidson, "Introduction: Freedom and Nature, Then and Now," in Scott Davidson (ed.), *A Companion to Ricœur's Freedom and Nature*, Lanham, Lexington Books, p. xi.

[20] Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," p. 72.

[21] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur", in Scott Davidson, Marc-Antoine Vallée (eds.), *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricœur: Between Text and Phenomenon*, Cham, Spinger, 2016, p. 32.

intimate passivity, interiority and exteriority, present concerns and future horizons, and the capacity to act and the contingency of human life. In conclusion, affectivity and imagination accompany our will to "live, desire, and be in the world"[22] as embodied beings temporally and spatially situated with others.

1. Affectivity and Volition: the Unity of Feeling, Thinking, and Imagining

In his phenomenology of the will, Ricœur elaborates his first analyses on the topic of affectivity as "a key force that, emerging from the embodied self, influences both one's behavior and one's relationship with the world"[23] and with others. It is, then, in his early work entitled *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950/1966), that he began to pay great attention to the issue of affectivity, conceiving it as an embodied phenomenon linked to human volition. Ricœur's project to lay out a philosophy of the will, which was originally conceived to include an eidetics, an empirics, and a poetics of the will, stands in opposition to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological primacy of representation and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's primacy of perception. More precisely, Ricœur criticizes "the transcendental doctrine erected on the narrow base of the analysis of 'representations,' i.e., all the operations of consciousness whose primary type is perception."[24] In commenting on Husserl's theory of consciousness, Ricœur argues: "the question is to determine whether the analysis of noetic and noematic structures is still valid for the enormous affective and practical sector of consciousness."[25] Like Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur borrows from Husserl the eidetic method, i.e., his descriptive approach to "the formal or invariant structures that shape all possible experience."[26] However, contrary to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/1962),[27] Ricœur does not focus on perceptive experience, but on the practical dimension of human life, opening up a reflection concerning "the living experience of the incarnate Cogito."[28] For him, the incarnate Cogito is a subject who has a capability not only to perceive the world, but also "to make something happen or to react to what is going on. This capacity directly involves

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[22] Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," p. 65.

[23] Ibidem, p. 61.

[24] Ricœur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1967, p. 214.

[25] Ibidem, p. 213.

[26] Davidson, "Introduction: Freedom and Nature, Then and Now," p. xi.

[27] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962.

[28] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 87.

the body as well as a form of intentionality closely related to the aptitudes of our lived body."[29] Ricœur refers to this as "becoming receptive to Cogito's complete experience, including its most diffuse affective margins."[30] As he argues: "the reconquest of the Cogito must be total […] The integral experience of Cogito includes the I desire, I can, I live, and in general the existence as a body."[31] On the one hand, Ricœur acknowledges the validity of Husserl's phenomenological descriptive method for the study of the structures of the volitive and affective aspects of our practical life. On the other hand, though, arguing for an anti-Cartesian decentering of subjectivity, he criticizes Husserl's late phenomenological idealism and his notion of a transcendental ego as the total, transparent, and self-sufficient source of all meaning.[32] According to Ricœur, Husserl's disembodied, transcendental ego is a formal and empty subject. Following Gabriel Marcel, Ricœur seeks to explore "the mystery of incarnate Cogito"[33] as a subjectivity shaped by a constitutive tension between activity and passivity. It is necessary, then, to reconsider the relation between volition and embodiment in order to discuss through the lens of phenomenological inquiry "the opacity of our affects, the limitations of our abilities, and the definite nature of our habits."[34]

Breaking away from the Cogito's desire for self-transparency and self-sufficiency, Ricœur intends to conciliate freedom and necessity, namely the voluntary and the involuntary dimensions of the subject's volitive experience as including not only perceptual and perspectival aspects, but also the affective field. Indeed, the experience of an object in the world is "not merely a question of what I experience, but also how this object appears to me and how it affects me in my act of experiencing it."[35] We perceptively experience an object from the limited perspective of our body as the center of our orientations in the world, as the "here" for every "there." Yet, "we are always, more or less dramatically, touched and motivated by what we experience."[36] Otherwise put, we are at once prospectively and affectively situated in the context of the world of objects as a common space of limitations and possibilities

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[29] Marc Antoine Vallée, "Paul Ricœur and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. From Perception to Action," in Scott Davidson (ed.), *A Companion to Ricœur's Freedom and Nature*, p. 7.

[30] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 8.

[31] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 9.

[32] See Ricœur, "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea," in Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (eds.), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1978, 9.

[33] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 94.

[34] Dries Deewer, *Ricœur's Personalist Republicanism. On Personhood and Citizenship*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2017, p. 47.

[35] Giovanni Stanghellini, René Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood. Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 42.

[36] Ibidem.

shared with other living beings by means and by reason of our bodies. Hence, our experience "never appears in isolation but always against a certain background and in context with other objects"[37] and subjects. As embodied beings we are, then, passively situated in the world and actively turned towards the things that we find in our relation to it. On the one hand, affectivity is intentionally directed towards an object, it "does not shut me up in my desiring self. It is openness and not closing that is revealed to me in affect."[38] Ricœur specifies: "I am not turned toward my affective perspective; on the contrary, it is out of it that things appear interesting to me; and it is upon these things that I grasp the lovable, the attractive, the hateful, the repulsive."[39] According to him, feelings have intentional structures: they designate "qualities felt on things, on persons, on the world."[40] In his *Lectures on Imagination*, Ricœur further argues that affectivity can't be associated with solipsism because "feelings too are intentional, that hatred is hatred of, that love is love of, that when we feel fear, the world appears as fearful."[41] On the other hand, affectivity relates to "an affection of the self."[42] In dealing with this back and forth movement between our embodied nature and the world, Ricœur speaks of "affective closing."[43] He concludes: "feeling expresses my belonging to this landscape that, in turn, is the sign and cipher of my inwardness."[44] Consequently, our affective openness and closeness are linked not only to our relations with others and the things in the world, but also to the discovery of our own individuality. As he writes, "with the affective closure, we recover the feeling of the original difference between myself and every other; feeling good or bad is feeling my singularity […] just as one's place cannot be shared, the affective situation in which I find myself and feel myself cannot be exchanged."[45]

Our affective relation to the world would not be possible apart from our capacity to think and to imagine, which are respectively defined by Ricœur as "the fundamental act of human existence"[46] and as "the power of affective presentation and implicit evaluation of pleasure-to-be."[47] Let us first address the connection

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[37] Ibidem.

[38] Annemie Halsema, "Transcending the Duality of Body and Language: Ricœur's Notion of Narrative Identity," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, p. 10.

[39] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 78.

[40] Ibidem, p. 127.

[41] Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, p. 196.

[42] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 89.

[43] Ibidem, p. 55.

[44] Ibidem, p. 89.

[45] Ibidem, p. 85.

[46] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 444.

[47] Ibidem, p. 103.

between affectivity and thinking, and then the relation between affectivity and imagination, while acknowledging the inextricable unity of these dimensions of the volitional sphere of our life. Ricœur's explanation of the correlation of affectivity, thinking, and imagination is grounded on his rejection of the naturalistic account of conscious life. Although in his critique of naturalism he does not directly mention Husserl, Ricœur follows the German phenomenologist in considering naturalism as a form of objectivism which in its narrow sense "sees nothing but nature and first foremost physical nature."[48] Thus, from a naturalistic point of view, "everything that is is either itself physical, belonging to the unitary nexus of physical nature, or it is indeed something psychical, but then a variable that merely depends on the physical [...] All beings are of a psychophysical nature, that is, univocally determined in accordance with firm laws."[49] In short, naturalism's final aspiration is to achieve "a unified and complete explanation of all aspects of human nature"[50] in terms of causal explanation in conformity with the methods of the natural sciences. Consciousness is considered by the naturalistic approach as an object of empirical investigation, i.e., as something that can be explained exclusively through the causal mechanisms related to the biological, psychological, and perceptual phenomena. In reducing consciousness to its physical properties and patterns, naturalism leaves aside the affective, the subjective, and the individual aspects of our experience. Turning his back on naturalism and all mental physics,[51] Ricœur points out that naturalism is a reductive objectifying account: it is an "invitation to deprive experience of the body of its personal traits and to treat it as an other object."[52] To resist "the temptation of naturalism to strip our experiences of our own bodies of their personal traits"[53] means for Ricœur to open up the discussion of the relation between the objective knowledge of the body and the living experience of the incarnate Cogito, i.e., between the understanding of the body "in terms of externality of the world"[54] and the experience of "the intimacy of the body from within."[55]

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[48] Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," in *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, 2, No.1, 2002, pp. 253-254.

[49] Ibidem.

[50] Stanghellini, Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood. Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, p. 31.

[51] See Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 41.

[52] Ibidem, p. 87.

[53] Roger Savage, "Feeling, Interiority, and the Musical Body," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, p. 83.

[54] Kearney, "Forward. The Swing Door of the Flesh," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, p. xii.

[55] Ibidem.

According to Ricœur, the body as an empirical object and the body as experienced are "two points of view of the same body considered alternately as a personal body inherent in its Cogito and as object-body, presented among other objects."[56] Specifically, Ricœur recognizes a diagnostic connection between the body as an object and the body as living flesh. He argues: "the diagnostic relation which conjoins objective knowledge with Cogito's apperception brings about a truly Copernican Revolution. No longer is consciousness a symptom of the object-body, but rather the object body is an indication of a personal body in which the Cogito shares as its very existence."[57] In this sense, "any moment of the Cogito can serve as an indicator of a moment of the object body – movement, secretion, etc. – and each moment of the object body is an indication of a moment of the body belonging to a subject, whether of its overall affectivity or of some particular function."[58] More directly, Ricœur is arguing that rationality and affectivity are essentially connected "by a tie of mutual inherence and adherence."[59] He defines affectivity as "the non-transparent aspect of the Cogito"[60] and as "a mode of thought in its widest sense."[61] As he puts it, "to feel is still to think, though feeling no longer represents objectivity, but rather reveals existence. Affectivity uncovers my bodily existence as the other pole of all the dense and heavy existence of the world. We can express it otherwise by saying that through feeling the personal body belongs to the subjectivity of the Cogito."[62] In his view, thinking is not a detached categorization of objects perceived in the world, because our affective dimension is always involved in our experience of it. Affectivity permeates, then, our experiences: "feelings reveal what the world is like for me, how the world touches me, and what it means to me to be a person embedded in the world."[63] In making my thoughts and experiences significant for me, "feeling interiorizes reason and show me that reason is my reason, for thought it I appropriate reason for myself […] feeling reveals the identity of existence and reason: it personalizes reason."[64]

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[56] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 88.

[57] Ibidem, pp. 87-88.

[58] Ibidem, p. 13.

[59] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," in Scott Davidson, Marc-Antoine Vallée (eds.), *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricœur: Between Text and Phenomenon*, p. 32.

[60] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 86.

[61] Ibidem.

[62] Ibidem.

[63] Stanghellini, Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood. Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, p. 2.

[64] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, pp. 102-103.

In his phenomenological approach to human willing, Ricœur describes affectivity as closely tied not only to thought but also to imagination. According to him, imagination "is undoubtedly not completely exhausted by a function of evasion and denial within the world. Imagination is also, and perhaps primarily, a militant power in the service of a diffuse sense of the future by which we anticipate the actual-to-be, as an absent actual at the basis of the world."[65] Thus, imagination does not depict "a pure negation of the present, but rather an anticipated and still absent presence of things from whose lack we suffer."[66] More precisely, in *Freedom and Nature* Ricœur presents a positive reconsideration of the role of imagination. Specifically, imagination enables the anticipation of something absent as well as of sensations of pain and pleasure on the basis of our previous experiences of the world. The expectation of a pleasant or painful experience is based on an analogy with past experiences in which the affective memory of a past feeling serves as "the *analogon* (or whatever you wish to call it) of future pleasure."[67] Imagination consists, then, in a representation of something that we have already met as embodied beings by means of our sense perception. As such, Ricœur argues that imagination "in terms of its matter is itself carnal."[68] In other words, linked to our embodied and embedded nature, imagination accompanies the reading of the affective signs of the sensible qualities of things in the world[69], and it mobilizes our desires and our capacity to discern between good and bad ways to realize our projects so "that our life itself can be evaluated."[70] Later in his 1975 *Lectures on Imagination*, Ricœur once again emphasizes that imagination and images are not shadows or residues of a reality.[71] Otherwise put, imagination is a product of language and it is "an act through which the reality of our perception is multiplied, enriched and transformed."[72] Whereas visual perception is more reproductive, we can ascertain by means of affectivity some productive dimensions as we refigure the experience. Considered in this context, an image "does more than intend the absent object or value generally – it endows it with a quasi-presence."[73] Intertwined with the affective moment, Ricœur claims an image is not a faded version of external reality, it is "an intention toward but embodied in an

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[65] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 97.

[66] Ibidem, p. 98.

[67] Ibidem, p. 101.

[68] Ibidem, p. 110.

[69] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," p. 33.

[70] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 99.

[71] See Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, p. 7.

[72] Delia Popa, "Affective Imagination: the Shared Awareness of our Dreams," in *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Interpretationes. Studia Philosophca Europeanea*, 10, No. 2, 2020, p. 81.

[73] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 258.

affective-kinesthetic presence."[74] Following Ricœur, imagination is a constitutive dimension of human being's experience and its affective tones. Imagination has itself an affective function as long as it works "with immediate impressions and contingent reactions, with sudden changes and newly born emotions [...] producing long-lasting feelings that can be revisited and reflexively explored."[75] Finally, we can see that for Ricœur imagination can't be understood "in terms of having mental representations (representing the world in the mind), but instead as the imagination of experiences (as in the imagination of the satisfaction of needs)."[76] Contrary to the representionalist account of imagination, Ricœur's understanding of imagination as "the (re-enactment of (past) experiences that are familiar and that make sense of the world through embodied interaction with it"[77] shares substantial common ground with the enactive theory of imagination in cognitive science (Varela, Colombetti, Thompson, Rosch).[78] Affectivity typically does not simply replicate – as it would in the rarer case, say, of immediate pain from physical injury – but includes a symbolic dimension. We react to experiences affectively in different ways. We refigure the experience somatically. As such, Ricœur's work provides significant insights for thinking the interrelation of the affective and carnal with the symbolic and imaginative. In considering imagination as involved in our capacity to act and interact, Ricœur discusses the implications of imagination in the affective entanglement established between the body and the world. To explain this important point in further detail, in the next part of the article we will turn our attention to the continuum of affectivity and imagination in what Ricœur conceives as the first moment of the cycle of willing, i.e., decision or project.

2. Affectivity and Decision: Crossing Corporeal Boundaries

We are affectively, cognitively, and practically situated in the world by means and by reason of the body, which underlies our feeling, reasoning, conceptualization, and symbolic expressions of lived experience. Specifically, in Ricœur phenomenological analysis of the will, the body is seen as the mode of our

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[74] Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, p. 198.

[75] Popa, "Affective Imagination: the Shared Awareness of our Dreams," p. 74.

[76] Geoffrey Dierckxsens, "Making Sense of (Moral) Things: Fallible Man in Relation to Enactivism," in Scott Davidson (ed.), A Companion to Ricœur's Fallible Man, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2019, p. 107.

[77] Ibidem, p. 101. See Sean Gallager, *Enactivist Interventions. Rethinking the Mind*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017.

[78] See Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991. See Giovanna Colombetti, *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2014.

incarnation in the world, namely as "a receiver and a translator of environmental triggers and cues."[79] As such, the body places us in the world, enabling us to learn and to understand it. The body is not only "a source, a site, and a place"[80] of knowledge, but also and at the same time a source of affects as we are enmeshed in the world and its challenges. As we have already mentioned, the body is both an "object and subject in the world: the source of the self and the place to which the self returns after its numerous hermeneutic detours."[81] Following Ricœur, the relation between human embodied condition and the world as a space of possibilities and limitations can be described in phenomenological terms as a circular bond characterized by a detour from the body to the world and a retour from the world to the body. Influenced by Maine de Biran's analysis of touch, effort, and resistance, by Husserl's idea of "hylé," referring to sensory raw material as one of the ingredients of actual empirical experience, and by Michel Henry's philosophy of incarnation, Ricœur understands the body as both part of the material world, i.e., as a physical body, and yet also as a willing, living, subject of experience. He stresses that through active "touch, in which our effort is extended, […] things attest their existence as indubitably as our own."[82] It is in the structural tension between materiality and spirituality, passivity and activity, that "one's own body is revealed to be the mediator between the intimacy of the self and the externality of the world."[83] In other words, the lived body is "the place where we exist in the world as both suffering and acting, pathos and praxis, resistance and effort."[84] Not only we are affected by the external world in which we meet things that matter to us, but we have also the capacity to affect the world through our acts and interactions with objects and with others. In short, the body is "capable of initiative, of inaugurating something new, even while the body is made possible and constituted by its material and cultural situation."[85] Ricœur will further develop his phenomenological account of the relation between the body and the world, between being-affected and affecting, in his mature works. Indeed, in *Oneself as Another* (1990/1992), in the tenth study dealing with the ontological notion of flesh, he argues that the lived body is "the origin of alteration of ownness."[86]

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[79] Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," p. 62.

[80] Ibidem, p. 64.

[81] Ibidem, p. 63.

[82] Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 322.

[83] Ibidem.

[84] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," p. 35.

[85] Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," p. 68.

[86] Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 324.

The lived body "marks the condition of sensible relations between the self and the outside world, that is, with the sensible world 'outside' the body: in every contact with the exterior world, the body is affected in a particular way."[87] Hence, our mode of relation with the world is essentially one of affective immersion and participation. It is from our corporeal situatedness that we can affectively experience the world as the space providing us with opportunities for our actions and as a context of limitations to our powers. As we argued in the previous part of this article, imagination plays a fundamental role in the configuration of the affective relation between the body and the world. In order to understand this point more fully, in what follows we will now focus on the connection between affectivity and imagination with reference to the experience of our vital needs, motives, and values, arising from the body. Otherwise put, we will describe how affectivity and imagination are intertwined with the lived body as a source of felt necessities expressed by our lacks, motivations, and related evaluations. Ricœur understands these three as dimensions of the corporeal involuntary, i.e., as circumstances that provide contents to our voluntary decisions, choices, and actions, while imposing limitations on them. In short, willing and acting, i.e., "the affective and the volitive subject processes,"[88] are understood as a combination of freedom and necessity.

In discussing the involuntary dimension of experience, Ricœur focuses on the relation between affectivity and imagination in his description of the experience of the involuntary needs of the body. Needs are not revealed to the subject of experience as mechanisms of stimulus-response, i.e., as reflex sensations "translating an organic defect in the form of a motor reaction."[89] Contrary to the naturalistic account of needs as physiological reactions, Ricœur considers them as "something to be phenomenologically experienced not as a natural event from without, but as a lived experience from within."[90] As he explains, need is not a "re-action but a pre-action,"[91] i.e., an action towards something lacking and desired as long as recognized as good on the basis of our previous experiences. As such, needs are expressions of our conscious lack of something and pre-actions preceding "all sensations of fulfillment and satisfaction."[92] For Ricœur, we are inclined but not compelled by our spontaneous needs to act in a certain way. In other words, we are capable of

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[87] Dierckxsens, *Paul Ricœur's Moral Anthropology. Singularity, Responsibility, and Justice*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2018, p. 131.

[88] Ricœur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, 213.

[89] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," p. 32.

[90] Ibidem, p. 31.

[91] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 91.

[92] Saulius Geniusas, *Phenomenology of Productive Imagination: Embodiment, Language, Subjectivity*, Stuttgart, Ibidem-Verlag, 2022, p. 273.

suspending our needs to the point that "there are men who prefer to die of hunger than betray their friends."[93] Needs drive us towards overcoming the frustration felt at the absence of something vitally important, i.e., they lead us to act in the direction of something, on the basis of the connection between our former experiences of the world and the power of imagination to cultivate images drawn from sensory experiences. Let us consider the example of the experience of being thirsty and the associated vital need to drink water. This example does not rely on visual perception alone. Senses of taste and bodily replenishment are also involved. The affective is broader than the visual, and once again imagination is not a reproduction but a production, a set of anticipatory responses. When I feel thirsty, I am urged to satisfy this need by drinking, sooner or later, some water. My body requires water to work properly: if I will not fulfil the need to drink water in a day or slightly more I will not survive. Imagining to drink a glass of water implies not only "knowing what it is like to drink water, or in other words, re-enacting past experiences of drinking water, of needing it and enjoying it".[94] In other words, the experience is not simply one of reenactment, but of a new inhabiting the experience itself. Thus, as Ricœur puts it, "we are led to seek the crossroads of need and willing in the imagination – the imagination of the absent thing and of the action directed toward the thing."[95] It is from "a prior, affective bond established between my body and the world"[96] that, linked to sensory perception, imagination elaborates the representation of something already felt as desirable for satisfying a vital need. When a need is coupled with the image of an object meant to be potentially satisfactory, it is transformed into a desire. According to Ricœur, a desire can be defined as "the present experience of need as lack and as urge, extended by the representation of the absent object by anticipation of pleasure"[97] which gives to the object its affective force. It is in this sense, that "we may speak with some caution, in a very conjectural way, of an emotional representative of the absent thing."[98] In describing human beings as needy beings who are capable of experiencing pleasure and of anticipating it by imagining desired objects, Ricœur affirms that to feed oneself is to interrelate with "the level of reality of the objects"[99] on which we depend; we are " part of the great natural cycles."[100]

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[93] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 93.

[94] Dierckxsens, "Making Sense of (Moral) Things: Fallible Man in Relation to Enactivism," p. 107.

[95] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 95.

[96] Scott Davidson, "From the Carnal Imagination to a Carnal Theory of Symbols," in Roger Savage, *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, p. 113.

[97] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 101.

[98] Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, p. 197.

[99] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 87.

[100] Ibidem.

More precisely, we can't satisfy our needs outside of the world of human interaction and, even more fundamentally, outside of our affective immersion in the natural world and our participation to it as offering us possibilities for and limitations on our survival. On the one hand, these reflections lead Ricœur to implicitly stress the evolutionary continuity between humans and animals in their relation to the world. Like other animals, we seek to fulfill basic biological needs. Yet, at least in common with the higher species, we develop various forms of imagination.[101] On the other hand, Ricoeur stresses also the difference between us and other animals because it is only in the framework of human existence that imagination shapes not only our immediate, sensible experience, but also the conceptual frameworks of our relation to things around us and to the world.

The unity between affectivity and imagination is further explained in Ricœur's analysis of the field of motivation as playing a fundamental role in constituting, affecting, and orienting our actions. As he writes, "it is because the impetus of need is not an automatic reflex that it can become a motive which inclines without compelling."[102] Specifically, the "fundamental affective motive presented by the body to willing is need, extended by the imagination of its object, its program, its pleasure, and its satisfaction."[103] Connected to our needs, motives arise from the body as their "affective medium,"[104] they incline us to decide for something "in order to" as well as "because of."[105] In short, behind decisions, all motives are of intentions and they work as justifications for our actions. Contrary to the naturalistic perspective of psychological determinism, for Ricœur motives are not causes followed by effects.[106] Rather than causing our decisions, motives depend on the will which can invoke and receive them as sources of legitimation for our projects. As Ricœur stresses, the analysis of motives leads us to understand that there is no theoretical or practical opposition between voluntary decision and the background of involuntary needs and their connected motivations. As he puts it, "the circular relation of motive to project demands that I recognize my body as body-for-my-willing, and my willing as project-based-(in part)-on my body."[107] The role of imagination is to give "common form"[108] to motives. Indeed, by offering us an image of something absent, imagination allow us also to anticipate some affect linked to

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[101] See Annabelle Dufourcq, *The Imaginary of Animals*, London, Routledge, 2021.
[102] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 93.
[103] Ibidem, p. 97.
[104] Ibidem, p. 122.
[105] Ibidem, p. 142.
[106] See Ibidem, p. 71.
[107] Ibidem, p. 85.
[108] Ibidem, p. 105.

an absent object seen as a source of pleasure or pain, joy or suffering. In this way, imagination generates a movement of affective attraction or repulsion, contributing to the configuration of motivations and accompanying the reasons for acting in order to get or to avoid something. Whereas pleasure is desired, pain is feared. We are, then, affectively tied to imagined objects by desire, love, and hatred and so on.[109] Therefore, the affective image of something is like an "advance emissary" for its presence, involving "all the affective tones of things that attract of repel me."[110] In this sense, imagination is not an escape from reality, but it is defined as "a militant power in the service of a diffuse sense of the future by which we anticipate the actual-to-be, as an absent actual at the basis of the world."[111]

The affective bond between the body and the world leads to the discussion of organic values. As Ricœur argues, the body is not only the source of needs and the organ of movement, but it is "the mark of all existents, it is what first reveals values."[112] More precisely, the body's organic values are "a first rank of values which I have not engendered."[113] These basic values must all be attended in some balanced fashion as necessary conditions for the preservation of our life, which is considered to be the first value. Rooted in the body, organic values inform and orient the human being's effort to exist as an "affirmation of being in the lack of being."[114] This original affirmation binds the desire to be to the ways through which human beings seek fulfillment at the levels of historical, social, and cultural belonging-together with others. Therefore, "all other values assume a serious, dramatic significance through a comparison with the values which enter history through my body."[115] Ricœur introduces an analogical connection between organic values and social values, which in turn evinces two levels of experience: the instinctive or organic plane of life and the social or human level, thereby showing that there is a "hierarchy of levels or degrees of being in which the human order is linked to the vital order depending on it, in a double relation of dependence and emergence."[116] There is, then, a formal resemblance between organic and social values: "though affectivity related to collective representation differs 'materially'

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[109] See Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, p. 197.

[110] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 81.

[111] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 97.

[112] Ibidem, p. 94.

[113] Ibidem.

[114] Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1974, p. 341.

[115] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 86.

[116] Ibidem, p. 423.

from affectivity on the organic level, it resembles it 'formally' as motive of."[117] In short, decisions include needs, motives, and values (organic, social, cultural, etc.) emerging from the affective experience of one's own body as mediating our understanding and acting in the world. Shaping and influencing our decisions, values are not abstract or universal truths, but they emerge from the lived context of action. In discussing values, Ricœur observes that imagination as a power "to fascinate, to dupe, and to deceive [...] has to be understood by starting from this function of affective anticipation and of latent valuation."[118] Imagination plays, then, an essential role in the formulation of conventional value judgments emerging over time through the assimilation of the experience of past actions. Otherwise put, imagination "is not just about projecting possibilities from within,"[119] but it is involved in "a diagnostics in which primal judgments become both affective and effective."[120] More simply, in anticipating some positive or negative affect by means of affective images related to something experienced in the world, imagination is involved in evaluation as long as it helps us to anticipate some values whether good or bad. Ricœur writes: "values emerge without my having posited them in my act-generating role: bread is good, wine is good. Before I will it, a value already appeals to me solely because I exist in flesh; it is already a reality in the world, a reality which reveals itself to me through the lack."[121] Values are meaningful in relation to our affective experience as embodied beings who are capable to reproduce images based on previous experiences and to anticipate future possibilities. Affectivity and imagination are reflected in our primordial will to live, seeking pleasure and escaping pain and sorrow as much as possible. In this sense, "affects are, in essence, the literal, biological source of energy, the beginning of the "to be" in the "I am," surging forth to be the foundation of being and having an ontological status."[122] The drive to engage with the world and others is the spring of the affective inter-esse that at the level of social interactions comprises the field of self-other relationships. Affectivity and imagination delineate "the field where self, other, and the world meet."[123]

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[117] Ibidem, p. 125.
[118] Ibidem, p. 102.
[119] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," p. 33.
[120] Ibidem.
[121] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 94.
[122] Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," p. 66.
[123] Roger Savage, "Introduction. Paul Ricœur, the Lived Body, and an Ontology of the Flesh," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, p. xxvi.

Conclusion

In this article I discussed the significance of the bond between affectivity and imagination in shaping human decision with reference to Ricœur's phenomenological analysis of volition and his theory of imagination. In their involvement in our embodied condition, affectivity and imagination shape not only our perceptive experience of the world but also our active engagement with it, i.e., our capacity to act in it. Our affective and imaginative openness to the world is always inserted within the limits of our embodied existence, our fallibility and finitude. In experiencing the world, we develop our conscious awareness of our bodily condition as marked both by passivity, i.e., as affected by external resistances, and by activity, i.e., as shaped by our capacity of wanting, moving, doing, and imagining new possibilities.

Affectivity is an intentional state of awareness directed towards the world and nourished by the work of imagination. The internal realm of affective experience and imagination, and the external objects and circumstances of the world are conjoined. Affectivity and imagination ground the development of our understanding and of our cognitive-conceptual knowledge of the world. Following Ricœur, affectivity and imagination are understood not as disinterested dimensions, but in terms of disclosure, discernment, and involvement with reality.

All decisions are animated by an affective and imaginative charge. Therefore, affectivity and imagination are essential not only for our interest in knowing the world and its object, but also for acting in it. Indeed, by balancing needs, motivations, values, constraints, expectations and consequences, affectivity and imagination are involved in the schematization of means and ends connected to the practical possibilities of actions. Therefore, affectivity and imagination are directed towards the production of effective actions in the world. Inseparable from our practical power to act in the world, affectively imagining "the world in the flesh is a matter of feeling, valuing, and doing."[124]

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[124] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," p. 33.

The "Philosophical Objects" Project: Practical Philosophy Through Experimental Research Pathways

Elena THEODOROPOULOU[*]

ABSTRACT. The «Philosophical Objects» (PhOs) project concerns the organization of a research procedure where the basic paradoxical problem refers to the possibility of determining an object as philosophical. Through this effort, it is not only a philosophy of object that is at stake but also a conception about the determination itself of philosophical in function of its possible relation to the object. Moreover, it is progressively disclosed how such a project could be recognized as genuinely related to practical philosophy if the latter is interested in exploring the modes through which philosophy can encounter nonphilosophical ways of thinking and acting by thus revealing its practical potency and its experimental character.

Keywords: "Philosophical Objects" (PhO), object, practical philosophy, experimental concept, research

Emerge, discover, create, transform

The «Philosophical Objects» (PhOs)[1] project concerns the organization of a research procedure in which the basic paradoxical problem refers to the possibility of determining an object as philosophical, the subsequent re-conceptualisation of the object itself, the modalities of an object to be apprehended as philosophical, and

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[1] «Philosophical Objects» (2015-): conception, design, organisation, Elena Theodoropoulou. For more information, s. on the website of the «Laboratory of Research on Practical Philosophy» (L.R.P.Ph.), [https://practphilab.aegean.gr/], https://practphilab.aegean.gr/philosophical-objects/

the possible philosophical quality to be associated/interwoven with the concept and the modes of such an object.

As slowly the objects emerge unfolding enigmatically their world, across conceptual cuts and seams and construction efforts, perplexities and weaknesses are also discovered (if PhO is not but a probationary, not pre-established, recognizable, rather non existing but imaginable entity-as long as its principles, presuppositions, restrictions, characteristics are progressively molded). Nevertheless, this very entity as *a priori* attributed with the name of philosophical, by this very act of naming, is unescapably invited to prove the features carried by this particular attribution; so, the PhO, is, from scratch, a problem and an exercise that because of its main constituent concepts (philosophical & object) it refers to a philosophical process which is not about creating, representing, translating a concept to an object (and vice versa) or about materializing the abstract or producing an art object. It is instead about the disclosure of an experimental intermediary zone between the concept and a material which establishes its own world unreachable by the same subject who lies behind this procedure. Finally, both subject and object seem to always be in retreat. The philosophical uncertainty creates a fluid within which objects and subjects glide –the PhOs seem like encrypted, hidden entities. The method issue here becomes an internal, even innate, constituent of the philosophical activity– that is, this latter goes along with or through its method, it is its method or, inversely, its method and methodology cannot but be the way of this activity to be philosophical.

On an initiatory level, its aim would be a certain sensibilization to the recognition of the philosophical element through its probable appearances or disappearances, manifestations or deviations (in the way of an experimental[2] attentive formation itinerary). The PhO are proposed as a mode of existence, a gesture of establishment and deinstallation of (something like an) an object interwoven with the thinking that it arises it– even if this is not about objects that are given, definitive, as part of a material culture, nor the provocative manifestation of a concept or the deficient materialization of a conceptual nucleus, not even corresponding to any pre-defined, exemplary figure. In contrast, they are not proposed (or they propose not themselves) as the confirmation of a truth (that the spectator/audience/interlocutor should discover, reconstruct, confirm within a symphonic sharing of multiple points of view).

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[2] Cf. the Foucauldian sense of experimentation, «from which one comes out trans-formed» in order not to think in the same way as before, contrary to a theoretician's attitude who wants to build «a general system either […] of deduction or of analysis in order to apply it uniformly to different fields» (Foucault, 1994, 41, 42).

Moreover, the project, as it develops since 2015, includes, as a substantial moment of it, the organization of an event of exhibition through a particular philosophical curating, which consists in the dynamic depiction of the creation/construction/invention of new objects or the modification/transfiguration of objects already existing[3], which henceforth will have the possibility to be determined /put forward and mainly questioned as 'philosophical objects'[4], from the conception of the object to the investigation and then its realization as exhibit, from the collective reflection and the exchange of comments within the research group to the development of ideas, from the reading of texts to the discussions, from the exhibition to a sort of philosophical metacognitive relaunch leading to a re-conception of the whole itinerary so far in function of the initial aim and intermediary synergies (even more if the objective of the exhibition of 'objects' could not prejudge nor the final exhibition could validate an affirmative position in relation to the initial questions of research).

Thus, by selecting, developing, making present, creating, fabricating an ob-ject (obiectum, ob+iacere, αντι-κείμενον), precisely, at the same time, as an object (as appearing or conceived) and as a PhO as well, because it is produced, lying hereafter in front of us, in this very perspective, we would like to restitute every time the question of a strong, but not definitive, understanding of the philosophical itself, in a modality, primarily, operational, through numerous attempts. Even more, for these reasons, to propose a follow-up of gestures developing an experimental course of practical philosophy[5].

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[3] Could possibly the PhOs be transported and exhibited again, elsewhere and otherwise, as PhOs or simply as objects (without any specific quality or aim) or even could be reconstructed as other PhOs, but equally be disappeared (as not having any more a reason of existence) or destroyed aftermath exhibition, or archived as traces? Because being an object, «means that it is standing in front of us, only because it is observable: situated, that is to say, directly under our hand or gaze, indivisibly overthrown and re-integrated with every movement they make. Otherwise, it would be true like an idea and not present like a thing. It is particularly true that an object is an object only in so far as it can be moved away from me, and ultimately disappear from my field of vision. Its presence is such that it entails a possible absence» (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, 103).

[4] The signs surrounding this word (simple English inverted commas with an elevated comma) are intended in a way to raise them slightly at both ends, as if by two little ties, to make them stand out, to raise them a little above the text or the act, to give them a fleeting visibility. It's not a question of emphasis or highlighting, but rather a gesture of tact that pulls the word towards a light accentuation that can always escape attention. It's a gesture analogous to an unaccented beat. It is just a way to re-mark the entity of the 'philosophical object' vis-à-vis or within the world of possible objects (but also, internally, the 'philosophical' itself vis-à-vis the possible philosophical entities or the other possible determinations of an object and the 'object', related as it is to the determination of philosophical, vis-à-vis the 'non-philosophical' objects), in a move upward or of detachment: it is an «as if», an unfinished step, hesitantly and perhaps ironically emerged.

[5] For the theoretical frame and methodology of this project, s. Théodoropoulou, 2019 and 2020b.

Hence, the aim is to create, invent, highlight or recreate, modify or transform an object capable of being perceived/recognized as philosophical, to make visible[6] the philosophical dimension of it (an endeavor though which it constitutes also a basic philosophical question). More conventionally, one could supposedly think about the existence of a PhO, each time when philosophy transforms its object of interest to something to what it wants to concentrate its attention and reflect more systematically about it (thus, we could say that a PhO is, for example, any concept that a philosopher creates or elaborates in a philosophical way). In fact, this specific attention refers to (or presupposes) the existence of a gaze which would be philosophical, willful and capable to recognize and define each time an object as philosophical.

Moreover, even if we choose or re-construct an object which, according to our understanding, carries a philosophical dimension, we still don't know how it would be perceived by the other[7] (participant, interlocutor, spectator/ listener) that is to say, it is always possible for the object to be liquated within an indeterminacy, even passing presumably to the situation of a 'litter'[8], as to

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[6] Cf. «Making things visible is just one of the effects of a practice approach to the co-constitution of visuality and materiality: of not thinking 'visuality' as simply observation, nor considering the 'material' purely as 'solid matter'. The question of what is made visible are critical to analyzing using this approach» (Gillian, Tolia-Kelly, 2012, 4). In fact, «The Visuality/Materiality approach […] is about claiming collective possibilities as well as embodied and phenomenological, whilst decentering the capturing, objectifying eye». In these terms, «the visual is an embodied process of situation, positioning […] re-memory […] encounter, cognition and interpretation». In contrast, the materiality «does not assume solidity of object and fixity of meaning […] but incorporates the poetics of rhythms, forms, textures and the value of memory-matter engagement […] the sensory affordances of materials can also incorporate a pluralistic account of reactions and interpretations that link to histories, memories and ecologies of seeing, feeling and perceiving» (*ibid.,* 5). This is then about an approach where «Visuality/Materiality is an emergent orientation of research practice that is inevitably critical and constantly reflexive of the power play between representation, text, practice and technologies of production, display and performance […] The critical argument at its heart is that the 'visual' and the 'material' should be understood as in continual dialogue and co-constitution» (*ibid.,* 3-4).

[7] «Othering, the constitution of an 'Other,' entails an indebtedness to the 'Other', who is irreducibly and materially bound to, threaded through, the 'self'–a diffraction/ dispersion of identity. 'Otherness' is an entangled relation of difference (*différance*). Ethicality entails noncoincidence with oneself […] Ethics is an integral part of the diffraction (ongoing differentiating) patterns of worlding, not a superimposing of human values onto the ontology of the world (as if 'fact' and 'value' were radically other). The very nature of matter entails an exposure to the Other» (Barad, 2010, 265).

[8] Cf. the Joycean word-play between "letter" and "litter" (s. Dixon, 1961, 89) and the 't' added by Lewis Carroll (Caroll, 1893) to the word "literature" (thus becoming "litterature"), «thereby comparing the text to trash» (s. Marret, 1996, 9, cited in: Kirstin, 2004, 153-153). The constructed relation between «letter» and «litter» contains the suspicion that the convention, the canon carries

something that «falls wide of meaning», that «lies outside meaning»[9]. In that sense, by choosing, developing an element in order to show it/put it as ob-ject, notably a philosophical one, we want to try to reveal (or at last contest) its philosophical dynamics and we appeal the others to see it abruptly or to see it (or not) repeatedly as a philosophical presence/appearance. In a way, we constitute and establish it as a philosophical one (but at the same time, a gap, a discrepancy, an error seems to be always left to remind the possibility of a collapse of the whole project itself– because in fact the PhO was never a PhO). This is about an open and permanent invitation to consider the objecthood as an exercise (a *non finito*): the object as an entity discovered, perceived, invented/constructed, touched, deconstructed, invisible, immaterial, discussed, inner and outer (without the inner being the opposite of the external[10]). The object though is not to be stuck in a deadlock exteriority - it becomes a limit for the perception, but it is not defeated by any "beyond" which surpasses it like an obstacle destined for disappearance. It's about a structure of resistance for every movement on both sides but on the same plane, in a deep luminosity[11].

That's why, the act of the r(a)ising pro-duction installation, from the moment of the object's rising in space, results in the reiteration of a doubt: i.e., the tendency towards an early reification of these research objects which could not, therefore, neither fall into the state of availability and that of the usual educational materials,

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ineluctably its own rubbishness, the possibility to turn into something worthless: «Jacques Lacan [Lacan, 1966] rightly noted that Finnegans Wake is peppered with derivatives of the words "letter" and "litter", the appearance of which are always intended to blur the distinction between the two and to put the entire canon of literature into question by rubbishing the conventionality and the very "literary-ness" of its code. As Joyce wrote: ''With lines of litters slittering up and louds of latters slettering down [...] where in the waste is the wisdom?''» (cited in Kirstin, 2004, *op.cit.*).

9 As Lacanian 'Lituraterre' [s. Lacan, 2013, 29-38] is a neologism «formed from the word 'literature' to designate that part of literary activity that falls wide of meaning» (cited in: Gutermann-Jacquet, 2015, 43). This is a core (kern) of literary Being lying «at the heart of literature, as at the heart of the analytic discourse» which is the «unreadable, the not-for-reading, the sign that has become trash [...]» (*Ibid.,* 45).

10 In Kandisky's words (in his article, «Painting as a Pure Art», 1913, 349-50): «For the content, which exists first of all only "in abstracto", to become a work of art, the second element—the external— must serve as its embodiment. Thus, content seeks a means of expression, a "material" form' [...] Thus the work of art is an inevitable, inseparable joining together of the internal and external elements, of the content and the form» (cited in: Henry, 2009, 22).

11 By creating models internally and by operating on clues and variables, scientific thinking is always in an admirably active way, ingenious, negligent, treating every being as «an object in general», simultaneously, as if it were nothing and nothing more than something predestined for our artifices –this is a thinking of the object– for this mode of thinking there is not a preliminary "there is" on the site, on the grounds of the sensible world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 159)- «Science manipulates things and gives up living in them», (*Ibid.,* 159).

nor into the precarious immobility of objects at exhib/pos-ition. In that way, a practice associating the visual with the oral, the body with the action could be inaugurated. Else ways, the project is not developed while keeping a distance and making a distinction between subject and object, it is not limited to the sitting and still posture, nor limited to reflection and discourse. Seizing, conceiving, elaborating and forming the objects, the recognition and hermeneutics of their traces, their absence or inexistence (by weaving a web of support(ment) but also a thread of connection with every other object and among all the various objects, equally though by provoking interruptions, denials, recessions to a possible collapse of objects and their subjects)[12] - there is, seemingly and ironically, a persistent effort to not let the project to fall into an objectlessness. By being a such process, the performative element is raised and the project sometimes grows as a performance: persons need to realize and somehow 'see' their connection with the(ir) object manifest itself and probably this manifestation engage and move their bodies.

Towards this strange " 'philosophical' 'object' "

If, according to Deleuze, «things possess a structure only in so far as they maintain a silent discourse, which is the language of signs» and «since one does not recognize people, in a visible manner, except by the invisible and imperceptible things they themselves recognize in their own way»[13], one could recognize on the PhO some of the criteria of structuralism as «the positing of a symbolic order, irreducible to the orders of the real and the imaginary, and deeper than they are»[14], the local or positional criterion, the symbolic elements having «no extrinsic designation nor intrinsic signification, but only a positional sense»[15], the criterion of the Empty

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[12] «Objects are not originally or even ordinarily contemplated objects, they are the objects of our movements. In this sense, it is true to say that the original being of things is not a *Vorhanden* but a *Zuhanden*. Moreover, by asserting the original relationship of the being of things to our movements, by saying that objects are not first represented, but immediately lived by the powers whereby we are related to them, we do not claim to inaugurate any primacy of the hand over sight, for example; we rather insist that vision is a knowledge of the same type as manual prehension or motor touch, i.e., a knowledge which is not an intellectual or theoretical knowledge, which is not a representation. After all, it is effected by the body, because it is a bodily knowledge [...] we must place ourselves interior to the powers which it unfolds in order to understand the nature of the world which our body knows. Indeed, we are truly placed interior to these powers» (Henry, 1975, 99).

[13] Deleuze, 2004, 171.

[14] *Ibid.,* 173.

[15] If according to Levi-Strauss, in his discussion with Paul Ricoeur, «sense is always a result, an effect: not merely an effect like a product, but an optical effect, a language effect, a positional effect», there is, Deleuze continues «profoundly, a nonsense of sense, from which sense itself results [...]

Square [La Case Vide], a «wholly paradoxical object or element» enveloped in the structure, "eminently" symbolic, called «Object = x, the riddle Object or the great Mobile element»,

> always displaced in relation to itself. Its peculiar property is not to be where one looks for it, and conversely, also to be found where it is not. One would say that la case vide "is missing from its place" [*il manque a sa place*] (and, in this, is not something real); furthermore, that it does not coincide with its own resemblance (and, in this, is not an image); and that it does not coincide with its own identity (and, in this, is not a concept)», «is it and must it remain the perpetual object of a riddle, the perpetuum mobile[16].

The object, existing either physically in space (i.e. «un object of perception», «a real object»[17]) or, initially, as a mental image, an «imaged object»[18], it starts to take its significance when «revealed by consciousness»[19]. This relation between the object in its various forms and the intentional conscience is essential for the project because it is based on the subject's will and capacity to recognize, elaborate, invent, and materialize objects[20]. The moment of the emergence/'appearance' of the object, when it comes to be seized or it is prepared to be materialized-visualized/represented/re-created/re-constructed, is exactly a moment in an endless[21] and relentless, almost

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For structuralism, […] there is always too much sense, an overproduction, an over-determination of sense, always produced in excess by the combination of places in the structure» (*Ibid.,* 175).

[16] *Ibid.,* 184, 185, 187.

[17] Sartre, 2004, 180

[18] Or, in the frame of the Sartrean phenomenological ontology, as an «imaging consciousness»: «an image is nothing other than a relation. The imaging consciousness that I have of Pierre is not a consciousness of an image of Pierre: Pierre is directly reached, my attention is not directed at an image, but at an object» (Sartre, 2004, 7). In other words, the image cannot but be an act, i.e. an intentional consciousness (*Ibid.,* 183), «an act that aims in its corporeality at an absent or nonexistent object, through a physical or psychic content that is given not as itself, but in the capacity of analogical representative of the object aimed at. In the case of the mental image the content has no externality. One sees a portrait, a caricature, a spot: one does not see a mental image. To see an object is to localize it in space […]. However, my mental images do not mix with the objects that surround me […]. In fact, the mental image aims at a real thing, which exists among others in the world of perception; but it aims at it through a psychic content. No doubt that content must fulfil certain conditions: in the image consciousness we apprehend an object as an 'analogon' for another object» (*Ibid.,* 52).

[19] Barnes, 2002, 36.

[20] «Consciousness is not a being but the activity whereby a human being recasts an impersonal universe in the form of the human life world. Its revelation of being is a creative revealing, but consciousness never becomes its creations» (*Ibid.,* 24).

[21] Cf. «The artwork is not the occasion for the subject to complete it; instead, what Adorno calls its truth content is the open-endedness of an object at rest within its lack of completion. Its content is not something, especially not some truth, to be deciphered by the subject. The artwork is instead

ineluctable, procedure-chain of acts directed to the final phase of materialization, the creation and exhibition of PhOs.

Even more, if there is no a possible, separate, clear category of objects recognized absolutely and at some extent generally as 'philosophical'–because the work of philosophy is not to 'produce objects'–even though this very work can be related to objects in various senses (like, for example, the written language itself or an object-thing presented in the frame of a philosophical analysis, the jar-thing in Heidegger or the mirror in Merleau-Ponty, or the Plato's ring of Gyges, live teaching etc.)[22]. Unless if someone explicitly indicates that, in some way, an object 'is' or 'could be' a philosophical one: then, one need to understand in what way the philosophical feature is attributed to the object; in other words, it seems that the PhO cannot but be the issue-scope of a procedure of attribution and determination[23]; that's why is highly significant, within this project, this determination to be supported by an evolving, stepwise philosophical research and study. In that sense, the questions 'what is philosophy', 'what philosophy and philosophers can do', in 'what way philosophy and philosophers work', 'which are the works and objects of philosophy' are relevant to this project as it is developed. The subjects participating in the project need to understand in some degree why and in what way their objects are PhOs and which are their distinctive features, because exactly this understanding give to these objects their ephemeral (even contestable, arguable) character as PhOs.

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an occasion for the subject to liken itself to a state of unfinishedness» (Huhn, 2004, 8, cited in: Robins, 2014, 126).

[22] Cf. Harman contention: «all objects are equally real, but that they are equally objects […]» defending «a new metaphysics able to speak of all objects and the perceptual and causal relations in which they become involved» (Harman, 2011, 10-11).

[23] Even though PhOs could be intentional objects, as objects of thought, they could not be characterized as 'nonexistent objects'. «Intentional objects are, by definition, those things in the world which we think about; or those things which we take, or pretend, or otherwise represent to be in the world; or which we merely represent in thought. If there is such a thing as thinking about 'things' (in these various senses of 'thing') then there are intentional objects […] thought about the non-existent is best construed […] in terms of thought about *nonexistent intentional objects* […]» (Crane, 2013, 4). All of these are *objects of thought:* «We think about objects, events, kinds, states, facts ... all of these can be objects of thought […] An object of thought is just something thought about. Since we can think about things that do not exist, then some objects of thought do not exist» (*Ibid*., 13). Likewise, the PhO, as an hypothesis, an experimental concept, could not (on the basis of the fact that, firstly, is conceived/imagined as a possible type of object and, consequently, it seems to lack for concreteness, its character needing to be argued and then put in a certain form), be understood as an 'abstract' object (cf. «Let us assume, for the sake of brevity, that [abstract objects] they are not concrete entities (nor mental entities, if conceived as clearly different from concrete ones»), Falguera & Martínez-Vidal, 2020, vi.

What then makes an object philosophical & moreover a PhO, exactly if the PhOs are (probably) not but a way to see/understand or name an object (in fact the PhOs existing by virtue of their conceiver and nomenclator and disappearing if this conception caves in)? This imminent existence and hesitant conceptuality is it related mainly to the fundamental difficulty of a genuine linguistic philosophical element to be materialized-represented through objects, without the philosophical element to be jeopardized or the object turn to a rather aesthetical object? Even more, if this possible materialization cannot but be mainly arbitrary and suspiciously not philosophical in itself[24]: unless if it would be philosophical, just to the extent that the artistic object is, as it conveys a philosophical dynamics/content? It's interesting to see how the question of objects and their philosophy, their appearance and their ways, the exhibition device, the innate or explicit conception about philosophy and practical philosophy, the pedagogical horizon and educational perspectives, the way that the public is implicated, the relation between the behind the scenes and the exhibition part, the Museum effect, the research-experimental movement, the way to include the history of philosophy, the subject-object relation, the question of experience, the relation of objects with philosophy and other folds of an approach that tries to connect in some way philosophical thinking with practical aspects of it[25],

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[24] The examples possibly given to the participants in the project concerning the interrelation between object and philosophy thus creating for them a sort of frame and a pool (the main issue being not to provide them a kind of manual or encyclopaedia but to encourage them to think, comment, open new ways of understanding of the core questions of the project) cannot be considered as unique or incontestable. The notion of 'example' itself is not paradigmatic-normative but functional: this is not about the presentation of a model needed to be imitated or reproduced (because they would be based on a given, pre-existing definition of the PhO) but the examples carry a certain, finite point of view which should be discussed, they constitute a challenge for thinking. They represent the experimental aspect of that which could be a PhO providing occasions of thinking–in other words, the examples as material are to be further elaborated in order to reveal repeatedly the PhO as a research object, that is to say as an object to be. Consequently, this act of 'exemplifying' can include also anti-paradigms or even simulations which function rather as provocations -trial objects- because the paradigm or the original itself does not exist or we don't know (yet) exactly what it is – thus examples can function as traps. In fact the material presented needs to be discussed in order to be decided if finally can constitute a probationary example of what it could be or not a PhO - analogy, metaphor, simile are possible relations to the material uploaded. We could say that, in this frame, a 'material' could serve as a potential example, if it provides us with three at least data: 1. a theory about the object, 2. a carrying philosophical dynamics, 3. the construction and implementation logic of an object. Whereas the material can be scattered pieces of images, words, texts, objects, art works, carrying the suspicion of this relation that interests the project, the 'example' is a possible, synthesis of them to a certain, tendentious though, form.

[25] As about the relation (gap or bond) between the image [object] and the text, but even more about the use of another work or pieces of it in order to construct another object or idea, cf. the idea of Joseph Kosuth about the art as tautology: «A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of

can create, through their specific conceptualization, development and interconnection, a whole separate world which defines and differentiate projects with, apparently, similar motivations and references[26].

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the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that that particular work of art is art, which means, is a definition of art» (Kosuth, 1993, 153 / s. also *Joseph Kosuth's Tautologies*).

Within the movement of conceptual art, Kosuth adopted a radical position: the idea behind the artwork corresponds already to an object, which, therefore, can be visualized.

«[…] While Beckett often addresses the uninterpretable, Kosuth, conversely, attempts to visualize the emergence of meaning» (Undo.net, 2011). In the same spirit, Kosuth had also remarked about another exposition of his: «I support all kinds of contradictory theoretical entities and I have no problem with it […] I took cartoons such as *Blondie*, *Wizard of Id*, whatever, and I blew them up and silk-screened them on laminated glass with neon in L.A. Then with that are quotes by [Gottfried Wilhelm] Leibniz and [Søren] Kierkegaard. I spent a long time putting together the right cartoon with the right philosopher». And when some Hollywood lawyers, asked him if he had get the «permission to use these cartoons?» he replied that he «didn't get permission from Kierkegaard either». Then, he «pointed to the cartoon» saying, «That's not my work». And then he pointed to the quote and he said, «That's not my work either. Those are props. My work is the gap between the two. It's the surplus meaning that goes together to create» (Interview of Joseph Kosuth by King, 2018).

As about the relation between the work and the meaning, s. Joseph Kosuth's gallery installation (at Gallery 669 in Los Angeles, 1968), titled *A.A.I.A.I.-Art as Idea as Idea* (An interview with Joseph Kosuth by Morgan, 1994). Kossut systematically visualizes philosophy or literature or art theory texts and «most of the selected excerpts are closely related to the specific place where the works are presented. These works also make it clear that the work is only given meaning when actively perceived by the observer. Kosuth's artistic results do not present themselves as artifacts, but rather as descriptions of an artwork, aided by texts, diagrams, plans, photographs and films» (Undo.net, 2011).

[26] Cf. in this sense (i.e., with an ostensible similarity with the PhO project), the organization of the *German Philosophy Museum* (*DenkWelten*). Generally, as it is explained on the relevant website, it is about bringing «philosophical ideas to life. We have philosophy you can touch and experience: fun, interactive exhibits with scientific claims. The basic idea of DenkWelten is to create a museum of philosophy, not a museum of philosophers. Its aim is to illustrate philosophical ideas, with exhibits that are surprising, have inherent artistic value and, where appropriate, can also be interactive. The museum aims to substantially broaden the visitor's understanding of philosophy […] The artistic assertion of the exhibits creates an intersection in the often-hidden aesthetic qualities of any philosophical reflection. Using practical examples, the worlds of thought displayed are intended to create a direct connection to everyday experiences in order to clarify the ongoing relevance of philosophical ideas». In this frame, the curating follows a methodology connecting, among other elements, references to primary sources, brief biographical and cultural-historical backgrounds, accompanying texts, exhibits professionally presented and documented, chronological and thematic focus for exhibits, reference to the names of philosophers, a visit beginning «in an anteroom, in which the fundamental question: "What is philosophy?" prepares access to the actual exhibition», doors opening to a practical or theoretical approach to philosophy determining the order of the exhibits in the exhibition, works arranged in chronological order according to the date of publication. The selection of works to be exhibited, «is explicitly not inspired by historical philosophy, but was made for pragmatic reasons […] It is also suggested that all visitors be given a simple object (e.g. a platonic solid apple or a wooden apple), with different objects corresponding to different guiding questions

So, whereas one can assume safely what is possible to give to an object the complexion of the philosophical nature (taking for granted that concepts, theories, arguments, texts are acceptable as philosophical 'objects', as par excellence centers of interest for the philosophical thinking action), the idea that this very object could take a form other than the linguistic forms that convey par excellence the philosophical meaning, creates a persistent uncertainty blurring the project of PhOs. This very uncertainty looks like a retreat, a kind of disorientation, a monstrosity, a surrealistic gesture or a barocco, an irony or a joke, a gap, a discrepancy, a symbolism, an ersatz, a quasi-[27] a surplus, a compound, a pleonasm, a useless even though imaginative representation, a pedagogical tool, a popularization, an anomaly, an assumption, a pagan idol, a metaphor, an incarnation, a heretical provocation, a retreat before the common sense[28]. But the PhO does not intend to be a construction inspired

and exhibits being labelled with corresponding objects. This "guiding object" could also serve as an entry proof […] At the end of the exhibition, the original question is repeated in an interactive installation […]» (*Das Museum–Konzept*, https://www.denkwelten.net/konzept.html [our translation]).

[27] Cf. this abounding world of things in Serres & the crucial significance of the *quasi-object* as a ground for objects and subjects and the intersubjectivity between them: «This quasi-object is not an object, but it is one nevertheless, since it is not a subject, since it is in the world; it is also a quasi-subject, since it marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject […] A ball is not an ordinary object, for it is what it is only if a subject holds it […] The ball is the quasi-object and quasi-subject by which I am a subject, that is to say, sub-mitted. Fallen, put beneath, trampled, tackled, thrown about, subjugated, exposed, then substituted, suddenly, by that vicariance. The list is that of the meanings of *subjicere, subjectus*. Philosophy is not always where it is usually foreseen. I learn more on the subject of the subject by playing ball than in Descartes' little room […] This quasi-object that is a marker of the subject is an astonishing constructer of intersubjectivity. We know, through it, how and when we are subjects and when and how we are no longer subjects […]» (Serres, 2007, 224-7).

[28] In fact the project of PhOs, explicitly or implicitly, willingly or unwillingly, refers to a bunch of concepts and themes opposed and interrelated forming the conceptual environment of the object and of its connection with subject and problematizes «an a priori distinction between persons and things, matter and meaning, representation and reality» (Henare, Holbraad, Wastell, 2007, 2). It is a project bending also towards the possibility of a «thinking through things» as a method consisting «to take 'things' encountered in the field as they present themselves, rather than immediately assuming that they signify, represent, or stand for something else […] exploring a more open, heuristic approach to analysis that allows things', as and when they arise, to offer theoretical possibilities […]» As «*things might be treated as sui generis meanings*» and «meanings are not 'carried' by things but just are identical to them», Henare, Holbraad and Wastell choose the term of things instead of this of objects, because «they carry minimal theoretical baggage» and this «denuded usage of 'things'» signal the «transformation of 'thing-as-analytic' to 'thing-as-heuristic' […] the difference between an analytic and a heuristic use of the term 'things' is that while the former implies a classificatory repertoire intended for refinement and expansion, the latter serves to carve out things (as an appropriately empty synonym for 'objects' or 'artefacts') as the field from which such repertoires might emerge. Analytics parse, heuristics merely locate». In this frame, «Conception is a mode of disclosure (of–metaphorical–'vision') that creates its own objects, just because it is one and the same with them, so to 'see' these objects is to create them […] So, if the first step to 'ontological breakthrough' is to realize that 'different worlds' are to be found in 'things', the

from a specific philosophical idea, which, as an inspirational source, would attribute to it the value of a successful analogy (not bothering the philosophical pretention), but it would incorporate a heretic will: to be itself a vehicle of philosophical thought and not to take the value of a reminiscence, a reflection, a shadow, a parcel of this thought. Notwithstanding, a hesitation and mistrust accompany the PhO by rendering it a lisping entity that cannot but be philosophically weak or incapable of constituting an authentic vehicle of philosophicity–if there is one.

Consequently, seemingly, the contention that a PhO can include seeds of philosophical thinking or is expected to be capable to mobilize philosophical thinking does not make PhO to be in itself philosophical–rather, at last, it figures as a quasi-philosophical entity, a hint, a spurring or an incomplete incarnation. The speculation about the PhOs seems anyway to be much more complicated than the respective one regarding the 'aesthetic object' (since the PhO could be similar to this one or altogether 'be'/become an aesthetic object). Thus, the PhOs cannot exist but under certain conditions and while they can have a certain concreteness, their philosophical determination is precarious as closely related to a particular intention, gaze and criteria that they have in the first place formed it; once these parameters change or don't stand any more, then the PhOs cease also to exist. They become remains of a performance, empty costumes, in some cases quasi-aesthetic objects, debris of images and sounds, enigmas, palimpsests, wondering objects and finally, thus, probably, they become again, in absentia, and in another way, 'philosophical objects.'

So, is our thinking which intuitively in the beginning, sits upon/touches an object[29], by risking in that way to predefine it or which pushes an object, in the view to emerge as another object or under another light, reorganizing it, this time as a philosophical one (referring to a philosophical idea) or which creates new philosophical objects departing from philosophical or other thoughts[30]. The philosophical question

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second one is to accept that seeing them requires acts of conceptual creation–acts which cannot of course be reduced to mental operations (to do so would be merely to revert to the dualism of mental representation versus material reality)» (*Ibid.,* 2-15).

[29] Merleau-Ponty had emphasized the act of seeing as a way «to enter a universe of beings which *display themselves*». «In other words: to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it […] I can therefore see an object in so far as objects form a system or a world, and in so far as each one treats the others round it as spectators of its hidden aspects and as guarantee of the permanence of those aspects» (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, 79)

[30] Nevertheless, the existence of objects in the frame of the PhOs project or this critical reference to the concept of object (objecthood/thinghood), are far from the study of the proliferation of everyday things, their salience and their exhibition (see: 'thing studies', thing theory, material culture or object studies) often as obsession with «stuff–things, ephemera, paraphernalia and possessions» (*A philosophy*

seen as inherent or hidden within the object which comes to /is called to come to light or the philosophical idea as added to the object through an intuition/hermeneutical act on behalf of the subject watching the object, constitute possible courses for the designing of the project[31]. As the object is gradually implemented, the philosophical question evolves equally or rather the object is implemented making evolving the philosophical question and vice versa. The PhO could correspond to the philosophical question; it can put the question or be a kind of answer or finally put another question as a development of its own construction. The philosophical question though, as the PhO is exhibited, will stay unseen and unutterable, as almost inexistant (even if it lies within/behind the object giving him somehow strength and substance). Contrarily to the educational act, the construction of the PhO does not include an already known recipient–it is not constructed with the intention of a learning goal to be achieved[32]. It is constructed in the name and for the sake of the philosophical question.

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of everyday things, 2011). Notwithstanding, it could be possible that a PhO concerns this phenomenon, because a such object is in fact a meta-object containing (animated by) a critical gesture of invocation and inclusion of objects/things in our perceptive and conceptual field which though in principle remains silenced, unnoticed as such –it immerges the object into its own presence, a hole in the whole that itself is, like the dough within itself. So, an exhibition/ encyclopedia of material things is impressive but things there are taken rather as close entities. PhOs go beyond the things populations because exactly they try to be inventions, in the run to take form persistently as they stand on fundamental philosophical concerns which are the reason of their existence. Their liberty is a denied liberty, because of the creator's act which germinated them but equally (and significantly) a position of liberty, because of their progressive autonomization before, during and after their exhibition, more than any other object constructed for a certain purpose (an spontaneous and unwanted– delicate-fight against their author/creator). Thing philosophy and object philosophy converge or diverge creating a crack through which or within which the PhO project is established. PhOs are no objects of the ordinary life -nevertheless are related to human experience; they are not for usage or created for a purpose; they remain mainly strange but conducive to their transfiguration.

[31] Two possible routes can be proposed to highlight particularly the pedagogical dimension of the project: either starting from a concept initially chosen in order to be henceforward the interior thread or scaffolding traversing and supporting the conception and creation of objects or leading to this concept to be produced/emerged progressively, as objects will be created/chosen as points of convergence of different ideas presented during the preparatory workshops (object germination). A third route concerns the way in which either the passage from the concept to an object and vice versa, or the passage from concept to concept or the connection of objects with concepts and their intertwining with them are undertaken (spirally as spreading outwards-by adding/multiplying the concepts -or, inwards, following the moves of kneading dough: repeatedly, pulling the ends of the dough and fold it onto itself and then pushing the dough forward and folding the stretched dough over itself).

[32] There is the possibility to conceive the PhO as a material for educational reasons, a springboard between the non-philosophical and the philosophical. But if under educational purposes, materials are agents of normativization, 'materials' as the PhO are de-normativisation factors: «As the carpenter

During a such long procedure, one cannot go straight to the object –he|she needs to fall behind, to retreat, spend time, consciously put barriers. The object is not just a figment of imagination needing to take shape; it will come up, emerge as the research goes on and the thinking is unfolding. Probably though it will not come up. Patience and attention[33] is needed in order to choose, describe, narrate, recognize, interpret, include / exclude, readapt, open passages, connect, highlight, reasoning, distinguish, understand, keep tracks, trace the history of the object, as a 'matter of concern'[34]. How can a PhO-heavily dependent (also in the phase of the reconstruction

notches the ends of the wooden beams, after having worked relentlessly on different beams, destroying different beams, we need to know how to notch, in order to respect the material and then, probably, create another object. But carpenters and woodcarvers, who touch the wood with their bear hands, have a relation with this wood, whereas this relation hides a certain knowledge. In other words, this living material, through a subtle initiatory training, acquires a learning value, as Bachelard has shown us ways of doing so. This, then, could be a kind of de-normativisation. Every notch, every dissection or dismantling movement being a threshold to another form, where the subject learns to (re) organize the world through such a material» (Theodoropoulou, 2021, 12). Materials are understood through an organic approach developed as a scaffolding-in-progress: « Organic because it co-creates» the material, «it accompanies it while not removing its scaffolds, but bringing them to surface» (s. Theodoropoulou, 2018). On this matter, s. also, Theodoropoulou, 2020a.

[33] Cf. the highly significant paradox created when the mode of inattentiveness and the social practices of inattention where the visual images circulate «as fleeting and unremarkable ephemera» in a «routine inattention and distraction» are not but «products of highly concentrated institutionalized forms of attention» (Frosh, in: Gillian, Tolia-Kelly, 2012, 171), whereas the «attentive fallacy», as «the seemingly self-evident idea that the significance of images–and the path to understanding them–is generated through a distinct, focused encounter between a visually immobilized viewer and a discrete and equally stationary image» (*Ibid.,* 173). On that basis, Frosh understands *inattention* (and drawn our attention to it) «as a taxonomic term that covers a spectrum of visual modes, all of which have in common brief duration and low cognitive and emotional intensity, and all of which are–like attention itself –circulatory forms of connectional energy between perceiving subjects and the potential objects of their perception» (*Ibid.,* 174).

[34] S. particularly: «A matter of concern is what happens to a matter of fact when you add to it its whole scenography, much like you would do by shifting your attention from the stage to the whole machinery of a theatre […] It is the same world, and yet, everything looks different. Matters of fact were indisputable, obstinate, simply there; matters of concern are disputable, and their obstinacy seems to be of an entirely different sort: they move, they carry you away, and, yes, they too matter. The amazing thing with matters of fact was that, although they were material, they did not matter a bit, even though they were immediately used to enter into some sort of polemic. How really strange they were» (Latour, 2008, 39). Specifications regarding the matters of concern: they have to: 1. matter [«Matters of fact were distorted by the totally implausible necessity of being pure stuff of no interest whatsoever–just sitting there like a mummified limb–while at the same time being able to "make a point", humiliate human subjectivity, speak directly without speech apparatus and quieten dissenting voices», *Ibid.,* 47], 2. be liked, 3. be populated. («they have to become something that is to be explicitly recognized as a "gathering", as Ding and not as *Gegenstand*», *Ibid.,* 48), 4. to be durable. («Endurance is what has to be *obtained*, not what is already given by some substrate, or some substance», *Ibid.,* 49).

process, when it is about the analysis-reconstruction of an object already existing) on the subject, escape the limitations and the creative and interpretative sense giving intention/authority of the subject and the burdens it imposes on the PhO? How can it resist all the symbolic load that prescribes and obscures it? But also, why even ask this question? Why does the subject itself carrying out the PhO constitute a problem for the PhO? Why in the first place should we consider this particular subject-PhO relationship problematic? Why should there be a demand of emancipation of PhOs (and not of their institutionalization)? And how can a constructed entity be emancipated once it leaves the hands of its constructor? What is the role of the exhibition phase in framing such questions? Possibly these very questions relate to the dubious nature of PhOs as philosophical and to the ensuing inquiry-and this also is their point of escape. How then is the subject disempowered/withdrawn? What processes of undoing the subject and empowering the object exist? And again: How, as Frosh put it,

> is one to capture and arrest the dynamism and mobility of that which eludes or resists our focused concentration, 'the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance' as Simmel puts it[35], to enable elucidation, analysis, critique?[36]

How to avoid the «violent immobilization» that this gesture/decision of a such a project implies, «a kind of visual subjugation» accompanying the «primary act of attentiveness»[37]?

Would then the PhOs be considered as traces? Share they the amphibolic nature of a trace[38]? Are they traps for an amphibolic as well h(a)unting game with

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[35] Simmel, 1997, 175.

[36] Frosh, 2012, *op.cit.,* 172.

[37] See the metaphors of critical attention and critical analysis through «seizure, capture, holding, grasping, arresting» involving the notions of «separation, distinction and judgement and of dissection or breaking down», in general of «the distinction of a body from its surroundings […] separating the object from temporal and spatial dynamics of flux and inchoateness and detaining it before the viewer» (*Ibid*).

[38] Cf. significantly the characteristics of the trace as enumerated by Krämer: 1. The absence («The presence of the trace testifies to the absence of what formed it»), 2. The performance of orientation («The attention required when reading traces that are always imperceptible at first, is therefore always is always "focused attention"», 3. The materiality («[…]the materiality of the trace is not subordinated to the representation. Traces don't represent; they present something»), 4. The disturbance («It's only through deviations do traces become perceptible»), 5.The arbitrary («Unlike the sign we create, the meaning of a trace exists beyond the intention of the person who generate»), 6. The dependence on an observer and an action, 7. Interpretation, narration and polysemy (« Something that can only be interpreted once, and can only have one meaning, is not is not a

the sense (sense of the PhO, of the project itself as a gesture of proposal of something perched on the verge between sense and nonsense, existence and inexistence, dependence and independence, anticipation and experimentation, production and interpretation, immobility and movement, attentiveness and inattention, the intentional and the unintentional, randomly and the premeditatedly (a trace as a 'mise en scène'[39]), the trace and indication or sign, perceptible and imperceptible[40] in this very moment of their appearance[41], their exhibition-before this moment or after) permitting, provoking or subverting every plan of a lecture of traces or signs as a practice of knowledge? If then being a trace (or furtively a sign) makes disappear the object as object, evaporates its objecthood, its thingness, its stubbornness, perhaps, the PhO should be always revisited; the PhO would be the detail and what is left of its own presence, rather a detail itself[42].

Becoming-folds of practical philosophy

In general, if the PhO itself: constitutes an ontologico-esthetical gesture by its discovery and position through its own 'inexistence' (first quasi- moment/position-'quasi', since it is proposed/arisen rather by a subject decision than by and for the PhO itself) and an ethico-pedagogical collective gesture as well, through the systematic recognition and the development of these 'objects' in time and space (second moment/position), then this project comes as a reflective gesture of critical removal of these very positions (third moment/position), while the possible meta-readings of these attempts become a fourth gesture of repetition, with a view to pull up the differences and their suspicions and thus understand the project as a movement[43] of practical philosophy.

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trace, but rather the sign of something else»), 8. Temporal rupture («Unlike the index, which always refers to things happening at the same time without being visible at the same time, there is always a time lag between the act of leaving a trace and the act of reading it: this non-simultaneity must be conceived as the order of the trace»), 9. One-dimensionality and irreversibility («Insofar as the trace expresses something through narrative interpretation, it is a totally one-dimensional communication, in which the interchangeability of roles by "sender" and "receiver" remains excluded»), 10. Mediality, heteronomy, passivity (Krämer, 2012, 3).

[39] *Ibid*., 2.

[40] «At the heart of the notion of trace is therefore not only everything that is clearly perceptible, i.e. the standards that must be respected, but also that which is barely perceptible, that which lies at the limit of the imperceptible» *Ibid*., 3.

[41] «The traces are discovered or arise at the time of the act of reading»?, *Ibid*.

[42] s. Theodoropoulou, 2021, 263, 276-7 and 2020c.

[43] In the framework of this project, *movements* «hide a decision tendency, an intensive propensity to trial, a willingness for openings and inaugurations –they open new spatio-temporal frames for research activities, they manifest a stream of thinking […] designate shifts of direction, movings to

The experimental character of the whole procedure imposes also the tentative character of the PhOs and their nonconformance as a power of appearance and withdrawal altogether. Consequently, the project is developed as a series of participative pro-posals aiming to the unremitting dis-closure/covery and finally reformulation of paths, aporias and articulations of the whole project. Throughout the project, the relation of philosophy with the notions of construction, representation and performance are proposed and explored on the one hand revealing the polytropic and performative element of the entity of the PhO itself but also of the polyphonic procedure that brings it to light, as it appears and, simultaneously, is put into question by linking in this way the project and the PhO itself with forms of art and speech but also with a pedagogical dynamics -as an aspect of practical philosophy and public expression- which is tested in order to be reversed by folding in that way the field itself of practical philosophy.

As the project invests on the power of the sensory and intersubjective perception (as an «embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended approaches to cognition» indicating an intentional relation to the world[44]), different speeds of understanding and diverse understandings, various paths to perceive, act and knowing are developed and revealed in the sense of an «open intersubjectivity»[45] and interwoven apperceptive horizons. The development of modificative typical, among other, interferences, like the pedagogical procedure[46], the discussion workshops or

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another situation, another place, another thought, another stance, another choice»; *ob-gestures* «could be disruptions or incursions but also can be bonds or passages, interstitial entities, but any way they appear with some discreteness and they have the quality of an event of advancement, a manoeuvre, a turn, as actualized in a PhO». *Tones* designate «the quality, the intensity of an ob-gesture, specify movements and gesture character details, the degree of their intensity, the way by which the world of the project is unfolded creating a general sensation about it» (Theodoropoulou, 2020b, 263).

[44] Gallagher, 2008, 163-178.

[45] Bower, 2015, 455-474.

[46] Which is not undertaken as a strategy: in fact, in the frame of educational environments, objects are usually laying passively in front of teachers and students: docile, obedient to their intentions, disposable, inert and naked under their gaze, in their hands, parts of a powerful preexisting general idea which governs and moves them, orders their appearance in this context, their usage/manipulation being the reason of their existence, pieces of something which changes characteristics according to the educational purposes -the emergence of such un 'object' into the perceptual and cognitive horizon of the viewers should be the same for everybody in order to obtain in that way the pedagogical aim, to fulfill the reason of this constructed, collective experience. Ideas, concepts, values, arguments, emotions, serve all together this well-tuned and premeditated (or limp enough to permit the enunciation of vague statements about the idea behind and before the object, about reality and the world) pedagogical performance around almost dead and in-the-process-of dissection objects (Theodoropoulou, 2021). The PhO though is a rebellious object without the guarantee of any recognized quality or feature but only of the moving strength of a will to be put as

the concept-routes (conceptualization, text and artworks research and analysis), sustain the multiplication of point of views, the polyphonic as much as polytropic procedure, meaningfully also the provocation of different experiences: every subject participates in this creation, every object agitates and forms its relation with the subject and vice versa[47]. Ideally the project challenges, receives and highlights this plurality as a creational liberty and as polyphonic dialogue with objects-every object multiplies the subjects and vice versa through the interlacement of non-passive perceptions.

The object becoming PhO[48] is the arrowhead of this effort, its spur, a condensation and a displacement of a process of understanding.

> An evolving map of object presences and disappearances, of instant condensations and im-mobilities, through the multiplicity of frames, conditions, contexts which explain and modify their position and situation [...] There is a dignity in the object related to this tremendous power of overcoming destruction and claiming existence one can understand (the) object as an

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question and to be explored –this process needs a voluntary engagement. Fundamentally is an event without (demanding) value.

[47] The difference that Böhme distinguish between *Realität* ('the factual fact') and *Wirklichkeit* ('actual fact'– «the effect of an object in a particular presence», Böhme, 2001, 57, cited in: Bjerregaard, in: Fuglerud & Wainwright, 2015, 50) is eloquent for the conception of the relation between subject (perceiver) and object (perceived), their in-betweenness (Böhme, 1993, 113–26, cited in: Fuglerud, & Wainwright, 2015, *op.cit.*), their common reality, the Atmosphere.

[48] The multiplication of objects, this world of possible objects growing and expanding, creates an intermediary zone that persons ought to deal with, once they get conscience of it. This is not about to attribute more or less autonomy to the subject or object, nor to verify their mutual disappearance, their merging, the ones within the others «engulfed in the maelstrom of indeterminate states that currently define the living and the non-living» in the frame of a possible theoretical or artistic dialogue about the terms object/animated/inanimate/alive/semi-alive (s. *International Conference Objets Vivants*, 2021). With the project of PhO this is rather more about to push persons to obtain awareness of objects, an awareness which makes them sensible to the peculiar existence of objects and to the question about them as well, as a question related to their own self-conscience and their conscience as possible creators. Cf. Karen Barad's position on theorizing being «as much a material practice as other kinds of practices, like experimenting, to which it is often counterposed» (Barad, 2012, 154). Furthermore, if theorizing for her is related to mattering, to the not disembodied to experimenting: «Theorizing is a form of experimenting, is about being in touch. What keeps theories alive and lively is being responsible and responsive to the world's patternings and murmurings. Doing theory requires being open to the world's aliveness, allowing oneself to be lured by curiosity, surprise, and wonder. Theories are not mere metaphysical pronouncements on the world from some presumed position of exteriority. Theories are living and breathing reconfigurings of the world. The world theorises as well as experiments with itself. Figuring, reconfiguring [...]. Thinking has never been a disembodied or uniquely human activity. Stepping into the void, opening to possibilities, straying, going out of bounds, off the beaten path–diverging and touching down again swerving and returning, not as consecutive moves but as experiments in in/determinacy» (*Ibid.*).

> opportunity and as a way of multiplying the world effects on oneself and vice versa by multiplying the rhythms, the gestures, the experiences, the bevels, by always creating «a new reality of being»[49] whatever their character or category/order is. Objects are an ontological riddle, [...] are challenging us, playing with our perspicacity, our open-mindedness, our clear-mindedness, our aesthetic and ethical subtility and resistance to not yielding to their apparent easiness (or their easiness to turn something into an object with all the thrills of thinghood). Their persistence, suddenness, and transformability are qualities upon which objects can exercise our thinking[50].

In fact, practical philosophy designates the need to follow the philosophical thinking emerging in unexpected places, through unexpected materials, interfering with various ways of doing research, participating in the acts of persons, multiplying the voices and the points of view, being with the subjects within their life. This movement of philosophy upstream and downstream of creative acts, following these acts were they lead, this particular philosophical interest stimulating such a movement is practical philosophy as an experience. But still, if, as Badiou argues, «Philosophy, far from proposing ends, means always, in one way or another, to have done with ends, and even to end with the end», whilst «The greatest virtue of philosophy [...] is that, in not ceasing to conclude, it attests to the interminable imperative of continuing. It therefore requires no other means for abolishing ends»[51], how this understanding affects practical philosophy? Could this one be a «maladroit» philosophy in the sense of «the non-address, the absence of address» (if «philosophy is without specific address. No community, real or virtual, is in relation to philosophy. No statement of philosophy is addressed as such to anyone»[52]). But if there is no address, perhaps, philosophical experience could restate in some way this void.

In practical philosophy, knowledge is not an absolute end and experience is an open end. The experiment of philosophical objects repeats and intensifies the queries of practical philosophy by challenging the recurrent distances between philosophy and non-philosophy, subject and object, through the intuition of an object conceived as event–«thinking in terms of the event» [«thinking à partir de l'événement»[53]]. Situating the object under the complex category of the event is utmost significant for its understanding as, paradoxically, the subject creates the object, becomes its spectator and then, this very event, discloses or annihilates

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[49] s. Bachelard, 1994, 68, 78, 85.

[50] Theodoropoulou, 2020b, 292.

[51] Badiou, 2006, 9-10.

[52] *Ibid.,* 10. «Firstly I name 'address' not with regard to who or to what philosophy addresses itself but with regard to the subjective position that is proper to its address. Yet that which characterizes this position is purely and simply void».

[53] Greisch, 2014, 62.

the subject itself within/trough another aspect in a processus of constant (de)subjectification and (de)objectification. This is a risk and a problem that practical philosophy explores through a project like this particular one. How create an event from something structurally premeditated, how forget or loose this creative root, how then discover an event out of this disappearance, how let come and recognize (as) a newcomer (an event) from 'there' (elsewhere/anywhere) that which has originated from 'here' being part of the intuition and action of a subject–an event-object which desobjectifies the object that it is (or tries to be) and de-subjectifies the subject which is not[54], a murmuring (instead the threshold of a murmuring, a "mmmmmmm")[55], a disruptive, hyperbolic, unpredictable, practical event.

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[54] «What is an ideal event? It is a singularity–or rather a set of singularities or of singular points [...] turning pointe and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; [...] ''sensitive'' points [...] The singularity belongs to another dimension than that of denotation, manifestation, or signification. It is essentially pre-individual, non-personal, and a-conceptual [...] Singularity is neutral. On the other hand, it is not ''ordinary''[...]» (Deleuze, 1990, 52).

[55] s. Nancy, 2007, 25

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Ethical Dimensions of AI Within Cyber-Integrated Ecosystems

Radu SIMION[*]

ABSTRACT. The innovative aspirations and territorial expansion ambitions of *Homo technologicus* have transformed it into a powerful entity capable of altering anthropic spaces and the surrounding environment in unprecedented ways. The consequences of advanced technologies and AI development can be vast, with asymmetric impacts and profound implications. Therefore, it is essential to examine potential concerns, vulnerabilities, threats, and promising advantages with transparency following the ethical values guiding the scientific community. In light of the rapid proliferation of new technologies, this article aims to examine the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in waste management, focusing on its potential to enhance sustainable living and support biodiversity. To mitigate associated risks, the article proposes a holistic framework emphasizing relational ethics, ensuring transparency, accountability, and genuine ethical commitments in AI deployment. Additionally, the concept of humanwashing, where AI-enabled machines are anthropomorphized to foster acceptance and trust, raises concerns about misleading perceptions regarding AI capabilities. To effectively navigate these ethical challenges, the article advocates for a multidisciplinary approach involving researchers, policymakers, industry leaders, and civil society. Emphasizing relational ethics requires a shift from a traditional ethical framework to one that recognizes all actors' interconnectedness and cumulative impact. Ultimately, the article underscores the necessity of a rigorous ethical framework for integrating AI into waste management. This framework ensures that artificial intelligence technologies contribute positively to sustainable living, preserve biodiversity, and encourage a balanced interplay between people and technological advancements.

Keywords: AI ethics, machinewashing, waste management, greenwashing, environmental ethics

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Machinewashing and AI Ethics in Environmental Technologies

Since the dawn of human evolution, the development and improvement of tools used by members of this species have been key factors enabling subsequent, more complex innovations. These advancements facilitated the expansion of communities and social networks for communication, support, and exchange, leading to the development of an infrastructure of tools and proto-technologies that simplified daily tasks and provided easier access to necessary resources. The series of inventions and innovations has been continuous, with periods of acceleration in certain historical eras. As human groups collectively experimented with an increasingly wide array of materials and areas of interest, levels of specialization evolved. The understanding of the components and composition of the natural world has significantly empowered humans, placing them in an advantageous position on the developmental hierarchy. This knowledge has been instrumental in advancing various fields, driving technological innovation, and fostering a deeper comprehension of our environment. As a result, humanity's ability to manipulate and utilize natural resources has been markedly enhanced, contributing to societal progress and elevating our status on the global developmental scale. Far from reaching a state of contentment, an insatiable desire for knowledge has spread like wildfire, encompassing nearly every corner of the knowable world. Our technological ecosystem has been enriched over time with new, adaptable tools. Initially, the spread and transformation of these tools were somewhat controllable, or at least appeared to be, but this process eventually led to new uses and contributions. This cumulative process brought about radical changes, some predictable and others increasingly difficult to foresee and manage. Nowadays, technology has seamlessly integrated into the human environment, connecting the natural world, human activities, and the artifacts we use. This integration should not cause alarm but rather encourage a critical examination of the assumptions and hypotheses that shape our understanding of human action, agency, and shared responsibility with the moral objects we interact with.

Consequently, addressing the challenges posed by technological and robotic advancements requires a thorough and rigorous framework. This framework should underscore their innovative features and potential, while also demonstrating the capacity of experts to deliver multidisciplinary perspectives and adapt to the swiftly changing global environment. This approach not only highlights the forward-thinking aspects of the framework but also emphasizes the importance of expert adaptability and interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing complex challenges. Machinewashing, similar to greenwashing, presents a significant ethical issue in the development and deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. This practice involves

organizations misleading stakeholders about the ethicality of their AI systems, similar to how greenwashing involves overstating environmental commitments. Machinewashing can be defined as a strategy where organizations engage in deceptive behaviors concerning the ethicality of their AI systems. This includes presenting false or exaggerated ethical commitments through various means, such as language, visuals, or the AI algorithms themselves, often accompanied by symbolic actions like covert lobbying to prevent stricter regulations (Seele & Schultz, 2022).

The term machinewashing serves as an analogous concept to greenwashing, wherein corporations exaggerate their environmental commitments to project a facade of sustainability that is not reflected in their actual practices. This phenomenon highlights the discrepancy between proclaimed and implemented eco-friendly measures, often misleading consumers and stakeholders about the true environmental impact of the company. In both cases, the superficial adoption of green practices is leveraged for reputational gain, rather than being underpinned by substantive and verifiable environmental actions.

Several criteria help identify machinewashing. According to Seele and Schultz (2022), behaviors such as promoting ethical AI initiatives while engaging in inherently unethical business practices, exaggerating ethical achievements through targeted advertising, and lobbying against regulatory measures while publicly endorsing ethical commitments are indicative of machinewashing. The motivation behind machinewashing lies in the pursuit of reputational gains, competitive advantage, and business legitimacy. Companies, particularly large technology firms, engage in machinewashing to maintain control over critical resources like algorithms and data, which are essential to their operational success (Benkler, 2019). This strategic behavior is also driven by the need to mitigate regulatory pressures and shape the AI ethics discourse favorably for their business models (Kalluri, 2020). High-profile examples underscore the prevalence and impact of machinewashing. Technology companies often publish extensive AI ethics guidelines and principles, yet their business practices reveal significant ethical lapses, such as racial biases in algorithms, violations of user privacy, and resistance to regulatory measures designed to ensure ethical AI deployment. This dissonance between public ethical commitments and actual practices highlights the core issue of machinewashing.

The analogy between greenwashing and machinewashing provides valuable insight into the dynamics and implications of the latter. Both phenomena involve deceptive communication strategies aimed at enhancing corporate images without making substantive ethical improvements. However, machinewashing presents unique challenges due to the complexity and opacity of AI systems. Issues such as algorithmic biases, privacy violations, and the broader societal impacts of AI are less

tangible and more difficult for stakeholders to perceive and understand (Rust & Huang, 2021). Additionally, machinewashing exploits current regulatory gaps and the lack of dedicated watchdog organizations. Unlike the environmental sector, where NGOs and regulatory bodies actively monitor and address greenwashing, the AI ethics domain lacks equivalent oversight mechanisms. This absence allows companies to engage in machinewashing with minimal risk of legal repercussions.

The concept of humanwashing extends the discussion of machinewashing to the anthropomorphization of AI-enabled machines (AIEMs). This practice involves designing and promoting AIEMs to appear more humanlike to foster acceptance and trust, often leading to misleading perceptions about their capabilities (Scorici, Schultz, & Seele, 2022). Humanwashing can create a superficial illusion of AI's benign and ethical nature, diverting attention from potential harmful uses or ethical shortcomings. The anthropomorphization of robots, where robots are designed to resemble humans in appearance and behavior, significantly contributes to humanwashing. This practice can enhance human-robot interaction and societal acceptance but also risks creating unrealistic expectations and obscuring the true nature and capabilities of these technologies (Giger et al., 2019). Designing and presenting robots as humanlike can foster collaboration and trust but may also lead to feelings of eeriness and unease, known as the *uncanny valley effect* (Mori, MacDorman, & Kageki, 2012). Humanwashing involves leveraging anthropomorphism in marketing and corporate communications to create favorable perceptions of AIEMs. Companies exploit the knowledge asymmetry between themselves and the public, presenting robots in a way that emphasizes benign characteristics while downplaying or concealing potentially harmful capabilities. This practice is analogous to greenwashing, where firms manipulate communications to build a ceremonial facade. The implications of machinewashing and humanwashing are significant for ethical AI governance. These practices can undermine public trust in AI technologies and hinder efforts to develop robust ethical standards and regulations. Addressing these issues requires a collaborative effort from researchers, policymakers, and civil society to create transparent and accountable frameworks for AI ethics.

Integrating AI technologies into waste management represents a unique intersection where the implications of machinewashing can be profound. Waste management, a crucial component of environmental sustainability, involves the efficient collection, sorting, recycling, and disposal of waste materials. The advent of AI offers promising avenues for optimizing these processes, but it also opens the door to potential machinewashing if ethical considerations are not rigorously upheld. AI technologies can significantly enhance waste management practices by improving efficiency, resource utilization, and environmental sustainability. For

example, AI-powered systems can optimize waste collection routes, thereby reducing fuel consumption and emissions. Smart bin systems equipped with sensors and AI algorithms can monitor waste levels in real time, enabling efficient collection planning and resource allocation. Additionally, AI can automate waste sorting processes, using image recognition and machine vision technologies to accurately separate recyclables from non-recyclables, thus increasing recycling rates and reducing contamination (Olawade et al., 2024). However, the potential for machinewashing arises when companies overstate the ethical and environmental benefits of their AI-driven waste management solutions. For instance, a company might claim that its AI technology significantly reduces waste and enhances recycling rates, but fail to disclose that the underlying algorithms are biased or that the data used to train these systems is flawed. This misrepresentation can create a false sense of security and delay necessary regulatory and policy interventions, ultimately undermining efforts to achieve genuine environmental sustainability.

The concept of relational ethics is particularly relevant in this context. Relational ethics emphasizes the interconnectedness of all actors and the cumulative effects of their actions, providing a framework for understanding and addressing the complex ethical issues associated with AI and waste management technologies. This approach can help ensure that AI technologies are developed and deployed in a manner that genuinely promotes ethical and sustainable outcomes. To face machinewashing in waste management, it is essential to adopt a multifaceted approach that includes rigorous regulatory oversight, transparency, and accountability in AI development and deployment. This includes ensuring that AI systems are designed and implemented with ethical considerations from the outset, involving diverse stakeholders in the design process, and continuously monitoring the ethical implications of AI applications. The intersection of machinewashing and waste management technologies underscores the need for an integrated ethical approach. Ethical AI governance should not only focus on the immediate benefits of AI applications but also consider their long-term impacts on society and the environment. This requires a shift from a deontological or consequentialist framework to a relational ethics model that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all actors and the cumulative effects of their actions (Valera & Castilla, 2020). Integrating AI technologies into waste management practices promises significant benefits but also necessitates a vigilant approach to ethical considerations. AI can revolutionize waste management by enabling intelligent systems that improve efficiency, enhance recycling processes, and reduce environmental impact. However, the ethical challenges posed by machinewashing must be addressed to ensure that these technologies genuinely contribute to sustainability rather than merely presenting

an illusion of progress. For example, AI-driven waste collection systems utilize data analytics and predictive algorithms to optimize collection routes and schedules, thereby reducing operational costs and minimizing environmental impact (Baddegama et al., 2022). Smart bins equipped with AI capabilities can monitor waste levels and communicate with collection services to ensure timely and efficient waste removal, thus preventing overflow and reducing unnecessary collection trips (Dubey, Gunasekaran, & Childe, 2020). While these innovations can significantly enhance the sustainability of waste management practices, they necessitate careful oversight to avoid the pitfalls of machinewashing.

Similarly, AI technologies in waste sorting involve advanced sensor-based systems that employ machine learning algorithms to identify and categorize various types of waste. These systems can improve the accuracy and efficiency of recycling processes by ensuring proper identification and separation of recyclables from non-recyclables. Automated sorting technologies that integrate AI with robotics can further streamline these processes, reducing reliance on manual labor and enhancing the overall efficiency of waste management operations. However, the ethical implications of these technologies must be meticulously considered. For instance, biases in AI algorithms used for waste sorting could result in inefficient sorting or the exclusion of certain materials, thereby decreasing recycling rates and increasing environmental harm. Ensuring the integrity and accuracy of AI systems in waste management is crucial to avoid such outcomes and to prevent machinewashing from undermining genuine sustainability efforts (Chen, Zhang, & Liu, 2021).

The integration of AI in waste recycling processes offers substantial potential for enhancing efficiency and sustainability. AI technologies can optimize material identification and sorting, improve process efficiency, and ensure the quality of recycled materials. For example, AI-driven systems can employ machine learning and computer vision technologies to identify and sort different types of materials, thereby enhancing the accuracy and speed of recycling operations. These advancements can significantly reduce contamination in recycling streams and increase the overall quality of recycled products. AI technologies can also optimize various stages of the recycling process by analyzing operational data and identifying inefficiencies. For instance, AI algorithms can monitor equipment performance, energy consumption, and material flow to pinpoint areas for improvement and optimize process parameters (Chauhan, Singh, & Tiwari, 2023). This can lead to more efficient recycling operations, higher resource recovery rates, and reduced environmental impact.

Quality control is another critical area where AI can have a substantial impact. AI-driven quality control systems use advanced sensors and machine learning algorithms to detect and remove contaminants from recycled materials,

ensuring high-quality outputs. These systems can continuously monitor waste streams, detect impurities with high precision, and adapt to varying waste compositions, thereby enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of recycling operations (Modak et al., 2022). Moreover, the integration of AI with robotics and automation technologies can transform labor-intensive recycling tasks, such as sorting and processing, into highly efficient automated operations. AI-driven robots equipped with sensors and intelligent algorithms can handle diverse waste materials, improving the accuracy and speed of sorting processes and reducing the need for manual labor (Subramanian et al., 2021). This can lead to significant cost savings and enhanced productivity in recycling facilities.

Nevertheless, the implementation of AI technologies in waste management also raises ethical concerns. One major concern is the potential displacement of jobs due to increased automation in waste management processes. While AI-driven automation can improve efficiency and reduce labor costs, it may also lead to job losses and economic disruption for workers in the waste management industry. Addressing these concerns requires careful consideration of the social and economic impacts of AI technologies and the development of strategies to support workers affected by technological changes. Lastly, the ethical implications of data privacy and security must be thoroughly addressed. AI systems in waste management often require access to sensitive data, such as waste generation patterns and user behavior. Ensuring the privacy and security of this data is crucial to maintaining public trust and complying with data protection regulations. Implementing strong data protection measures and establishing clear data governance frameworks are essential to safeguard user privacy and ensure the responsible use of AI technologies in waste management.

The Role of AI in Modern Waste Management Practices

Waste management has emerged as a critical global issue, driven by the increasing volume of waste generated by modern societies and the profound ethical implications of its management. The evolution of waste management practices has shifted from traditional methods to more technologically advanced solutions, notably incorporating AI. Historically, waste has been regarded as an unavoidable byproduct of human activity, encompassing household garbage, industrial waste, hazardous materials, and electronic waste (e-waste). This concept includes not only the physical remnants of production and consumption but also their societal and environmental impacts. As societies evolved, so did their waste, reflecting

technological and cultural changes. The waste produced by ancient civilizations, often found in archaeological sites, provides a historical record of human activity and consumption patterns (Cuozzo, 2020).

In contemporary times, the complexity of waste has increased significantly, with non-biodegradable and hazardous materials posing severe environmental and health risks. This complexity is exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure for waste collection and disposal, especially in developing regions where illegal dumping and pollution are prevalent. The lack of standardized global waste management practices further complicates these challenges, leading to varying levels of efficiency and effectiveness across different regions (Olawade et al., 2024). The Anthropocene epoch, as popularized by Crutzen and Stoermer in the 2000's, signifies a period where human activity has significantly impacted Earth's geology and ecosystems. Waste, in its various forms, serves as a critical marker of this epoch. The material and symbolic significance of waste in the Anthropocene cannot be overstated, as it illustrates the profound impact of industrial capitalism on the planet. Myra J. Hird's insights highlight waste as a socio-material phenomenon involving complex interactions between human activities and geological processes. Hird (2015) argues that waste management practices often reflect neoliberal governance structures, framing waste as a technological issue to be resolved through individual responsibility and technological innovation. This framing limits discussions to technological solutions without addressing the underlying socio-economic and ethical dimensions of waste. The prevalent perspective of waste management as a technological issue emphasizes individual responsibility, overlooking systemic and structural factors contributing to waste generation and mismanagement. The global political economy of waste involves complex networks of production, consumption, and disposal that transcend national boundaries. Waste is often exported from developed countries to developing regions, posing significant environmental and health risks.

As it currently stands in its evolution, AI offers promising solutions to these challenges by optimizing various aspects of waste management, including collection, sorting, recycling, and monitoring. AI-driven systems can process vast amounts of data in real-time, enhancing the efficiency and accuracy of waste management operations. For instance, AI algorithms can analyze data from Internet of Things (IoT) devices to optimize waste collection routes and schedules, reducing operational costs and environmental impact, providing real-time data on waste generation and disposal, while blockchain can ensure transparency and traceability of waste management processes (Chidepatil et al., 2020). Additionally, AI can facilitate predictive maintenance of waste management infrastructure, preventing breakdowns and enhancing service reliability (Heikkilä, Heikkilä, & Nieminen, 2023). However, integrating AI into waste

management introduces new ethical considerations. One significant concern is the potential bias in AI algorithms, which can perpetuate disparities and lead to unintended outcomes in decision-making processes. This issue is particularly pertinent in waste management, where equitable resource allocation and fair treatment of communities are important. To address these concerns, it is essential to incorporate transparency, explainability, and accountability into AI-driven systems. Efforts are underway to develop algorithms that enhance transparency and explainability, thereby enabling stakeholders to scrutinize and comprehend the rationale behind AI-driven decisions. These initiatives aim to ensure that AI systems are not only accountable but also align with ethical standards and societal expectations.

Beyond algorithmic biases, the ethical implications of AI in waste management encompass broader issues related to data privacy, security, and the societal impact of technology. The implementation of AI technologies often involves the collection and processing of large amounts of data, raising concerns about data privacy and security. Robust data protection measures, such as encryption and access controls, are essential to mitigate these risks. Compliance with relevant data protection regulations, like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), is crucial to safeguarding user privacy. AI's role in promoting sustainability in waste management is also significant. AI can facilitate the transition to a circular economy by optimizing recycling processes and reducing waste generation. For instance, AI-powered sorting systems can improve the accuracy and efficiency of recycling operations, ensuring more materials are recovered and reused rather than sent to landfills (Chen, Zhang, & Liu, 2021). Additionally, AI can enhance the monitoring and management of waste treatment facilities, reducing the environmental impact of waste disposal and promoting sustainable practices. These technologies can work synergistically to create intelligent waste management systems that are more efficient, transparent, and sustainable. The integration of AI and robotics in waste management also offers significant potential. Social robots, equipped with AI, can assist in various tasks, such as sorting and recycling, by interacting with humans and enhancing operational efficiency. These robots can handle specific tasks, reducing the burden on human workers and increasing overall efficiency. Moreover, social robots can educate the public about waste management practices, promoting awareness and encouraging sustainable behaviors. The moral considerations of using social robots in waste management include ensuring that these technologies respect human dignity and autonomy. Social robots should complement, rather than completely replace human efforts. This approach mitigates concerns about job displacement and ensures that the benefits of automation are equitably distributed (Constantinescu & Crisp, 2022).

Understanding these mediations is central to developing ethical frameworks that guide the design and implementation of waste management technologies. Here, I would also introduce the concept of "supervised agency" in AI deployment, which highlights the need for collaborative responsibility, recognizing the intertwined roles of humans and AI systems in decision-making processes. AI interactions should be viewed as instrumental uses of technology, with responsibility remaining with human operators who utilize AI as tools. AI-driven waste management systems must also consider the role of emotions in ethical decision-making. Emotions provide essential insights into our values and guide us in navigating complex ethical landscapes. This perspective challenges technocratic approaches that rely solely on quantitative risk assessments, advocating for a holistic approach to evaluating technological risks, including those associated with waste management.

Holistic Approaches to Ethical AI Governance in Waste Management

The practical uses of AI and robotics in waste management are vast and promising. As previously mentioned, AI-powered waste collection systems can optimize collection routes, leading to reduced fuel consumption and lower emissions. These technologies can prove efficient, contributing to the sustainability aspirations that contemporary societies aim to achieve. However, the potential for machinewashing arises when companies overstate the ethical and environmental benefits of their AI-driven waste management solutions. Ethical AI governance should not only focus on the immediate benefits of AI applications but also consider their long-term impacts on society and the environment. This requires a shift from a deontological or consequentialist framework to a relational ethics model that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all actors and the cumulative effects of their actions. Relational ethics underscores the interconnectedness of all actors and the cumulative impacts of their actions. This perspective is particularly relevant in cyborg ecologies, where technological systems, human communities, and natural environments are deeply intertwined. A holistic approach to ethical decision-making that considers the broader social, environmental, and economic impacts of AI technologies is imperative. For instance, AI systems should be designed to enhance, rather than disrupt, the natural processes and human practices they interact with. This might involve developing AI algorithms that support ecological balance, such as optimizing waste processing to minimize environmental harm. Additionally, involving affected communities in the decision-making processes ensures that their needs and perspectives are considered.

Data privacy and security are critical equity concerns that technology ethics must analyze. AI systems in waste management often require access to sensitive data, such as waste generation patterns and user behavior. Ensuring the privacy and security of this data is essential to maintain public trust and comply with data protection regulations. Robust data protection measures, such as encryption and access controls, should be implemented to safeguard user privacy. Clear data governance frameworks should also be established to ensure the responsible use of data in AI applications. Creating sustainable cyborg ecologies in waste management necessitates collaborative efforts from various stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, industry leaders, and civil society. Interdisciplinary research is essential to develop a comprehensive understanding and solutions for the ethical challenges associated with AI and waste management. Researchers should work together to explore the multifaceted implications of AI technologies, drawing on insights from fields such as computer science, environmental studies, ethics, and social sciences. This collaborative approach not only enhances the depth of understanding but also ensures that diverse perspectives are incorporated into the ethical frameworks guiding AI development and deployment.

In addressing these moral imperatives, it is crucial to emphasize justice, care, and precaution while encouraging the development of models for anticipating potential hazards. Delegating responsibility to moral agents and the technologies involved is essential, as merely simulating the responsibility we have towards each other and nature is not a viable solution. The need for competent, coherent, and persistent management in the context of the climate crisis and unpredictable changes resulting from invasive and disruptive anthropic activities is evident. Quality decision-making processes are indispensable, especially now, when technology is not just an extension of human action but a creator of possibilities, techniques, and logic. A philosophy of innovative moral administration of the technological world may seem distant from the reality we face. However, confronting machinewashing necessitates clarity and deeper analysis within a research environment where concreteness, fairness, and competence prevail. Furthermore, the practical implications of AI in waste management extend beyond technical efficiency. They encompass broader ethical considerations, such as social justice, environmental sustainability, and community engagement. AI systems should be designed to support ecological balance, minimize environmental harm, and respect the rights and interests of all stakeholders. This involves transparent decision-making processes, inclusive participation, and a commitment to the public good. In this broader context, the value-sensitive design (VSD) approach emphasizes shaping technology with moral imagination, ensuring that the design and deployment of AI systems incorporate ethical considerations from the outset. VSD highlights the co-constitutive relationship

between humans and technology, where technologies not only shape but are shaped by social values and structures. This approach aligns with the World Economic Forum's recommendations for a human-centered approach to technology design, emphasizing the need for ethical and value-driven frameworks in the development of AI. VSD's tripartite methodology—comprising conceptual, empirical, and technical investigations—ensures that stakeholder values are systematically identified and addressed throughout the design process. This iterative and recursive method promotes a multi-lifespan perspective, considering the long-term and emergent effects of technologies on society (Umbrello, 2019).

Recent scholarship suggests that moving towards an ethics of AI that embraces narrative and virtue ethics can provide a more holistic and human-centered approach. This approach, inspired by the 'little ethics' of Paul Ricoeur and the virtue ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre, focuses on the narrative aspects of ethical practice. It proposes that understanding and engaging with the narratives of stakeholders and the socio-technical systems within which AI operates can lead to more ethically sound AI practices (Hayes et al., 2024). By emphasizing the importance of narrative, this perspective aligns with the broader ethical framework that includes virtues such as empathy, care, and justice. It encourages AI developers to consider the stories and experiences of those affected by their technologies, fostering a deeper ethical engagement and responsibility.

Additionally, the problem of machinewashing must be critically examined through the lens of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics challenges us to consider the moral relationship between humans and the natural world, emphasizing the need for technologies that do not merely exploit but enhance the environment. AI systems in waste management should thus be evaluated not only for their technical capabilities but also for their adherence to principles of sustainability and ecological integrity. This involves a critical assessment of how AI technologies impact the environment and whether they contribute to long-term ecological balance. In this regard, the works of contemporary environmental philosophers highlight the importance of adopting a stewardship ethic, where humans are seen as caretakers of the Earth rather than its dominators. This perspective calls for technologies that support regenerative practices, minimize waste, and promote the health of ecosystems. AI systems in waste management, therefore, should be designed with these ethical principles in mind, ensuring that they contribute positively to the environment and do not exacerbate existing ecological problems (Hayes et al., 2024).

The challenges posed by technological advancement grow exponentially alongside its expanding capabilities, with its future trajectory largely dependent on its societal and individual impact. These effects can be both disruptive and disorienting, often testing the limits of acceptance for groups that perceive innovation as a threat

to their established way of life and entrenched knowledge systems. Nonetheless, humanity's intrinsic drive for change—manifested in the desire to diversify products, enhance entertainment, expand consumption, seek information, streamline daily tasks, and explore groundbreaking scientific paradigms—renders halting technological progress neither feasible nor advisable. Technology, by its very nature, will find niches within existing systems, gradually infiltrating and destabilizing rigid frameworks until they become obsolete. Consequently, resisting technological evolution with inflexible paradigms proves ineffective, particularly given that contemporary challenges arise from the rapid dissemination of digital information, in contrast to the historically incremental development of physical tools

At the heart of every technological innovation lies an idea, and ideas possess a unique resilience—evading suppression and adapting ingeniously to circumvent limitations or censorship. As artificial intelligence continues to evolve in sophistication, it will present opportunities and possibilities that exceed current projections while simultaneously amplifying risks to societal stability and control. This is especially pertinent as novel prototypes and technological recombinations increase the mutability and transformative potential of AI, fostering unpredictability that may provoke anxiety or hinder swift, rational responses. Hence, proactive efforts to anticipate and address phenomena such as machinewashing and the manipulation of data in AI-driven processes are essential. By preemptively mitigating potential disruptions in AI-powered waste management and other critical applications, we can better prepare for the complex challenges that lie ahead. Challenges will inevitably persist, yet they do not diminish our collective capacity to anticipate, comprehend, and ultimately surmount them, thereby progressing toward more secure and proficient technologies. A paradox emerges in the diminishing fervor for technological innovation as formerly groundbreaking advancements become more affordable and seamlessly integrated into daily life. Over time, the extraordinary capabilities of ultra-advanced devices, once perceived as luxurious or belonging to the realm of science fiction, become commonplace and unremarkable. The rapid ascent of artificial intelligence presents a unique epistemic difficulty, as it defies our historical paradigm of gradual technological evolution. This difficulty stems from the distinctive manner in which humanity has historically approached the development, refinement, and adoption of new tools and technologies.

A comprehensive ethical framework is indispensable, integrating relational ethics, data privacy, the moral imperatives of scientific inquiry, and environmental stewardship. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, ensuring stringent data protection protocols, and adopting a holistic ethical paradigm, we can harness the transformative potential of AI for sustainable waste management while safeguarding

the interests of diverse stakeholders. Beyond endorsing the value of a holistic perspective on machinewashing and the ethical dimensions of emerging technologies, it becomes imperative to confront the dangers of hubris. An integrative ethical vision can serve to mitigate the detrimental impacts of excessive ambition, unwarranted intrusions of personal interests, and morally unjustifiable actions that compromise the collective good, including the rights of future generations and the stability of the climate. Addressing these ethical concerns demands more than technical solutions; it necessitates inclusive dialogue and bold, collective visions grounded in moral integrity. Such visions can foster social and psychological safety by counteracting alienation from both the human community and the environment. Personal reflection and collaborative engagement emerge as powerful instruments to expose and challenge hypocrisy, self-interest, and the exploitative treatment of nature. Delegating ethical responsibility to technological systems under the guise of imminent crises, or justifying precipitous actions through questionable rationales, risks producing counterproductive or even harmful outcomes.

In a world increasingly characterized by impatience and volatility, there is a pressing need for decision-making processes rooted in clarity, coherence, and comprehensive deliberation. This entails creating environments that promote rigorous evaluation and open debate, where divergent perspectives can be expressed freely, without fear of opposition or derision. Such spaces cultivate intellectual curiosity and enable the organic growth of knowledge. Overreliance on self-sufficiency risks stalling progress and fostering marginalization, rigidity, and arrogance.

To sustain and advance the discursiveness of thought (*diánoia*), it is vital to nurture evaluative practices that support disciplined, reflective discourse on the interplay between humanity and technology. This discourse must be anchored in ethical integrity, counteract disorder, and foster self-reflection, equitable interactions, and a spirit of non-coercive understanding. These hermeneutic processes are hallmarks of an enlightened and educated culture—one dedicated to preserving continuity, responsive to the well-being of sentient beings, and mindful of maintaining the delicate balance of ecosystems.

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Ecoexistentialism in Caspar David Friedrich Works:
An Analysis from the Perspective of Recent Cognitive Science Discoveries

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ABSTRACT. With this paper, I propose an interpretation of Caspar David Friedrich's works on the 250th anniversary of his birth. Known as a romantic painter, Friedrich explored and cultivated our deep relationship with nature through his art. From the perspective of recent discoveries in the cognitive sciences, I will analyse the ingenuity of the techniques by which, using the vast and open landscape, but also the characters represented with their backs, the artist creates the right context in which the viewer has the feeling of dissolving his self in nature, the experience of identification with the elements around and above all, the living of the present sensation, through the cleavage of the self and the activation of the experiential self. In the works of Caspar David Friedrich, I identify aspects related to existentialism and, above all, a prefiguration of immersive art that generates such existential experiences about nature.

Keywords: Ecoexistentialism, Caspar David Friedrich, Cognitive science, nature, art, experiential self

"All art should become science and all science art." these are the words of Friedrich Schlegel that best summarize the approach I am about to present. How today, 250 years after Caspar David Friedrich's birth, recent scientific discoveries in the field of cognitive sciences reveal the incredible techniques that the artist used in his work to create a context that profoundly reveals to the viewers the experience

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of nature. This leads to an exercise of ecoexistentialism, which is a way of metabolizing existential problems in relation to nature. Thus, we discover in the Caspar David Friedrich an exceptional way of representing the landscape to dissolve our self in its vastness, to feel connected with everything around and to have an immersive experience in the middle of the painting leading to its perception with our experiential self, for an authentic feeling of the present.

Caspar David Friedrich's art and manner of representing nature significantly influenced the art of the twentieth century.[1] The rear-facing figure and his relationship with the depth of landscape representation generate strong emotional, metaphysical, and transcendent experience. Friedrich was not the first to express this experience in artwork, but as Jens Christian Jensen observes, he was the "first artist to employ this theme in landscape painting."[2]

It seems that he tried to implement Goethe's concept of manner, according to which the artist must create a visual language that speaks of a connection between the soul and the painted image.[3] In this way, his landscapes reveal more than just a recording of nature, they express the silence, the sublime, transience, and eternity.[4] Consequently, his vision and creations impacted the works of several twentieth-century artists, including Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) and Mark Rothko (1903-1970).[5]

Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) drew inspiration from Friedrich, as his paintings' melancholic, city-like landscapes mirrored the metaphysical qualities of Friedrich's expression. The "Chirico City" represents "a world of silent squares, peopled with statues and shadows, and bounded by far horizons, a world of elegiac beauty and vast dignity."[6]

Also, with his work Monk by the Sea (c. 1809), Friedrich questions man's place and purpose in the vast universe, a concept that will later be formulated and cultivated in existentialism. The first step that Friedrich took in this direction was to replace the physicality of a religious building with nature and the universe.[7]

He was truly a daring innovator in terms of art, influencing its dynamics in the centuries that followed. As we will see, Caspar David Friedrich managed more than 200 years ago to represent through his art some aspects and nuances related

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[1] Berdan Alice. (2016). Caspar David Friedrich and the 20th Century. *Ibid*. Volume 9.

[2] Jens Christian Jensen. (1981). *Caspar David Friedrich: Life and Work*. New York: Barron's Education Series, Inc., p. 106.

[3] Hofmann, Werner, Caspar David Friedrich. (2000). *Caspar David Friedrich*. New York: Thames & Hudson, p. 22.

[4] William Vaughan, Helmut Börsch-Supan, and Hans Joachim Neidhardt, (1972). *Caspar Friedrich 1774- 1840: Romantic Landscape Painting in Dresden.* London: Tate Gallery, p. 10.

[5] Berdan Alice (2016). Caspar David Friedrich and the 20th Century. *Ibid*. Volume 9.

[6] James Thrall Soby. (1941). *The Early Chirico*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, p. 15.

[7] Berdan Alice. (2016). Caspar David Friedrich and the 20th Century. *Ibid.* Volume 9.

to our relationship with nature, aspects that science managed to formulate and demonstrate in the last decade. In this article, I will try to argue that there is a close link between Friedrich's art and the latest discoveries regarding the psychology of our relationship with nature. Also, I'll make a connection between the concept of ecoexistentialism and Caspar David Friedrich's art.

Open landscape and self-transcendent feelings

It is a well-known fact that our interaction with nature generates positive emotions, and it is an important factor for our well-being and mental health.[8] Even that 'nature is an under-recognized healer', as it is written in a report of the Institute for European Environmental Policy.[9]

An important aspect regarding these positive emotions is that they include a broad spectrum, ranging from emotions related to well-being, such as relaxation and joy, to emotions related to the existential dimension of our being: awe, admiration, deep connection, and freedom. A distinction between those positive emotions can be made by dividing them into self-oriented (e.g.: pride, amusement, joy) and self-transcendent emotions (awe, freedom, deep-connection, love, admiration)[10].

As a nuance of language, we can name more complex emotions - *feelings*, thus *awe* can be defined as the self-transcendent feeling of wonder experienced by the self when facing something greater and vast, beyond current understanding, a sense of being in the presence of something greater than oneself.[11], frequently described by subjects that experience panoramic views, nature, great works of art or powerful existential moments like childbirth.[12] As a reaction to the feelings of awe, we have attitudes like selflessness and increased connectedness with other

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[8] Hartig, T., Van den Berg, A. E., Hagerhall, C. M., Tomalak, M., Bauer, N., Hansmann, R., Ojala, A., Syngollitou, E., Carrus, G., Van Herzele, A., Bell, S., Podesta, M. T. C., & Waaseth, G. (2011). Health benefits of nature experience: Psychological, social and cultural processes. In K. Nilsson, M. Sangster, C. Gallis, T. Hartig, S. De Vries, K. Seeland, & J. Schipperijn (Eds.), *Forests, trees and human health*. Dordrecht: Springer Science Business and Media.

[9] Ten Brink, P., Mutafoglu, K., Schweitzer, J. P., Kettunen, M., Twigger-Ross, C., Baker, J., … Dekker, S. (2016). *The health and social benefits of nature and biodiversity protection. A report for the European Commission* (ENV. B. 3/ETU/2014/0039). London/Brussels: Institute for European Environmental Policy.

[10] Cappellen, P.V., and Saroglou, V. (2012). Awe Activates Religious and Spiritual Feelings and Behavioral Intentions. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 4, 223-236.

[11] Keltner, D. and Haidt, J. (2003). Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion. *Cognition and Emotion*, 17, 297–3147

[12] Shiota, M. N., Keltner, D. and Mossman, A. (2007). The nature of awe: Elicitors, appraisals, and effects on self-concept. *Cognition & Emotion*, 21, 944– 963.

people, with the community, and with the world, resulting in prosocial and pro-environmental behaviours / attitudes.[13]

This feeling of awe leads to an increase in the sense of connection and, on a mental level, to the perception of the dissolution of some boundaries between the subject and the environment, sometimes referred to as bodily dissolutions. This experience of loosening up boundaries between body and environment takes us to the root of selflessness and connectedness[14]. Studies indicate that selflessness elicits happiness via dissolution of perceived body boundaries[15] and also that the interaction with nature can loosen up boundaries between self and environment.[16]

Recent studies have investigated the context in which interaction with nature can lead to these self-transcended experiences.[17] The researcher investigated whether spacious, rather than dense, natural landscapes inspire feelings of selflessness and connectedness and whether these emotions and related affective states are influenced by the salience of perceived body boundaries, suggesting that spaciousness may be linked to the embodied experience of dissolving those boundaries

The participants were exposed to VR environments where they experienced different settings: open natural spaces versus closed/dense natural ones, spacious versus wild, spacious versus tended, dense versus wild, and dense versus tended.

Selflessness was measured using the self-loss subscale of the awe experience scale.[18] Items affirmations include 'I felt that my sense of self was diminished', 'I felt my sense of self shrink', 'I experienced a reduced sense of self', 'I felt my sense of self become somehow smaller', and 'I felt small compared to everything else'. Also, connectedness was measured using the connectedness subscale of Yaden et al.'s (2018) with items that were formulated as: 'I had the sense of being connected to everything', 'I felt a sense of communion with all living things', 'I experienced a sense of oneness with all things', 'I felt closely connected to humanity', and 'I had

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[13] Piff, P. K., Dietze, P., Feinberg, M., Stancato, D. M., & Keltner, D. (2015). Awe, the small self, and prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108, 883–899.

[14] Van Rompay, T. J. L. and Jol, T. (2016). Wild and free: Unpredictability and spaciousness as predictors of creative performance. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 48, 140–1491.

[15] Dambrun, M. (2016). When the dissolution of perceived body boundaries elicits happiness: The effect of selflessness induced by a body scan meditation. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 46, 89–98.

[16] Bratman, G. N., Hamilton, J. P., Hahn, K. S., et al. (2015). Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112, 8567–8572.

[17] Van Rompay, T. J. L., Oran, S., Galetzka, M., & van den Berg, A. E. (2023). Lose yourself: Spacious nature and the connected self. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 91, 1–10.

[18] Yaden, D. B., Kaufman, S. B., Hyde, E., Chirico, A., Gaggioli, A., Zhang, J. W., & Keltner, D. (2018). The development of the awe experience scale (AWE-S): A multifactorial measure for a complex emotion. *The Journal of Positive Psychology,* 14, 474–488.

a sense of complete connectedness', using 7-point rating scales. A third measurement was made on the connectedness to community using the Inclusion of Community in the Self Scale, when the respondents were asked to select the pair of circles that best expresses their relationship to the community. The six pair circles developed by Mashek et al (2007) are overlapping each slightly more than the preceding one. Also state-anxiety was measured using a short version of the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory with a 7-point rating scale related to statements such as: 'I feel upset', 'I feel frightened', 'I feel nervous', 'I am jittery', and 'I am confused'.

If we examine the VR- environment used for the experience of spacious, we will find a great similarity with Friedrich 's works that represent open landscapes. Interestingly enough, on one VR landscape we can find an oak tree similar with the one represented in Friedrich's arts. The paintings which we can make a possible connection to the ones used in this study are: *Bohemian Landscape* (c. 1810/11), *Midday* (1822), *Summer* (1807), *The Source of River Elbe* (c. 1810), *Village Landscape in Morning Light* (1822), *Oak Tree in the Snow* (1827 and 1829), *Fog in the Elbe Valley* (1821). Also there are similarities on dense-tended VR- environment with the *Chasseur in the Forest* (1813-14) and *Early Snow* (c. 1828).

Results reveal that participants experienced a greater loss of self and felt more connected in the spacious VR- environment, the type of nature (tended or wild) was not significant. Also, participants sensed less salient body boundaries in the spacious condition compared to the dense ones. Regarding the anxiety, it was lower in the spacious settings and in the tended ones.

With these remarks we can argue that also with the effects of spaciousness from other paintings such as *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) and *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen* (1818) the artist the artist facilitates the embodied experience of dissolving body boundaries and connection with the environment.

In terms of self-experience, spacious landscapes, as opposed to dense ones, create an environment that diminishes self-centeredness and fosters a deeper sense of connectedness with the broader world. Beyond aesthetics, preference, and safety considerations, spaciousness plays a crucial role in self-experience; it enables individuals to release self-referential negative thoughts and it affects their connection to their surroundings.

Back-figure and the two selves

Just as Friedrich discovered the vastness of the landscape and always returned to it in his works, he did the same with the faceless characters - *rückenfiguren* (back-figure, figure from the back). Friedrich was not the first artist to represent

back-figure in his art. Starting with the 14th century, in Italy, artists such as Giotto, Raphael and Vermeer are known to use it in their paintings. By the way he frequently employed this character in his works, sometimes in the centre of the paintings, Caspar David Friedrich is famous in the history of art with *The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, considered an archetype of this representation.

There are many interpretations of the reason why the artist chose these characters to appear in this way. It was speculated that he incorporated the rückenfiguren to create a connection with those who might at first be looking just to the landscape without reaching beyond it to melancholy, solitude, and isolation. For that kind of perception, the back-figure character can be an element sending to the metaphysical experience of the painting[19].

As Julian Jason Haladyn wrote*:*

> It functions as a placeholder we can imaginatively occupy, allowing us a virtual existence in the landscape and shaping our lines of sight within the spatial frame. Our relation to the Rückenfigur arguably produces a visual and conceptual distance by allowing us to be present in the painting even while obviously absent, the figure being our vicarious self. This distance, however, requires us to be more actively involved in the experience of the painting if we are to enter its world.[20]

Starting from here, I want to argue that, by using this character with his back, the artist complements the open landscape technique to help us reach the point of self-dissolution in nature even more. He does this by accessing our *experiential self* with his incredible intuition, the type of self that has been recently described in psychology.

The psychologist and cognitive scientist Daniel Kahneman, who was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 2002, distinguishes between two selves: the *experiencing self* and the *remembering self*.[21] The *remembering self* is a storyteller, accessing the memory and projecting the past, preventing us from living present moment. The *remembering self* helps us create and keep our identity, the story of our life and existence. The *experiencing self* is the one that lives in the present, in the *here and now*. It is also capable to reexperiencing the past by bringing all the memories and feelings in the present moment, but its main function is to help us experience the present moment.

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[19] Berdan Alice. (2016). Caspar David Friedrich and the 20th Century. *Ibid*. Volume 9.

[20] Haladyn, J. J. (2016). Friedrich's "Wanderer": Paradox of the Modern Subject. RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne. *Canadian Art Review*, 41(1), 47–61., p. 49.

[21] Kahneman D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York.

Analysing Friedrich's paintings according to Kahneman's discoveries, the difference between the experiences of the open landscapes without and with the back-faced character can be summarized as experiencing something *about* the nature, in the first case, and experiencing something *in* the nature, in the second one.

Using this technique, the painter only makes a splitting between our two selves. Looking at the character, we identify with him, we project on him our experiential self and he gives us his experience of *here and now*, not only in the front of the painting, but in the middle of it. With this projection of ourselves in the painting, we connect with the surrounding landscape, and thus, the possibility of revealing our self and identifying it with nature is absolutely possible.

If this character did not exist, our narrative self could enter the scene, which would make us think what we would feel if we were there, at which point our experiential self is inactive. In this case, it takes a more sustained effort of imagination to activate it. By identifying the experiential self with the character in the painting, we become the character, and the landscape becomes our reality. Thus, entering this kind of reality in our consciousness results in creating a kind of memory as if we were once there, a memory that our narrative self can later integrate into the story of the experience.

Conclusions

In the light of the latest scientific discoveries, what Caspar David Friedrich does to those who look at his paintings with vast landscapes and back-faced characters, is an incredible exercise in which he dissociates the two selves, activating the experiential self and projecting it in the midst of a landscape which, through its vastness, makes them dissolve themselves and identify with nature. In addition, it inoculates the viewers with some false memories, in relation to the reality of the event, as they have never been in those landscapes. Not to mention that a few of those landscapes do not even exist, as far as some of those environments were composed of disparate elements, they are real in relation to experience, and if this is what the brilliant painter wanted to convey, it seems that, in his creativity, he found the methods to do it.

Our identity, our self-transcendent emotions, the dissolution of the self, and the identification with something more than ourselves are all part of existential experiences. Experiencing them in a deep relationship with nature, they become part of *ecoexistentialism* - a way of experimenting and exploring existential problems (identity, well-being, love, death, freedom, and the meaning of life) in relation to

nature. Regarding the existential experience of identity, from the ecoexistentialist perspective, we find in Caspar David Friedrich an exploration of identity that dissolves in nature - an identification with all that is around, and also an exploration of the inner identity linked to our two selves that we experimented by projecting one of the into characters from the paintings. In this context, we can identify in Friedrich's work an artistic approach that reveals and brings our philosophical relationship with nature to the scene.

What Caspar David Friedrich does when inserting the experiential self inside the painting and surrounding it with landscape is what immersive art installations do today. In this context, we could say that the romantic painter probably foreshadowed the experience of immersive art.

Caspar David Friedrich is one of the most representative artists of all time who deeply explored man's relationship with nature and cultivated it through his art. His approach remains current, just as the words of Schubert (1780 – 1860) about Friedrich are still relevant today, describing him as "a painter of nature out of time, whose mind seems to be deeply attuned to the innermost meaning of nature."[22]

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La femme dans l'univers de Bernanos :
entre tentation et rédemption

Léna HOBEIKA[*]

ABSTRACT. The Woman in the World of Bernanos: Between Temptation and Redemption. The article offers an in-depth analysis of the role of female figures in Bernanos' work, highlighting their ambivalence as symbols of suffering, temptation, and redemption. Tormented by evil and sin, they embody the tragic image of an era marked by major existential and spiritual crises. However, far from being reduced to the demonic or mere agents of evil, they also represent figures of resilience and spiritual regeneration in a world on the path of secularization. Deeply influenced by Catholicism and Carmelite mysticism, Bernanos emphasizes the salvific dimension of women, focusing on the crucial role of suffering and sacrifice as privileged paths to salvation. Oscillating between spiritual aspiration and the failings of the human soul, Bernanos' characters transcend classical stereotypes and the expectations of a patriarchal society, thus opening a broad field of reflection on the human condition, as well as on the notions of redemption and salvation. Through a poignant style that merges the real and the imaginary, Bernanos provides a complex vision of the feminine condition, denouncing the gradual loss of faith in a world subjected to historical optimism and prevailing materialism.

Keywords: holiness, spirituality, demonism, temptation, redemption, good, evil

RESUMÉ : L'article propose une analyse approfondie du rôle des figures féminines dans l'œuvre de Bernanos, mettant en lumière leur ambivalence en tant que symboles de souffrance, de tentation et de rédemption. Tourmentées par le Mal et le péché,

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elles incarnent l'image tragique d'une époque marquée par des crises existentielles et spirituelles majeures. Toutefois, loin de se réduire au démoniaque ou à de simples agents du mal, elles constituent également des figures de résilience de régénération spirituelle dans un monde en voie de sécularisation. Profondément imprégné par le catholicisme et la mystique carmélitaine, Bernanos valorise la dimension salvatrice de la femme, mettant l'accent sur le rôle crucial de la souffrance et du sacrifice comme voies privilégiées pour accéder au salut. Oscillant entre aspiration spirituelle et défaillances de l'âme humaine, les personnages bernanosiens transcendent les stéréotypes classiques et les attentes d'une société patriarcale, ouvrant ainsi un vaste champ de réflexion sur la condition humaine, ainsi que sur les notions de rédemption et de salut. À travers un style poignant, fusionnant le réel et l'imaginaire, Bernanos offre une vision complexe de la condition féminine, dénonçant la perte progressive de la foi dans un monde soumis à l'optimisme historique et au matérialisme ambiant.

Mots-clés : sainteté, spiritualité, démonisme, tentation, rédemption, bien, mal

La figure féminine occupe une place considérable chez Bernanos et se manifeste sous plusieurs aspects, reflétant la vision d'un monde dévasté par les guerres et les conflits. Dans ses œuvres, la femme est souvent représentée comme une figure d'aspiration spirituelle et de fragilité humaine, permettant d'explorer des thèmes divers tels que le mal, la grâce, la tentation et la rédemption. Confrontées à la souffrance et à des dilemmes intérieurs, la plupart de ses héroïnes sont constamment tiraillées entre le bien et le mal, affrontant de nombreux défis dans une société en déclin. Dans cette perspective, il serait pertinent de commencer par analyser la représentation de la femme démoniaque chez Bernanos, symbolisant les forces du mal et traduisant la vision tragique d'un monde qui sombre dans le néant. Nous montrerons ensuite que cette représentation du démoniaque est étroitement liée au fantastique, voire au fantasmagorique, où les personnages, perdant leurs repères, finissent par sombrer dans la démence et la folie. La fiction bernanosienne prend ainsi la forme d'un récit onirique destiné à dévoiler les angoisses et les inquiétudes de l'homme dans un monde où le mal semble se propager de manière inexorable. Enfin, nous démontrerons que, loin de se conformer aux modèles et aux archétypes traditionnels, la femme, bien qu'incarnant le mal et le péché, revêt une dimension paradoxale, sa souffrance étant une voie vers le salut éternel. Par le biais d'un style percutant, Bernanos tend à saisir la complexité de la condition féminine, proposant une vision plus profonde et nuancée du réel.

La femme démoniaque : métaphore de l'âme humaine

Dans l'univers bernanosien, la femme incarne souvent les forces du Mal, symbolisant un monde déchu ayant perdu la foi. Dans *Sous le soleil de Satan*, la jeune Mouchette, en agissant comme tentatrice, joue un rôle crucial dans la déstabilisation de l'abbé Donissan, un prêtre dévoué qui mène un combat intense contre le mal. Rongée par le vice et l'orgueil, elle se trouve sous l'emprise d'une possession démoniaque qui la conduit à sa propre destruction et à son anéantissement : « cette mystique ingénue, petite servante de Satan, sainte Brigitte du néant [1]». Acculée à la solitude, elle cède au désespoir, malgré les tentatives du prêtre pour la ramener vers la foi. Elle exerce aussi une puissante attraction sur le curé de Lumbres, qui, doté du don de lire dans les âmes, tente de lui faire comprendre les racines profondes de son mal-être. Ses déceptions consécutives sont liées au diable, qui abuse de sa souffrance et de ses tourments intérieurs pour la posséder. À la figure de Germaine s'ajoute celle de Ginette, une aristocrate au comportement débridé, épouse d'un homme désabusé et confinée dans le jeu des apparences.

Malgré sa beauté extérieure, elle apparaît comme un être instable, reflet d'une société chaotique et corrompue où les normes se délitent. Elle entretient aussi une relation ambiguë avec Monsieur Ouine, un personnage énigmatique, qui parvient à séduire ses victimes en usant de ses talents pédagogiques. Exclue de la société de Fenouille, elle constitue une aberration par rapport à la norme, illustrant l'image d'une civilisation décadente qui court à sa perte. Par ailleurs, il convient de souligner que le personnage démoniaque chez Bernanos est un transgresseur, réclamant son émancipation sociale et familiale. Dans *Sous le soleil de Satan*, Germaine se dresse contre l'autorité patriarcale incarnée par trois hommes : son père, brasseur républicain bourgeois, le marquis de Cadignan et le docteur Gallet. Animée d'un désir de liberté, elle aspire à échapper à une vie insignifiante et à fuir le carcan familial, dans l'espoir de trouver un homme capable de l'aimer. Blessée dans son orgueil et déçue par son attitude, elle le tue dans une scène de confrontation violente. Loin d'être anodin, son geste criminel s'apparente à un acte autodestructeur, symbolisant sa souffrance et son désespoir dans un monde en faillite. De surcroît, dans *La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette*, l'auteur dépeint une jeune fille rongée par le vice, qui se réfugie dans le mensonge, affrontant seule une société malsaine et profondément inhumaine : « le mensonge n'a jamais paru répréhensible à Mouchette, car mentir est sans doute l'unique privilège des misérables[2]». Symbole d'une enfance

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[1] Georges, BERNANOS. « Sous le Soleil de Satan ». *Œuvres romanesques*. Paris : Gallimard, coll. « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », 1961, p. 137.

[2] Georges, BERNANOS. Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, *op.cit.,* p.1305.

déchue, Mouchette subit le mépris de son entourage et devient la victime d'Arsène, qui lui impose son désir par la force. À l'instar de Germaine Malhorty, elle souffre d'un vide intérieur, cherchant à affronter une société décadente qui sombre dans la misère et la débauche. Victime de la haine d'une société mesquine qui transforme la victime en coupable, elle apparaît comme l'héritière de la trame universelle du Mal. Par ailleurs, dans *Monsieur Ouine*, Jambe-de-Laine est un personnage marqué par une folie obsessionnelle, adoptant un comportement à la fois maniaque et déréglé. Animée par des pulsions meurtrières, elle ressemble à une amazone évoluant dans un univers chaotique et inhumain. À la fois douce et brutale, hideuse et magnifique, elle échappe à toute classification, réfutant les contraintes imposées par la société bien-pensante. Elle devient même l'objet d'une violence collective, lynchée par les hommes de la paroisse qui cherchent à exorciser en elle « l'image mystérieuse de leur propre abjection[3]». Réputée pour sa traque des jeunes gens et parcourant les routes derrière sa diablesse de jument, Ginette sème le trouble dans le village, contribuant au dérèglement de la société et à la faillite de l'ancien ordre chrétien. Par ailleurs, il est à signaler que la plupart des êtres démoniaques sont en réalité des enfants, victimes d'adultes prédateurs qui les maltraitent.

Dans la plupart de ses romans, Bernanos dépeint des enfants soumis à des abus physiques, émotionnels ou spirituels, comme c'est le cas de Germaine Malorthy et Mouchette, qui illustrent cette dimension de manière significative. Confrontées à un monde brutal et inhumain, elles subissent la dépravation d'adultes malveillants qui ont saccagé leur enfance. À seize ans, Germaine est enceinte du marquis de Cadignan, tandis que Mouchette est dépeinte comme une jeune fille ayant perdu son innocence dès un âge précoce. Vouées à la solitude, toutes deux se caractérisent par leur hermétisme et semblent inaptes à communiquer avec autrui, offrant l'image d'un monde individualiste où les relations sociales se détériorent. Face à la figure de l'enfance spirituelle, Bernanos met en scène des adolescentes maltraitées, dénonçant une génération désœuvrée ainsi que les dérives d'une société en pleine sécularisation, qui s'anéantit en détruisant sa jeunesse. Très impliqué les problèmes de son époque, il dresse le portrait de la France de l'entre-deux-guerres, soumise à la débâcle du patriarcat et à l'effondrement de l'ancien ordre chrétien. Menons notre analyse plus loin en affirmant que la conception du démoniaque chez Bernanos repose sur l'angoisse et pourrait être rapprochée de la vision de Kierkegaard, qui affirme que « l'individu est dans la sphère du mal et il est angoissé devant le bien (…) le démoniaque est une servitude où l'on n'est pas affranchi du bien[4]». Contrairement

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3   *Idem*., Monsieur Ouine, *op.cit.*, p.1498.
4   Soren, KIERKEGAARD. *Concept de l'angoisse*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990, p. 276.

à François Mauriac, qui assimile le démoniaque à une manifestation psychologique, Bernanos lui confère une dimension surnaturelle, afin de mieux rendre compte du tragique d'un monde où les paroisses se dévitalisent et où les valeurs se dégradent. Face à la sécularisation et à la perte de la foi, qui affectent la France depuis le XIXe siècle, l'auteur renouvelle ses choix esthétiques pour exprimer le mal-être de l'homme, ses souffrances et ses profondes inquiétudes spirituelles. Largement influencé par le satanisme d'Aurevilly et la vision baudelairienne du Mal, Bernanos s'écarte de la tradition en mettant en place une représentation renouvelée du diable, afin de retranscrire le tragique mystère du salut. Bien qu'il emprunte des motifs propres aux héros de la tragédie antique, tels que la révolte, la démesure et la liberté, le tragique chez Bernanos ne repose plus sur la fatalité divine, mais est étroitement lié à la perte de foi et à la dégradation des valeurs. Chez lui, la représentation traditionnelle du tragique, fondée sur la fatalité et la relation conflictuelle entre les hommes et les dieux, s'éclipse progressivement au profit d'une exploration plus approfondie de l'âme humaine, visant à dévoiler ses zones d'ombre, ses paradoxes et ses contradictions. Le roman bernanosien se place ainsi sous le signe d'une écriture de l'intériorité, où le personnage n'est plus seulement un moteur de l'action, mais aussi un déchiffreur d'une réalité complexe, jalonnée de défis.

Féminité et démesure : entre démonisme, onirisme et folie

Le thème de la femme démoniaque est étroitement lié à l'onirisme et au surnaturel, qui ne se limitent pas à de simples artifices stylistiques, mais constituent des moyens cruciaux pour explorer la dimension spirituelle et surnaturelle de l'existence. En effet, l'occultisme, le démonisme et le satanisme connaissent un essor considérable à la fin du XIXe siècle, reflétant l'image d'une société à la croisée des chemins, partagée entre le monde matériel et la quête de l'indicible. Cet engouement pour les pratiques ésotériques et l'occultisme vise ainsi à défier la suprématie du rationalisme et du déterminisme historique, qui conduisent l'humanité à sa perte. Comme de nombreux écrivains de l'entre-deux-guerres, Bernanos manifeste un vif intérêt pour le fantastique, emportant le lecteur dans un univers insolite et étrange. Il convient tout d'abord de souligner que le motif du rêve occupe une place prépondérante dans son œuvre, étant cette « autre scène » où s'affrontent les forces inconciliables qui forment la psyché humaine. Dans *Un Mauvais rêve*, Simone Alfieri, qui se hait depuis l'enfance, se livre entièrement au mensonge et son crime prend la forme d'un rêve maléfique, dévoilant la noirceur de son âme et ses haines dissimulées : « (…) la scène qu'elle allait vivre se dessinât tout à coup à ses yeux comme sur un

écran magique[5]». Les images oniriques illustrent le drame ontologique de l'être, possédant un potentiel révélateur qui met à nu les impulsions, les affects et les désirs de l'individu. Le rêve est ainsi imprégné de négativité ; il n'est plus associé à une dynamique de projet édifiant et constructif, mais devient synonyme de perdition et de dépossession de soi. À cela s'ajoute le motif du double, un thème fantastique par excellence, qui traduit la scission intérieure du personnage, en proie à une profonde crise morale et spirituelle. Dans la plupart de ses romans, Bernanos met en scène des personnages dédoublés et instables qui scrutent leur reflet dans la glace, à l'instar de Simone Alfieri, qui observe son image dans le miroir avant d'accomplir son crime : « La glace usée ne laissait paraître qu'une sorte de nappe diffuse, rayée d'ombre, où elle croyait voir descendre et monter sa face livide, ainsi que du fond d'une eau trouble[6] ». De même, dans *Sous le Soleil de Satan*, la jeune Mouchette, rongée par le Mal, se suicide devant son miroir : « La glace connut seule ce nouveau regard de Mouchette la grimace frénétique de ses lèvres[7] ».

Chez Bernanos, le miroir n'est pas un simple accessoire ou élément du décor ; il revêt une signification profonde, reflétant la dualité et le dérèglement des personnages qui sombrent dans la folie. Confrontés à un monde absurde, ces êtres démoniaques souffrent d'un manque, voire d'un vide ontologique, exprimant « chacun à leur manière, un peu de la grande inquiétude […] que porte en lui tout homme capable de réfléchir devant un univers incompréhensible[8]». Par ailleurs, il est à ajouter que la plupart des personnages se caractérisent par leur monstruosité et sont souvent comparés à des animaux, ce qui met en évidence leur déchéance physique et morale. Pour évoquer la cruauté et l'inhumanité de ces êtres démoniaques, le romancier choisit des images de félins comme c'est le cas de Simone Alfieri, décrite avec des griffes « y enfonça cruellement ses dix griffes[9] », ou encore de Germaine Malhorty, comparée à un jeune félin, qui essaye avec ivresse « ses muscles adultes, ses dents et ses griffes[10]». Ces images métaphoriques renforcent ainsi la perception des personnages comme des êtres dégradés et médiocres, régis par leurs instincts destructeurs et leurs passions démesurées. Chez Bernanos, le drame de la chair est omniprésent et l'hystérisation du corps constitue l'unique langage de la rébellion féminine contre les contraintes d'une société patriarcale. La folie, loin d'être une

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[5] Georges, BERNANOS. Un Mauvais rêve, *op. cit.,* p.1003.

[6] Georges, BERNANOS. Un Mauvais rêve, *op. cit.,* p. 1017.

[7] *Idem*, Sous le Soleil de Satan, *op.cit.,* p.207.

[8] Julien, GREEN. « Notice sur Sud -Textes de Julien Green ». *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3. Paris : Gallimard, coll. « Bibliothèque de La Pléiade, 1961, p.1719.

[9] Georges, BERNANOS. Un Mauvais rêve, *op.cit.,* p.1015.

[10] *Idem.,* Sous le soleil de Satan*, op.cit.,* p.75.

simple pathologie mentale, est perçue comme un moyen de transcender les frontières du réel et de défier les limites imposées par le rationalisme. Bien qu'à première vue, le récit bernanosien semble classique, il entraîne progressivement le lecteur dans un univers onirique, tout en révélant que l'homme ne se contente pas de vivre dans le monde matériel, mais frôle également les frontières du monde invisible. Menons notre étude plus loin en affirmant que le développement de la psychologie a permis à Bernanos d'innover dans la conception de ses personnages, en mettant en scène des névrosés, des déments et des obsessionnels qui contemplent leurs propres dérèglements. Aux antipodes du roman réaliste, Bernanos s'oriente vers une nouvelle forme d'approfondissement de ses personnages, afin de mieux saisir le tragique du monde moderne et la complexité de l'âme humaine. Face à la dominance du positivisme et du rationalisme, considérés comme les seules voies d'accès à la vérité, Bernanos choisit un « réalisme onirique », visant à rendre compte des mésaventures de l'homme dans un monde en pleine sécularisation. Son œuvre s'apparente donc à l'irréalité du rêve, défiant les explications rationnelles et les conventions religieuses pour englober l'indicible et l'ineffable. Bien que profondément ancrée dans une tradition carmélitaine, elle laisse apparaître une forme de « mystique sauvage », où le sacré et le profane s'entrecroisent, offrant une vision plus profonde et authentique du réel. Mêlant métaphysique et matérialisme, Bernanos développe une « esthétique du paradoxe », où le surnaturel s'inscrit dans les aspects les plus concrets du quotidien, révélant ainsi une continuité indissoluble entre le charnel et le spirituel, l'immanence et la transcendance.

La femme, un mécanisme salvateur

Bien que la femme prenne, dans l'œuvre de Bernanos, une dimension démoniaque, elle revêt également une dimension salvatrice, voire christique. Dans *Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette*, la jeune Mouchette incarne le mythe du bouc émissaire, victime d'une société mesquine qui inverse les rôles en la transformant en coupable. Enfermée dans une spirale infernale de souffrance, cette adolescente taciturne s'adonne au suicide comme la seule voie pour accéder au salut : « Mouchette se laissa glisser sur la côte jusqu'à ce qu'elle sentit le long de sa jambe et jusqu'à son flanc la douce morsure de l'eau froide[11] ». En acceptant la fatalité de son destin, elle se soumet entièrement au sacrifice, percevant la mort comme une force à la fois libératrice et rédemptrice. Bien qu'elle n'affiche aucune conviction religieuse,

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[11] Georges, BERNANOS. Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, *op.cit.,* p.1345.

Mouchette n'est pas exclue du pardon ; elle incarne la parabole de l'Agneau immolé, traduisant une vision catholique de la souffrance et une forme de solidarité fraternelle au sein de la communauté chrétienne. Aussi, dans *Monsieur Ouine*, Ginette représente le mythe du bouc émissaire, subissant le mépris et la haine des villageois. Rejetée par son entourage et marquée par des traits de victimisation, elle symbolise la dégradation des valeurs morales et spirituelles. Elle devient l'objet d'une « idolâtrie haineuse » et finit par être lynchée par les hommes de la paroisse, qui projettent sur elle leurs tensions et leur haine : « le mouvement inconscient de la foule avait dès ce moment le caractère de sollicitude effrayante qui marque la première approche vers sa proie d'un animal affamé [12]». Par ailleurs, dans *La Joie*, Chantal de Clergie, incarne l'esprit thérésien dans un monde dominé par la puissance implacable du Mal et du péché. Profondément influencé par sa lecture de l'autobiographie spirituelle de sainte Thérèse de Lisieux et de *La Nuit obscure* de Jean de la Croix, Bernanos explore la spiritualité carmélitaine qui imprègne l'ensemble de son œuvre. Dotée d'un esprit de simplicité et d'une humble allégresse, Chantal incarne la grâce de l'enfance et la tradition de vivre au jour le jour, trouvant la joie dans les petites choses du quotidien: « une pauvreté surnaturelle, fondamentale, avait brillé sur son enfance [13]». Sa vie, marquée par la piété et l'abstinence, renvoie à un état de dessaisissement intérieur, où l'homme s'unit au divin dans une dynamique de confiance et d'abandon. À l'instar des prêtres saints, Chantal se dépouille de tous les biens matériels pour embrasser une vie de dévotion et de piété. Elle devient ainsi le symbole d'une foi immuable, se dressant contre les forces du Mal, représentées par son père, un historien médiocre, sa grand-mère, très attachée à ses clés, et Fiodor, le chauffeur éthéromane. Faisant preuve de dévouement, elle s'engage dans le monde réel et apparaît comme le symbole de de notre faiblesse, puisqu'elle « intègre la finitude de l'homme, ses limites, ses manques, la marque de ses blessures, les lignes sombres de ses misères psychiques ou morales, cachées ou patentes (…) [14]». À l'opposé de la figure traditionnelle du saint, qui se consacre exclusivement à la prière et à la méditation, Chantal agit dans le monde réel en établissant un dialogue avec autrui. Loin des héros dotés d'attributs surhumains, elle est dépeinte comme un personnage profondément humain, dont l'épreuve surnaturelle s'inscrit dans le prolongement du quotidien : « Chantal ne vit pas seulement, en effet, de la prière, de l'oraison ou de la méditation – en un mot de la contemplation. Elle assume aussi

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[12] *Idem*., Monsieur Ouine, *op.cit.,* p.1498-1499.

[13] Georges, BERNANOS. La Joie, *op.cit.,* p.553.

[14] Jean, CLAPIER. « Aimer jusqu'à mourir d'Amour ». Approche du mystère pascal chez Thérèse de Lisieux ». *Nouvelle revue théologique*, vol. 126, no. 3, 2004, p.420-434.

le risque d'un affrontement avec le monde [15]». Elle ne cherche pas à fuir la douleur, mais à la confronter, tout en montrant que la sainteté ne réside pas seulement dans la contemplation, mais aussi dans l'action. Par son dévouement envers autrui, Chantal incarne une forme de sainteté active et militante, assumant sa mission jusqu'au sacrifice. Dans un monde dominé par le nihilisme et l'immoralisme, l'écrivain prêche la spiritualité carmélitaine, tout en invitant le lecteur à suivre la voie de l'humilité, qu'il considère comme l'unique rempart contre l'absurdité et la vacuité du monde moderne. À la figure de Chantal se joint celle de Jeanne d'Arc, qui réunit des vertus particulièrement chères à Bernanos, telles que l'audace, l'héroïsme et l'honneur chevaleresque. Dans son essai *Jeanne, relapse et sainte*, Bernanos met en lumière la faiblesse et l'impuissance de la jeune pucelle, tout en condamnant la lâcheté et la défaillance des autorités religieuses : « toute rouge de colère, avec les yeux pleins de larmes [16]» ; « elle riposte d'un tel cri de détresse [17]». Menons notre analyse plus loin en affirmant que Bernanos dresse le portrait de femmes pieuses, symbolisant une forme de sagesse, de lucidité, ainsi qu'une capacité à percevoir la vérité au-delà des apparences. Chez lui, les femmes ne sont ni idéalisées, ni dotées d'attributs surhumains ; elles sont profondément humaines, marquées par la souffrance, et symbolisant une voie de régénération spirituelle. Bien qu'il s'inspire d'une large tradition biblique et carmélitaine, Bernanos propose une conception innovante de la sainteté, où la transcendance coexiste avec les tentations et les défis de la vie terrestre. Il tend à révéler la souffrance et les épreuves auxquelles sont confrontés les saints, contrairement aux romanciers qui ont voulu peindre des figures sublimes, angéliques et infaillibles. Profondément révolté contre une Église embourgeoisé, Bernanos prône une vision renouvelée de la sainteté, perçue comme une lutte pour les idéaux de justice et de fraternité. Loin des institutions religieuses et des dogmes, l'auteur cherche une expérience plus authentique de la sainteté, alliant à la fois le temporel et le spirituel, l'immanence et la transcendance. Pour lui, la sainteté s'accomplit à travers la liaison avec le pécheur, et l'opération de la grâce ne peut se réaliser sans cette solidarité rédemptrice, favorisant une transformation radicale de l'être dans son essence ontologique. Dans un monde dominé par les démagogies et les puissances intellectuelles, Bernanos plaide pour un christianisme de l'incarnation, reposant sur le dévouement et le sens du sacrifice. Fidèle à sa foi catholique, il

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[15] Michel, ESTÈVE. « La jeune fille : recherche de l'absolu dans le mal et dans le bien Mouchette et Chantal de Clergerie ». *Bernanos et les âges de la vie* sous la direction d'André Not, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2012, p.19-32.

[16] Georges, BERNANOS. « Jeanne relapse et sainte ». *Essais et Écrits de combat*, vol. 1. Paris : Gallimard, coll. « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », 1971, p.23.

[17]*Ibid.,* p.28.

prône une « Église invisible », fondée sur la souffrance purificatrice comme voie de sanctification et de communion avec l'amour divin. Face à la modernisation de l'Église catholique, l'auteur élabore une forme de sainteté militante, incarnée par des êtres charnels qui cherchent à préserver leur intégrité tout en luttant contre l'incrédulité du monde moderne. En tant qu'écrivain engagé, Bernanos nous offre un regard profondément humain sur la condition féminine où la femme sort du cadre traditionnel qui lui est attribué pour retranscrire le tragique d'une société en dégénérescence. Pour lui, les vérités spirituelles ne sont pas abstraites, elles se manifestent à travers les expériences humaines et les aspects de la vie ordinaire.

Conclusion

En somme, Bernanos met en scène la condition féminine à travers des personnages qui, malgré leurs vertus et leurs nobles aspirations, se trouvent emportés par leurs faiblesses et leur désespoir. Dans ses œuvres, la femme n'est jamais idéalisée ; elle est souvent dépeinte comme un être à la fois sublime et misérable, incarnant une dualité entre la chair et l'esprit, le péché et la grâce. Loin des stéréotypes et des attentes patriarcales de son époque, il dépeint des femmes plongées dans des souffrances profondes, tiraillées entre leurs désirs personnels et les impératifs sociaux. Dans un monde où les structures sociales sont disloquées, Bernanos propose une vision complexe de la condition féminine, dénonçant le matérialisme et le progrès technologique qui prévalent sur les valeurs morales et spirituelles. Sa représentation de la femme n'est pas unidimensionnelle ; elle est profondément ancrée dans sa vision catholique et s'inscrit dans une réflexion plus large sur l'homme et la société. En tant qu'écrivain engagé, il nous livre une réflexion approfondie sur le rôle de la femme, non seulement dans la société, mais aussi dans la quête du salut, à une époque où les valeurs chrétiennes semblent vaciller sous l'assaut du modernisme. Par le biais d'un style oscillant entre subjectivisme et objectivisme, ainsi qu'entre métaphysique et matérialisme, Bernanos aborde la condition féminine de ma manière novatrice, tout en exprimant sa désapprobation envers le monde moderne. En étroite interaction avec les événements socio-politiques de son époque, il offre un regard perspicace sur la société, invitant le lecteur contemporain à réfléchir sur le rapport entre le personnel et le social, le sacré et le profane.

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The Socratic Imperative and Philosophical Autonomy

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ABSTRACT. The Socratic imperative to examine one's own life is linked to the fundamental moral idea of personal autonomy. Therefore, it is quite difficult to reject it, but it is equally challenging to apply it for various reasons. If it is philosophically assumed, a distilled version of the Socratic imperative has significant implications for one's meta-philosophical options and the way we conceive of philosophical education. I argue that a commitment to the Socratic imperative implies a commitment to what I call "philosophical autonomy", namely an intellectual obligation to map the space of (meta-)philosophical options and position oneself in the dialectical theoretical space as close as possible to those philosophical subjects that are relevant for the task of examination of one's life.

Keywords: the Socratic imperative, philosophical autonomy, meta-philosophy, philosophy as a way of life

I.The Socratic imperative

It is hard to find an introductory book or course about philosophy without some reference to the Socratic dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living" (Socrates, as quoted in Plato, Apology, 37B, trans. Benjamin Jowett). It has become part of the job description of a philosopher, and a mission statement for philosophy. It is an easy-to-sell dictum in universities: students think that they are in the right place, a 101-philosophy course, and are on the right track examining, for a semester

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or so, their lives. By taking the philosophy course, they will rise above the crowd and embrace a life of deeper meaning and purpose, a life worth living. However, the dictum is problematic, given that it is not clear what examining one's life amounts to and why only the examined life is one that is worth living. These are important questions and a good starting point for a professor teaching her/his 101-philosophy course, as well as for this paper.

According to Socrates, to examine is to discuss virtues and investigate the big problems of life. "And if I say again", he remarks, "that daily to discourse about virtue, and of those other things about which you hear me examining myself and others, is the greatest good of man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you are still less likely to believe me". For Socrates virtue is knowledge, knowledge of the human good, and vice is ignorance. If one does not know the human good, she/he is likely to do, randomly, good or bad things. Only if she/he knows what good, truth and beauty are, will she/he do good deeds, will be truthful and will have a beautiful character and a fulfilling life. This is because, in his view, humans always and necessarily want to do what is good. All our actions are explicitly or implicitly driven by some conception of the human good and if I know what the good life truly is, then I will also do good deeds. Our main duty is to live the good life and thus, to know the good. This means that we must examine our life in order not to live the least worthy of lives, one of ignorance, and thus, even unknown to us, a possible immoral life.

I do not want to defend here the Socratic project, as unpacked above, with all its assumptions. However, it is useful to distinguish the building blocks of the Socratic imperative. One is the idea that examining one's life is a precondition for living the good life. Another one that an evil life in not worth living, but only a good one is. Any of these two elements can be rejected, resulting in different versions of the Socratic imperative. Rejecting the first idea leaves open the possibility that one could live an unexamined but good life that it is worth living. One could be the recipient of a great amount of moral luck for example, and thus live, by chance, a good life. Even if she/he lived without considering the consequences of her/his actions, her/his life's trajectory or the features of her/his character, the life we are envisioning might still be a good one.

Regarding the first idea, that examining one's life is a precondition for living the good life, we can identify two interpretations. The first one is that the act of examining one's life has only instrumental value: reflecting on one's existential condition, with its particular features, is necessary in order to obtain whatever constitutes the good life. In order to assert that the unexamined life, *good or bad*, is not worth living, one must attribute intrinsic value to the epistemic act of self-examination.

We could further dissect the imperative, and remark that even if a good life necessarily incorporates the act of examination, the examination might be done by someone else. It is an open question if one can externalize the effort of examining one's life. Socrates probably would reject this option, although not in an easy manner. He thinks that his conversations are a kind of alethic midwifery procedure, equivalent to the process of examination. The passivity of his partners in the Platonic dialogues is proof that an examined life is not necessary one of solitary self-examination and might be in big part undertaken by someone else. One could argue, also, that any life, whatever its epistemic and moral features, is worth living, even an unexamined life of vice and corruption. This thesis might be put on a Kantian orbit: if we are referring to the life of a person, we are talking about a being with intrinsic value, given that she/he has will (good or bad) and reason.

We have thus two dimensions in the Socratic imperative: the moral one (good or bad life), and the epistemic one (unexamined or examined life) and we have four possible lives: good and examined, good and unexamined, bad and examined, and bad and unexamined. Every dimension can be unpacked in different ways. The good life can be understood, considering virtue ethics, as a life of excellence and character, where a person cultivates virtues (like courage, wisdom, temperance, justice) and seeks eudaimonia (flourishing). From a Kantian perspective, the good life is one lived in accordance with universal moral principles (derived from the categorical imperative). In an utilitarian framework, a good life is one where one seeks to increase general happiness and reduce suffering for the greatest number of beings. From an existentialist perspective, a good life is one of authenticity and responsibility. In a religious interpretation, the good life is one of devotion, love, compassion, and transcendence. And so on. To examine one's life can also mean, in practice, many things: one can reflect philosophically on one's life, can explore in an artistic manner her/his biography, or one can meditate in order to understand his condition. The examination, whatever the method, has as final goal understanding. Understanding can, in its turn, be understood in many ways. Scientific or philosophical understanding is explicit, conceptual and theoretical, while artistic or religious understanding is non-theoretical, sometimes conceptual and sometimes implicit (as a form of know-how). From a philosophical perspective, I will argue in what follows, understanding one's life involves a certain path, one that is mandatory for philosophers.

Before exploring what I call "the imperative of philosophical autonomy", we should give credit to the Socratic imperative in its most convincing interpretation: it is very plausible to believe that a good, noble and examined life is worth living; that a good and examined life is better than a good but unexamined life; and that, finally,

a good life described as good *because* it is examined, is better that all lives. Why so? Because if someone examines her/his life and acts in accordance with a conception of the human good, then this makes the good life *her/his life*. The goodness, if any, of hers/his intentions and actions is not, in this case accidental, but intrinsic to hers/his existential project. She/he is not just the actor of hers/his actions, but also the screenwriter and director of her/his good life. By examining the life one is living, it truly becomes one's own.

But what if the concept of *the good life* is meaningless? The examined life is part of the good life because, one could argue, the human life is a value-centered life. And the examination is necessary to discover the proper values that ought to be at the center of one's life. The good life is one that, in addition to being examined, we could add, is a happy and flourishing one. It is open to debate if there is a coherent knowable set of values connected to happiness and human flourishing. Maybe there is no such set, or it is not accessible to humans through reason or philosophy. In that case, we need a form of philosophical therapy, in hope that we will learn how to live given this skepticism or nihilism regarding the problem of the good life. Regardless of such problematic options, I think that it is plausible to consider that the examined life is still better that the unexamined life because examining one's life relates to understanding the human condition, the personal existential predicament, and the moral dilemmas one faces. To live is to be conscious and understand the experiences and existential options. The examined life, regardless of the question of the good life seems, thus, necessary for having a richer experience of life. And a life lived more fully *because* it is understood is better than a life lived with less philosophical awareness (and thus less understood).

The Socratic imperative is an epistemic and ethical imperative. Stripped of certain substantial problematic claims that are part of the Socratic project, in its soft formulation, the imperative says that we must examine our life in order to live a better life. The ethical dimension of the imperative needs to be stressed. To examine one's life, in a minimal sense, one necessarily needs to formulate, in some situations, considerations that justify his/her actions considering some set of coherent values.

Even this stripped-down version of the imperative might be considered ambiguous and thus problematic. Are we supposed to examine every action we undertake or every situation we find ourselves in? Examining every action is impossible, and examining some actions is sometimes undesirable. Impossible for lack of time, and undesirable because it undermines some quality of experience and of the action, like being in the flow. This quality, one might argue, is essential for the good outcome of some actions, for example, in the case of performing an artistic act or responding to an emergency. Thinking of an action can be done during, after

or before an action. If it is done during the action, it changes its structure. Thus, the standard of reflective rational action is not necessary for every action. In some cases, we are in the process of prospective deliberation, deliberation done to choose a course of action. In other cases, we are just acting, having no time for deliberation, or we are in the flow, and it is just not appropriate to reflect. But we can and must, one might argue, engage in a prospective and retrospective examination of our actions even in such cases, when it is possible. Yes, some actions are done out of habit, or in the flow, or in a kind of "fluent agency" (cf. Kornblith 2010; Railton 2009; Arpaly and Schroeder 2012). In such cases my dispositions or moral reflexes could be the appropriate object of prospective or retrospective examination.[1] However, even if we restrict the domain of reflection, theoretical philosophical reflection might be epistemically paralyzing.[2]

Second, as mentioned, the requirement to formulate for oneself a coherent set of values is highly demanding and might be impossible. It can be thought of as an ideal that guides us, and in practice a continuous project. It is an open question if such a coherent set of values even exists. If there is, then we are also faced with problems regarding justification. Such values are either self-evident, or they have to be derived from other values (and not facts, if we accept the standard is-ought divide). In the end, some values or their alethic correspondent, necessary moral truths, must be postulated, due to the problem of being stuck in an infinite argumentative regress. However, some basic moral principles, e.g. "Do not hurt an innocent person!" or complex general ones like the utilitarian principle or the categorical imperative, are not self-evident or necessary moral truths.

Finally, we can ask ourselves what beauty is, truth or the good, friendship or solidarity, understanding or self-development. But we can ask also why to pursue them in the first place. The examined life presupposes deliberation (prospective deliberation) and retrospective examination, but also meta-deliberation. It is one thing to ask myself what I should do, given my set of values, or if my past actions are in line with these values, and another to ask myself if my values are the right ones, if they deserve pursuing, to ask what the act of pursuing values amounts to and what it actually means to reflect and understand (i.e. examine). At this point, it becomes evident that the imperative of examining one's life necessary leads to different important conceptual problems that must be examined. Thus, even if there are different types of examination (or understanding), religious, artistic, scientific etc.

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[1] Do my moral dispositions lead to justified actions in line with my set of values? This is a rather complicated subject, and I leave this and other related problems for a future discussion.

[2] Daniel Kahneman (2011) suggests that over-analysis can lead to cognitive fatigue and suboptimal decisions.

they cannot be comprehensive if they do not take into consideration all the conceptual problems we discussed in this section. Philosophical examination is, it seems, necessary in the process of self-examination, however this process might be conceived.

II. The imperative of philosophical autonomy

Examining our life and our high-order values implies a critical stance that can be scientific, artistic, or religious, not just philosophical. One might argue that not all perspectives are valid or, in contrast, that they are all valid and should all be pursued. Maybe only the philosophical stance is legitimate, and it makes no sense to examine one's life scientifically or artistically. This is a legitimate problem but one that I will not analyze in this paper. What I want to discuss in this section is relevant only to the philosophical stance, understood as a rational activity, one where some toolbox of argumentative methods is used, and specific problems and puzzles are central.

What I want to argue is that, if one accepts a soft version of the Socratic imperative and adopts a philosophical stance towards it, then one should strive to be *philosophically autonomous*. This means that one should choose to study, and devote her/his time, to problems that are logically connected, and closer conceptually, to the duty of self-examination. Meta-philosophy must be seen as the fundamental philosophical branch, and the problem of what philosophical questions have priority in light of the Socratic imperative, the starting point of philosophical reflection.

However, to know what do to, I must know what I am, one could argue, what freedom is, what is the structure of the universe, if there are other persons or minds like mine and so on. Thus, metaphysics might also be considered paramount. From a Kantian perspective, epistemology is *prima philosophia* and, in accordance, I have to map the structure and limits of knowledge, whatever its target, meta-philosophical or metaphysical. We could go on and remark that, given that every theoretical investigation involves a linguistic medium, with its own structure and limits, the philosophy of language should be in fact our starting point.

As with every philosophical topic, the problem of *prima philosophia* is complex. Of course, life does not stand still while we are debating the problems that are logically connected with the task of examining one's life. We have limited time for philosophy, whatever the subject, and we are forced to make, eventually, some educated doxastic choices regarding the structure of the universe, knowledge and language while, at the same time acting, interacting, reacting in our existential situation. Neurath's boat analogy is useful in this context:

> "We are like sailors," he writes, "who on the open sea must reconstruct their ship but are never able to start afresh from the bottom. Where a beam is taken away a new one must at once be put there, and for this the rest of the ship is used as support. In this way, by using the old beams and driftwood the ship can be shaped entirely anew, but only by gradual reconstruction. (1973[1921], 199)

If we accept the Socratic imperative, we realize that, to have an examined life, we must solve lots of philosophical puzzles. At the same time, we cannot suspend judgment until a final resolution of those puzzles is reached, given that we just cannot suspend living. Thus, we must commit ourselves to some principles and theoretical options that we deem to be reasonable.

Let us recap. The Socratic imperative is partially problematic, but still relevant in a softer version, in order to live a good life. Any substantial personal ethical reflections have logical connections with different metaphysical, epistemological, logical, or linguistic problems. To be able to solve (if ever possible) such problems, we require resources (time and energy) that might never actually be at our disposal. What the exact connections between practical problems and other philosophical fields are, is itself a meta-philosophical puzzle. While agnosticism is a theoretical option in many cases that has no practical consequences, "apragmatism", as we might call it, the suspension of action, is highly difficult and problematic. We have strong moral beliefs. We hope that they are rational, internally coherent and justifiable. They do presuppose some specific solutions to old philosophical theoretical problems. For example, the moral act of assigning blame presupposes that someone is responsible for her/his actions. Responsibility requires personal freedom. But personal freedom is a long debated philosophical topic.

III. Philosophical maps and dialectical distances

What are the consequences of these remarks for how we do philosophy? If we accept the soft Socratic imperative, something that I think we have to, I argue, each philosopher must have an inter-disciplinary map consisting of logical connections between different philosophical disciplines and a sub-map, an intra-disciplinary one, consisting of connections between different puzzles to other puzzles. Given such conceptual maps, the domains that are closer to ethics should demand more philosophical attention; likewise, some intra-domain puzzles should demand more attention than others. We sometimes have intuitions that support this view, intuitions according to which some philosophical domains are more relevant than others, from an existential point of view, and some puzzles, in a specific discipline, are

more relevant than others. Thus, it is plausible to consider that different philosophical topics have a certain "conceptual distance" from the Socratic imperative and practical issues.

How might we measure this distance? My proposal is to use what I call a "theoretic dialectical system". Each philosophical problem could be formulated as an argument. Each argument is liable to some objections, some stronger than others. Each objection faces other objections. And so on. The farthest an objection from some central problem, the more technical we perceive that objection to be. When we read papers titled along the line of "A response to John's objection to Dave's critique of Moore's theory of concept formation", we know that there is a big dialectical distance between some central issue in a philosophical field and what we are reading. The paper might be well written, but the dialectical distance from a central issue makes it probably less worthy of our attention given that we do not have all the time in the world to go, however far, in every dialectical direction.

So, what I claim is that

We must examine our life, given that the examined life is better than the unexamined life. (The soft Socratic imperative)

In order to successfully examine one's life, we must reflect on moral issues but also solve logically related philosophical problems.

Some problems are morally more important than others because they are dialectically closer to the Socratic imperative. (Some sets or clusters of problems - philosophical domains – are morally more important than others.)

We must have a conceptual map that represents the logically related philosophical problems between different puzzles and domains.

We should be more concerned about (and reflect more on) philosophical domains and problems that are philosophically closer on our map to issues relevant to the Socratic imperative, which should be represented as the center of the map. (This is what we might call "the imperative of philosophical autonomy").

IV. Possible objections and solutions

My central claim is that, if we have a reflective Socratic duty to ourselves, it demands a systematic approach to philosophy, not a "cat-approach" to philosophy, where one attends to philosophical problems contingently, according to inclination,

due to curiosity, angst, intellectual reflexes, professional obligation or other some contingent facts (for example that I have met some talented and charismatic professor that happens to be an expert on some philosophical topic). In the same way that we must act according to some principles that we choose for ourselves, principles that can be adopted and respected by every moral agent, we must reflect not on whatever philosophical issues, but especially on the ones that are connected to the duty of reflecting on one's life, issues that are dialectically closer to the Socratic imperative. To do otherwise is to succumb to philosophical heteronomy. Thus, I also think the imperative of philosophical autonomy must be universally assumed (especially by philosophers).

One might object,[3] first, that even if some philosophical problems are, indeed, more important than others, this does not mean that everybody should focus on them, in the same way that the fact that there are some noble and worth pursuing jobs (like being a doctor or a social worker), does not mean that other jobs should not be chosen. Second, the fact that there is a long process of objections and responses related to a philosophical debate is not intrinsically problematic, given that this is an intrinsic part of the rational process of asking and giving reasons. And philosophy is exactly such a rational enterprise. What matters is that the debate is meaningful and significant, not that it is long.

I do not think that the analogy is warranted. Different jobs require different abilities. Thus, even if there are more noble ways of earning a living than others, not everybody can have what it takes for such jobs to get close to, or achieve, excellence in the areas associated with those jobs. So, there's no imperative to have a career in some domain that might be deemed morally superior to others. However, being a moral philosopher, a political one, a philosopher of mathematics or one specialized in the philosophy of religion does not require extremely diverse abilities, as do different professions like being a ballerina, a doctor, a professor or an economist. All philosophers are part of the same profession for which two abilities are central, namely critical thinking and conceptual creative thinking. Maybe a more adequate analogy would be one that centers not on multiple professions, but on a single one: there is no imperative in the medical field that all doctors should be cardiologists just because some medical conditions result in more deaths per capita; analogous, there should be no imperative to focus on some philosophical problems just because these are (by some standard) more important than others. But if increasing the number of cardiologists would result in fewer deaths, then it is reasonable to demand that more medical students orient themselves towards cardiology. In the

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[3] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for formulating these two objections.

same manner, if indeed some philosophical problems are more important than others, then it is also reasonable to adopt the imperative of philosophical autonomy and concentrate more on these important philosophical problems.

The second objection targets the idea of dialectical distance. My claim was that as the dialectical distance increases, the relevance of the objections decreases. But the chain of objections and responses, of critiques and rebuttals, is essential — it is claimed — for the progress of a rational activity like philosophy and does not entail distancing from the fundamental philosophical problem. If it is meaningful or relevant, the longer the dialectical chain, the better, given that we get a deeper understanding of the problem.

What I would like to point out is that, in philosophy, most arguments rest on premises that are not themselves established through deductive reasoning, but rather through probabilistic forms of inference — such as induction, analogy, or abduction. We seldom establish the truth or falsity of philosophical claims. We can aspire, most of the time, to plausibility or reasonableness regarding the premises and the conclusions, and these features are probabilistic. The response to John's objection to Dave's critique of Moore's theory of concept formation has a high probability to be probabilistic, as is John's objection and Dave's critique. Every probabilistic argument, even if it is strong, leaves room for the conclusion to be false, even if the premises are true. Thus, there is always room for black swans. Probabilistic arguments can be, in principle, bypassed. Thus, as the chain of probabilistic arguments increases in a debate, the margin of error becomes larger because the density of arguments increases. Given that most philosophical debates are probabilistic and conceptual, there are few chances of empirical corrections in philosophy (in contrast with scientific debates). Besides the probabilistic dimension of arguments, every dialectic step (objection-response) has, in the end, a smaller probability to be epistemologically relevant to the starting point of the debate. This happens because of the zoom out effect of the analytic process. If the soundness of an argument A depends on premises $p1$ and $p2$, and on its validity, then there are at least three possible targets for objections. A critique of the critique (a response) can also target at least other 3 elements. And so on. If the critique is not logical, targeting the structure of the argument, but the truth or plausibility of premises, we can expect a semantic distancing from the central problem to the objections and responses. This semantic distance entails in many cases what we perceive as the irrelevance of a debate. What started as something important, for example, the examination of the value of nature, ends up in a debate about the ontological status of normativity. This semantic sliding and the entailed irrelevance is a neccesary feature of the philosophical process. The first critique in the dialectic chain has a certain probability (greater than zero) to be incorrect, bypassable and irrelevant

(shorthand: the "inbir-factor"). The response to the critique, and the response to the response have their own inbir factor. We see, thus, that in philosophy, the longer the debate/the dialectical chain, the greater the chances that it becomes irrelevant. Given that there are also philosophical debates that are meaningful and relevant irrespective of their dialectical dimension, it is important to ask how it is possible to reduce the inbir-factor (I will approach this problem in detail in another paper).

V. Types of philosophical autonomy, philosophy as a way of life, and philosophical education

Philosophical autonomy can be defined as the ability and obligation of the philosopher to structure her or his reflection in an independent, critical and systematic way, without merely following the inertia of dominant paradigms or the authority of other thinkers. It also means developing a philosophical trajectory that is free, as much as possible, from the contingencies of one's life and personality. We can distinguish several types of philosophical autonomy:

Meta-philosophical autonomy, discussed above, is the ability to construct a conceptual map of philosophy and decide which issues are priorities for philosophical reflection. I argued that such a philosophical map should have at its center a soft version of the Socratic imperative.

Epistemic philosophical autonomy, i.e. independence in the formation of beliefs, avoidance of dogmatism and uncritical acceptance of existing philosophical theories.

Methodological philosophical autonomy, i.e. the ability to choose the appropriate methods of investigation. If my argumentation is correct, we should choose the methods that are the most useful or appropriate in our effort to position ourselves adequately to the Socratic imperative.

Practical philosophical autonomy, i.e. the application of philosophical reflection to one's own life and the way philosophy is lived, not just theorized. In the framework of the Socratic project there was a connection between theory and actions, such that knowing that x is good for me and that y and z are the means to achieve x, automatically directed my will towards x using y and z. Without such a commitment, the link between knowing and doing is problematic. In this context, philosophy as a way of life is a methodological option that deserves our attention.

If the process of examination ends with a non-sceptic conclusion regarding the project of the good life, then one must take philosophy to be more than a theoretical endeavor. It must be seen as a practical one. Conceptually close to the Socratic imperative and the duty regarding philosophical autonomy is a meta-philosophical option known as "philosophy as a way of life". In this regard, I agree

with Michael Chase, who argues that "philosophy as a way of life should be considered as a third way of doing philosophy that is distinct from both analytic and continental traditions" (2013, 280) — and, in fact, "more valuable and fruitful than the alternatives, as it guarantees a process of genuine self-transformation" (266). According to him, this is the most valuable account of philosophy there can be, the only one that can make sense and appeal to a person who is genuinely engaged with philosophy, and also the only one that preserves philosophy's original and authentic role and task. This is a strong claim, but one that is compelling and in accord with the above-mentioned ideal of philosophical practical autonomy. Philosophy as a way of life can be identified in many philosophical traditions, beginning in Antiquity, as Pierre Hadot (1995) has forcefully reminded us, and ending with important modern figures as, most notably, Montaigne, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Foucault. "What unites them with ancient philosophers is, according to Marta Faustino, "(i) the valorization of practice (actions, behavior) over theory (theses, books) and the consistency between the two, (ii) the performative character of their writings and their aim to promote self-transformation, and finally, (iii) a concern to provide some kind of guidance for one's life on the basis of an ideal of human flourishing or perfection." (2020, 208) It is an open and relevant question, for further research, what exactly is the connection between the Socratic imperative in its soft expression (the examined life is better than the unexamined life), the imperative of philosophical autonomy and the project of philosophy as a way of life. It is a central question that must be explored, I think, in order to understand the relation between philosophy and the good life.

The increased philosophical specialization has complex causes related to a certain dynamic in the history of ideas and some social developments.[4] The result is that many philosophers are focusing on some philosophical niche and grow old working on a few technical puzzles. However, if correct, the imperative of philosophical autonomy requiers, first and foremost, meta-philosophical examination and the development of a personal meta-philosophical roadmap. To be an expert on any philosophical topic is a great achievement. If that topic is dialectically close to the Socratic imperative, then the reflective activity associated to that topic is in accord with the imperative of philosophical autonomy. If the reflective activity was initiated, at some point, as a result of a meta-philosophical choice based on considerations that are at least implicitly related to the Socratic imperative, then it deserves special merit, given the Socratic duty to live an examined intellectual and practical life.

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[4] Systematic philosophy is more or less a thing of the past. Maybe for good reasons. It is not obvious that philosophical topics can be integrated in a conceptual architecture where some issues are fundamental and have conceptual priority, and others are derivative and secondary.

I want to end by exploring the important connection between philosophical autonomy and philosophical education.[5] What are the consequences for the way we structure philosophical education in academic institutions like philosophy faculties, if we take seriously the Socratic imperative? First, I think that we should focus not just on critical philosophical thinking (that promotes epistemic autonomy), but also on meta-philosophical critical thinking in order to be able to navigate on the high-seas using a philosophical map. As I explained, this means promoting methodological autonomy, something that, in turn, requires us to reject the idea of premature philosophical hyper-specialization. Students should be exposed, as much as possible, to different philosophical traditions and methods (non-occidental and occidental) and encouraged to engage with the big philosophical questions in order not to get lost in niche technical philosophical exercises. Finally, philosophy students should be encouraged to develop their practical philosophical autonomy, i.e. the ability to apply philosophical reflection to one's own life and the way philosophy is lived, not just theorized. In this regard, institutions could implement personal philosophical counseling programs for students and create opportunities for them to engage creatively in practices or exercises that promote experiential philosophical exploration and transformation.[6]

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[5] See Abbs 1994 and Nussbaum 1997 for exploration of the relevance of the Socratic imperative for education in general.

[6] Here are some examples of institutions that have implemented programs meant to promote philosophy as a way of life. Northeastern University (USA) implemented The Philosophy as a Way of Life Working Group, that provides faculty and students from various disciplines the opportunity to explore what it means to adopt philosophy as a way of life. Participants engage with readings and design "experiments in living" to apply philosophical concepts practically. University of Notre Dame (USA) developed the Philosophy as a Way of Life project, supported by an $806,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This initiative included courses like "God and the Good Life," which integrates philosophical traditions into practical exercises. Students engage in activities such as creating "Desire Maps" to explore their goals and participate in immersive week-long practices inspired by Stoicism, Confucianism, and other traditions. The project also supported faculty training, curriculum development, and interdisciplinary research on flourishing. Graduate programs at Kyoto University and the California Institute of Integral Studies incorporate philosophy into addressing real-world problems like climate change. These programs encourage students to apply philosophical thinking to individual and societal challenges, blending theoretical inquiry with practical application.

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Book Review

Gheorghiu, Oana-Celia. *British and American Representations of 9/11: Literature, Politics and the Media*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, IX, 269, 96.29 €, ISBN 978-3-319-75249-5 (hardcover), 978-3-030-09182-8 (softcover)

This study catalogues 9/11 fiction produced by American and British writers with the purpose of revealing the untenability of keeping fiction and reality separate. By viewing its selected corpus as belonging to contemporary realism, it employs the framework of New Historicism/ Cultural Materialism, both of which are deemed necessary to account for the study's undertaking in establishing a continuity between literature and reality, using Stephen Greenblatt's writings as a guideline. Particularly, his concept of "cultural poetics" is mobilized to highlight the exchange occurring between the social space and the aesthetic practice in the wake of the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent War on Terror. It aims to showcase how the chosen literary representations mirror the turmoil that Western identity went through after the event. Moreover, it sheds light on how the authors and their social milieu apprehend the Muslim other.
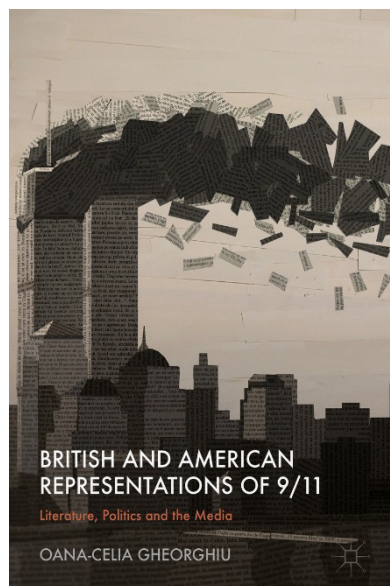
By investigating the traces of political and media discourse within Iain Banks's novel *Dead Air* (2002), David Hare's play *Stuff Happens* (2004), Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday* (2005), Martin Amis's short story *The Last Days of Muhammad Atta* (2006), Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* (2007), Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), and Amy Waldman's novel *The* Submission (2013), the work emphasizes the imbrication of text and context. Using Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Louis Althusser, and Jean Baudrillard, Gheorghiu underscores the idea that fact, as an objective, external occurrence, is only accessible through mediation, which makes it perpetually entangled within the parameters set up by the power structures of a given context, and therefore, any political or media discourse pertaining to that occurrence acquires the same level of fictionality that literature occupies. For, not only do the literary representations at the heart of this study incorporate "real" facts circulating within their immediate historical context, they, too, have the capacity of shaping identity paradigms, bringing about real social effects. Chief among these effects is the exacerbation of the otherness of Muslims which sharpen the binary of East-West in the wake of the attacks, the reification of Anti-Americanist discourse among the British, and the (dis)location of the truth claims of media and political discourses.

In order to tackle this premise, the book is divided into two parts: "Encoding September 11 in the Media and the Literary Text", and "Ideological Reconfigurations of Identity in the Literary Representations of 9/11". The first part contains chapter two, "Making History: Politics, the Media and Literature in the Twenty-First Century", and chapter three, "Literary Rewritings of History and Politics After 9/11". The second part includes chapter four, "The Shattered Self of the West", and chapter five, "Extreme Otherness: the 'Muslim Menace'". The two parts are tied together in the conclusory sixth chapter. Each chapter is organized into sections, including its own endnotes and reference list. The book also contains an annex where a detailed, minute-by-minute timeline of the 9/11 events, accompanied by statistics of the fatalities, which are organized by location. The timeline also enumerates the dates when the preparations for the war on terror were publicly announced, and the four-phase plan of the war waged in Afghanistan. The annex is concluded with reference to the temporal and thematic arrangement of the study's literary corpus. The book also includes an index.

The first section of chapter two chronologically traces the unfolding of the attacks on the World Trade Center, relying on the 9/11 Commission Report made public in 2004. Additionally, it enumerates the major stages that mark the US offensive in Afghanistan and later on in Iraq. It also includes George Bush's congressional address that set the tone of the "Us vs Them" dichotomy. The discourse of his press conferences

is analyzed with particular attention to the generalizations and uncorroborated truth claims the former president makes. By resorting to these historical moments, the study aims to showcase how the media appropriated and represented them at various intervals: during the shock/denial stage, the fury stage, and the analytical stage. It argues that the events have been narrativized by American news networks, setting up a constructed discourse that verges on fiction. The crash in the towers is presented as a hypotext that media accounts hypertextually engage with. In other words, the media representation of the attack is seen to be formed into an intertextual grid. To sustain this argument a distinction is made between the information and the commentary and analysis of it. It is further illustrated by an analysis of the CCN broadcast of the event which is seen to begin first by relaying the scene of the event, then transforms into a narrative structure by virtue of the news anchor's commentary, and the subsequent eye-witness interviews. The news coverage is then paralleled with Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*'s opening lines to account for their hypertextual quality with its reference to the news networks' texts.

The second chapter analyzes the ensuing editorials reflecting on the events and the subsequent retaliation, with specific attention to the British press. Ian McEwan's article "Beyond Belief", and Martin Amis's "Fear and Loathing", published as opinion pieces in the *Guardian,* are analyzed by drawing parallels between them and the novel and short story the two novelists subsequently produce. By doing so, the study aims to illustrate that literature is not merely representational but participative by virtue of its embeddedness in the social space. The chapter ends with an overview of the literary representations produced around the attacks and meditates upon the merits of classifying them as either postmodernist or neorealist.

Chapter three analyzes Ian Bank's *Dead Air* with a special focus on how it evokes the media and its representation of the attacks. The study argues that the protagonist, a Scottish leftist journalist, engages in a critical analysis of political misinterpretations provided to the audience by various news outlets, making the neorealism of the novel resemble historiographic metafiction. The character evokes 9/11, American imperialism, the othering of Muslims, the Scots' relation to Britain, Euro-skepticism, and the American democratic process, all of which demonstrate the novel's active engagement with reality with a note of indifference toward the American plight. The study also observes that the novel's cultural references to American superheroes and movies casts a hyperreal light on the events. In addition, the chapter analyzes David Hare's play *Stuff Happens*, arguing that it exemplifies a form of verbatim theatre. The play engages with political discourses by intermingling verifiable statements with fictional ones, creating a hypertextual dramatic text that blurs the line between truth and fiction, contaminating fiction with the real. American

and British officials are included as characters whose dialogues are composed of real statements found in news outlets as well as fictitious ones, resulting in what Gheorghiu calls the theatricalization of the actual. The chapter also discusses McEwan's novel *Saturday*. The argument draws a parallel between the novel and Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), finding similarities in not only its depiction of a day in the life of a wealthy family of Londoners who experience the echoes of the anti-war demonstrations in their capital city, but also through the narrative techniques it uses, and the historical predicament in which the two novelists find themselves, sandwiched between two wars. It further argues that the novel forges a dual relationship with the external reality, one that is post-traumatic as a result of the attacks, and an anticipative trauma that will arise in the wake of the Iraq war. What comes to the fore in *Saturday*, then, is a sense of denial and indifference coupled with an effort to belittle the reality that made its way into its fictional realm.

Chapter four begins with an inquiry into alterity studies with the intention of accounting for the literary depiction of self and other in the study's selected corpus. It first argues that the Western self is fragmented into the US as the "self" and the rest of European countries as "other" as the outcome of the United States' emergence as a global superpower after WWII. US hegemony has instigated the rise of anti-American sentiment across Europe as a response to an unaccepted inferiority, creating a tension within the inner levels of the Western self. Moreover, by resorting to Simone de Beauvoir, Zygmunt Bauman, and Antonio Gramsci, the section points out that in the dichotomy of self/other, the positionalities within the dyad are interchangeable. Consequently, it argues that the perpetrators of the attacks have positioned the West, precisely the US, as Other. Evidence is drawn from Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* to support this claim, arguing that the incorporation of the disruptive presence of the perpetrator of the attacks within the structural flow of the novel evinces the irruption of terror into the natural order, shattering its coherence, symbolized by the various falls occurring throughout the narrative.

Furthermore, the Easterner's othering of the West is argued to be the product of social and cultural conditioning, expanded in chapter five by resorting to Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Louis Althusser. Occidentalism comes to the fore as the repository of the Easterners' caricatures of the West, providing the tools to reverse the dichotomy of self/other, garnering the Easterners the privileged position. This argument is used to illustrate that Muslim characters within the literary texts at hand articulate this type of Occidentalism. Evidence is drawn from Martin Amis's short story *The Last Days of Muhammad Atta,* which imaginatively depict the days leading up to the attack. It is argued that Amis puts anti-Western discourse in the mouths of these characters, bringing the reality of Occidentalism into fiction. Amy

Waldman's novel *The Submission*, however, is regarded to be framed by the political correctness of left-wing liberalists. It is argued that even though Waldman is well versed in media discourse by virtue of her being a journalist, she favors the ideological stance of *The New York Times* in the construction of the characters.

While this study has thoroughly analyzed some of the 9/11 fiction, two points of contention can be raised. First is that the study relies, to a fault, on the authors of the works as the ultimate meaning-makers of the fictional realm they depict. Although their inclusion is intended to highlight how the authors' nonfictional works interfere within the fictional realm, it stands at odds with the implied assumption of this study in highlighting how authors themselves echo the discourses of their cultural milieu. While this premise is maintained in the discussion of the British and American novelists, it is suddenly dropped when the discussion shifts to analyze the Pakistani writer Muhsin Hamid's novel. It is particularly pronounced in the inclusion of his interviews, which were envisaged to showcase how he intends to bring about particular meanings or effects to his protagonist. What eludes this argument is the fact that Hamid himself is echoing a marginalized, unintelligible discourse that the study seemingly takes as Hamid's authorial view. A more sensitive approach to the positionalities of US minorities would have been possible had the study not dismissed the critical toolkit of postcolonialism, viewing it as outdated and therefore ineffective. This constitutes the second point of contention.

Despite it being no longer "trendy" among academic circles interested in creating a multicultural curriculum, and buying into the illusion that colonialism is over and done with, postcolonial theory nonetheless has developed tools with which to understand and account for the very discourses Hamid articulates. The study seems to uncritically echo the rise of the disdain for "poco" studies in US academia shortly after 9/11[1]. It must be admitted that Homi Bhabha has made an appearance in the study to meditate on Waldman's protagonist's engagement in acts of mimicry. However, the historical constellation that produced mimicry is completely brushed aside; the act of assuming sameness while maintaining a hint of difference is a product of colonial power and its institutions[2]. In other words, the production of difference as an outcome of the categorizations and hierarchical ordering instigated by colonialism and maintained by imperialism and global capitalism, and the way that that difference shapes the dichotomy of self/other as well as identity formation is completely absent from the discussion despite dedicating an entire section to the

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[1] Ray, S., "Postscript: Popular Perceptions of Postcolonial Studies after 9/11". In Ed., *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, Blackwell Publishing, 2000, 574-583.

[2] Byne, E., "Said, Bhabha, and the Colonized Subject." In Ed., *Orientalism and Literature,* Cambridge University Press, 2019, 151-165.

concept of alterity. The gap has allowed for the essentialization of the "Muslim other" despite the study's declaration that it does not intend to put all Muslims in the same "bad Muslim" basket.

Nonetheless, the study remains a worthwhile read for students and scholars interested in the interaction between news media and literary texts, as well as those interested in 9/11 fiction, because it provides a good example of how a critical analysis can potentially maintain stereotypical constructions while attempting to deconstruct them.

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