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Editors’ Preface

Today anthropology is associated with a set of disciplines that have the common goal of providing knowledge about human beings. These disciplines are as numerous as are the aspects of reality that fall under this heading. No doubt they reflect its richness and complexity. No doubt they justify, for the most part, their pretension to objectivity. Yet, in becoming ever more specialized, they have become ever more jealous about their methods and the ways they construct their object. Hence the mirror they hold up to human beings is cracked. That the human sciences have become increasingly autonomous since the nineteenth century has contributed more than a little to the development of such a situation. For the competition among them is growing and the conflicts among their paradigms, which at the beginning opposed them to one another, at present place them in opposition to themselves. Psychology, sociology, ethnology, economics, history, and linguistics can serve as good examples. It is worth noting that they have not been able to block the claim of the natural sciences to say something about what it means to be human. Paleoanthropology, notably, demonstrates this – and what are we to say about the neurosciences and their program of “naturalizing” the mind and everything that, in a recent past, seemed to belong to such disciplines? To the simplicity of their models, the natural sciences also add an impressive claim to causal efficacy. In this way, the conflicts among paradigms that undermine the human sciences from within and prevent them from achieving unity find a solution in a form of a reductionism through which human existence gets entirely
explained by what is other than human. But beyond unity, it is human specificity that is thereby lost from sight. Invited to conceive of themselves as a thing among things, humans may well, to cite a well-known phrase, find themselves washed away like “a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea.”

In these conditions, one can well understand the “urgent task” that constitutes philosophy in Paul Ricoeur’s eyes, an answer to the question: what is it to be human? The answer to this question, he says in the opening lines of the text we have placed first in this collection, is not that of “the human sciences,” which “find themselves dispersed among disparate disciplines and literally do not know what it is they are talking about.” But neither is the task that of an “ontology” that, under the influence of Heidegger, thinks there is nothing to learn from these same sciences and remains, therefore, too general and indeterminate. Instead it consists in an ever renewed effort to make sense of these disciplines in terms of one other. On the one side, in effect, philosophy cannot dispense with a radical interrogation into the being of human being. This interrogation, which begins with Plato, shows that anthropology has an older history than the disciplines which dispute among themselves in its name—a properly philosophical history that justifies the sought-for handholds Ricoeur looks for in this thinker but also in Aristotle, Pascal, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, to name only those he most often calls upon. On the other side, though, philosophy cannot deprive itself of the resources of the human sciences nor act as though they have contributed nothing, despite the fragmentary image they give of human beings, to the exploration of their being. Ricoeur’s dialogue with psychoanalysis bears exemplary witness to this, as does his interest in history, sociology, and the sciences of language. His relation to structural anthropology, to be sure, appears more difficult. He does not follow Lévi-Strauss when he, in wholly rejecting traditional philosophy, affirms the same ambition and claims to construe logically the invariants of both mind and culture. But this relation finds a balance when the notion of structure is used simply as a tool for analyzing certain social phenomena such as myths or kinship. The value of this analysis can then be acknowledged and


even taken as a necessary moment in our understanding of these phenomena.

This understanding, however, is never total, not only because the knowing subject, here more than elsewhere, belongs to its object, but even more so because the rationality it claims cannot “recover,” without some loss, “the irrationality” of its source. The analysis of myth included here confirms this—Ricoeur’s analysis appears exemplary in this regard. The “coherence of the logos” cannot be equated with the meaning of muthos and its interest as regards life. Nor can it be equated with the “depth of pathos” in which myth takes root. Pathos, muthos, logos: there exists a knot of relations among these three dimensions of human existence that philosophy cannot make sense of without cutting through the closure of conceptual discourse. This is why “philosophical anthropology is never finished,” contrary to the theoretical ardor of those disciplines that, in principle, know no limit.

This incompleteness, generally speaking, marks Ricoeur’s thought, as he himself wrote at the end of his last big book, Memory, History, Forgetting, where he indicates the positive sense of life always being ahead of everything we can think or say about it.³ But it also reveals the difficulty we had to face in putting together this volume, which presents itself in two ways.

On the one hand, “anthropology” is not a central term of Ricoeur’s philosophical vocabulary. It does not appear in the title of any of his major works and does not correspond to any particular orientation of topic or method. Its use in some of the texts included in this volume must not mislead us: it does not appear frequently in Ricoeur’s other published works. One might therefore doubt its pertinence and think that it does not justify the importance we are giving it. Yet the anthropological import of Ricoeur’s thought exceeds his use of the term—to such an extent that his whole philosophy can be seen from this perspective. When, in his intellectual autobiography, he turns to the project that he had conceived to be his “life’s work,” for which the Philosophy of the Will, considered as a whole, realized the first step, Ricoeur expressly characterizes this as a project in “philosophical anthropology.”⁴ Yes, he then goes on to express regret over the imprudence of one who was at the time a “debutant in philosophy” and states that the last portion of his initial program,

which was intended to deal with the “relation of the human will to Transcendence,” remained unrealized and, with it, the whole idea of “a poetics of the experiences of creation and re-creation” that could respond to the “pathetics” of suffering and of the fault. But it does not follow that he simply abandoned this project. Nor does it follow that nothing of this poetics was realized in his subsequent work, even if this was at the price of an *epoché* applied to Transcendence and, with it, to religious life, taken henceforth as one application among others as a species of the “rule-governed creation” that is language and that finds itself set forth, in three different ways, in *The Symbolism of Evil*, *The Rule of Metaphor*, and *Time and Narrative*. Whether it was a question about symbols, metaphor, or narrative, “the idea of an ordered creation still belongs to philosophical anthropology.” And one can think that this is also the case, for even stronger reasons, for the notions elaborated in the later works: action, the human person, memory, history, recognition. Let us repeat therefore, if anthropology did not have an assigned place in Ricoeur’s thought, this was because it constitutes his overall philosophy.

However, the difficulty does not disappear for all that. It changes its meaning. If Ricoeur’s philosophy as a whole is an “anthropology,” if everything that he produced philosophically – books, articles, lectures – can be arranged in one way or another in terms of this broad heading, how, then, to choose from among them? And, once this choice has been made, what order ought they to be given? The risk here is double, as is the temptation to forget that Ricoeur did not express the intention to publish such a collection during his lifetime.

The problem of choice does not really arise for those texts that explicitly deal with the relation between philosophy and anthropology or that directly address the question “What is it to be a human being?” Such is the case for “The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of a Philosophical Anthropology,” “The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limit-Idea,” “Human Beings as the Subject of Philosophy,” and “The Addressee of

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5Which one may well take as the real motivation behind the whole project.


Religion: The Capable Human Being." But these are not all the texts we have chosen. For the others, the problem still stands. Our hesitations, in reminding ourselves that every choice implies a rejection, sharpened our awareness that we had — and still have — other texts that could legitimately have been included in this volume. In the end, we kept those that, apart from their intrinsic interest, seemed to us to best bear witness, when brought together, to the diversity of perspectives, methods, and concepts implied in Ricoeur’s anthropology. Diversity need not necessarily exclude unity. Among these texts, some clarify the genesis of the big books, while others add to them, and still others can be read independently of the rest, but together they outline a trajectory whose coherence easily triumphs over the apparent variety of themes and problems.

That coherence may seem surprising if one knows that almost sixty-five years separates the first and last text. Yet, the more time one spends with Ricoeur’s work, the more one sees how constant were his initial intuitions. Between the lecture on “Attention,” given in 1939 just before his going off to war and captivity, and the remarks he had prepared for the awarding of the Kluge Prize on “personal capacities” and “mutual recognition,” in 2004, just a few months before his death, it is possible to trace a continuous line despite the turns and detours.

The lecture on attention, which remained unpublished,8 is noteworthy not only because it constitutes Ricoeur’s first important contribution to the philosophical world,9 nor because it is the first expression of a style that happily joins rigor and depth, but because we find there already all the “polarities,” or, as Ricoeur also liked to say, all the “tensions,” that structure his later works — beginning with the one that opposes the voluntary and the involuntary. But this is not all that needs to be said: the first summit in Ricoeur’s anthropology, represented by Fallible Man, which followed by ten years The Voluntary and the Involuntary, can already be glimpsed in this

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8If one considers that the text published in 1940 in the Bulletin du Cercle philosophique de l’Ouest was the result of what were really artisanal methods and that its diffusion, owing to the impending war, remained confidential.

Editors' Preface

We have tried to make this coherence as visible as possible. This led us to combine several criteria and to superimpose three orders – chronology, methodology, and themes. One and the same trajectory, therefore, is outlined by the “phenomenology of the will,” the “semantics of action,” and the “hermeneutics of the self,” which are unfolded in turn in this book. These three orders, however, are not rigidly bound together. For example, we sometimes have taken some liberty as regards chronology. The phenomenological method that is used in the first pieces is not abandoned in the turn to semantics and hermeneutics. Rather, it serves to enrich them. This is why, in the last text of Part III, which mostly deals with the Kantian hermeneutics of religion, it is still a question of a phenomenology of the capable human being.

But if the idea of a “hermeneutic phenomenology” is not likely to offend readers familiar with Ricoeur’s work – who will have learned to understand each of these terms in terms of the other – we do need to say something more about the choice of the word “semantics,” for it does correspond in this collection to distinctly different uses. We wanted first to place the accent on the encounter, at the

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12 At least four different usages of the term are evident, which correspond to four different theoretical contexts. During the period of Ricoeur’s discussion with structuralism, it is associated with a linguistics of discourse like that of Émile Benveniste – in opposition to the linguistics of langue developed by Roman Jakobson on the basis of Ferdinand de Saussure. It is a proximate sense that is used a bit later in Ricoeur’s discussion of metaphor, where it designates a level of analysis – that of the sentence – which is intermediary between those which privilege, respectively, semiotics and hermeneutics. Ricoeur’s discussion with English-language analytic philosophy leads to a third sense, directly linked to the opposition – central to this philosophy – between “semantics” and “syntax.” Finally, Ricoeur himself proposes an enlarged sense of the term in “Le discours de l’action,” in La Sémantique de l’action, ed. Dorian Tiffenau (Paris: CNRS, 1977), 1–137, as we explain below. [This long paper reproduces much of the material from a course Ricoeur had taught at Louvain in 1971. – Trans.]
beginning of the 1960s, between phenomenology and analytic philosophy, for almost all the texts published during this time, particularly those dealing with human action, bear witness to this encounter. By publishing material from his course on the semantics of action in *La Discours de l'action*, in 1977, Ricoeur himself ratifies this use of the term. But, in this work, he proposes not only to "enrich English-language analytic philosophy and . . . the phenomenology of Husserl . . . in terms of each other," but also to underscore "the difference between action . . . and behavior" as explained by the "natural sciences." And, in order to do this, he suggests broadening the sphere of meaning of discourse about action to include action itself. This is what is suggested by the title of the paper included in this volume, "The Symbolic Structure of Action," where symbolism is "constitutive" and not simply "representative." Having taken this step, nothing prevents our taking another and recognizing the meaningful — or symbolic — dimension of human life in general. This is what we wanted to indicate by speaking of a "semantics of acting" — where this latter term has a larger meaning than does the concept of action as envisaged by specialized theories, as is attested to by Ricoeur's many references to Aristotle's *energeia*, Spinoza's *conatus*, or Jean Nabert's "affirmation." That human beings are "symbolic animals" is what Ricoeur continues to remind all those who would define them by other criteria — without failing to add that such a property, far from simply being something added to a preexisting biological structure, characterizes its very own acting. Hence it is not difficult to understand why thought about human beings is thought that "starts from the symbol," as shown by the text we have placed first in Part II.14

This prescription, to repeat, cannot be observed by any science, whether "natural" or "human": it is addressed in human beings to the art of interpreting. One can speak almost indifferently, in this sense, of a semantic or a hermeneutic turn in Ricoeur's anthropology. "Hermeneutic of action" — Ricoeur himself sometimes speaks of his enterprise in these terms.15 Thus we have not sought to trace a clear frontier between these methodological concepts. They serve simply to mark out an itinerary whose continuity, as already stated, wins out over its breaks.

14 And which has only a small part in common, as we shall see, with the well-known conclusion of the *Philosophy of the Will*.
The same remark can be applied to the themes that this phenomenology, semantics, and hermeneutics apply to the “will,” “acting,” the “self.” To be convinced of this, it will suffice to consider together the intentional structure of the will and Ricoeur’s definition of reflection. Thanks to such a structure, the will finds its meaning in its actions; and it is in acting – and not “shut up alone in a stove-heated room” – that human beings understand themselves and truly become selves. Ought we to add to this that, for this to happen, one has to understand oneself “as another” and apply this insight not just to the individual – or to what we call the person – but also to societies and cultures? In asking this, we get a better measure of the complexity of the task assigned to a hermeneutics of the self as well as of the importance accorded in this way to the “uncanniness” that gives a title to one of the last texts included in this volume. But this “uncanniness,” or this alterity, is not just that of another “human being, someone similar to me,” as implied by the notion of mutual recognition, central to Ricoeur’s last work, for which the epilogue of this volume provides a kind of sketch. It is still in me, in my “flesh” and in all the ways that this finds itself stamped, from the early works on, by the seal of vulnerability or of “affective fragility.” Hence the text we have placed at the end of Part III makes specific “incapacities” correspond to the capacities of the “capable human being” – including the capacity to speak, to act, and to narrate.

This “correlation between capacity and fragility” finally appears therefore as the heart of Ricoeur’s anthropology. It explains in this way the encounter between an ontology of freedom and what presents itself not so much as an eschatology as a pedagogy of hope. The place made here for religion is not surprising. The thesis about the voluntary and the involuntary had early on stated that the question regarding human being is also the question of “man’s limitations.” Yet an anthropology of religion is not a religious anthropology. Hope, moreover, precedes every particular belief; and it is equally the horizon of action in its ethical and political dimensions. No doubt we should see in it an originary form of human time – a distinct form of that project from which every

capacity is derived.  

But this, as he says below, is just what Ricoeur invites his "perplexed reader" ceaselessly "to ponder."

Johann Michel and Jérôme Porée

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18 Otherwise the capable human being would be invulnerable, even capable of conquering his or her fragility.
Note on this Edition

The “essays and lectures” brought together in this volume scrupulously respect Ricoeur’s original texts in conformity with the policy of the editorial committee of the Fonds Ricoeur, the Ricoeur Archive. Any modifications that have been introduced have to do only with changes in punctuation, or typographical errors, or evident mistakes that may exist in the manuscripts or the already published versions; the most important of these are indicated by brackets. Other modifications have been made to quoted passages and references (which are often imprecise or incomplete). But we have not thought it necessary to indicate all of these; only the most significant of them are followed by the indication “Editors’ note.” Catherine Goldenstein, the archivist of the Fonds Ricoeur, provided valuable assistance at every step in the preparation of this volume. We wish also to thank Olivier Villemot, who was responsible for producing the final word-processed version of this manuscript.
As in the two previously published volumes in this series of papers by Paul Ricoeur – *On Psychoanalysis* (2012) and *Hermeneutics* (2013) – this volume gives English-speaking readers access to a number of important early papers or previously not widely known texts and lectures by Paul Ricoeur. Where a translation of one of these texts previously had appeared in English, I have retranslated it using the French text as now published, which was prepared from the papers now in the Ricoeur archive in Paris. The one exception is the Epilogue, which essentially reprints the English text of remarks Ricoeur prepared for the presentation ceremony of an award to him from the Kluge Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, in 1994, which poor health unfortunately prevented him from attending in person. A transcript of those remarks and a video of Ricoeur delivering them, which had been made before the ceremony, when it became known that Ricoeur would be unable to attend, continue to be available online at the Library’s website.

Where brackets appear in the text, they represent indications by the editors of additions or corrections made by Ricoeur to his manuscript or typescript, and occasionally insertions made to ensure the continuity of the text in cases where a manuscript had not been previously edited for publication.

David Pellauer
Introduction

The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of a Philosophical Anthropology

If philosophical anthropology has become an urgent task for contemporary philosophy, it is because all the major problems of this way of thinking converge on it and make its absence cruelly felt.\(^1\) The human sciences find themselves dispersed among disparate disciplines and literally do not know what they are talking about. The renewal of ontology, on its side, provokes an identical question in its own way: who is this being for whom being is in question? Finally, the very "modernity" of human beings indicates a possible place for this meditation: if humans can gain or lose themselves in their work, leisure, politics, culture, what, then, is a human being?

From Pathos to Logic

There can be no question of resolving the problem of philosophical anthropology in just a few pages, nor even of posing the problem in its full breadth. But it may be possible to choose one problem in

philosophical anthropology overall that will be both specific enough and revelatory enough to show what makes it a problem.

This problem is the one I placed at the center of my study *Fallible Man*, the problem of the inner disproportion within human beings or of their antinomical structure, wherein they find themselves distended between an infinite and a finite pole. This problem is the modern form of the Platonic problem of the "intermediary," of the *metaxu* of Book IV of the *Republic*, which gets developed in terms of the *thumos*, the meeting place of "courage" and "irascibility" that Plato locates between the rational and irrational parts of the soul. This is the same problem that, for Kant, comes down to the problem of the "third term" with regard to the transcendental imagination.

Why do I pose this problem of human existence in terms of a middle ground? For its value as a means of approach to one considerable difficulty for philosophy, that of evil. There is something mysterious and perhaps inscrutable (*unerforschar*), says Kant, in his essay on radical evil, about the origin of evil. We may even have to say that to make sense of evil is to suppress it. Yet if evil is impermeable as an event, there may be a kind of threshold insight into it that may make its possibility understandable. To put it another way, we may be able to comprehend in what way human beings are fallible. For fallibility is implied in the disproportionality that makes them fragile. Disproportion, intermediateness, fragility, fallibility, constitute a meaningful sequence. Descartes, for example, at the beginning of his fourth Meditation, says that man is "something intermediate between God and nothingness, or between supreme being and non-being," and he concludes from this, "insofar as I participate in nothingness or non-being, that is, insofar as I am not the supreme being and am lacking in countless respects, it is no wonder that I make mistakes."4

What is the interest of reason in this problem? It is twofold, having to do with doctrine and with method.

The interest of doctrine: from the angle of the problem of disproportionality and the intermediary, a reformulation of the problem of

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finitude becomes possible. To put it in a few words, I doubt that the concept of finitude is the central concept for philosophical anthropology— but rather the triad: finitude–infinitude–intermediary. We must start therefore not from something simple, perception, for example, but from something double, perception and language; not from what is limited, but from the antinomy of limit and unlimited. In this way, it becomes possible to catch sight of something of the originary dialectical structure of human reality. In this way, [too,] the problem of disproportion and what is intermediate [gains] a considerable philosophical stake.

However, there is also reason’s interest in a question of method, for philosophical anthropology finds that a pre-philosophical understanding precedes it, a deeply felt and mythical understanding of this theme of the disproportion within a human being, understood as a being who exists in the middle, who is fragile and fallible. Before any philosophy of the mixed, there is what I call the pathos or deeply affective language of wretchedness. This problem allows us to glimpse the birth of philosophy in the non-philosophical, in the pre-philosophical. The pathos of wretchedness is the non-philosophical origin, the poetic womb of philosophical anthropology. Hence, the choice of this perspective allows an understanding of how philosophy always presupposes something, even though what it seeks is a starting point. The problem is to reduce this presupposition, but to reduce it in such a way that one conserves and comprehends it. This is what the search for a starting point means, even though philosophy never begins absolutely. Before it exists, there is a complete language, that of myth, of symbol, which has already spoken of, as an enigma, everything that philosophy can ever talk about in terms of reason, “clearly,” everything that a philosopher can ever bring within the lumen naturale.

I shall offer a few examples of this pre-philosophical richness: the Platonic myth of the soul as a mixture, then Pascal’s powerful rhetoric of the finite and the infinite, and finally Kierkegaard’s reflection in The Sickness Unto Death. From the first to the third of these three examples, there is a kind of progress in the direction of the

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5 Which involves the positing of infinity, the negation of finitude, and limitation (we rediscover in this way something like the dialectic of the Philebus: “limit,” “unlimited,” “mixed,” “cause,” and also of the Kantian sequence of the categories of quality: “position,” “negation,” “limitation”).

6 Metaxu, “third term.”

type of reflection that I want next to propose. In fact, for Plato, meditation on the soul as intermediary is still ensconced in symbols: for example, that the soul’s composition can be compared to that of a city. The representation is even frankly “mythical” for there is no direct, rigorous, dialectical language to speak of the soul’s oscillating between corruptible things and incorruptible ideas. It is “perplexed and searching.” It opines and it errs. It is not vision but takes aim at things, not contact but inclinations. This strange reality, which is no longer that of things and not yet that of ideas, is dealt with through myth. What is more, this myth is both one of finitude and guilt. This myth is like a great fog in which reflection has to find a way to distinguish between what is an originary limitation and what a subsequent catastrophe. For example, the myth of the “mixture” in the Symposium recounts the birth of Eros from a principle of abundance, Poros, and a womb of impoverishment, Penia. Is this original poverty bad? We might think so, if we connect this myth from the Symposium to that in the Phaedrus, which does seem to be the myth of a “fall.” The fall of souls into an earthly body seems to assign a misfortunate existence to the origin of human beings, which is indiscernible from sentient and historical existence. And yet, even in the Phaedrus, it is possible to distinguish a myth of a fall, properly speaking (of the fall into an earthly body), and a prior myth of a mixture: the souls in the heavenly procession drive a winged chariot. This mixture, before any fall, already harbors an originary disgrace, the presence of a restless horse. Fragility thus seems clearly prior to the fall. So the theme of the intermediary soul remains linked, on the one hand, to the symbolic and mythical expression of a “mixture,” and, on the other, tributary to the confusion, to the primitive non-division of an originary limitation and moral evil.

The Pascalian theme of “wretchedness” is situated at a higher level from the point of view of rigorous thinking: it is no longer mythical; it is eloquent, and this eloquence stems from a rhetoric of persuasion more than from a logic of conviction. The fragment on two infinities is well known: “What is a man in the infinite?” Unlike Plato, who uses the symbolism of a mixture, Pascal draws upon a schema borrowed from the cosmological sensibility of a century on the way to discovering the scale of the universe. This initial symbol is that of a spatial disproportionality. Human beings are “intermediary” in the

8 Απορεῖ καὶ ζητεῖν (Plato, Republic 524a5).
9 The Greek term here is συντυχία.
literal sense, between the very large and the very small. But the spatial symbol gets surpassed in the direction of a properly existential scheme: “Limited as we are in every respect, this condition of holding the middle between two extremes is apparent in all our faculties.”11 Bit by bit the infinitely large that encompasses me indicates the “end” that escapes me, and the infinitely small that I include indicates “the origin” and even the “nothingness from which I came.” Here is where our wretchedness shows itself: “Let us then understand our condition: we are something and we are not everything. Such being as we have removes us from knowledge of first principles, which arise out of nothingness. And the smallness of our being conceals from us the sight of the infinite.”12 This dissimulating of human beings’ actual intermediary position is indicative of the extent of their wandering: “This is our true state. It is what makes us incapable of certain knowledge or absolute ignorance. We float on a vast ocean, ever uncertain and adrift, blown this way and that. . . . Nothing can affix the finite between the two infinities that both enclose and escape it.”13 Hence, despite the great differences in symbols – the Pythagorean symbol of the unlimited and the limited in Plato, that of the infinitely large and the infinitely small in Pascal the myth of the “mixture” and the rhetoric of “wretchedness” orient reflection toward the same theme: that of an unstable composition between two extremes that stretch and distend human beings.

But it is perhaps Kierkegaard who gets closest to the initial intuition of our inquiry. In The Sickness Unto Death, consciousness (the self) is defined in a slightly skewed fashion as “a relation that relates to itself [freedom] and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another [God].”14 What renders this relation to an absolute other unstable is, Kierkegaard says, that the relation to oneself is a “synthesis of the infinite and the finite.”15 For Kierkegaard, the imagination that portrays unlimited possibilities is infinite; finitude is the finite realization of life in terms of a family, a job, the state. Despair, from which sin arises and which is sin, betrays the finite through some fantasized existence, one without any duty or connections, or betrays the infinite through a trivial, obedient, philistine existence.

11 Pascal, Pensées, 61.
12 Pascal, Pensées, 61.
13 Pascal, Pensées, 62.
In this way, the intuition of an unstable mixture, which makes up the duality of human existence that we referred to at the start, stands out in Kierkegaard. But Kierkegaard’s discourse is still rhetorical, still a confession, an appeal from one human being to another.

The Transcendental Synthesis

How can we pass to philosophical discourse from myth, from rhetoric, from an indirect appeal, and why this resistance of μῦθος to λόγος?

Our first philosophical step will be one that we can call “transcendental.” Here we shall make free use of the Kantian analysis of the “intermediary function” par excellence: the transcendental imagination – and we shall attempt to say why this analysis is necessary but why it is insufficient.

This analysis is necessary – despite the reproach of subjectivism addressed to Kant – because the “transcendental imagination” reveals the fundamental unity of the understanding and sensibility through its projection on a “thing,” an “object.” This is the strength of Kant’s analysis. The unity of a human being is solely intentional, that is, it projects itself beyond itself, using the structure of objectivity that the transcendental imagination makes possible. But how is a human being this intermediary for him- or herself? The transcendental style of reflection falls short here. It remains purely objective, in the sense that this unity of the self to itself remains merely intended, that is, figured in terms of something that stands over against it. This is why it is necessary to cross this level but not remain on it.

The starting point of a transcendental consideration of human being as intermediary and on the “intermediary” function of the imagination is the fault line that reflection introduces between sensibility and understanding. As soon as reflection intervenes, it divides human being. It becomes one thing to receive the presence of things, another to determine their meaning. To receive them is to hand oneself over intuitively to the very existence of things; to think them is to connect them, to set them in order. All progress in reflection is a progress based on this split. On the one side, sensibility – which we say makes dependent what it allows to appear – suffers from another incurable limitation: perspective. The thing gives itself side-on, unilaterally. To perceive is to perceive from some point of view, from a zero-point as origin: from my body, which is the original here from which there are places in the world. On the other side, the intellectual determination of things – which we said connects them – is traversed by a signifying intention that transgresses every point
of view and that reveals every point of view as a point of view. Language is the privileged site of this transgression, just as the gaze is the site of every perspective. And, in language, saying something surpasses the mere signification of naming by adding an existential signification, by positing existence and, with it, the intention or pretention of truth, what we could call the vehemence of affirmation. For reflection, the disproportion between the word that speaks of being and truth, and the gaze tethered to appearance and perspective, is the ultimate manifestation of the scission between understanding and sensibility. It is the new form of the Cartesian dialectic of the infinite and the finite. No longer between two faculties, the will on one side and the understanding on the other, but running through each faculty, which are at the same time both finitude and transcendence, both point of view and intended truth, both goodness and being.

Whence the problem of the third intermediary term. This third term, to repeat, is given not in itself but in the thing, on the thing. This means that, for a transcendental reflection, human beings bring about its synthesis only through intentionality. The thing is the already realized unity of speech and point of view. It is the synthesis as having taken place. This synthesis that has taken place is the thing’s objectivity. Indeed, objectivity is nothing other than the indivisible unity of an appearance and a sayability. The thing shows itself and can be spoken of. Each of these two aspects refers to the other: to speak about the thing is to determine its appearing; appearing is its power of being spoken of — that is, of being universalized in communicable, convincing discourse. This is so true that it is by starting from the thing and on the thing that reflection can discern in turn the inadequation of perception — what we could call the appearing of disconnected silhouettes\(^\text{16}\) — and the meaning of this flow of silhouettes that transcends them. The thing points back reflexively to the human being as both a point of view and as speaking. This objectivity of the object is thus not in consciousness; it rather stands over against it, as that to which it relates itself. It is in this sense that

it can serve as a guideline in looking for the synthesis it points to within human beings. So it does not prejudge real unity of human beings for themselves, for such unity is entirely intentional. It is by projecting themselves into the mode of being of the thing that humans make themselves intermediary. They make themselves a “middle ground” between the infinite and the finite in laying out this ontological dimension of things, that is, that they are a synthesis of meaning and presence. In this sense, we can say that a thing is a thing only if it conforms to this synthetic constitution, only if it can appear and be spoken of, only if it can affect me in my finitude and lend itself to rational discourse.

Let us turn now, through a reflexive turn to ourselves, to the function that makes possible this synthesis on the thing — that is, that makes it possible, by projecting in advance, the objectivity of the object. If I make myself the synthesis of speaking and perspective by bringing about, even before the appearance of this or that, before any discourse about this or that, the space of appearance and of discourse, what is this power to open this space within me and for me? The problem we are discussing here is that of the given, the one Kant confronted under the name of the transcendental imagination whose importance for a philosophical anthropology I would like to show based on this infinite–finite polarity.

In Kantian terms, the unity of meaning and presence gets stated as follows. The categories of the understanding apply to phenomena and intuitions are placed under its rules. Whence the well-known formulation of the problem:

Now it is clear that there must be a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other, and makes possible the application of the former to the latter. This mediating representation must be pure (without anything empirical) and yet intellectual on the one hand and sensible on the other. Such a representation is the transcendental schema.17

What interests us in this theory of the transcendental imagination is that there is no for itself for this third term. It is exhausted completely in there being objectivity. For itself, the imaginative synthesis is obscure. The schematism is “a hidden art in the depths of the human soul.”18 Whereas the objectivity of the object is what is most

18Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A141/B180.
clear, manifest – the *lumen naturale*, properly speaking – the transcendental imagination which stands over against it remains an enigma. What first reveals itself in human beings are the two poles of feeling and thinking, whereas what shows itself in the thing is their synthesis. I understand what receiving, what being affected, signify; I also understand what it means to determine something intellectually. What is more, as Kant says, “these two faculties or capacities cannot exchange their functions.” Yet the “common root” [of these two sources in the mind], which would be precisely the humanity of human beings, is “unknown to us.” For example, the movement from the object toward the transcendental imagination is “unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty.”19 There is something like a blind spot at the center of our vision, “a blind though indispensable function of the soul,”20 says Kant. Not only is everything that can be said about the transcendental imagination obscure – to name it as the transcendence of finitude, human openness,21 is simply to baptize the difficulty – but the afterglow of reflection is entirely swallowed up in the synthesis of the object. There is no direct intelligibility for this mediating term.

One can show this for time, which is the *medium*, the *metaxu*, par excellence. At first glance, with time, we have to do with the instrument of the subjective synthesis of activity and sensibility. Time is, in effect, a surmounted paradox. On one side, owing to its distension, it is the form of all diversity, the look of what is disconnected (in Kantian language, pure succession). On the other side, it is intellectually determinable, since all the categories take root in it in the form of the schemata. Do we not touch here on the most intimate, unified form of human reality?

[Yet] this amazing transcendental of time – at once sliced up and ordered – is finally more enigmatic than the transcendental imagination for which it is the hidden soul. The most one can say about the function of time as “intermediary” is that it brings together the two properties of letting separate things appear and be rationally determined through the categories. The idea of an exhaustive account of a radical genesis of the rules governing rationality and intuition on the basis of a “common root” of the imagination and time remains a pious wish. To put it another way, if we call “consciousness” this

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Introduction

The synthesis of the understanding and sensibility in the transcendental imagination, this consciousness is not yet a self-consciousness. The unity of consciousness – the one Kant is talking about when he says, “It is clear” that “the unity that the object makes necessary can be nothing other than the formal unity of the consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of the representations”\(^{22}\) – this multiple unity is entirely intentional. It gets spent entirely “on” the object; it exhausts itself in the unity of meaning and presence “in” the object.

So, the transcendental unity of consciousness falls well short of the unity that can constitute a person in and for him-or herself. We must even say that the unity of an \(I\) think is not that of a person. The \(I\) of \(I\) think is not a person, an individual person; it is simply the form of a world, that is, the projection of objectivity, as the synthesis of the sayable and the perceptible. In short, the \(I\) of the \(I\) think is merely the projecting of the object.

Yet it would be a mistake to conclude from this reflection on the transcendental synthesis that a philosophy in a “formal” style is useless. We have to take it rather as the first step toward an anthropology, a necessary but not yet sufficient one. Reflection on the “intermediary” role of the imagination in the constitution of human being in its unity merely outlines the empty framework within which we must now trace the figure of the concrete human being. But if anyone should claim to leap over this reflective step, they will find themselves lost in a fantastic ontology of the “mixture” of being and nothingness. If human beings are a “mixture of being and nothingness,” it is because they first bring about “mediations” in terms of things. The intermediary status of the thing between the human being and nothingness stems from its very function of “mediating” the infinite and finite as something. This is how the myth of the “mixture” gets transposed into philosophical discourse.

In philosophically saving the myth of the “mixture” through a theory of “synthesis,” reflection of a transcendental style also preserves the rhetoric of “wretchedness” that has always accompanied the myths of a “mixture” like their shadow. As we have seen, the synthesis by which transcendental philosophy accounts for things is merely intentional, merely formal. It is merely intentional since it exhausts itself in the unity of the object, merely formal in that it is prior to any content. It is in this sense that transcendental philosophy allows for a beginning but not the continuation of a philosophical anthropology worthy of the name. For there is a surplus

\(^{22}\) Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A105.
In the myth of a “mixture” and in the rhetoric of “wretchedness” that a merely transcendental reflection in a Kantian style does not elevate to the level of reason.

From the Transcendental to the Practical

I shall offer two examples of what a philosophical anthropology that could conserve the felt impulse of preunderstanding and transcendental rigor might look like: one example from the practical dimension; one from the affective dimension.

I propose calling the antinomy of character and happiness the form that the disproportion within human beings takes on at the level of praxis.

What is character? If we do not wish to turn it into what characterology has made of it—a fixed, abridged portrait locked up in a formula—we have to say that character is a generalization of the notion of perspective. To put it a better way, the notion of perspective is drawn from that of character. In reality, it is an abstraction whereby one assumes that human beings exist only in relation to things. Perspective is the human point of view on things as things. In this way, perspective does not constitute a limitation in every regard, but simply a limitation of perception. So we have in perspective and perception a model to approach limitation as it applies to character. How can we generalize the notion of perspective?

We can say that there is a perspective to desire. This perspective is bound to its very intentionality. Every desire is a lack of..., a thrust toward... In this sense, there is clarity, but it is clear that as desire of this or that, desire is a confused way of feeling about “myself,” of finding “myself” well or not well. With desire my body is not an opening to the world, traversed by all the intentions for which it can serve as their organ; it is an obscure reflection on itself, a mute presence to itself, a singularity that cannot be put into words and that is incommensurable with any one point of view. Here is where egoism as a vice finds its occasion and becomes a temptation. It turns difference into preference. But this preference is rooted in a feeling innocent of difference—in what the Stoics called a “feeling and taste of oneself.” Such attachment to one’s own constitution is the bass note of every affective desire, so multiple and diverse as they are in their objects.

One more step toward the idea of character is provided us by a reflection on the “I can” that is no longer bound to the obscure aspect as in desire, but to the aspects of inertia affecting every habit. Husserl
had noted that the ego is constituted through its habits.²³ Ravaisson saw its philosophical importance.²⁴ Habit represents the constituted side of the ego. Every habit is acquired; once acquired it preserves an “acquired form” and this form affects the “I can” and gives it a practical perspective on the world, which is the ego as “habitual.”²⁵

We may continue to piece together the idea of character: as the acquired form of my evaluations, a sedimented world of values that are not called into question, my “personal idea of happiness and honor.”²⁶ Character is the sum of these different aspects of finitude that Descartes had reduced to the understanding and whose different moments we have listed: perspective, affective immediacy of the living being to itself, or originary sense of self, persevering, and inertia. What character adds to them is the consideration of a totality, the finite totality of my existence.

What, then, does the finitude of character signify? Far from being a thing, it is the limited openness of our field of motivation considered as a whole. An openness, for I have access to all the values of human beings by means of their cultures: my field of motivation is open to the human overall (nothing human is foreign to me). But the humanity of human beings is accessible to me only from the existential angle of my character and, because of this, each one is someone. Each human is a human being but the human occurs only in some one human. Thus character is not a fate that governs my life from the outside but rather the inimitable manner in which I experience my human freedom. Hence it is never perceived in itself.²⁷ It is implied in the humanity of my existence as the origin of my field of motivation. I am only able to allude to it through the feeling of difference that makes me different from everyone else.

But when I have pronounced these words – other than every other other – the most important polarity, that toward which my whole analysis is directed, comes into view. If perspective, desire, and power are rooted in a way of being finite and singular, in a character that

²³This point is important. There has been a philosophy of habit ever since Hume.
²⁴Félix Ravaisson, De l’habitude (1838); Of Habit, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (New York: Continuum, 2008).
²⁵See also F. J. J. Buystendijk, for example: L’Homme et l’animal (Paris: Gallimard, 1965); Prolegomena to an Anthropological Physiology (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1974).
²⁷No more than the origin of perception is an object of perception.
In like an ontological place, they can be thought of only dialectically, in relation to a series of contrary terms that culminate in a certain infinity: happiness.

We can approach this encompassing happiness by degrees. A reflection on desirability reveals the bipolar constitution of desire. On the one side, it sinks deep into the sense of self; on the other, it opens on an infinite horizon [which one can rightly call] happiness [or] beatitude. As Stephan Strasser has shown so well, happiness indicates the presence to human activity considered overall of the end that fulfills it. Not the achievement of some isolated act. That would still be just the feeling of some “result,” an awareness of some triumph. Instead, it is the fulfillment that corresponds to what we have just called our total field of motivation and that is nothing other than the “whole soul” according to Plato or our “personal idea of happiness and honor” according to Bergson. This is why I cannot think of character and happiness other than conjointly, as an antinomy constitutive of human reality. Character is the perspectival orientation of our total field of motivation. Happiness is the end toward which all my motivation is oriented. Zero point and horizon — this is how the analysis of perception with its “point of view” and its world “horizon” gets generalized. But, whereas the polarity of point of view and world remains limited by consideration about some “thing,” the polarity of character and happiness has to do with the “whole soul.” On the one side, character is attained by being alluded to; on the other, happiness is not encased within any one experience [but] itself alluded to in those privileged [moments] that [point in] its direction. In these precious moments when we are not attending to our limits, to our singular character, but to the openness of a horizon, to the promises of some event, the feeling of “immensity” answers dialectically to that of “narrowness.”

At the end of this analysis the polarity that makes for the fragility of human beings and, we can already say, their fallibility reveals itself. Indeed, there is no given “mediation,” no immediate mediation, if I may put it this way, between happiness and character. On the “theoretical” plane, we have seen, the only mediation is external; [but] the unity of happiness and character is a task, and this

29 The thing: the unity of understanding and sensibility, baptized the transcendental imagination by Kant, is merely the condition of possibility of a synthesis in the object.
task is what we call the idea of the person. The synthesis of understanding and sensibility is not "for itself" because it was the projecting of the object. The synthesis of happiness and character has to become for itself because it is the projecting of the person.

Kant is again a good guide here, for he saw that the person was more an exigency than a reality. And this exigency is quite precisely the reconciliation of happiness and a character. But who does not see that this concept of the person, far from annulling the tension between happiness and character, between the infinite and the finite, presupposes it? I do not see the person but I must treat others and myself as persons. I am not by right a person; I have to respect the person "in" others and "in" myself.

Respect plays out on the ethical or practical plane the role the transcendental imagination played on that of knowledge, of theory. The transcendental imagination reconciled understanding and sensibility only by making possible the synthesis of the object. In the same way, respect does not reconcile the finitude of desire and the infinitude of reason and happiness "in" me and "in" others except by making possible the very idea of a human being that is like the ideal mediation of practical reason and sensibility.

Thus we should say about respect – respect for the moral law and respect for the person, which are inseparable for Kant – what we have said about the imagination: "a hidden art in the depths of the human soul, whose true operations we can divine from nature and lay unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty." For respect too is glimpsed in something that stands over against it: the humanity of human beings in history, which corresponds to the objectivity of objects in the world. Respect is what makes possible the practical representation of human beings as persons who have value and are filled with meaning. But I do not coincide with this practical representation, I must treat myself and others as an end. In itself, respect remains the fragile suture of morality and sensibility. We have to speak of it in terms of a paradox: reason is what lies behind its psychological motive, and sensibility can be influenced by reason. To speak of it, Kant had to forge the surprising expression of an a priori motive. That is, the synthesis of the rational and the sensible occurs in a feeling, in the feeling both of being "wounded" by the duty that requires the sacrifices of my sensibility and of being "raised" to the rank of a rational being. But I cannot reflect on this feeling without once again splitting it apart and without representing my personality under the sign of belonging to both a sensible and an intelligible

order. In this double belonging is inscribed the possibility of a dis-
contrast, something like the existential "fault line" that makes for
human fragility.

Affective Fragility

To conclude, we still need to say something about the place of feeling
in an anthropology of finitude. Feeling is the most intimate point
within a person, the one where disproportion is concentrated, the
culmination or most intense point of human fallibility. What gives
this philosophical significance to feeling? And why seek in feeling
the ultimate testimony to the fragility of human reality?

The reason is found in the most general function of feeling in the
constitution of the person. Feeling, as William Stern has seen, is
the inverse of the function of "objectivation" that consists in "detach-
ing" the self, putting it at a distance from objects which, as we say,
do not touch us, which leave us unmoved. Feeling has the function
of "reincorporation" within the vital ground of what "stands out"
against this background. In this way, this function of inclusion, of
absorption, confers on feeling what Stern nicely calls its "proximity"
to the person.

If such is the case, it is legitimate to conclude a reflection on
human fragility with a philosophy of feeling. In sum, all the syntheses
and all the mediations we have looked at were syntheses "on" the
object. Even the synthesis of the idea of the person was one projected
on some spot and, in this sense, still a synthesis of an object. If feeling
is indeed what I have just indicated, a movement of internalization,
then it is in feeling that must be reflected in some way the kind of
synthesis that projects itself in the object or in the idea of the human
being. It is in feeling that the "disproportion" par excellence we have
considered in terms of its extreme points of character and happiness
splits apart.

Here, the risk is not so much our being overwhelmed by feeling
or emotion. I do not grant any primacy to emotion over knowing or
over the function of objectivizing. For a philosophical anthropology,
knowing and feeling (objectivizing and internalizing) go together.
They are born and grow together. Human beings conquer the "depth"
of feeling as the counterpart of the "rigor" of knowing. Therefore,

31 William Stern, Allgemeine Psychologie auf personalistischer Grundlage
(The Hague: Nijhoff, 1935); General Psychology from the Personalistic
if we respect this correlation between feeling and knowing, more exactly between the “inclusion” of feeling within the person and the “picking out” of the object against the background of the world, there is little risk of falling into a “sentimental philosophy.” All the more in that we began from the synthesis in the object and the idea of others, and caught sight of feeling on the return trajectory to being oneself.

What new form of fragility does feeling reveal? We rediscover here Plato’s important idea of the thumos, the mediating function par excellence. Feeling is the privileged middle zone, the transition zone between mere vitality and pure intellect. “Pathos arises out of Bios and Logos grows out of Pathos,” writes Stephen Strasser in his remarkable book on the Gemüt.\(^{32}\) Or to put it even better, echoing Plato: “from bios to logos via the thumos.” As Plato saw, the thumos is ambiguous. Sometimes it struggles with reason, when it is energy and courage, sometimes with desire, when it is the power behind some undertaking, irritation, anger. A modern philosophy of feeling has to return to this insight of Plato’s – but how?

In order to orient us toward this life of the thumos, I propose adopting the guideline Kant gave in his Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, when he distinguishes three types of passions: the passion of having (avoir, Habsucht), of power (pouvoir, Herrschsucht), and of worth (valoir, Ehrsucht).\(^{33}\) It is not that we could begin from these contingent passions as a fact, an aberrant fact. Instead they invite us to discern, in their transparency, genuine demands that belong to the primordial constitution of human beings. It is through these demands – through the most primitive Suchen [seeking] of Habsucht, Herrschsucht, and Ehrsucht – that the fragile image of a human self gets constituted. Moreover, these demands point in turn toward a transcendental structure that comes to them from certain “objects” (in the sense that Hegel speaks of the “objective” Mind or Spirit) indicated by the words “having,” “power,” and “worth.” They govern the most radical theme of economic, political, and cultural theory. Therefore, if we know how to reflexively disentangle the demands that constitute the being-a-self of a human being from the successive objective spheres that are its expression in the world, the philosophical theory of feeling will not fall into the

\(^{32}\) Strasser, Phenomenology of Feeling, 163.
arbitrariness of a “psychology of the passions,” but will rather receive an a priori transcendental structure comparable to the one Kant gives to respect. It really is a question of a priori feelings, governed by “intentional objects,” which stem from a theory of objectivity of a higher order and which are to self-consciousness what the thing in general and the natural world are to consciousness.

These three demands – having, power, worth, or, if one prefers, appropriation, domination, fame – truly constitute the thumos of a human being between the life of the body and that of the mind. In this way, we come to our question: if it is really these three demands that constitute a “self” different from things and from other human beings, a felt, lived self, what does the fragility of this thumos, the fragility of this “self,” consist in?

It seems to me that this fragility best appears when one examines how these demands can be satisfied, what their end terms are, their modes of completion, of accomplishment. There is where their unstable functioning between the vital and the intellectual most clearly appears. The vital demands end in pleasure and the cessation of pain, the intellectual demands in happiness. Where do the demands for possession, for domination, for fame, end?

We are immediately struck by the fact that the self is never assured and that the demand in which it seeks itself is in a way endless. For example, pleasure is a kind of provisory repose, as Aristotle had demonstrated, and happiness is par excellence a durable repose or at least a restful movement; the thumos is always restless. The “heart,” to take up that lovely term, just as lovely as the Greek thumos and the German Gemüt – the heart is par excellence what is restless. Between the finitude of a pleasure that tops off a determinate act and marks a repose, and the infinitude of happiness, the thumos slips in something indefinite – and already the nuance of the threat that attaches to any endless pursuit. When will I have enough? When will my authority be sufficiently established? When will I be sufficiently appreciated? Where in all this is the “enough,” the “sufficient”? 

As we see, the thumos disturbs the structure of acts at the vital level, characterized by a cycle: lack, getting under way, unfolding, achievement along with pleasure or pain. Affective regulation would be complete if the achievement of the process were marked by a stopping point, if all the tensions were saturated. But human action, in that it unfolds under the sign of the three fundamental demands for being oneself, no longer presents this cyclic, closed, finite structure. It is in principle a perpetual movement. The result is that the ends–means structure undergoes a sort of extension, of distension.
When no action is finally really ended, every action becomes intermediary and human life is in danger of forgetting, of losing, its goal as a result of the undetermined character of the threefold demand through which the me seeks itself. Something strange actually happens: the more our action becomes precise and even technical, the more its goals become distant and fleeting. Making action technical and putting off the goal of being oneself contributes to that feeling of insecurity, of emptiness that sometimes affects human action. By introducing an indefinite demand between the vital and the intellectual, the thumos is caught up in a double system of exchange between them. It is in these exchanges between vital tensions and the demand to be a “self,” on the one hand, and the appetite for happiness, on the other, that the life of the person is “mediatized.” And it is in this “mediation” of the thumos that the instability of that life appears.

Let us first consider the connections between the vital and the human. It is certain that all our instincts are gathered together and transmuted by the threefold demand that makes us human beings. This is particularly manifest in the case of sexuality. Sexuality becomes human in that it is traversed, grasped, and incorporated into the properly human demand. This is why one easily finds in it a note of possession, of domination, and also a quest for mutual recognition. But, on the other hand, these demands connected with being oneself aspire to and wish for a totality in which we have recognized the desire for happiness. Thus, human beings invest all their energy, all their heart, in “passion,” because an object of desire has become everything for them. In this “everything” lies the imprint of the desire for happiness. But life does not want “everything.” The word “everything” has no meaning for life but only for the intellect. It is the mind that wants “everything,” that thinks “everything,” and that only finds repose in “everything.”

In this way, the double attraction of pleasure and happiness, of finite and infinite accomplishment, gets exercised through the thumos. And it is the indefiniteness of the demand for possession, domination, and being valued by others that the drama of the infinite and the finite gets played out.

We can now give a name to the specific fragility of human feeling: conflict. Conflict is inscribed in the disproportion of happiness and pleasure, and in the fragility of the human heart. Freud, in this sense, is the first psychologist to have understood the central and essential significance of conflict in human anthropology, but he failed to comprehend its origin. In placing the origin of repressive forces in a borrowed and ultimately introjected “superego,” he shifted to society
and the pleasure principle the near cause of conflict. Our whole analysis tries, on the contrary, to seek the origin of “conflicts” in the intimacy of the human *thumos*, divided between the vital and the intellectual and polarized by the pleasure principle and that of happiness.

We are thus led to place “conflict” at the center of philosophical anthropology. We arrive here at the end of an analysis that has unfolded from the most abstract to the most concrete, from the transcendental imagination and its art hidden in the depths of the human soul, to the *thumos* with its internal tensions [and] its fragility. Taking this analysis as a whole constitutes an exegesis of the idea of an “intermediary” received from the myths of a mixture and the rhetoric of human wretchedness.

At the end of this movement, we can say the following:

1. The human situation between being and nothingness, to speak like Descartes, is the situation of a being who is him- or herself a *mediation* between being and nothingness, between the infinite and the finite.

2. This *mediation* is projected in the synthesis of the object, which is both discourse and existence, meaning and appearance.

3. This mediation occurs as *action* in the practical synthesis of the person, who is at once end and existence, value and presence.

4. This mediation is *self-reflexive* in the feeling of a disproportion of the self within itself, a non-coincidence or inner “difference,” that attests to the originary fragility of human reality.

Hence the projecting of a theoretical synthesis, *praxis*, and feeling respond, on the level of philosophical meditation, to the feeling-laden themes we allowed ourselves to be instructed by at the beginning: the myth of a “mixture,” the rhetoric of “wretchedness,” the existential anxiety over not being able to be oneself. In this way, the initial *pathos*, reduced by transcendental reflection, is recovered in a theory of *praxis* and feeling. But the felt preunderstanding is inexhaustible. This is why philosophical anthropology is never completed. And above all why it never stops taking up again into the rigor of reflection the irrationality of its non-philosophical source. Its distress is its not being able to redeem both the depth of *pathos* and the coherence of the *logos*.
I

Phenomenology of the Will
The goal of this lecture is twofold: to outline a strictly descriptive psychology of attention and to demonstrate the impact of the problem of attention on such great metaphysical questions as those of truth and freedom.\footnote{This lecture was presented in Rennes on March 2, 1939 at the invitation of the Cercle philosophique de l'Ouest. Emmanuel Leroux, the editorial secretary of the Bulletin du Cercle philosophique de l'Ouest, where this lecture was published, writes on the introductory page of issue 15, dated January–March 1940: “The communication published in the current issue far surpasses the usual dimensions for such papers. Monsieur Ricoeur, in preparing his presentation for publication, undertook to give it further development. He left us his manuscript before leaving to join the army and is now a prisoner in Germany. In these conditions, I thought nothing better could be done than to publish the whole text as an exception, but I am happy to do so as an expression of favor to our young colleague in captivity.” – Editors’ note.}

The idea of a psychology more concerned to understand what is lived than to explain it is today classic. It was introduced by Husserl. Husserl reckons that all psychology is distorted by the use of concepts borrowed from the physical world and that it is necessary to grasp what is specific about lived experience.

A pure description of attention presupposes that a prior question has been resolved: that of the relations between “paying attention
to” and “perceiving.” Already in 1894, in England – that is, outside the phenomenological movement – Shand noted how psychologists ordinarily underestimate an essential characteristic of attention. Attention gets expressed by a verb: “pay attention to,” which calls for an object, just like hearing, smelling, looking at, meditating. Husserl’s great studies allow us to fully interpret this aspect which attention shares with every mental act. This requirement of language signifies that reference to another thing than oneself is essential to the description of attention. Its reality lies entirely within this referring. Attention is an intentional act.

It is necessary to keep this characteristic at the forefront of our analysis. Above all, it is necessary not to lose sight of the fact that the reference of an act to its object – of the gaze to its spectacle – is not a relation like others. The pen is beside the inkwell, the carpenter is the cause of the chair. These are relations of one object to another object; they are relations within the world. None of them gets us closer to the reference of an act to its object, which is something lived (enjoyed, erlebt) but never fully thought, by which I mean posited before the mind as an object of a relation between objects and situated in a table of categories. Furthermore, the act and its object are not two realities, two symmetrical terms that can be thought of separately. Hence the act of attention is nothing in itself other than the attention paid to something, and this “something” is nothing other than what the act refers to.

What does one pay attention to? A psychologist accustomed to the language of classical psychology will reply: to representations, meaning by this “the image that an object engenders in our consciousness.” And he will add: “the world as we know it is composed uniquely of our representations,” to the point that the ensemble of our representations constitutes both our consciousness as knowing and the world as known. Attention [then] can be nothing other than a reflexive operation, a second-degree consciousness, a redoubling of representation. It is not difficult to say just how false this scheme is. The representation is not the object of attention, for two reasons: (a) because the representation is itself an intentional act and not some mental thing; (b) because attention is not numerically distinct from the representation we shall henceforth speak of as perception.

4 Wundt, Grundzüge der physiologische Psychologie, vol. 2.
Perception is Intentional

The whole phenomenology of attention is dependent on a phenomenology of perception. But this latter is vitiated at its base by the notion of “representation.” It is important to rectify the notion of representation we find among most psychologists.

To perceive is not “to have a representation in consciousness” nor “to be conscious of a representation.” To perceive is to be aware of objects, of the world. When I perceive, I am not occupied with myself, I am not aware of myself. I am outside myself. Nothing is gained by saying that in identifying the representation with an element or a mode of consciousness (conceived of atomistically or in flux), one does not mean one is placing the accent on the reflexive aspect of consciousness but simply on its interiority. Precisely, this rectification leads to a pure error. One sets aside the fundamental aspect of perception: the intentional grasping of the Other, of the object, the act–object connection. (I am deliberately using a more attenuated term than that of “relation.”) Then one imagines a neutral domain where my act and the known object, the percipere and the perception, are somehow brought together. One calls this neutral domain consciousness, this thin layer upon which the self and the world get glued together is taken to be constitutive both of the perceived world and of the self that perceives. The qui and the quod, the cogito and the cogitatum, fuse into a monster: the conscious phenomenon, the psychic state. This degradation of the reality of thinking has its source or motive in an effort to align what one calls the object of psychology with the object of the natural sciences, whereby one does not recognize intentionality. There would be psychic phenomena just as there are biological and finally cosmic phenomena. In reality, one gets blocked by an apparently simple notion – the notion of a state, or element, or phenomenon, or psychic (or conscious) current – a unique reality of its kind, unsituatable, that gets apprehended only as [a] being with two aspects (and here again the expression is quite improper), to which no element of the physical world or no category is comparable: the act–object pair. One is misled even further if one looks for an internal–external relation in this – a dangerous language that would institute symmetry between two things. The asymmetry between them is total. They are not even a pair. The act of perceiving is internal only in the operation of grasping an external object, the perceived object is external only as the object of that act. What does it all come down to then? Precisely speaking, it is a question simply of rediscovering the original
meaning of this lived experience that is constitutive of psychic life: intentionality. Phenomenology here teaches us only to "distinguish." This status of perception governs the whole phenomenology of attention.

Attention and Perception

Perception is intentional: one always perceives something. Attention too is intentional: one pays attention to something. In what sense is it a question of two different acts? Above, common sense spoke against Wundt and every psychologist: I do not pay attention to my perceptions; I pay attention to what I perceive. Or rather, what I pay attention to is the object that I perceive. What I see is what I look at, what I hear is what I listen to. Perception and attention are indiscernible and, in this sense, Condillac and Mill were right against Wundt: "the feeling of pain is attending to it, and attending to it is feeling it." Shand objects that attention is distinct from its object. He is not wrong, but its object is not an act of perception but a perceived object. Attention is perception and not a reflection, a redoubling. Must we not say that to pay attention is a way of perceiving?

Thus we ought no longer to speak of attention, first of all because a verb is always preferable to a substantive noun for a psychic act, [next] because it is not numerically different from perception. We ought to say: "to perceive attentively." Hence the phenomenology of attention finds its program outlined: it is necessary to seek what ascepts perceived objects take on when perception is attentive and, parallel to this, what impressions are experienced by the subject in the very act of attention.

Before undertaking this elucidation of the two faces of attention – the act face and the object face – along with all that is artificial about this dissociation, we must make precise the domain of

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6 Henri Piéron makes the same point when he objects to Dallenbach's idea of attentivité [that is, attending to attention]: "the notion of a particular attentivité to the impressions upon which attention bears has to do above all with the awareness that one directs on the attentive orientation and cannot characterize this orientation in general." "L'Attention," Journal de Psychologie 28 (1931).
Attention

We have to take this notion in the broad and, in sum, the Cartesian sense of the term. What I consider to be before me as a spectacle is perceived. (We shall conclude with the connection between attention and spectacle.) Sensory perception is just a specification of a class of acts much broader than those Minkowski proposes calling acts of "spection":7 "regarding can evidently represent a phenomenon of a general order where regarding with the eyes would be just one of its modalities." The classical image of natural light (and the century of the Enlightenment with its leading lights!) authorizes a kind of visualizing of intelligence that assumes a real homogeneity of intellectual and sensory perception. This homogeneity has to rest on the fundamental character of a "spectacle," which is at the same time the union and the distinction of "in me" and before me." Seeing is therefore an extremely broad class of acts. The existence of an intellectual attention and a perceptive attention confirms the extension we must recognize to perceiving.8 We are thus authorized to speak of a whole field of perception that will also be a whole field of attention. There is too much tendency to speak of sensory registers that are heterogeneous among themselves and in their connection to intelligence. My attention can displace itself from seeing a stone to the consideration of a hypothesis, from this [thing there] to a very abstract idea. The phenomena that place the accent on the foreground or on the background, characteristic of attention, therefore have to be considered in terms of the totality of the field of perception. We have to see to what extent a feeling can be considered as present like a perception. Cartesians willingly speak of a species of confused perception whose object, they say, "in some way touches us."9 But this vision without stepping back is not at all a spectacle. It lacks the affect of the essence of seeing: presence before


*Phenomenologists have favored this linkage of intelligence and perception on the basis of "spection" by showing a mental perceptive core in judgment, the apprehension of a state of affairs (lekton, dictum, Sachverhalt) starting from which and following the analysis of which the synthesis of judgment becomes possible. Bertrand Russell, from his side, invites us to consider the apprehension of relations as a species of perception, of intuition.

*Nicolas Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* (1674–5), probably referring to Book I, XVIII, although we have not been able to locate an exact citation. – Editors’ note. [The Search after Truth, trans. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp, in *The Search after Truth; Elucidations of the Search after Truth; Philosophical Commentary* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980).]*
me. I can pay attention to a pain only through an objectivizing similar to what the Stoics demanded of the wise man, by forcing myself to consider the pain as an "alien" event – or like the physician who follows the progress of an illness in his own body.

The Aspects of Objects Perceived with Attention

**[Clarity and Distinction]**

We agree in finding two essential characters to the process of paying attention: a phenomenon of selection (*this* object and not *that* other one)\(^\text{10}\) and a phenomenon of clarity (I see *better*). These two characters are inseparable: the selection of an object or an aspect does not occur without an augmentation in clarity. We can even say that these two characters have the same meaning. If one notes that the clarity of the object of attention is a phenomenon of contrast, one can take this contrast for what is essential to selection. We shall see in a moment that inhibition, effort, are not inherent in attention, but only the contrast in clarity between the attentively perceived object and the field of inattention.

The problem of clarity has been the object of careful inquiry ever since William James and Wilhelm Wundt up through E. B. Titchener and Karl Dallenbach. The Gestaltists' studies have made considerable progress, which is not taken into [enough] account in recent psychological treatises. The method that fits this research, and that, as we shall see,\(^\text{11}\) does not fit a study of attention as an act, is the method of instantaneous slices of mental life. Attention is characterized, at a *given moment*, by a specific distribution of the perceptive field.

One says attention augments the *clarity* of objects. What does "clarity" signify here? One thing is certain: it does not come down to that clarity which is an attribute of the perceived object and that is part of its "meaning" – a clear day, a clear color, a clear sound. From this point of view, the obscure can be attentively perceived as

\(^{10}\)Piéron, "L'Attention": "attention is choosing."

\(^{11}\)Let us simply say here, in order not to break away from the analysis we have begun, that attention does not appear as an act that depends on me unless it is replaced within its endurance over time. Its *mobility*, in which our power resides, makes sense only in *succession*, whereas the distribution of the *field* of perception finds its full meaning in a *given moment*. 
The clarity of attention is not a quality of things, in the sense of a primary or secondary quality. And yet, in a sense, it is indeed the clarity of the object. We must not say that we become clearly aware of an obscure perception, at the risk of falling back into the confusion between attention and reflection. If attention is perception, and not a redoubling of perception, the clarity of attention is indeed the clarity of the perceived object.

A step further will be taken if we note that the clarity of the object of attentive perception is a phenomenon of contrast between a figure and a background. Here the Gestaltists have brought a decisive contribution to the psychology of attention. Husserl says the same thing: "Jedes Erfassen ist ein Herauflassen" which Emmanuel Levinas translates as "each perception is an ex-ception." Wundt had already compared this phenomenon to the structure of the visual impression. The focal point (Blickpunkt) stands out against the local field (Blickfeld). Now this phenomenon of distribution applies to all the senses, to intellectual attention, and finally to the whole perceptual field.

The metaphor of a clarifying distribution can be replaced by that of planes. There is a kind of putting into relief or relegating to a lower level that is characteristic of attention. But these are just metaphors, which have to be taken as such: the qualitatively obscure, the spatial background, can be clearly perceived and accentuated through their attentive relief.

Dallenbach emphasizes the difference between attributive and perceptive clarity. All the metaphors (and it would be a problem to know why this metaphor is more adequate than any other) – clarity, vividness, relief, fullness of the object perceived with attention, obscurely, fleetingly, relegating to a lower level of the field of attention – have to direct us toward the specific experience and teach us "to distinguish" the phenomenological residue of attention from every other psychological "signification."

18Malebranche, The Search after Truth, Book III, Part I, IV: "the mind's attention stands to its objects as the eyes' steady gaze stands to objects of vision" (227).
14"The mind's close attention, as it were, brings the ideas of objects it is attending to much closer" (Malebranche, The Search after Truth, 213). Pleasure affects us because it touches us.
Eidetic psychology cannot go beyond this. Within this framework, empirical psychology can pursue experimental research of the following type: oscillation of attention, number of planes or degrees of attention (two contrasted planes or continuous shades?), apparent alteration in qualitative intensity owing to attentional clarity. But this type of *scientific* research presupposes that we understand the "signification" of attentional clarity prior to any inquiry of an inductive type. This understanding is not inductive. A few examples can serve as a springboard leading to the understanding of what "paying attention" means.

**The Paradox of Attention**

We are now prepared to pose more clearly what I will call the paradox of attention. When I fix on an object, it appears to me *differently*, more clearly than when I allow it to slip into the background. I do not doubt for an instant that the world has changed. And yet, it is the clarity of the object, not conscious awareness redoubling a perception inattentive to itself. This is indeed a paradox that needs to be protected against two kinds of degradation. [First of all, there is] the one we have done justice to and that we can formulate as follows. "Attention is an act of reflection on perception, it is what changes and the perception that it doubles remains intact." [But] one can further say – and this is the second degradation of the paradox of attention – "it is in fact the perception that changes with attention, but the perceived is a variable *sign* of something immutable in itself and more or less unknowable." This position is equally inadmissible. The permanence of the object throughout the modifications of attentive perception is itself *given* in perception. It is the *same* object that appears to me in diverse ways when I explore and inspect it. Generally speaking, the thing in itself signifies just what we perceive, not that the thing belongs to perception, to consciousness, yet it "signifies" nothing other than *what* we perceive.

So the paradox is quite clear: when I pay attention, my landscape changes *aspect*, without changing *meaning*. Change of *aspect* and identity of *meaning* belong to the same register of being: existence as an object, that is, as perceived. Bradley already said: when I pay attention to an object, it is more precise, more clear, and yet attention does not alter the existence of the object. If I say that the object is reinforced or more intense, I am aware of another object, I have transformed it by coming to know it. Paying attention consists in
developing "the object ideally for me as it is in itself, and so to know it. The object is an individual whole that does not lose either its identity or its unity: "the object itself, though developed by the process, cannot be taken as changed." 16

These descriptive considerations are of the greatest importance for the philosophical problems we are going to raise in a moment, if it is true that things appear to us all the better insofar as we are more attentive to them and that the art of thinking clearly in which logic and ethics are conjoined 17 consists in paying attention as much as possible, as has been said from Saint Thomas to the present, in passing through the Cartesians and Berkeley.

What is a change of aspect clarity, vivacity that would not be a change in meaning? One can present the difficulty in a different way: attention is a kind of action; it "accentuates," "brings out," in a sense "chooses." 18 It makes something about the object appear.

But and this is the paradox that constitutes attention attention makes something appear in another sense that was already there. The counterpoint that I discover, that I suddenly hear in the playing of a symphony, is that same symphony. One can say that it was in the background and passes to the foreground of perception, yes, but if it was not solely in the background, I would not hear it as a counterpoint (cf. too the image d'Épinal and ambiguous figures). The passage from the background to the foreground, from obscure to clear, implies the apprehension of a new aspect that was not perceived as an aspect. What is signified therefore by the fact it was there? Is there a break between existence and the perceived a break that overthrows our whole theory of perception? The same remarks could be made if one were to look at Bradley's idea of "development," or the "concentration" and "diffusion" by which we detail or embrace the object. The aspect of the object changes without the meaning of the object being changed. Yet and this too is important it is not necessary to seek an explanation of this preexistence of the aspect of the object in some logical concept borrowed from a table of categories: possibility, virtuality. It is attention alone that gives a meaning to this preexistence. It is the privileged experience

16 Bradley, "On Active Attention," 5.
17 Pascal: "Let us labor, then, to think well. This is the principle of morality" (Pensées, 64).
18 Although choice presupposes another situation than a simple perceptual field in the sense spoken of above to be "looked at." Choice in the proper sense refers not to a zone of "objects," but to one of "projects."
of attention. The perceptibility of the object, insofar as it extends beyond my clear perception, in itself signifies nothing. This notion signifies something only on the condition that with it I designate the relation of the field of inattention to that of attention. There is no exploration of the field of inattention as such. The background is to be "perceived with" (mitgeschaut) as the background of the inspected aspect.

Sartre, taking up Husserl's view, refers to this specific character of attention in a study of the image that stems from the same method as does this communication. The difference between the image and perception, as experienced, rests above all on the fact that the stuff of the image is the whole of the image, whereas perception gives us what exists as overflowing our perception. The object is inexhaustible, it can be indefinitely rotated in relation to an indefinite number of perspectives. The totality of existence is given "toned down" with the object perceived in a particular way. What seems important to me is to relate this overflowing of the object to the experience of attention: the object overflows perception because attentive perception withdraws the perceived from the total field. Withdrawn by attention, overflowing of the object are one and the same thing. Far from this notion of an overflowing object, of perceptibility referring us to something unknowable, it is part of the structure of actual perception. Later we shall take up a more metaphysical point of view on this notion of perceptibility. I do not want to say that everything we understand by substance of the object is exhausted by the "toned-down existence" in the field of inattention. In effect, the field of inattention is given to us all at once (mitgeschaut) with the perceived aspect, or rather with each of the object's instantaneous "profiles." But an object is never given to us all at once. As Husserl has emphasized, it is part of the essence of an object to be given through a multiplicity of "profiles," "perspectives" (Abschattungen). A spatial object is always given to me from one side at a time and each side from an infinity of angles. But each side announces the whole cube to me. Every object is given successively. "The perception of an object is therefore a phenomenon with an infinity of faces." What does this indicate to us? The necessity to move around the object, to attend, as Bergson says, to the fact that the sugar dissolves. Let

20 Sartre, "Structure intentionnel de l'image."
21 Sartre, "Structure intentionnel de l'image."
Attention is not a subjective sign of a thing in itself: "each perception of this continuous current of perception is already the perception of the thing." The thing is just the more or less anticipated unity of these "profiles." This thing, this nunc, and not, to be sure, the concept, the type. This notion of the perceived object as the unity of a multiplicity can clarify the paradox of attention. Husserl, so far as I know, did not bring together these two orders of consideration. Here is how it can be done: Husserl noted, on the one hand, that the object is given in a succession of profiles, on the other that each perception, hence each profile, at a given moment has a foreground and a background. This constitutes the aspect of the attentive profile. For, when I pay attention, I change in some way the accent on the object, I turn it in order to see the sides, or I develop the same side in order to unfold its multiple details, or I grasp it overall within a larger state of affairs. In doing this, I change the profile because attention is within time. But what is noteworthy is that each profile, in the case of attention, is taken from the preceding one. It is an aspect of the preceding one through the change of accent, through a new distribution of the planes. So, the change of aspect of the object in attentive perception is a particular case of a progressive unveiling of the object. This is the unveiling that depends on a simple change in my attention and not on some change [devenir] in the things. The identity of the object is thus most slowly grasped in the series of appearances of the object that do not depend on me (the die that spins). Our exploration of the world — and the experience of identity that goes with it — is a tightly woven mixture of changes of aspect that I carry out more or less voluntarily and of avatars that do not depend on me.

But our analysis has led us to envisage attention as an act. The changes of the aspects that appear to attention refer us back to an inner movement by which we make the object, the details, etc., shift, in short, to a change that we make appear. What does this "making appear" signify? To what measure does it depend on me, or, rather, what does this "depend on me" signify?


Here, Ricoeur added parenthetically, referring to the different cases of the figure just referred to, "when I do nothing more than change the accent." — Editors’ note.
The Act of Attention

If we want now to grasp more closely the exact nature of the activity characteristic of attention, we run into great difficulties.

(a) First of all, it is the essence of every act to not be able to be wholly reflected. An act is never before me (never an object) except at the price of ceasing to be itself, of becoming a state. The essence of an act of perception is to be caught up in the grasping of an object. I pay attention to this. I am wholly given over to the object. The eminently prospective character of attention is the essential obstacle to total reflection. To observe it is to change it since it is to take up a reflective attitude. Introspection, retrospection, and care for oneself are intimately bound up with one another. We have seen how attention is exclusive of such self-concern. To observe oneself is more or less to stop living. We are obliged to “surprise” the act thanks to the flavor of the halo of activity that is immediately experienced in the movement of attention toward its object; halo, lived experience, that is, not represented, not reflected. The act’s inherence in me is not experienced except in the very active grasping of something Other. In this sense, Malebranche and Berkeley were correct: there is no idea of the soul but rather a feeling (what Alexander calls “enjoyment”).24

(b) Beyond this inherent difficulty to all introspection, we have to take into account the difficulties belonging to introspection of the flow of time. Introspection tends to apply to instantaneous slices of time. We are tempted to look for some lived experience that, at a given moment, would correspond to the notion of an act. This difficulty weighs on the psychology of attention more than any other problem. It is because one has not seen the temporal aspect of attention that research into activity has borne so little fruit.

Attention and Pre-perception

First we encounter a prior problem: is attention, as has been so often repeated, a pre-perception, that is, a more or less conscious of itself preparation for perception by means of schemes, images, memories, “strong forms,” as the Gestaltists say, which would come to

24 “Enjoyment” is in English in the French text. The philosopher referred to here is Samuel Alexander (1859–1938). – Trans.
superimpose themselves in some way on perception in order to sort it out and clarify it? This idea is common to old-time associationism, to Bergsonian schematism, to that of Revault d’Allonnes, and to Gestalt theory.\textsuperscript{25}

I think this is not at all what attention means. If this idea imposed itself, it was first of all for theoretical reasons. A psychology of “states of consciousness” is incapable of comprehending that a perception can be experienced in the active mode without this constituting another “state” imposed on some prior one. In a general fashion, the notion of an act has no more place in psychology than does that of an intentional relation to an object. Both of them are constructed on the neutral, fictive plane of a “state of consciousness.”

But there is also a factual reason. It is easy to confuse attention with more complex phenomena like expecting and looking for, which are types of pre-perception, of anticipation. A child looks for the wolf’s head in the Épinal image – what then does “look for” mean? The child knows what he is searching for. He signifies it, thinks it (in the sense that Husserl takes the term \textit{meinen}), he does not see it. When he has found the wolf’s head, he has actualized, fulfilled (\textit{erfüllt}) his until then empty intention. The object is there, alive and in person. No doubt, the idea helped him to see it. Is that the secret of attention: the passage from the “simply thought” to the “really possessed,” from “intended” to “seen”? I think, on the contrary, that what makes seeking attentive is not the presence and action of an a priori idea. It is [rather] exploration, as naïve as possible, that serves the seeking. One seeks to see, but one explores in order to see. It is not representation or desire that make attention possible, but the naïvety of looking. In the same sense, the anticipating intention, constitutive of seeking, can itself be attentive insofar as it is kept upfront in consciousness; it cannot be said to be attentive in virtue of another anticipation, except at the price of an infinite regress. To be sure, attention is always more or less in service of a desire, an intention (in the ordinary sense of an anticipating project), a task – in short, of a need and a volition. But neither the need nor the volition constitutes attention.\textsuperscript{26} What is attention in looking for something is not the anticipation; it is the fact of turning toward the

\textsuperscript{25}Gabriel Revault d'Allones (1872–1949) was a psychiatrist and professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne. He was long-time editor of the \textit{Revue d'esthétique} and author of the article on schematization in \textit{La Nouveau traité de psychologie}, ed. George Dumas (Paris: Alcan, 1934). – Trans.

\textsuperscript{26}Bradley, “On Active Attention.”
background in order to question it. The interrogative character of attention seems essential to me. One does not look for or find what one "thinks." Rather, one seeks by exploring, by questioning the object. So at the limit one can question the background without having some a priori idea.27

Here we touch the requisite action implied by attention. In this limit-case, attention is not complicated by an anticipatory schema. But this is just a limit-case. Husserl had already emphasized that attention consists uniquely in turning to or turning away, and that the act of extracting the object from the background or allowing it to fall back into it consists solely in this Zuwenden and Abwenden. What is more, there is a frontal and rear plane only in that I turn toward or turn away. It is this act that constitutes the specific distribution of the field of attention. The act face and the object face do not have an independent signification, but are constituted together in the intentional experience.

This idea of Husserl's is quite compatible with the opposition that I note between interrogation and anticipation. That it should be a means in service of a willed or instinctive anticipation is not doubtful. But it is only accidently the object of a desire or willed (for example: I want to pay attention, to resist falling asleep at a concert) or their effect. There is a fundamental opposition between two attitudes, one consisting in inflecting perception in the direction of some anticipation, the other in seeking an innocent eye and senses, in opening one's mind, in welcoming the other as other. Through this respect for the object, we place ourselves in the hands of the object, much more than we inscribe the object to our past account. The true name for attention is not anticipation but surprise. This opposition remains unperceived at the level of sensory perception because our senses are rarely disinterested. It is capital at the level of thinking in search of the truth. If attention were anticipation, how could we oppose attention to precipitation and prevention? Descartes recalls to us that error is first of all memory, the memory of an intuition and not the immediate presence of an object. Malebranche and Berkeley emphasize that preconceived ideas upset the view of truth only as a result of our inattention. For them, attention is the mind's innocence. Perhaps there has never been an act of attention, in the sense

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27 Cf. the experience of "in order to see" in Claude Bernard, Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale (Ballière, 1865), § 5; An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine, trans. Henry Copley Green (New York: Macmillan, 1927; Dover Books, 1957).
that Kant said there has never been an act of good will. It is a limit in pure experience, but one whose meaning we do comprehend.  

**Voluntary and Passive Attention. Consideration of Passing Time**

We come here to a classic distinction: that between voluntary and passive attention. Here more than elsewhere, we need to guard against the naturalist temptation. We must not seek the causes of voluntary attention and try at any price to reduce them to those of passive attention. At least, we ought not to begin there. First, we must recognize the specificity of these two experiences and seek what they signify.

There is no doubt that we perfectly distinguish between voluntary and passive attention. Language—which harbors a veritable wisdom, a veritable phenomenological tact—perfectly expresses this difference in lived experience. In one case, I am absorbed by . . ., occupied by . . .; my attention is captured by . . .: the object has a kind of grip on me. To be sure, it is not illegitimate to consider the character of objects’ appeal or attraction as a projection of our desires, and to think that the object’s attraction is only the projection of the pressure of our desires. A psychology of temptation here would be rich in lessons. Passive attention tends at the limit toward fascination or a total capture of attention. We shall return later to these experiences in relation to freedom. The capacity to be surprised and to master one’s surprise about the object, to be gratuitously occupied by it, so to speak, would be the opposite limit.  

Voluntary attention is a mastering of passing time, a power of orientation in time.

This mastering of passing time presents itself at first glance as an emancipation from passing time. The ingenuousness of the gaze, the naivety of perception, is possible only for one who knows in some way how to neutralize his or her past. We have taken from Descartes the opposition between intuition and remembering an intuition. We have seen how philosophies and psychologies that look for attention in some inference about the present based on the past miss the real meaning of attention. An act is all the more attentive in that it is . . .

*In this sense, Husserl is correct to say that real example is not required for eidetic psychology.*

*In concluding, we shall speak of how this spectacular, free attitude is interior in metaphysical dignity to an actual engagement.*
more reliant on the regulation of its object and less so on the traces of older acts.

This type of emancipation from passing time has inspired philosophies of the instant that erect Act and Passing Time as an antinomy. I do not think it necessary to look for the secret of attention in a change of passing time into a myriad of instantaneous acts. A certain emancipation from passing time implies instead a mastery of passing time, a capacity to orient oneself, to stop, to change objects. Furthermore, a power is only thinkable in terms of some succession.

To put it another way, there are two passing times: one undergone and one mastered, guided. Whatever may lie behind this power of orientation, a comprehensive psychology must not be either reductive or genetic; it has to be purely and simply descriptive, for that is the only way to distinguish between attention and fascination. In fascination, I have lost my power to change the object. Mental life is, so to speak, frozen, congealed. Time passes but in place.\(^{30}\) I no longer focus on the object, I am absorbed by it.\(^{31}\)

### Attention and Effort

One last point needs to be noted: this mutability of thinking that depends on me and gets combined with an involuntary unrolling of time does not necessarily imply effort. To stop does not necessarily presuppose a shriveling-up around the object, a battle against the forces of distraction. The distribution of the perceptual field into a background of inattention and a center of attention may or may not be complicated by inhibition, and the fleetingness of the object that one stops considering is not necessarily an exclusion. Attention is not a force.

### Attention and Its Philosophical Problems

It is possible now to situate the problem of attention among other philosophical problems. Philosophy is in relation to phenomenology like a Cubist view of things in relation to an Impressionist one. It looks for the order to experiences and their agreement, whereas pure description looks for their distinction and specificity. This perspective is necessarily more precarious and only probable.

\(^{30}\) Cf. Mallarmé's "Le Cygne": "le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui."

\(^{31}\) Cf. too the metaphors of the bird-catcher's bird lime, the hunter's net, etc.
Attention

The problem of attention allows us to cast a glance at the two important sides of thinking: knowing and acting, truth and freedom. It allows us to grasp their articulation, their common root.

Attention and Truth

H. Cartes was the first who emphasized that the idea of evidence obtained a reference to attention, although his insights prolong those of Saint Thomas, as we shall see in relation to the problem of freedom. Malebranche, with a richer analysis, places this interrogative ingenuousness that is at the heart of attention at the center of "search for truth". He compares attention to a prayer by which we consult the Word. Berkeley, coming next, does not separate the intuition of a true philosophy from the theme of attention.

Generally speaking, everyone up to Kant considers evidence as a kind of presence that we do not construct – even if an action on our conditions it in some way. Truth only belongs to attentive minds.

This fundamental connection of objectivity with a subjective condition, with an inner action, is worth lingering over. Attention allows us to constitute a kind of descriptive realism based on the notion of interpretivity. More exactly, through the very character of attention, through its interrogative character, we understand that knowing is not situated in the register of doing, of producing. It is neither action nor passion.

(a) It is not a passion: for the object, to be before the mind is not to act on the mind. It is a different, irreducible relation, which Berkeley indicates this way: "objects are in thought not through some mode or attribute, but as ideas."32 The relation of causality therefore in no way clarifies the relation of knowing. It is a specific relation. The idea does not act, it is known.

Laird, in an article in Mind devoted to Berkeley, emphasizes that Berkeley brings us close to the idea of certain modern philosophers, namely, that a mental act can be adynamic, neither active nor passive.33 Or rather, because knowing is not suffering, knowing

George Berkeley, Principles of Human Knowledge, 1710, Part I, §§1–33. [Berkeley actually says, “those qualities are in the mind only as they are perceived by it, that is, not by way of mode or attribute, but only by way of idea.” Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 44. – Trans.]

can be experienced in a passive mode (fascination) or an active one (voluntary attention). There is no contradiction in this act’s being both receptive and active, or rather receptive and passive. Fascination at the same time is receptivity, in that it knows, and passivity, as an undergone passing of time. Attention is at the same time receptivity, through its adherence to the object, and activity, through its inherence in the subject and through his or her freedom of orientation.

(b) Hence one understands that knowing can be experienced in an active mode without being productive of its object, without altering its object from the point of view of its truth. Attention signifies a very elevated act of knowing and the most complete destitution in the face of the object. Through attention, I place myself actively at the disposition of the object. One sees at the same time that philosophies of attention are philosophies of the immediate. It is equally natural that the theme of attention should disappear from idealist philosophies, if we mean by this an ideal construction of the object. Attention conditions an opposition with a fundamental value in the order of knowing: not that of the intelligible and the sensible, but rather that of the immediate and the constructed. Malebranche and Berkeley, opposed on the level of the first pair of values and knowing, agree in subordinating the constructed to the immediate. Their philosophies are two philosophies of seeing and two philosophies of perception.

(c) Moving on, we rejoin a distinction known to Scholastic philosophers: we are masters of the presence of an idea (exercise) but not of its structure, its meaning (specification). I can produce an idea for me but not in itself. Through attention, it shows “itself” insofar as “I” make it appear. Here is receptivity in an active mode. At bottom, this is what the scientist calls impartiality. Through attention, I uphold the self-revelation of the idea.

There are numerous branches to this problem.

(a) There is first of all access to the problem of error. Malebranche’s philosophy invites us to see in error a flawed attention thanks to which automatic responses occur; a realm of passivity through demission. We shall return later to this question of a voluntary action by default.

(b) A philosophy of attention will have to dissipate the false dilemma of Fichte and Lequier: either self-evidence or freedom, and to refuse the combination of freedom and fideism.34

Freedom lies in attention, we shall say below. To be free is to maintain the presence of ideas but not their intrinsic interconnections. One can think about whatever one wants but one cannot think whatever one wants. Attention shows us the articulation of intellectual determinism and freedom. Descartes's letters to Father Messland clarify this nexus at the highest level of self-evidence. Such evidence infallibly entails the will's adhesion. Yet, on the other hand, I can always doubt this evidence by suspending the presence of the idea, by regarding something else. The freedom of the cogito's acts is built on the necessity of the interconnections of the cogitata, the system of truth on the contingent history of individual thought. Husserl, more than anyone else, has shown that the internal necessity of a logic is compatible with the freedom of consciousness. Indeed, the reference to me is inscribed in every "attentional" act. Attention is a "ray from the I" (ichstrahl) - whatever the nature of this inherence of the act in the I and the nature of consciousness one may take up in the final analysis.

Unfortunately, Husserl sacrificed to the tradition of idealism in looking for the subject of attention in a transcendental I that he opposes to the empirical me. This is an impersonal subject. One may think on the contrary that attention is the most personal act of all. If truth only appears to the most attentive minds, it does not appear to thinking in general but to this mind, at this moment of its history. Its presence is just as contingent and individual as its logical implications are necessary and anonymous. An impersonal act is just as absurd as an act without intentionality. Impersonality, or rather anonymity, is the mark of the logical object. There is a unification of knowledge - that is, the stock of humanity's cogitata but not a vanishing of persons to the benefit of some monstrous, faceless entity. Persons can communicate through converging intentions but not abolish themselves into something impersonal. The intentionality of knowing alone can allow us to understand how an object can be like a third person object for multiple consciousnesses. To think the same thing (which, by the way, is rigorously possible only if the abstract were not to present itself through successive spatial profiles) in no way implies the identification of [thinking] subjects.

The philosophical signification of attention orients us instead toward another value opposition than that of the empirical me and the transcendental I: the opposition of the "one" and the "person." To pay attention, to uproot oneself from prejudice and the preconceived idea, is to pass not from the me to the I (in the Kantian sense of this opposition) but from the one to the personal I. For example,
the scientist’s impartiality is a highly personal act at the same time that it lifts him or her to the level of the universal.35

(c) These remarks on attention and objectivity, on the one hand, and on attention and the I, on the other, allow us to say a word about the connection that Husserl has instituted between the existence of the non-perceived (the thing in itself) and the field of inattention, which he calls a potential consciousness. We have seen that attention consists in making what is perceived stand out against a background that is not strictly perceived for itself but “perceived with” (mitgeschaut), and that in return attention includes a specific experience of the object’s overflowing our knowing of it. Husserl thinks that there is an access here to the notion of the preexistence of the thing in itself. The non-perceived would be the perceptible and the perceptible the content of an inattentive consciousness. (A comparison might be drawn here with Bradley, for whom every object stands out against a ground of feeling:36)

I doubt that we can follow Husserl on this terrain. If it is legitimate to take every unperceived thing in itself to be perceptible, perceptibility in turn is not a potential perception, a “horizon of perception,” as Husserl puts it. The world is not given to me in permanence or in totality. Josiah Royce and Gabriel Marcel are correct when they link the signification of the in itself to perceptibility by others.37 Knowing is a three-way relation and not a two-way one. The object is what I speak about with others. The certainty that that other perceives, that the object is “seen by others,”38 is a more important key than the notion of existence in itself. A philosophy of attention does not go so far. We ought not to be surprised that Husserl turned to this side. His impersonalism prevented him from seeking elsewhere than in a potential consciousness the signification of the “in itself.” The plurality of personal subjects is the true access to the comprehension of the existence in itself of the universe. But just as

35Moreover, attention does not exhaust, in turn, the notion of the person (cf. below: Conclusion).
36*Feeling* is in English in the French text. – Trans.
38I am constantly surprised that a child of less than two years old should understand perfectly: (1) that an act of perception can stem from others; (2) that an object can be an object for others than him- or herself, for another subject; (3) that it should be the same object of perception for him or her.
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Attention is not just the attitude that makes us permeable to the truth, available for the object; it is also what makes us masters of our actions. We may seem to have turned a page, to have passed from the problem of knowledge to that of action. On the contrary, it is the vital articulation of the two problems that we have to outline. It is the very solidarity of the problems of truth and free decision that we need to place in relief.

The problem of freedom may be approached from a purely descriptive point of view as a search for meaning: what does the specific experience of governing our acts signify? Here we have to resist the temptation of controversies about determinism. It stems from another point of view: that of naturalistic explanation.

I have the concrete experience of a distinction between what depends on me and what does not depend on me, and also of an intermediary zone where, however, my responsibility is exercised. There is a realm of the voluntary that runs off in diminishing up to that vast world that does not depend on me. However, we need to classify every act from this point of view. For example, a motor automatism depends weakly on me. A wish depends on me for its expression but not for its realization. Certain decisions depend on me from the point of view of their production more than their execution, etc. Not only does this concrete experience have degrees, it is never separated from another equally quite concrete experience with which it is in tension: I am in the world, I am a piece of it, it holds me, encompasses me, supports me, will absorb me. These two experiences — that I can do something in the world and to the world, and that, overall, the world does not depend on me — are adjusted to each other in each concrete case without these two situations being able really to be thought apart from each other, nor juxtaposed, nor logically brought into agreement in terms of some thinkable relationship, nor such that one destroys the other. I am not wholly a part of the world since I can think this world and transform it. My action cannot be truly thought of as an event in the world that I look at

from the outside. In return, I am not wholly its master since I act only in terms of certain lines of force, certain ways the world allows. These two situations cannot therefore be experienced as lived except in terms of their tension. We never have the possibility to set them before us in order to look at them. They adhere too much to what we are for us to take this step backward, characteristic of all knowledge.

As soon as we detach them from ourselves, we are talking about another thing. A sneeze will no longer be my sneeze, with all the ambiguity contained in this "my," but an event to be explained. This body will no longer be my lived body but one object among objects, the biologist's body. This objectifying is the condition of the problem of determinism and the constituting of a cosmology. My influence will sometimes be denied, sometimes affirmed as an objective reality, a hypothetical, hyperorganic force, which rightly will be an object of ridicule to biologists. The conflict of determinism and freedom is born. These two concepts do not exactly overlap this twofold, paradoxical yet correlative experience. We must even be on guard, in the problem of the will, about introducing these rough concepts. They refer to the point of view of causality, which is a good instrument for exploring and coordinating what lies within closed systems of objects that we can look at from the outside, but which goes wrong as soon as we set it against lived experience, against those fundamental and concrete experiences of mine that are never set before me like a spectacle. I shall not take the expression "freedom" from here on in other than a purely descriptive sense as what is under my influence, without breaking off its solidarity with my experience of "being in the world."

Having said this, we are going to see to what extent what we know about attention can clarify the description of decision-making or, more precisely, to what extent the influence we experience in deciding comes down to mastering paying attention.

It is clear that a decision is the end of a process of maturation currently called deliberation. I want to try to justify the following thesis, whose permanence Laporte has demonstrated from Saint Thomas to Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz. What makes a

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In  in n  m, iiny decision, voluntary is the permanent play of attention. This thesis allows us to dissipate a false dilemma: does the decision follow from a judgment or does it stem from a coup de force that is inscribed between the final practical judgment and the decision? It may seem that we have here two limit-positions: Leibniz and James, the principle of the best and of the fiat.

Now the [four] first philosophers mentioned (and Laporte believes that Leibniz the psychologist does not break with the tradition as much as one claims) [say:] one can will only what one has known and judged to be good. The will follows the apparent good: that is, all things considered, the part that is judged to be preferable. On this point, there is no possible equivocation. [Yet] how are we to reconcile this principle with the Thomistic affirmation that the will is undetermined with regard to every particular good and with the Cartesian affirmation, which at bottom is reducible to it, that the freedom of indifference remains in every case where the understanding is not faced with something self-evident, that even in the face of such evidence a certain freedom remains (letters to Fathers Petau and Mesland)?

However, there really is no contradiction, for the will does not insert its act like turning a corner between the judgment and the decision; it lies at the root of the judgment. The man is not the master of his decision unless he is master of his judgment: influence over his decision, if it exists, is influence over our judgment. How can this be? Here is where attention seems to clarify everything.

If we follow the classic positions, the will intervenes in three ways and, in each case, it does so through paying attention.

(a) The very fact of deliberating is voluntary: to deliberate rather than allow one to be guided by some impulse, to apply one’s understanding [to think about things]; this is the first role of the will. But is it not through the use of paying attention to ideas that we render ourselves accessible to more or less rational motives? It is the exercising of the understanding, which we apply to a situation, that is voluntary. What the Scholastic philosophers called freedom of exercise is paying attention.

(b) Deliberation is a going back and forth among ideas, feelings, etc. It is not necessarily voluntary, that is, my sovereign act. It is so in fact only rarely. What it, our power to direct the debate, does make manifest is this surprising orientation among abstract or concrete objects. The presence of ideas depends on us or we are an automaton. Self-evidence, let us not forget, only appears to attentive

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41 *Nil volitum nisi preacognitum.*
minds. Its meaning does not depend on me—it's presence does. Attention consists in turning all the faces of a mental object. What the Scholastics called the freedom of indifference is again attention—attention as the power to guide the passing of time, to consider this or that. If we now admit that the decision is carried out by the last practical judgment following the principle of the apparent good, this judgment itself will have been voluntary in its elaboration.

(c) There is more: not only the fact of deliberating and the content of deliberation sometimes depend on us, but the final judgment, [the one] that carries out the decision, is voluntary in a third sense. Deliberation may end up at several problematic, incommensurable judgments, that is, ones sustained by tastes, values, motives, that have nothing in common and no spontaneous priority of one over the other. It is this same incommensurability that normally indicates the place for a voluntary choice. You are going to say: well, James' and Leibniz's *fiat* is mistaken. The principle of the best is sacrificed. False dilemma. Saint Thomas, Descartes, and Malebranche all affirmed that we decide on the basis of the last practical judgment, just as they all affirmed the existence of a freedom of indifference at this moment and even a kind of *coup de force* worthy of James. This is the case for Saint Thomas, [who] explains that the *coup de force* consists precisely in bringing it about that, in the oscillation of judgments forming and unforming themselves, a certain one should be last. "To make a certain consent be the last one is the whole act of election."42 It is indeed true that the decision is carried out by the last practical judgment but it is the last one as an act of the will. Is this stopping place anything other than a halt to attention applied to some thought? Earlier, it was the mobility of attention that guided deliberation, now it is stopping that gives it an end point. Deliberation is attention in its movement; what we call choice is attention that has come to a halt.

A few lines from Descartes and Malebranche will suffice to underscore the continuity of the doctrine from Saint Thomas. We never fail, writes Descartes, to choose the part that we judge to be the best *hic et nunc*.

but the nature of the soul is such that it hardly attends for more than a moment to a single thing; hence, as soon as our attention turns from the reasons which show us the thing is food for us, and we merely keep in our memory the thought that it appeared desirable to us, we

can call up before our mind some other reason to make us doubt it, and so suspend our judgment, and perhaps even form a contrary judgment.  

...we can escape evidence itself in ceasing to pay attention to the reasons for it. Our acts depend on our judgments but our judgments depend on our attention. We are masters of our judgment because we are masters of our attention: this is the whole Cartesian point. The clear idea is present only to the attentive mind. Pascal wants to say the same thing in fragment 99 of his *Pensees.*

Malebranche is the one who has written the most illuminating page on this point. We can love nothing that is not or does not appear to be a good, he says, but the understanding receives its direction from the will, in applying itself to some objects rather than others. The whole action of the will is to act on the understanding, to "desire that the understanding represent something new"; in itself it cannot will anything without [knowledge]; but it commands the understanding that represents some object to it. If there is any evidence, the will is obliged to "repose" because the understanding can no longer consider anything new, having exhausted every face of the object; in the absence of evidence, consent can be refused because the will is capable of going further and can again order the understanding to apply itself to some new thing.

All this is quite clearly schematic. Nonetheless, these broad-brush analyses all point research in the same direction: our influence resides in the conducting of mental time, in the mutations in our thinking.

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44 In the Brunschvicg edition (Lafuma 539; Sellier 458). ["The will is one of the principal organs of belief, not that it creates belief, but because things are truth or false according to the aspect from which we observe them. The will, which prefers one aspect to another, turns the mind away from considering the qualities of the one it does not care to see. And thus the mind, moving as one with the will, keeps looking at the aspect it likes, and so judges by what it sees" (*Pensees*, 145). – Trans.]

41 Ricœur places the following passage in quotation marks but it only corresponds in part to the text of Malebranche cited (*De la recherche de la vérité*, I, II, § 2, p. 8), so we have kept the quotations marks only where the words are those of Malebranche. – Editors’ note.

40 Ricœur cites Malebranche’s expression without using quotation marks. – Editors’ note.
What confirms that a fruitful philosophy lies in this direction is the astonishing convergence of classical philosophy, James’ theory of a *fait*, and the experimental psychology work of Ach and Michotte. This convergence rests according to me on the eminently descriptive common ground of diverse lines of thought and their fidelity to a healthy phenomenology. But this needs to be developed further. The following text by itself, however, underscores the interest in such a comparison:

*To sustain a representation, to think* is, in short, the only moral act, for the impulsive and the obstructed, for the sane and lunatics alike. . . . *The only resistance which our will can possibly experience is the resistance which such an idea offers to being attended to at all. To attend to it is the volitional act, and the only inward volitional act which we ever perform.*

The difference between James and the classical philosophers is as follows. He limits the role of attention on the one hand to a *type* of volition, on the other to an ultimate *moment* of decision. As concerns this latter point, Saint Thomas had, as we have seen, considered the halt in attention as a kind of *coup d'état*, but he thought that attention assured the unity of the voluntary phenomenon, or rather its temporal continuity. As for James’ first limitation of the *fait*, it is explained by the fact that he mixes effort and attention. In so doing, he misses the real homogeneity of every type of decision. (He distinguishes four or five, from the most rational to the most blind.)

It would be interesting to take up Michotte’s analyses, which have perfectly emphasized, on the basis of considerable experimental material, that choice is a kind of stopping of attention. Do not the psychologists say that attention is a kind of choice? The converse is more true, for choice is a complex phenomenon. The essence of

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47 Albert Michotte (1881–1965), a Belgian experimental psychologist who studied the perception of causality. Narziss Ach (1871–1946), a German psychologist who studied the competition between learned associations and task goals. – Trans.


49 The reference is lacking. Ricoeur may be referring to one or the other of Michotte’s two works: *Les signes régionaux. Nouvelles recherches expérimentales sur la répartition de la sensibilité tactile dans les états d’attention et d’inattention* (Louvain: Institut supérieur de philosophie, 1905), or *Étude expérimentale sur le choix volontaire et ses antécédents immédiats* (Louvain: Institut supérieur de philosophie, 1910). – Editors’ note.
Attention, according to Michotte, is not an effort; it is a "mental picture" by which one designates an alternative. This "designating," in its pure state, does not differ essentially from the gaze through which the field of perception gets organized and arranged. Through attention, something emerges and the rest vanishes. Similarly through choice, attention fixes on a possibility of action just as the gaze does on an object. Welcoming, allowing, consenting, paying attention, are the same thing. Faced with a germinal temptation, we feel how much the gaze is more primitive and even more efficacious than an effort, than a stiffening, than an inhibition. Vivification of one idea, vanishing of another, this is the essence of attention and choice. No philosopher has seen the kinship of choice and looking, of disjoined effort and choice, better than Gabriel Marcel. He too refuses to consider the will as a force. Willing, he says, is refusing to stop discussing. The vanishing of any "buts" constitutes the choice: "Thus there is no will unless there is real detachment, i.e., detachment that is not recognized as such. . . . In this way, I am able to triumph over the obstacles within me, that is, to negate or suppress them as such."

Numerous problems are grafted to this central problem of attention and decision-making for which we can here only point out the main lines and branches.

(a) Our influence has degrees. In this regard, there are some notions in Saint Thomas and the Cartesians that require a serious examination, in order to discern what lived experience they actually contain. They speak of a mind's "capacity," its "limitation," and its "share." The passions more or less tap this "capacity that we have for thinking" and more or less allow us the capacity to think other things, which is freedom. Saint Thomas outlines a kind of law of compensation between the inclination as tapped by the passions and the inclination that remains for the good, thereby announcing the strange law of the constancy of the quantity of the soul's movements found in Malebranche: "if something draws the whole intention or a large part of it to its side, one cannot be said to be paying full attention." This kind of distracting of attention, of tapping our

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gaze, is what modern thinkers call the law of interest. Commenting on Saint Thomas, Laporte notes, "for passion or habit, it is a single operation that 'distracts' us from the good or inclines us toward the bad, and . . . this operation always comes down to the same point: directing the attention." Is this not the key to the well-known "inclining without necessitating," which would then be a phenomenonological not a logical distinction? Everything depends on whether this absorption is total or if we retain some capacity of attending to. The will is conquered only if reason, that is, attention, is wholly absorbed: "therefore either passion alone occupies our soul, or there is outside it a will, and this will does not necessarily obey it." This remaining will is the power to think other things: *divertando ad alias cogitationes*. This analysis is more concrete than it first seems: fascination is precisely attention that has been totally captured, "necessary." Passion leaves us responsible precisely to the extent that it is not fascination, mental vertigo. To distinguish between "to incline" and "to necessitate" is simply to refuse the romantic alibi of the fatality of passion. In this question, what remains truly obscure is not the idea of a total yet more or less freedom; it is the idea of the mind's total capacity, whose concrete character and difference among different people we have not completely grasped.

(b) Another difficulty gets grafted to this first one: this capacity to turn away our attention, this capacity to think about something else, appears to us as *a power that may rest unused*. Here we touch on quite delicate experiences where it is difficult to separate the artificial from the actually lived experience. This analysis has for a long time been misled by logical discussions about ideas like power, capacity, and strength. Yet, there is something real here. Remorse includes the specific experience of an unemployed power, of a possible duty not carried out, the feeling of having been able to do something different.  

53 *Andersgekonnt haben* writes Max Scheler in "Repentir et renaissance," in *Le Sens de la souffrance*, trans. P. Klossowski (Aubier, 1936), 99. [The "ability to have been other than we were." "Repentance and Rebirth," in *Person and Self-Value*, trans. Manfred S. Frings (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987), 103. – Trans.]
Attention

Inattention. In [the other], I can pay attention; my inattention is not a simple lack of paying attention but an absence of making use of it. In this sense, Malebranche says that sin is distraction. The moralists invite us, like Descartes, to make use of our freedom “to the greatest extent possible.” The existence of faults of omission authorizes us to sometimes consider the absence of attention as a voluntary phenomenon, voluntary owing to a lack of making use of will. This will lead to some essential problems. In particular, is voluntary not only through a lack of attention. It is rather through an act of demission rather than some positive act that we are responsible for thinking badly. If an act cannot be voluntary by fault, that is, by nonuse, laziness, precipitation, impatience, are we guilty because of them?

Certainly the idea of an unemployed power is a difficult idea. The only question is whether it rests on a specific experience. In any case, it is an important element of our experience of freedom.

We have taken a somewhat cavalier view of some big metaphysical problems looked at from the point of view of attention and outlined in this way the features of a philosophy of attention.

I do not want to give the impression that attention is for me the last word when it comes to our inner life. I think, on the contrary, that there is an ascending dialectic – in the sense that Plato meant by this – that is not completed by attention. Attention raises us to the degree of rational thinking, but there is another degree that Gabriel Marcel’s philosophy, for example, has the merit of discerning and exploring. If philosophy, even when it places the accent on the role of attention, is ceaselessly haunted by the myth of an impersonal subject, attention represents in [inner] life a stage where thinking is not totally [adequate] to an ontology. “The illusion of a spectacle” is born at this level. As said above, paying attention and seeing are correlative. Attention presupposes the distinction of an “in me” and a “before me.” Quite naturally, the person takes himself to be this impartial spectator who sees the great metaphysical problems march by before him and takes on the attitude “of someone who is not involved in it but who judges his duty to. . . .” In reality, it is “a profound illusion to believe that I can maintain the same attitude when I undertake an inquiry, say, into the value of life; it would be a paralogism to suppose I can pursue such an inquiry as though my

Attention, says Marcel, rests at the level of what can be a problem and does not rise to that of being a mystery. With what can be a problem, the criteria of validity are independent of the X who recognizes them and of his degree of purity or contemplation. In the case of a mystery, I am “implicated,” in the sense that one is “implicated in some affair.” There it would be better to speak of reverence or, better, of disponible:

"reverent attentiveness is no doubt what is least perceptual in the soul; it does not consist in regarding something, it is a resting place, an internal restoration.” At the summit of this ascending dialectic, where the soul participates rather than gazes at, the distinction between “in me” and “before me” blurs.

When I say that a being is granted to me as a presence or a being (it comes to the same, for it is not a being for me if it is not a presence), this means that I am unable to treat it as if it were merely placed in front of me; between it and me there arises a relationship which, in a sense, surpasses my awareness of it; it is not only before me, it is also within me – or rather, these categories are transcended, they have no longer any meaning. The word influx conveys, though, in a manner which is far too physical and spatial, the kind of interior accretion, of accretion from within, which comes into being as soon as presence is effective.56

And Marcel lifts us to a level where presence is no longer presence “before me.”

Great and almost invincible is the temptation to think that such effective presence can be of that of an object; but if we believed this we would fall back to the level of the problematical and remain on the hither-side of mystery; and against this belief fidelity raises up its voice: “Even if I cannot see you, if I cannot touch you, I feel you, you are with me; it would be a denial of you not to be assured of this.”57

The possibility of this something beyond attention, the meaning of this ascending dialectic, make up perhaps the whole of metaphysics. It is certain that the problem of truth and the signification of freedom are equally transmuted in it – but that is another story.

The [following] theses have the goal of bringing to light the properly philosophical intentions of a phenomenology of the voluntary and the involuntary.¹ In carrying out the work of description and comprehension, these intentions remain implicit, like the background of a figure. To be sure, phenomenology has to try to be “presuppositionless,” to be philosophically “neutral.” But this vow can be loyally observed only if the implicit philosophy of the phenomenologist is “thematized” at some moment. And the way to thematize it in relation to his phenomenological inquiry is, at least provisionally, to reduce it to the intentions guiding his research, or, to speak like Kant, to the regulative ideas that at each instant propose to unify the object of this research.

In the particular case of a phenomenology of the will, it seems to me that the study of the articulations between the voluntary and involuntary moments of consciousness is continuously oriented by the ideal of the unity of the human person. It is very striking that it should be the great dualisms of history that have indicated the price

of this unity, as though dualism were the philosophical test that had to be passed through in order to conquer its true meaning. For example, Plato's old dualism, in the *Phaedo*, wanted to surpass itself in a higher ontological unity, as we see in the *Philebus*. And Descartes's dualism of method in the second of his *Metaphysical Meditations* tried to surpass itself in the concrete and practical unity of the person in the Sixth Meditation and in *The Passions of the Soul*. And again, the opposition of practical reason and sensibility in Kant sought reconciliation in the highest good at the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. So great philosophies seem to have been marked by the conquest of and victory over dualism.

The phenomenology of the voluntary and the involuntary, without saying anything about the ontological import of this double approach, at least at the beginning, will rediscover this ontological aspect on its proper level in terms of exigency and regulation. In return, the description of the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary — and of the functions in which this reciprocity gets expressed — allows new light to be cast on this unity and this duality of human beings. The object of this presentation is therefore to show how the study of the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary can renew the classical problem of the relationships between "freedom" and "nature," by proposing a "practical mediation" between them.

I

The dualism that phenomenology encounters on its own terrain and against which it has constantly to reconquer itself proceeds from the attitudes of consciousness faced with its own life. It is not yet therefore an ontological dualism but, if one may put it this way, a pre-ontological one, preliminary to any ontology. In a word, the concrete life of consciousness undergoes the attraction of two opposed exigencies.

On the one side an objective thought gets elaborated, that is, a thought that posits objects true for everyone in a world unleashed from every singular perspective, hence a thought that omits itself as a consciousness for which there are objects. The first effect of this objective thought is to treat the life of the body and the whole of involuntary life as a part of this objective world. In this way a scientific psychology and biology are born. And it must be said that to the extent that my corporal, involuntary life is confused and enigmatic for me, and sometimes alien to me, all this invites setting it among things.
On the other side, consciousness, in grasping itself in taking up its objects, tends to identify its own life, recognized in its density, with self-consciousness and thereby to exile itself in its aptitude for self-reflection. It has to be said that this tendency is also inscribed in the very structure of consciousness. We see this in the Cartesian cogito. Descartes's philosophy well shows how these two movements are solidary with each other, that is, the consolidation of an objective world not bound to any consciousness and, polarly opposed to this, the reduction of consciousness to self-consciousness.

To comprehend the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary is, on every level, to struggle against this dualism issuing from the attitudes of consciousness and, as a result, to place these attitudes in relation to a more fundamental attitude. On the one side, it is necessary to return before self-consciousness to see consciousness as adhering to its body, to its whole involuntary life, and through it, to a world of action. On the other side, returning before the objectifying of this involuntary life, we have to rediscover this life in consciousness, in the form of motives for willing, organs, and a situation for willing. In short, it is necessary to reintegrate consciousness into the body and the body into consciousness.

II

Let us first follow the former direction, that of a second-order reflection on the reflexive aspects of the will.

The three aspects that description makes appear as complementary—deciding, moving, consenting—can be considered in any order, if we take a simply descriptive point of view. Nonetheless, they present themselves in a progressive order if we consider them from the point of view of a “practical mediation.” The decision still preserves a certain distance in relation to action, which alone really incorporates willing into things.²

(1) Let us begin our analysis therefore with the decision. For reflection, the decision culminates in the self’s determination of itself: I decide, it is I who determine what I am going to do and what I determine. The reflexive pronomial form of the verb [in French]³

²It does not really matter whether there is a delay between the decision and the action. The vague intention that runs through an “observed automatism” is recognized only after the fact as voluntary because I can consider it as the virtual project of a differed action.
³Je me décide. — Trans.
indicates the both active and reflexive relation of the self to itself. And it has to be said that this reflective judgment is in no way artificial. It suffices that I claim responsibility for my acts or that I blame myself for this reflexive imputation of myself to appear to my conscious awareness. Even if I go to the extreme of this reflexive movement, I discover myself as the possibility of myself that constantly precedes itself and reiterates itself in the anxiety of being able to exist. It is in the direction contrary to this reflexive separation, symmetrical to the objectification of my body, that we have to orient our analysis. In effect, the reflexive imputation of myself is a complication of an unreflexive imputation, hidden at the heart of my projects. First of all, the decision runs toward the future, and it is in this intended intention, in this “willed” or project, that is hidden this discrete reference to myself. I determine me insofar as I determine to . . . To put it another way, the decision emptily designates a future action as a real action, as an action in my power. I project myself into the action to be done, I designate myself, if I may put it this way, in the accusative as an aspect of the project. I put myself in play in the very design of the action to be done. And this imputed me is not yet an actual cogito but the dumb presence of my powers, themselves unrealized and projected, apprehended in the figure of the action that will take place. Hence before any reflexive judgment – in the style of an “it is me who . . .” – there is a prejudgmental, prejudicative consciousness of myself, which suffices to make ready for reflection the intention of my projects. It will suffice that I assume a position in relation to them to privilege this relation of self in relation to itself in the willed intention. We are thus led to subordinate the reflexive moment of willing to its intentional moment. In willing, I am first turned toward a “to be done,” emptily designated as a practical signification that has a categorical modality different from that of the vow, the wish, its temporal dimension different from that of prediction. In this sense, the first possibility inaugurated by the will is not my own can-be but the contingent possibility that I open in the world by projecting acting in it; it is the “can be done” intended on the world, this world that always remains on the horizon of my choice like the field of operation of my freedom.

Yet, in turn, the project gathers my existence together at a given moment only because it is rooted in a certain manner in my involuntary life. No decision without some motive: I decide because . . . There is an original relation between an initiative and a search for legitimacy, a dialectic of élan and support, as Jean Nogué puts it,

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which is difficult to respect. The relation presupposes that I have stopped confusing motive and cause. A motive is exactly what inclines the will by depicting a good to it (at least, a good for me, here and now). It is therefore purely reciprocal with a willing that receives it, invokes it, grounds itself in it. Motivation therefore expresses well, in this first moment of my decision, one of the hinges of the voluntary and the involuntary. On the contrary, a cause — in opposition to a motive — belongs to the objective sphere and is related to the naturalist explanation of things. We touch here therefore for the first time on a “practical mediation”: motive and project are strictly reciprocal in the sense that the advancing of my choice and the maturation of my reasons are one and the same thing. For example, for a hesitant conscious awareness, an uncertain motivation, accompanies an uncertain project, and I stop my considerations in stopping my reasons.

At the heart of the will therefore is inscribed a special receptivity that we are not entitled to confuse with a simple passivity. And, in anticipating somewhat what comes next, we can already say that in this way the artificial opposition between values and freedom can be overcome, since I only encounter values in a course of motivation and there is no motive outside this reciprocal relation to a burgeoning decision. On one side, I have to say that it is of the essence of an act of willing to look for reasons. But, in turn, this special receptivity, through which a value appears to me, is inseparable from an awareness that gropes toward a choice. If therefore it is of the essence of an act of willing that it legitimates itself through motives that make values appear to me here and now, then, reciprocally, it is the essence of values that they should appear as the possible motives for a decision that attains its meaning in basing itself upon them.

When we have seen a bit later how my involuntary life surpasses itself precisely in an affective figuration of values, we will have read in a way the other side of this “practical mediation.”

(2) The study of voluntary motion, as I have just stated, for the point of view of a practical mediation, indicates a progress in reaching a decision since it annuls the distance to things, the kind of unreality of the sketch, of the project. To decide, we said, is to “designate emptily” what is to-be-done-by-me. To act is to “realize it” through embodied movement, to carry out my project. There is therefore, between action and intention, an identity of meaning that allows me to say: this is what I willed, or: I did not will that. The difference lies not in the meaning but, in a way, in this meaning as empty and as fulfilled. And my gesture in this way goes beyond discourse. Or, more exactly, the one thing I ought to say about what
I do is the intention that I am going to fulfill. But the gesture as carried out is no longer a *logos* or, more exactly, is no longer a *lekton* — something sayable — but the present of a “work,” the advance of my existence through the medium of my body.

Let us try to apply to the lived experience of action this same foraging beneath the most reflective of experiences. This second voluntary moment normally does not rise to consciousness except through the reflexive reiteration of our effort. What we have to recapture therefore is in a way the voluntary movement animating corporeal spontaneity just short of such effort. This is difficult to do because the whole of the psychology of the will tends to flow toward this moment of effort where the will recognizes itself in its opposition to corporeal resistance, just as, a moment ago, the prereflective imputation of the self tended to culminate in the reflective affirmation of the self determining itself.

Here too, I have to discover that effort is the complication of an unreflective willing that goes to the things themselves. In effect, the complete intending of an action is aimed not at the body but through it at some work to be done in the world. What I do is not “move-my-arm” but rather “write-a letter.” I will say that the act, as such — the *pragma*, if I may be allowed this neologism — is the work carried out passively against the background of the world. In order to analyze this intentional structure of action correctly, we should say: I carry out *[faire]* me-writing-on-this-paper, using the verb “faire” in something like the sense of “to do” in English, as a kind of *sui generis* auxiliary. What goes beyond the auxiliary is the complete intentional correlate of the doing. An analysis of the structure of this *pragma* is possible, for which Tolman’s excellent analyses or those of some of the behaviorists are quite utilizable. On their basis, we can rediscover in this complement to acting, in this *pragma*, all the practical articulations of signals, means, pathways, tools. Acting then appears as stretched between the *I* as willing and the world as the field of action, it being understood that, short of all reflection of effort on itself, the *I* at this stage is merely the surpassing of this willing in aspects of the world as a field to be worked and as a field in the process of being worked. My work at each instant gets detached as a figure from a world of action that appears to me not as a spectacle but truly as an unresolved practical complex that at each instant calls for a voluntary link between me and my body.

5 We shall return in a moment to this “through it.”
In this practical relation as it is unfolding as being done and as in the world as a theater of action, the body is “traversed.” This means that it is not the object of my action, it is not what I am doing, but rather its organ. This non-instrumental relation of this organ to this action is what we can grasp in ordinary movements that are carried out with grace and suppleness. For this, attention has to be displaced from the *pragma*, the work being done, to turn toward the organ I am making use of. And this kind of looming up of my body in my field of attention is exactly reciprocal to, contemporaneous with, the looming up of my effort at the center of my awareness. In this way, we see how the body normally reveals to us its mediating function simply through its intractableness. It is at this moment that my movement, complicated by my awareness of some resistance, gets reflected as effort. But, at the same time, we see the paradoxical situation for the descriptive point of view since action has its full meaning only when the will intentionally forgets itself in its work and when the mediating function of the body effaces itself, surpasses itself, transcends itself in some way in the passively done work. And so reflection, which has to bring to clear awareness the whole of the “act–organ–work” relation, is already on the way to transforming the situation and breaking off the practical mediation. As soon as I catch a glimpse of the organ of my acting and as soon as the acting is reflected on as effort, I have already fallen back into an incipient dualism. Consciousness already begins to turn back on itself in effort, and the body pushed away as a pole of resistance is ready to be objectified. This is why here one must practice a kind of reflection on reflection that lets the original core of the acting will, the moved body, and the world present itself.

(3) Here is where analysis picks up again, for the experience of action, that is, the experience of a voluntary impulse that begins to unfold in the body, always has a background as a counterpart, whose nature is invincible, one of necessity. Let us go directly to the most subtle forms of this necessity, not those that are outside, as when I lean against an armoire I am unable to budge, but those that are implied in the very exercising of the will. First of all, there will be the very partiality of my motives, the partiality of my action. This partiality, which in each case is my character, is far from figuring in a scale of values, but instead is the singular perspective through which every value appears. Far from being able to be changed, my character at each instant is the original formulation of my efficacity.

In turn, the unconscious is always in the background of my history, which I cannot match in some transparent conscious
awareness and which, in some part, cannot accede to such consciousness without the aid of a third party who interprets it for me before I am able to reintegrate it into my field of consciousness.

Finally, my being a living, that is, organized, being who grows up following a kind of vital, irrepressible, and irreversible impetus, born and descended from my ancestors—all this constitutes a fundamental vital situation that makes up the background of my every decision and every action, as the condition for and limit of the cogito.

It is precisely faced with the necessity outside and inside me that my conscious awareness tends to step back, to circle in on itself in order to expel outside itself, into an empirical subject that it will constitute, these limits of character, the unconscious, and being alive. Through this act of expulsion, reflection tends to posit itself as a universal constituting that would transcend the limits of an empirical subject.

In this way the moment of refusal implicit in reflection comes to the surface, the refusal of the human condition. It is what gives meaning to the threefold wish of absolute consciousness: to be total, that is, without the finite perspective of having a character; to be transparent, in the perfect adequation of the self to its intentional consciousness; and to be through itself, without the necessity of being the beneficiary of that nurturing and curative wisdom\(^7\) of the body that always precedes the will.

At bottom, the wish of reflective consciousness is that there be no passion of the soul, that thinking should be a pure act. I will say that aseity is the supreme wish of reflecting consciousness.

Therefore the third moment of willing finds its meaning here: it takes up this tendency of consciousness to posit itself as a constituted empirical subject, a taking up of the refusal of the human condition that this wish contains. If consent were possible, the unity of the human person would be achieved. This is why consent is the culminating point of this second-order reflection oriented toward the coincidence of the will and its concrete condition. If consent were possible, it would be this patience with regard to the involuntary self, not the speculative representation of some objective necessity but the active adoption of the necessity I am, something like a “fact” that ends at what is, something like a move that ends at the immovable. And in this way, in joining necessity to its nature, freedom would convert it into itself.

\(^7\)We have replaced the adjective sanante (undoubtedly derived from sana [an abbreviation for “sanitarium”] but rarely used) with this term. — Editors’ note.
A new approach will assure us below that this limit cannot be attained.

III

Now we have to consider the second movement in thinking, the one through which I try to grasp the meaning of my involuntary life as my own, as mine, short of the interpretation of this involuntary life in a sector of objects, correlative to a scientific consciousness.

I cannot dwell here on all the methodological difficulties of this undertaking. I shall simply recall a few points, and first the one that dominates all the rest: the conciliation of the voluntary and the involuntary presupposes that they be brought together in a unique universe of discourse. I cannot therefore deal with the will as a form of subjectivity and the involuntary as a form of empirical objectivity. A homogeneous treatment of the problem requires that I reconquer in its full breadth the experience of the "I think," by integrating into it the meanings of "I need . . .," "I am habituated to . . .," "I can," "I experience," and, in a general fashion, the whole of my existence as a body.

To this first remark I want to add three more that correspond to three difficulties. First, are we simply returning to the testimony of some private, incomparable experience? In no way. The lived body is also the body in the second person. So long as introspection can remain the prisoner of a kind of naturalized consciousness, to the same extent the understanding of the other in his or her body will be, if I can put it this way, denaturalized. I mean by subjectivity therefore the subject function of an intentional consciousness, one that I understand as applicable both to me and to others. Thanks to this mutual elaboration of understanding oneself and others, I raise myself to the true concepts of subjectivity, which are valuable for the other person, similar to me. This is why even the phenomenology of the lived body is a phenomenology of intersubjectivity.

Someone may object that this return to the subject— even if it is to you and to me— marks a falling away from the conquests of scientific psychology: what I know has a higher value than what I feel. But I do not mean to throw away the empirical knowledge of the voluntary. On the contrary, this knowledge has to serve as a diagnostic for a moment in the first or second person of the integral experience of the cogito. Indeed, it would make no sense to put into relation an organic deficiency, for example, an alimentary one, objectively known, and a voluntary attitude. Only the lived need can enter
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into the voluntary synthesis. On the other hand, the scientific knowledge about this need is the index of intentional functions to thematize on the phenomenological level. This is why the phenomenology of each epoch is in tension with the state of contemporary scientific psychology. To say nothing of the fact that a good phenomenology is constantly implied in a good psychology (as happens with Tolman's behaviorism and especially with Gestalt psychology), on the condition of knowing how to draw from their descriptions before they fall into a naturalistic explanation.

Someone will finally object that I do not have access to my pure involuntary life, that I have lost the naiveté of felt experience, that I no longer know what a desire would be to which I have not yet assumed some attitude. We need to do justice to this objection in its most radical form. There is no phenomenology of the purely involuntary, but rather a reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary. I grasp the involuntary as the other pole of my life, as affecting my will. In this sense, I never grasp the involuntary in its multiplicity except in relation to the will as one will.

[But at the same time] this last remark provides me with a guideline into the maze of involuntary life. Each moment of voluntary life that we have just described—deciding, acting, consenting—[in effect] reveals a reciprocal aspect of involuntary life and provides thereby a principle of order in bringing the involuntary functions to court. We are led [in this way] to decipher the involuntary-for-the-voluntary, that is, in its relation to motivation and to motion, and as an incoercible condition.

I would like to give a few examples of this inquiry into the non-objective aspects of the involuntary, by placing myself at the point of view of the progress of practical mediation.

(1) I said above that every decision includes a receptive moment: I decide this because . . . We have called this relation of the will to an intentional current that inclines it, motivation. Taking up the analysis from the opposite side, we are going to see, using the example of desire, how the body nourishes motivation in a way, what aspects of desire are included within the field of motivation.8

Think of a man who carries out a hunger strike, or simply a polar or desert explorer who passes beyond cold and hunger in order to

8To be sure, desire is not completely involuntary. Nonetheless, it would be possible to show—something I cannot do here—that the most abstract values run through the affective depths to solicit the will. This is why I think that desire has an exemplary value for every motivation.
follow his human project. The sacrifice he makes of his needs attests that these can be measured against other values and lend themselves to evaluation. There is a crossroad here that has to be taken in to account. The least need, like hunger, belongs to the cogito in that an opaque feeling of being affected — this specified lack, this oriented impulse that is hunger not cognitively aware of itself — finds a form, which is an imaging form, in the representation of an absent something and the way to get it. The imagination therefore is a kind of crossroad of unformed being affected and of voluntary attitudes, which is not yet here the imagined outcome of our educated life, I mean that denial we can oppose to the existing world, but rather a way of anticipating an absent reality against the background of the world. It is through this militant, prospective side that imagination can mediate between need and willing.

But there is more: desire is not only the anticipation through some image of perceptive contours and qualities, of bread, for example, but also the imaged anticipation of pleasure. There is, to be sure, a difficulty here. It is not easy to distinguish this dimension of being affected through some image. It is through a taken-up sensible affect, which is in a way the affective effigy or the analogon of some future pleasure, that I grasp the goodness of bread. Yes, it does come down here to an affective imagination that is already a kind of prereflective apprehension of some value (in the form of “that is good”). Yet we are already beyond the simple experience of a lack, and even beyond the simple representation of an absent thing. The pure affect surpasses itself in becoming the flesh — Fülle, as Husserl puts it — of a mute evaluation. Along with the expected pleasure, I believe in the goodness of the bread, without yet affirming this, without yet judging it. The same analysis can be made about other vital values: for pain, for the easy and the difficult, and even for all the non-vital values, insofar as they too figure affects, when they get depicted through imaged anticipations akin to desire or to fear.

Whatever may be said about these other examples, that of the most elementary need well illustrates the convergence of our two lines of analysis: on the one side, the will, through its least reflective, most receptive moments, offers to take up involuntary suggestions; on the other, being humanly affected, as experienced lack and anticipated imminence, on its side is transfigured by an evaluative intention that raises our body to the level of a field of motivation. And in this way our life can be balanced in terms of honor and friendship — as though, in this evaluation that has not yet crossed the threshold leading to discourse, to logos, our body were to transcend itself in order to become a human body, the body of a willing me.
(2) We are now going to consider the second dimension of the involuntary, the one that is suggested by the analysis of action.

The corporeal involuntary is also something other than this type of affective anticipation of the good and the bad, something other than this imaging evaluation. Just as the project emptily designates what is to be done, the body, in turn, in the example we have made use of, in a way de-realizes itself in desire. It de-realizes itself in participating in this nascent evaluation.

But, precisely, desire is something more: it is also a nascent action. And it is here that it rejoins, so to speak from above or below, the organic realization of the will in the act. It is therefore the same reality that we read from one side and the other. We have said that acting ends at the things themselves "through" the body. Our analysis of the involuntary gives meaning to this mediation of the body. The phenomenology of the involuntary becomes a phenomenology of the powers that the body offers to voluntary action.

I shall say nothing here about the initial motor sketches that, from life's beginning, give us both a hold on things and an unreflective use of our body well before any cognitive awareness of this body and well before we learn to move it. And I shall say nothing here either about the reasons that allow us to distinguish the preformed know-how of our reflexes. Instead, I want to dwell on two properly human forms of involuntary action that, in my opinion, well illustrate the fruitfulness of the method employed and, at the same time, the general intentions of this study of the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary - I am referring to emotions and to habits.

It is striking to see that these two functions, emotions and habits, can be understood in terms of each other, through contrasting them to each other. The one is a nascent disturbance, the other affects my will through the force of something acquired. Habit is "contracted," emotions "surprise" us - the prestige of what is old, the force of what is new; the fruit of time having passed, the irruption of the instant. But this contrast cannot be understood unless one has known how to recognize in each of them the properly human involuntary. Which is why, in the case of emotion, first of all, it is important not to let oneself get caught up in the lessons drawn from pathological cases, which draw the whole psychology of emotion toward the side of sterile disturbances, but rather to catch hold of those forms of emotion where the disturbance is nascent. This is what Descartes rightly saw in his Passions of the Soul. He associates emotion not with a shock but with a surprise. And he describes it not as a crisis but as an incitement to act on the basis of the vivid representations that engender the surprise. It is only in this way that emotion is
comprehensible: when it affects action through a spontaneity that is risky for mastery of oneself. Yet if the will always has to take hold of itself over against this spontaneity, it is through this spontaneity that it is able to move its body, following the well-known formula: "the will moves through desire."

Thus it seems to me that it is by starting from emotion as a surprise that we have to interpret the great emotional commotions, following the line of degradation running from a meaningful disorder to an incoherent one.

The whole psychology of emotion that begins from this last state necessarily misses the involuntary signification of emotion—precisely because this involuntary signification is obliterated by the naturalist explanation that then seems to impose itself. [Hence we can go] in the opposite direction from the one to the other end; for incoherent disorder does have a meaning as a dead end. It is typical of the fragile order of human being—still a human disorder.

Habit offers an analysis of the same kind: we have to break with assigning primacy to it as automatic, just as we had to do with emotion as a shock, if we want to understand something of habit as the force of a gesture, a skill, or a taste that we have contracted. It is supple habit that has a meaning. It alone illustrates the original pairing of willing and power. Its automatism, in this regard, is not the return of some primitive stage, a return to the simple, but rather a typical degradation of human habit—a degradation whose threat, moreover, is inscribed in the very nature of the "abolished" and the "contracted."

So description ought then to show the new aspects of this form of the involuntary that correspond to the inciting power of emotion. The two most noteworthy ones have to do with the coordination of action (both in terms of its parts and in relation to the regulative signals of the action) and with the facility that habit offers to the launching of some movement. These involuntary aspects of coordination and facilitation illustrate exactly what a power is. Our body offers itself to us as a moveable totality of powers, as more or less supple, more or less general motor and affective structures, something like rules, like transposable methods whose spontaneity is in a way offered to our willing. It suffices to observe our familiar gestures to see how our body forges ahead, attempts things and invents, responds to our expectation or escapes us. In short, the body here is that practical spontaneity, by turns emotive and customary, that mediates our willing. We have to go even further: our skills are, them too, a kind of body—a psychic body, if I may put it this way. Through the rules of grammar and of calculation, through social and
moral skills, we think about new things and so we act on our knowledge just as we act on our bodily powers. In one case like the other, the empty intending of the project finds in the naturalizing of the will the instrument of its efficacy. As Ravaissone’s admirable intuition in his little book on habit indicates,9 the will works through abolished acts of the will just as it does through awakened desires.

In this way, for a second time, we catch sight of the so to speak asymptotic movement of two lines of analysis: just as we have seen the will descend into corporeal spontaneity and traverse it toward some work, in the opposite direction the signification of the body is that it makes itself a human body insofar as it surmounts its presence to itself, its closure in on itself. It does so in its ability to act, and in this act it opens itself practically to the world on the basis of its human voluntary intentions.

(3) The double attempt I have presented, to grasp the meaning of the body as motivating and acting, conditions the third step in this phenomenology of the involuntary, [whose goal is] to rediscover the sign of necessity in the first-person singular: my character, my unconscious, my life. I will say that the preceding effort conditions this new approach, for it is precisely in the exercise of my powers that I catch sight of the natural ground from which they get uprooted. I really have to understand my character as my own, I have to recognize the partiality of my choices and my motives, the finite style of my effort and of my concrete action. I cannot oppose myself to myself. My character does not get posited outside myself as an object; it is truly the constituted partiality of this concrete constituting that I am, which is why I say that character is the way of being finite of the voluntary and the involuntary.

So we cannot make character a function comparable to habit, emotion, or need. It is rather the finitude of all these functions. This is not the place to show how the science of character, which pictures character as an empirical object that would be at one and the same time a class, a probable type, and an analytic formula, gets its meaning when it allows a diagnostic account of the character I am, which is no longer a class or a type, or a formula, but really the primordial narrow-mindedness of my existence. Hence it is through a critique of this empirically constituted object — character — that I rediscover the evanescent signification of character in the first person, the originary character I am. The unconscious of psychoanalysts calls

9 Félix Ravaissone, De l’habitude (1838); Of Habit, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (New York: Continuum, 2008).
for a similar critique, but a critique that retains the essential insight of psychoanalytic discoveries and that, in a way, recovers the sign of the first person of this unconscious, by liberating it from its naturalist naivety. I will even say that this critique is decisive for our inquiry, for the considerable importance, from a philosophical point of view, of psychoanalysis is to bring us back to the fundamental fact that the impressions, the dispositions, left in consciousness by lived experience, such as the stratifications of past conscious experience, can no longer be forbidden to my conscious awareness that they simulate a truly autonomous psychological nature.

Earlier, our reflection on habit led us to something similar: the spontaneity of our so to speak sedimented skills already simulated an independent nature. Psychoanalysis reveals to us a still more impressive situation wherein the dissociated affective dispositions become inaccessible to me. Conscious awareness always reflects current thoughts. It never perfectly penetrates a certain affective matter that offers it an unlimited possibility to question itself, to give itself meaning, and also to doubt every meaning that it proposes about its own affects. If therefore we have to refuse the Freudian mythology, it remains the case that reflective consciousness is always inadequate to its own potentials, which are within me like a true nature in the first person. The unconscious allows us to sketch a dialectic of definite form and indefinite matter, just as, earlier, character suggested an analogous dialectic of infinite impulse and a finite manner of existing.

However, the fullest instance of nature in me is my life situation, which barely reveals itself through the muffled awareness of being alive, an awareness that is modulated through tones of well-being and of not doing well, through the feeling of growing up and of aging, and which loses track of its traces in the shadowy memories of childhood. This awareness of being alive is clarified by means of the biological sciences. But, in return, these sciences make me attentive to the most extreme moment of the involuntary, namely, the necessity that I am there already alive, having already been born. Here, to exist signifies not an act but a state. I have to be living in order to be responsible for my life. More profoundly, I will say that existence is both willed and undergone. My act of existing and my state of existence are one in the “I am.” And it is only in this sense that I can say that the cogito, as act, encompasses the fact of existing and that I can say “cogito ergo sum.” But here ergo does not designate a logical implication. It is the practical mediation, the pact, the connivance that binds the consenting will to its situation, to the absolute involuntary grasped in its subjectivity.
IV

We have arrived therefore at the point where our plan to rediscover the unity of the voluntary and the involuntary seems to be on the cusp of succeeding. But this is also the point where the failure of our enterprise is most manifest and where our whole analysis has to start over again. This failure appears as soon as one tries to surpass the level of a simple articulation of significations – the significations of will and desire, of act and power to act, of consent and character – and when one tries to draw more tightly together the concrete life of consciousness, in short, the existential process of being a human being.

It then becomes apparent that we have surpassed one form of dualism only to make another more subtle and more radical one rise to the surface. We have fought against the dualism of method on every level, the dualism that opposes [for one thing] a reflexive consciousness, which circles back on itself, and for another, an objectified involuntary life, set within things. We have called this dualism a dualism of understanding, because it is solicited by the very method through which conscious awareness interprets its own life and expresses the two directions in thinking, the reflexive direction that leads to positing the \textit{cogito} by itself and the objectifying direction that leads to the absorption of the body and the whole of subjective life into the system of objects elaborated at the level of scientific consciousness.

But this dualism of understanding is motivated at a more radical level. It is motivated by a duality of existence that upsets a monism as well as a dualism. This is why we shall speak of a “dramatic” or “polemic” duality. And we shall recognize its unusual status in returning from its most manifest aspects to its most concealed ones – thus in reconsidering in the opposite direction the three moments of the phenomenology of the voluntary and the involuntary. At the end of this recognition of failure, the unity of the notion of a limit-idea will take on its full meaning.

(1) Consent to necessity is never fully achieved. Who can accept fully, concretely, everyday? Here is where suffering takes on its philosophical meaning, as the impossibility of coinciding with oneself. It introduces between me and my self a specific negativity in the sense that necessity is experienced not only as affecting me but as wounding me. I am no longer at home with myself, with my nature. Which is why, in return, freedom remains the possibility of not accepting myself and of saying no to what is not deniable. So freedom’s act of
The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary

Negating things stirs up the diffuse negativity of my condition. And by suffering I do not just mean physical pain and the suffering that affects communication between consciousnesses, but also at every degree of the involuntary, the sadness of growing old, of being “distended” by time, of being incomplete, finite. With suffering, the mode of failure of unity is a scandal.

So, consent can then assume necessity only through the detour of a metaphysics of creation, which is not our object here. Instead, we are going to acknowledge the existential fault line, in the unity of the person, at two other levels of the phenomenology of the voluntary and the involuntary: at the level of acting, then at the level of deciding.

(2) We have attempted to grasp the indivisibility in the passage from willing to being able to act. And, to be sure, voluntary action is not intelligible except insofar as it is unified, beyond the dualism of thinking and movement. But another kind of duality divides this unity internally. Voluntary motion is always a nascent effort, inasmuch as the spontaneity of the body is always a nascent resistance. “Homo simplex in vitalitate, duplex in humanitate,” Maine de Biran liked to say. Voluntary life is a debate with the body. This concrete dialectic gets expressed through the contrast of emotion and habit that we have already spoken of. Endlessly, the will plays the one against the other. Sometimes it profits from the surprise of emotion to shake itself from the sleep of habit – and the whole of Descartes’s treatise on the passions rests on his intuition about the synthesis of the will and emotion in “generosity” – sometimes the will works with the complicity of the pacifying function par excellence, habit, [and] this is why, after having said that the will is moved by desire, we have also to say that effort is willed habit. So, spontaneity is in turn organ and obstacle. But then there would be conscious awareness neither of moving nor of being able to move. It is the surprise of emotion that makes us attentive to the body’s customs and the acquired order of habits that makes us aware of the nascent disorder of emotion. Thus, the full scope of the place of resistance in voluntary life appears. It is not just external or muscular resistance, but the functional resistance to spontaneity that escapes me. Which is why my hold on my body is always to some extent a taking up of it again. We are thus led to recognize that the unity of effort and

10 Reversing a formula borrowed from Boerhaave’s Praelectiones academicae de morbis nervorum (Leyden, 1761): “Homo duplex in humanitate, simplex in vitalitate.” – Editors’ note.
spontaneity remains a limit-idea. Here, the failure of unity is no longer a scandal for us but a conflict.

(3) Finally, our regressive movement brings us back to the seat of the voluntary act. If we replace our decision in time in order to understand it in advance, if we see a decision being born and alive rather than considering it abstractly in terms of its moments, the abstract relations we have considered at the start of our project — imputation, motivation — join together, so to speak. We see conscious awareness oscillate between hesitation and making a choice. What we called earlier the existential fault line reappears. This fault line is manifest in a quite paradoxical descriptive situation, namely, that the event of making a choice can always be read in two different ways: in one direction, the attention stops at some group of motives. I decide because I choose for this or that reason. But, in another direction, it is the breakthrough of a new act. The final meaning of my reasons is that I decided in just this way. This double reading is inscribed in the very structure of deciding, which, on the one side, is an inventing of a project and, on the other, a reception of values; an activity and a receptivity.

And this is why there are always two philosophies of freedom. According to the one, choice is just the stopping of deliberation, attention coming to rest. Jean Laporte has interpreted the philosophies of Saint Thomas, Descartes, and Malebranche in this sense. According to the other, choice is an upheaval, an irruption of existence. To be sure, one can always reconcile them theoretically by saying that abstractly it is the same thing to stop at reasons for doing something and for choosing it. But, in the concrete life of consciousness, these two readings do not correspond to the same situations. There are choices that point toward a simple obedience to reasons that are not called into question at the moment of making that choice, and there are others, on the contrary, that, in the confusion of motives, point toward taking a risk, even toward a toss of the die. Pushing on to the extreme, we would have on one side acting out of scruple, where the choice can only emerge from an endless evaluation, on the other, the gratuitous act that in the strictest sense is a choice based on no value whatsoever. These two possibilities constantly lie in wait for me, and they reveal the tension internal to choice. Choice has to satisfy both being legitimate and being inventive, having a value and the audacity of existing. A fine rift runs through our freedom precisely because it is active and receptive, because it is a human freedom and not a divine creative fiat. And this is why I say that the synthesis of legitimacy and invention remains a limit-idea.
What therefore are we to make of these limit-ideas? The outline of an answer to this question shall serve as my conclusion. We can see in them an illustration of Kant's regulative idea, that is, of the a priori requirement to unify a field of investigation, whatever it might be. Yet Kant assigned this requirement solely to scientific knowledge. We need to recover a similar function for regulative ideas in relation to the originary phenomenological field. I will say therefore that there is a "human" signification, a signification of human unity, which is the idea of a motivated, incarnate, contingent freedom.

I set entirely aside the relation of this limit to the idea of a creative freedom for which it is both the image and the counterpart. I have wanted only to consider here the relation of this limit-idea of an attained human unity to the experience of a dramatic duality. This limit-idea is our guideline. It is what makes for the scandal, conflict, tension, of the categories of duality. But, in return, we have no access to this signification of the human as one except through the deciphering of the relations between the voluntary and the involuntary. It is therefore solely an intentional unity toward which the experience of a dramatic duality points.

Summing up, I will say that what I understand about being human is the synthesis of invention and legitimacy, of gracious willing and a docile body, of consent and necessity. In short, what I understand is their unity. Against this background, this horizon of unity, I live out the dramatic duality of being human. So it would be necessary to see how this unity gets illustrated in figures, in myths, as, for example, those of Rilke's innocent, dancer, Orpheus. But that would be another tale . . .
The Problem of the Will and Philosophical Discourse

The origin of this essay is to be sought in the dissatisfaction I feel when I consider, after almost twenty years, the kind of analysis I gave to the will in The Voluntary and the Involuntary. That work was meant to be a phenomenological description of phenomena such as the project, motive, gesture, etc. When I now consider the great philosophies of the will that mark the history of philosophy from Aristotle to Nietzsche, passing through Scholasticism, Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, and if I admit, as I think must be done, that these philosophies did say something significant about the will, the question arises whether the different philosophical statements concerning the will belong to one or to several kinds of discourse. [But, in this second case, another question arises: that of] the unity of philosophical discourse.

My working hypothesis is that the philosophy of the will requires at least three kinds of discourse, each of which has its own rules, its own type of coherence, and its own mode of validation. I call the

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1 This essay had not been published previously in French. It had been given in English in different forms at the University of Notre Dame on November 25, 1968, then at the University of Toronto on November 28, and at the University of Chicago on December 10. An earlier translation by Peter McCormick in collaboration with Ricoeur appeared in Calvin O. Schrag, ed., Patterns of the Life-World: Essays in Honor of John Wild (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 273–89. – Editors’ note.
phenomenological discourse”; the second will be discourse about meaningful action, which we shall have to identify with a type of dialectical discourse; the third would be a kind of indirect ontological and would require a hermeneutic discourse, that is, a discourse in the form of interpretation.

Phenomenological Discourse

The first discourse leads back to the third book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, devoted to the notions of voluntary and involuntary action, rational preference, and desire. [To be sure,] this first phenomenology had not yet found its unity since there was not yet a unified concept of the will, and the concept of the will as such was not perhaps even yet formulated. Nor had [it] yet found its [methodological] justification, [even if] dialectical method in Aristotle’s sense that is, a confrontation of opinions arbitrated through the work of definition – can be considered to be the ancestor of phenomenology. [But,] despite this lack of analysis and this lack of complete justification, the third book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* can rightly be called the first phenomenology of the will. This treatise has a relative autonomy among the courses and treatises that make up the *Ethics*. The development of the will can be followed like a guiding thread from Aristotle to post-Husserlian phenomenology, thanks to the sort of continuity and relative autonomy that allows this discourse to preserve its identity in spite of its insertion into different philosophical problematics.

I will only briefly recall here the principal occurrences of this phenomenology of the will, [beginning with] Greek philosophy [and] the Stoic conception of consent as the active counterpart to the passive image. This articulation between an active pole and one of receptivity constitutes an effective model that will return in the fourth of Descartes’s *Metaphysical Meditations*. Whereas Aristotle had organized his phenomenology around the central act of preference, as applied to some means, in opposition to desire, as a fleeting impulse directed toward some end, the Stoics reorganized the whole field of the *psyche* as a function of the polarity between activity and passivity. Every subsequent phenomenology of the will, including the subtle analyses of the Scholastics and Descartes’s elegant and simple description, will remain faithful to this double phenomenological

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2 [This discourse] already includes an extension in relation to what I earlier called phenomenology.
determination of the concept of the will: an articulation of means and ends in the project; an articulation connecting a more or less passive understanding and the power of decision in the act of choice. From Saint Thomas to Descartes—who [in this sense] does not break with the Scholastic tradition—the phenomenology of the will appears as a continual refinement of Aristotle and of the Stoics. This phenomenology culminates in the concept of a decision, which implies: (a) the project, as an intention of the will; (b) the choice, as the act that posits the project; (c) the cutting off of alternatives, as the content of the act, which the Scholastics called power over the contraries.

This tradition was not [forgotten] during the great period of German idealism from Kant to Hegel. The description of the will as arbitrary (WILLKUR) was never lost from sight, even if the WILLKUR as arbitrary was now subordinated to another dimension of the will: the Wille, properly speaking, which for Kant could no longer be articulated within the same universe of thought, at the same level, as that of the project, choice[, or decision]. We shall rediscover this turning point in the Kantian analysis of the will when we consider the second discourse on the will, but, before that, we need to bring this first discourse to its conclusion, that of a phenomenology of the will.

The phenomenology of the will found its justification in Husserl and its completion in the post-Husserlian literature. Husserl himself wrote little on the will. This fact can have an important significance concerning the limits of the phenomenological method, as we shall say below. Essentially, the Husserlian analysis rests on the priority of objectifying acts and, among them, on perception. Phenomenology is principally, for this reason, a phenomenology of perception and of assertive statements. Nonetheless, phenomenology did give the classic discourse about the will legitimacy and a foundation. Thanks to the phenomenological reduction, every naturalistic assertion concerning things, facts, and laws is placed in parentheses and the world appears as a field of meaning. This reduction makes possible the phenomenon of the will as will. The notion of a project appears as a particular case—and most strikingly—of the intentional character of the whole of psychic life. The project has its noetic face in the choice itself and its noematic face in the projected project, as something that must be done by me and that may or may not be fulfilled. The relation of the project to instincts, impulses, and affects is placed under the general concept of motivation, which is sharply split off from natural causality through the phenomenological reduction.
All these phenomenological features of the will find an appropriate descriptive instrument in Husserl's method, which had not been elaborated by Aristotle, the Scholastics, or the Cartesian tradition. However, the phenomenology of the will is not just justified by the Husserlian method. It, in turn, receives an extension beyond its classical expression. We can say that the primacy of the phenomenology of perception, before being a cause of the failure of this method, gives it a powerful impulse toward a phenomenology of the emotions and a phenomenology of the voluntary and the involuntary.

At this point in my presentation, I should like to say that it is at this level that a confrontation imposes itself between the phenomenology of the voluntary and the involuntary and the conceptual analysis of the notions of intention, project, and motivation by the generation of English-speaking philosophers following Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. I have in mind the work of Elizabeth Anscombe on intentions, of Stuart Hampshire on thought and action, John Austin's admirable "plea for excuses," and the work of Charles Taylor on the explanation of behavior. In fact, conceptual analysis is a kind of phenomenological research inasmuch as it does not encase itself in [a commentary] on expressions but, as these authors say, attempts to approach the complexity of life through knowledge of the fine distinctions and [mixed] relations that ordinary language has discerned over the course of the centuries. In return, phenomenology is a conceptual analysis insofar as it claims to apprehend, not lived experience as lived through, but the essence of lived experience, its articulations and interconnections. I will readily say that today the future of this first discourse lies in an interpenetration of phenomenological description and the conceptual analysis of ordinary language.

**[Dialectical Discourse]**

Nonetheless, this first discourse did not and could not exhaust the philosophy of the will. In fact, phenomenological discourse on the will always was just one phase inside a broader discourse that I

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propose calling discourse about responsible action and about meaningful action. Free choice was never the principal problem but rather the question: what kind of action makes sense?

Let us return for a moment to Aristotle, since he was the one who founded the philosophy of the will. What we have called his phenomenology is just one abstract segment within a treatise on virtue, its nature, acquisition, and conditions of efficacy. With the concept of “virtue” or, better, “excellence,” the problem of the meaningful accomplishment of a human life is posed. This problem, so to speak, constitutes the concrete envelope of the phenomenology of the will. More precisely, we learn from Aristotle that the architectonic science under which this description gets subordinated is politics, in that the good of the city is more general and more concrete than that of an individual. In this sense, the phenomenological discourse is just one phase within an ethico-political discourse. Only this [latter] discourse is autonomous. The description of preference is one component in a whole constituted by the determination of the ethical life which is also the political life. The accent must therefore be shifted from the arbitrariness of choice to its norm, within the framework of a theory of the will. In this regard, the treatise on prudence (Nicomachean Ethics, Book IV) constituted the pole of this second discourse just as the treatise on preference (Nicomachean Ethics, Book III) was the core of the former. I shall not consider here the details of this theory of virtue but only underscore one point, namely, the well-known definition of virtue as a “midpoint,” a point of equilibrium between two extremes, a mean between an excess and a default. The correct tension of an act, says Aristotle, is that of the norm; the mean between excess and default is this correct tension.

This analysis anticipates, through its relative formalization (the extremes and the mean), the more radical formalization that governs the Kantian philosophy of the will. For Aristotle, only the rule-governed will following the principle of the mean and animated by the virtue of prudence (which plays the role of the categorical imperative) is meaningful and [is also], for that reason, [the] sole true will. This continuity between Aristotle and Kant could not be glimpsed at the level of the first discourse. [It was, however, at the] second [level], that of discourse about rational [sensée] action. The revolution in thinking that characterizes Kantian philosophy of the will takes place within one and the same universe of discourse, that [precisely] of rational action. The question that opens the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals runs as follows: what makes a good will good? This question has to be placed on the same level as the Aristotelian question: what is virtue? What is prudence? This
kind of question implies that the moment of arbitrariness that constitutes the will as will at the phenomenological level gets articulated in terms of the normative moment that constitutes the will as will on the second level. The duality between Willkür and Wille, between the arbitrary will and the normative will, constitutes the central difficulty of the Kantian philosophy of the will. But, before leading to the ruin of Kantian philosophy, it gives this philosophy its strength. The Critique of Practical Reason is just the transcendental analysis of the good will, that is, of the conditions of possibility of a good will, just as the Critique of Pure Reason had to do with the conditions of possibility of a true judgment about perception. This transcendental analysis of the good will is not just a new approach to the problem of rational action; it radicalizes a tendency already at work in Aristotle – and perhaps, [before that,] in the conception of virtue already partly formalized [proposed by] Plato in Book V of the Republic – and leads to the definition of the will as practical reason.

But this radicalization is at the same time the origin of a paradox that will swamp the Kantian philosophy of the will. This paradox runs as follows. According to its intention, the Critique of Practical Reason aims at explaining how a representation produces an effect in reality. In other words, its problem is that of the actualization of thought in the field of action. It is even the difference between nature and freedom, the former constituting an action based on laws, the latter an action based on the representation of a law. Hence, freedom is a kind of causality that produces events in the world. Yet the result of this Critique destroys its intention. The principle of rationality being cut from its concrete ground of impulses and desires, the will as a unity of desire and rationality is broken into two pieces. The will is no longer a kind of desire – a rational desire – but a variety of reason. At the same time, the will is cut off from its goals since ends cannot be given a priori but belong to the sphere of desire. This is why Kantianism appears as a philosophy that splits things up. Furthermore, it becomes very difficult to comprehend how the movement of contingency, of subjectivity, of choice, which is Willkür can be reintroduced into the field of the will. The first theorems of the second Critique presuppose in an axiomatic fashion that the duality of the will in general, determined by law, and the human will, which is undetermined at its core, is a given, the ethical fact par excellence. The duality constituted by an objective will determined by law and a subjective and arbitrary will is the philosophical result of this second discourse about the will. It cannot be deduced from a phenomenology of the will (or from free choice, or from power over
The discordance between two types of will, if I may put it this way, reaches its culminating point in the “Essay on Radical Evil.” Here, evil appears as most extreme divergence between the maxim concerning free choice and the determination of the (objective) will by law. One might even be tempted to say that the “Essay on Radical Evil” represents the return of free choice at the first level to a philosophy of practical reason, which was constructed on the principle of the subordination of free will to the law-governed will. This priority of the will for the law was the founding principle of discourse about rational action. Evil signifies the rupturing of this discourse.

This antinomy of the will poses the question of the genuine nature of discourse about rational action. It seems to me that we ought to recognize the dialectical character of this discourse.

Just as Husserl is the representative of the phenomenological method, appropriate to the description of the will as project, preference, choice, etc., Hegel is the representative of the dialectical method, the only one adequate to the problematic of meaningful action [l'action significante].

If we consider the past history of the philosophy of the will from this point of view, we have to recognize that it poses a series of questions that cannot be resolved without a dialectical method, that is, a method [capable] of surmounting the antinomies by means of a mediation. We can recapitulate in the following way the dialectical situations implied by a discourse about meaningful action.

First of all, the will is a transition from desire to rationality. When Aristotle defines the will as “deliberating desire,” this very expression implies that the natural reality summed up in the word “desire” is negated and yet retained in a higher-order reality akin to rationality. Decision requires a dialectical conception of reality whereby the root of desire is sublimated in the energy of the decision. This is the first dialectical situation. It is represented in Hegel’s philosophy by the transition from a philosophy of nature to a philosophy of spirit.

Second dialectical situation: Scholasticism and Descartes conceived judgment as the interaction between two faculties: the understanding and the will. But this interaction was represented in terms of a relation of reciprocal causality: the understanding moves the will and the will moves the understanding. We can see in this a pre-dialectical expression transposed into the language of a faculty.

psychology, itself tributary to a cosmological concept of causality. This dialectical situation did not disappear, however, along with the psychology of faculties or with the cosmology that upheld it. The Kantian distinction between theoretical and practical reason just gives a new expression to this old problem, and we know the formidable difficulties that this dichotomy raises at the threshold of the third Critique. This second dialectical situation constitutes what is essential for the philosophy of spirit in Hegel's *Encyclopedia*.

Third dialectical situation: the transition from subjective will, which was the object of phenomenology, to objective will, which was the object of an ethical-political determination in Aristotle and Kant. This dimension is lost in a simple psychology of decision-making where only the individual will is taken into account, while the political dimension exits the field of a philosophy of the will to constitute the heart of a political philosophy under the heading of a theory of power and of sovereignty. Hobbes and the Spinoza of the *Political Treatise* bear witness to this other philosophy of the will, which gets constituted outside the field of a psychology of deciding. The dialectical unity of the problem of the will, as individual and collective, psychological and political, is lost sight of. Aristotle was not unaware of this unity but he did not have the logical tools to master this problem of the relation between a phenomenology of preference and a political philosophy. This third dialectic is at the center of what Hegel calls the philosophy of "objective Spirit." [It] contains the genuine philosophy of the will at the level of a discourse about meaningful action.

The first threshold of objective Spirit is the contract relation that binds one will to another in a reciprocal relation. This duplication of the will constitutes a specific relation that cannot be derived from a mere phenomenology of the will based on the concepts of project, motivation, voluntary motion. With the relation of one will to another, new determinations enter into play, principally because this relation is itself mediated by things as the objects of activity aimed at possessing them. The solitary will, in the act of taking possession of things, is still an arbitrary will. With the contract, each will renounces its particularity and recognizes the other will as identical with itself in the act of exchange; while the thing is universalized in the abstract representation of its value, the will is universalized through the contractual exchange of things. In this way, the thing mediates between two wills at the same time as the will of the other

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5 Ricoeur added the name Machiavelli in brackets to these two names. — Editors' note.
mediates between the will and the thing possessed. This is the first threshold in this history of the meaning of the will as objective Spirit. The tie to things in which my will gets actualized is just as important as the bond between the two wills themselves.

Only a will submitted to objectification, in this sense, is capable of recognizing itself as an author responsible for its acts. Here is the second threshold in the dialectic of objective Spirit: freedom is actualized not only in things as possessed, but in works and actions which represent it in the world. Beyond mere intention, the will has to pass the test of success and failure, and bind its fate to some phase of history. There is no actual project without the test of reality, without that judgment exercised by others, and finally without the judgment of the “world tribunal.”

The will then appears as an internal dialectic between an infinite exigency that reflects its unlimited power of self-assertion and the task of self-realization in a finite reality. Individuality is nothing other than this confrontation between the infinity of reflection and the finitude of actualization. This will alone has the right to be held responsible for what it does, but not for everything that happens owing to its action. As can be easily seen, it is within this framework of thinking that the philosophy of the will can do justice to Kant and to the difference he institutes between a law-governed and an arbitrary will. But it is not just the abstract rule — the law — that makes the difference between an objective and a subjective will. It is the concrete course of intentional action in which subjective and objective aspects are intermixed, desire and rationality reconciled, and the quest for satisfaction bound to that for rationality. A mere ethics of intention, cut off from the depth of desire and subtracted from the test of reality, is just an abstract segment in the total process of the actualization of freedom.

Finally, a philosophy of the will, conceived of as discourse about rational action, culminates in a theory of concrete communities in which the will is capable of recognizing itself. This objectifying of the will in the family, in civil society (that is, in economic life), and finally in the state realizes the Aristotelian project of a philosophy of the will that would be a political philosophy. [In this way,] Rousseau and Kant are once again justified. No political philosophy without the equation between the sovereignty of the state and the power of the will. The state that would not be an objective will must remain an alien and hostile reality. This was Rousseau’s problem. Hegel resolves it with other resources than the contract, which according to him remains just the abstract stratum of the will.
To say that discourse about action reaches its end in a political theory is to say that human beings have concrete duties, concrete virtues, only when they are capable of situating themselves within historic communities in which they recognize their own existence. One may be as critical as one wishes regarding the Hegelian hypothesizing of the state, the problem Hegel poses remains: does there exist a rational mediation between the individual power we call free choice and the political power we call sovereignty? If political life is this mediation, then the dialectic between the individual will and that of the state takes on meaning and with it the discourse about rational action.

[Hermeneutic Discourse]

Now, must we say that the discourse about rational action exhausts the task of a philosophy of the will? It seems to me that we have not yet reached the ground of the problem. The free choice that phenomenology concentrates on leads to the task of realizing freedom through personal and collective action. In turn, this second discourse points in the direction of a new kind of inquiry that requires a new type of philosophical discourse.

What kind of inquiry and what kind of discourse? The very notions of act, action, activity, say something about a mode of being to which neither ethical theory nor political theory does justice. In human activity, a character of being as act becomes manifest; access to a ground of being as creativity is uncovered. This is the ultimate implication of a philosophy of the will. But do we have an appropriate discourse to speak of this emergence of being, a [discourse] that could compete with the phenomenology of the project and the dialectical discourse deployed by the theory of rational action? Whoever is aware of the misfortunes, not to say more, that have affected ontology in the past must recognize that this discourse is at best a broken discourse, filled with ambiguity, and has more affinity with the variations in interpretation than with the coherence of absolute knowledge. Nonetheless, the question is to know whether interpretation may not receive a philosophical status as a specific form of philosophical discourse. This is the wager that motivates the third part of this essay. If someone should ask why this third discourse is a broken discourse, the first answer that must be given is that the apperception of what can be called "modes of being" is bound to a history, one which seems inevitably tied to their manifestation. This underlying history, it seems, cannot be reduced to a pure change in
theory, itself bound to a change in culture; still less to some ideological change. This history is in a certain way the history of modes of being, the history of the manifestation of being. It affects not just the answers but [also] the questions. It emerges at the surface of the history of philosophy in the form of new ways of asking questions. It affects the problematic. To give an idea of this underlying history, let us return once more to Aristotle. The three layers of discourse are easy to disentangle. We have the discourse about the voluntary and the involuntary which constitutes the phenomenological core of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book III). This discourse is incorporated into a larger discourse that Aristotle designates as the architectonic science of politics. [Finally,] this discourse, in turn, refers to the discourse about being. But how? Through the determination of ethical inquiry as inquiry into the *ergon*, a human being's work. This *ergon* is the veritable emergence of being as *energeia*. When Aristotle says that there is a task or a work for human beings as human, a task that cannot be exhausted through different *technai*, different skills, different crafts – a task that unifies human action and gives life its human meaning – his ethics points in the direction of the underlying stratum on which human *praxis* finds its ground. There is, he says, something like a human *energeia*, “an active life,” because being itself is activity. Better, it is in a virtuous life, a life lived according to virtue, that something is revealed about the determination of being as act. It would be necessary here to attach all the allusions in the *Ethics* concerning the notions of act and activity to the ontology of possibility and act in the *Metaphysics* (principally book Θ).

Yet, at the same time, we modern readers of Aristotle are necessarily struck by the discordances between his moral philosophy of *praxis* and his ontology of the act. In the end, the act par excellence, the act as act, excludes change and movement, and hence no longer is exemplified by human *praxis* but by the divine activity of thought as well as by the activity of contemplation, which, for human beings, is [the best] approximation of “thought thinking thought.” So human *praxis* floats between natural movement and the act par excellence, with no specific ground in being. This lack of a mediation between the ontology of *ousia-entelechia* and ethics does explain to a certain point the absence, in Aristotle, of any concept of freedom and maybe even of any unified concept of the will, even at the phenomenological level. These insufficiencies are evident to our eyes as modern readers of Aristotle because we are heirs of a metaphysical age for which the

will was identified with another mode of being, with being as subjectivity.

This is the first time I have pronounced the word “subjectivity.” This was not by accident. I think that subjectivity is not just a feature of the phenomenological field or even a component of a theory of meaningful action. Rather, subjectivity can come into question as a dimension of the two preceding kinds of discourse because it is first of all a mode of being that belongs to a metaphysical age, that of being as subjectivity. In the end, the emergence of the will as a philosophical problem expresses the progressive emergence of subjectivity as the predominant mode of being. This is why there is a subterranean history to the philosophy of the will that expresses, at the phenomenological and dialectical levels, the deep-lying history of being.

This deep-lying history does not coincide with the conceptual articulations at the other levels. It has its own structure. Or, rather, it implies a series of thresholds that do not necessarily coincide with progress in the phenomenological description, as was the case with Descartes.

For my part, I want to emphasize three of these thresholds between Aristotle and Hegel. First of all, the will had to be conceived of as infinite in order to become subjective, in the strong sense of the word. This infinity was unknown to Aristotle. For him, the power to choose was effective only within a limited field of deliberation set amidst finite situations. As Aristotle says, deliberation has to do with means rather than ends. Virtue, itself, as a mean between two extremes, defines the rules for finite action. A revolution therefore had to occur that inverted the relation between the infinite and the finite. This first reversal, as Hegel writes in his *Principles of the Philosophy of Right,* is the turning point from the Greek to the Christian world. This turn can be recognized in Saint Augustine. The *voluntas* reveals itself in the experience of evil and of sinning as the power to negate being. This terrible power is the infinite power of the will.

A second threshold in the emergence of the will as subjectivity is represented by the Cartesian *cogito,* the subject for which the world is a representation. But the will that we could describe in the first part as internal to the same framework of thinking as the Aristotelian description in terms of “preference” now appears as the emergence of the *cogito sum,* as the existential freedom of the *cogito* as such, as freethought, in the most basic sense of the word.

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The third threshold in this conquest of subjectivity, as a fundamental mode of being, will be constituted by the recognition of the antinomy between freedom and nature. This antinomy could not be conceived of so long as nature itself had not been unified in terms of a single lawfulness. Now, freedom is exiled from nature; no systematic unity remains capable of embracing, within a single cosmology, the notion of a natural effect and that of a free act imputable to an ethical subject. It was necessary that speculative thought had to undergo the test posed by this antinomy. It could not be recognized within a phenomenology of decision-making or within a discourse about ethical and political life. This antinomy is the point of crisis within the third discourse about the will.

Having arrived at this point, one might be tempted to say: have we not overcome the antinomies of Kantian discourse in that of Hegel? In one sense, yes. In another, no.

In one sense, Hegelian reason has overcome Kantian understanding – in the sense that the dialectic of rational action itself constitutes this overcoming. What is more, it is perfectly possible to read Hegelian philosophy as an attempt to overcome not only the antinomy of Kantian philosophy, [but also] the antinomy of Western philosophy taken as a whole. From a Hegelian point of view, the whole history of philosophy is a battle between philosophies of substance, illustrated by Aristotle and Spinoza, and those of the subject, illustrated by Descartes and Kant. The philosophy of the will and all the dialectics it gives rise to between desire and rationality, representation and volition, subjectivity and objectivity, imply a reconciliation between substance and subject. [These justify in different ways the Hegelian thesis that] substance is a subject.

As we know, this reconciliation is the key to the Hegelian concept of Spirit. But can we say that a philosophy of Spirit has exhausted the history of modes of being? Is not this concept of Spirit the sign of another reduction of the ground of being – of the reduction pointed to by the qualification “idealism”? The fundamental difficulty of the Hegelian philosophy of the will has to do with the relation between the will and truth. Hegel’s principal concern [at different stages] of the dialectic is to show the truth of each moment. Each moment has its truth in the following one, that is, in another moment in which its contradiction is mediated and surmounted. Finally, the whole process can be embraced in a retrospective gaze: the whole movement has its condition of possibility in the [superiority of] the philosopher, in his advance as regards the entire development, in a word his being placed in an absolute position at the end of the process. This claim on the philosopher’s part to situate himself both
within and beyond the process — both inside and outside it — has to be questioned as a pretension.

This question is perhaps the fundamental event of the post-Hege-
lmann age of the philosophy of the will. It primarily has to do with the relation between the will and truth. If truth is itself an aspect of the will as the “will to truth,” does there then not exist an inquiry that would have to connect the quest for truth to some quality of the will? As one may have already have guessed, this inquiry is that inaugurated by Nietzsche. He opens a new epoch in the philosophy of the will. In a sense, it expresses what the philosophy of the will has always sought to do: to reveal the ground of being as act, as energy, as power and not just as form, essence, logos. Something of Aristotle’s philosophy is not just preserved but [also] magnified, something of the philosophy of Spirit has been in a way devitalized, emptied of its force — I mean the priority of act over form, of energy over essence, of power over logos.

Yet, in a more radical sense, this rediscovery of an archaic intuition opens a crisis in philosophy — a twofold crisis.

[The first crisis affects] the very concept of subjectivity that governed the classical philosophy of the will. As Heidegger has shown in his great work on Nietzsche, [Nietzsche proposes both] to complete the philosophy of subjectivity and to open a career for another mode of being. The “will to power” [thus] has the ambiguous meaning of carrying to a kind of paroxysm the exigency of subjectivity and of breaking down this exigency by means of powerful symbols that are no longer symbols of subjectivity but the cosmic symbols of the Eternal Return, Dionysus, Zarathustra. The notion of the overman is the witness to this ambiguity in a philosophy in which subjectivity reaches its culminating point and founders at the end of a self-destructive process that Nietzsche calls nihilism. This is the first crisis that Nietzsche opens in the modern philosophy of being. He situates the modern inquiry into the will between two times: the time of subjectivity, which was that of classic philosophy from Plato to Hegel, and another time concerning which he speaks of only in a kerygmatic mode.

The second crisis expresses the first one at the level of philosophical discourse. This crisis can be stated in the following terms: if the relation between the will and truth must be inverted, if, contrary to Hegel, truth itself — or the search for truth — makes manifest a quality of the will — perhaps its worst quality — which is that of a weak will, looking for comfort and security, [then] what kind of discourse can we use to articulate regarding the will itself, its force, its weakness, its power to affirm itself, its strategies of vengeance and resentment?
Only a discourse that qualifies as an interpretation, that is, a discourse akin to a symptomology and philology: a discourse in the form of a semiology.

This crisis in philosophical language is not necessarily all bad. It can become a healthy discourse if we reattach it to the ambiguity of being itself. Aristotle already knew that being has to be spoken of in many ways. This multivocity of being is recognized in a philosophy that characterizes itself as a philosophy of interpretation. Now, this recognition poses more [problems] than it resolves. If Hegelian philosophy posed the question of the place of philosophy when it speaks the truth – the absolute truth – a philosophy of interpretation like Nietzsche's poses the question of the criteria for an interpretation that claims to be a correct interpretation. I leave open this ultimate question. I leave it open like a wound to the heart of philosophical discourse. The key to an answer, I believe, would have to be sought in a better understanding of the relation among the three kinds of discourse in which philosophy is capable of talking about the will: phenomenological discourse, which simply describes the will as project and choice; dialectical discourse, which articulates in a logical way the degrees of rational action; and discourse in the form of an interpretation, which behind the changes that have happened to the two preceding fields recognizes the deep-lying history of modes of being in which being itself is both hidden and revealed – demonstrated and hidden.
The Phenomenology of the Will and the Approach through Ordinary Language

The goal of my presentation is to render homage to two texts by Alexander Pfänder:1 Phänomenologie des Wollens (1900) and "Motive und Motivation" (1911).2 It seemed to me that the greatest praise I could offer would be to reactivate their meaning today, rather than deal with them in an archeological way. To reactivate their meaning today means beginning from another philosophical horizon and showing by what paths this other approach leads to phenomenology. This other philosophical horizon will be for us today the philosophy of ordinary language applied to the problem of action. It turns out that the second great work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, his Philosophical Investigations, in particular §§ 611 to 660, has given birth to a literature devoted to the forms of

discourse by which people talk about what they do, either in order to describe it, or to inform others, or to express a wish or give a command, or to clarify and justify what they do in terms of motives and reasons, or, finally, in order to state immediate intentions and long-term goals.

It is talking about action that is the common theme of this philosophy of the discourse of action. I propose, following a brief presentation summing up the work of this school, to show that, far from being a substitute for phenomenology or opposing it as a rival school disputing the same ground, linguistic analysis calls for a phenomenology as the foundation of ordinary language. Linguistic analysis and phenomenology, I am saying, are not situated at the same level. The former stays on the level of statements, the latter on that of lived experience or rather that of the meaning of lived experience. The former provides the latter with a plane for expression and articulation, the latter provides the former a plane of constitution and grounding. At the end of this demonstration, I propose to come back to some themes of Alexander Pfänder’s to indicate their surprising relevance today.

I

The school of ordinary language philosophy is, at first sight, anti-phenomenological. To the eyes of the philosophers of Oxford and Cambridge, phenomenology rests on the intuitions a subject draws from his or her private experience. But this intuition cannot be stated, because it has to depend on “private ostensive descriptions,” which in reality are parasitic derivations from public statements about public objects. Just as we name (private) sensations only on the basis of (public) objects, we name intentions and (private) leanings only on the basis of actions (which themselves are public). A study of statements, on the basis of an alleged descriptive science of lived experience, has the advantage of starting directly from the forms of discourse in which experience gets organized. Instead, therefore, of turning to an intuition of the essences of lived experience, one takes hold of the codification of experience in how it is talked about and finds a ground in the quite remarkable property of ordinary language not only of being able to articulate experience, but to preserve, thanks to a kind of natural selection, the most apt expressions, the finest distinctions, the phrases most appropriate to the different circumstances of human action. As the conservatory and thesaurus of the best ways of talking about human action,
ordinary language offers the surest entrance to the problem of the
meaning of action as human action.

We can divide the contributions of ordinary language philosophy
in the study of action into three groups. All of them, in different
ways, offer an analysis of statements and, in this sense, merit being
placed under the general heading of “linguistic analysis.” But it is
not the same thing to proceed to a conceptual analysis of expressions
like intention, motive, etc., to distinguish the different forms of acts
of discourse put in play by a description, a wish, a command, a
declaration of an intention, or to classify the forms of arguments
govern the different strategies of action. Conceptual level, propos-
tional level, and discursive level constitute three different
approaches for a “linguistic analysis” of action.

(1) Conceptual analysis is dominant in Elizabeth Anscombe’s
*Intention*,3 Stuart Hampshire’s *Thought and Action*,4 and A. I.
Melden’s *Free Action*.5 Let us consider the concept of intention
according to Anscombe. The meaning of this notion can be apportioned
among three contexts in which it “makes sense.” If I say, “I
have the intention to do this or that,” if I say, “I did this intentionally,”
or, finally, if I say, “I am doing this with the intention that . . .” These three contextual uses correspond to determined situa-
tions of discourse in which these phrases are uttered as meaningful
responses to questions such as: What are you doing? Why? For what
end? It is always in a “language-game,” where one form of response
corresponds to one form of the question, that an expression is
uttered as meaningful and equally received as meaningful. In these
different language-games, intention is treated not as a mental entity
hidden in the soul that would play the role of some psychic anteced-
ent to a physical movement, but as a characteristic of action itself,
which distinguishes it from movement as a merely physical event. In
these three expressions – “intention to,” “intentionally,” and “with
the intention that . . .” – an action is named and understood pre-
cisely through its relation to its intention. Ordinary language, as a
result, knows perfectly well the difference between an action and a
movement. A movement is a physical reality whose explanation
depends on notions like energy, tension, discharge. The notion of an
action depends on a variety of relations within a whole conceptual
network where “intention” is one of the crossing points and where

we encounter meaningful expressions like motive, goal, agent, means, end, etc. To ask for the meaning of one of these terms is to seek its place in this network and to make apparent the relations of intersignification among all the terms of the network. If there is an action, there is also an intention, and then a motive, and then an agent, etc. It is the reference from one concept to another that constitutes the "language-game" of discourse about action, in opposition to the "language-game" about movement.

Among all the internal connections of this network, the most noteworthy is assuredly the one that links intention and motive. This is precisely the one that Pfänder considers in his article from 1911 (just as the study from 1900 can be put in parallel with the analysis of intention by Anscombe, Hampshire, and Melden). The connection between intention and motive is the closest of all those in ordinary language, because the question "what?" (what are you doing?), to which the allegation of an intention responds, is made explicit by the question "why?" which is satisfied by the stating of a motive. Elizabeth Anscombe writes: intentional actions "are actions to which a certain use of the question 'Why?' is given application," which we can explain as follows: the question does not make sense unless the answer provides some evidence or asserts a cause. It does so if the answer states a motive, in the sense of a "reason for ..." Action has an intentional sense, therefore, if I can refer to a motive that is understood not as a cause but as a reason. In this way, the conceptual network is completed: in opposition to action-movement is added the opposition between motive and cause. A cause, in fact, is an event with no logical connection to its effect. Not only can the cause exist without the effect, but its meaning does not imply mention of its effect. The same thing does not apply to a motive, which is a motive for this action and, as a result, belongs through its meaning to the meaning of the action that it necessarily mentions. More precisely, an important group of motives - those that do not mention a past event or a future one - function to interpret the action, to make it understandable and clear to others and to oneself. They permit considering it as this or as that and, in this way, subsume it under a class or a type for which the interlocutor has a prior understanding.

Another connection needs to be considered in detail. It has to do with the assigning of an action to an agent capable of being identified

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6 Anscombe, Intention, 9.
7 At least in the Humean sense presupposed by these philosophers.
The language of imputation is of great interest, not only for moral and juridical language, but for ordinary language, which perfectly comprehends the relation between action verbs and their personal subject. Here too, the parallel is striking with what Pfändor says about “awareness of the will in the strict sense,” which he expressly defines by “the belief in the possibility of realizing what one aspires to through one’s own action.”

But I do not want to dwell at length on this first group of works that stem in different ways from conceptual analysis. Let us simply keep in mind two questions, for they will lead us below to question the autonomy and sufficiency of a mere analysis of ordinary language: what allows us to say that these concepts that one draws from their ordinary use are not merely linguistic accidents, curiosities of English, that they are not contingent but inevitable and, if I may put it this way, unavoidable? Furthermore, what language-game are philosophers speaking when they analyze ordinary language? These two questions are connected for, in order to assure oneself that the network brought to light truly constitutes the *categorial* network of human action, the philosopher has to speak using the *transcendental* of ordinary language, hence, has to constitute it at another level than that of ordinary language. But we shall return to these questions below.

(2) The second class of analyses is the one that bears on “speech acts,” hence on the propositional structure in which the concepts of intention and action are inserted. The today well-known analysis of performative utterances by Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* is characteristic of this second group of analyses of discourse about action. What a psychologist calls “willing” gets stated linguistically, not just through a conceptual network where intention and motive are set in relation to each other, but also through verbal forms such as “evaluate,” “prefer,” “choose,” and “order,” placed at the head of expressions about action (to will that . . .). It is these verbal forms that Austin compared to performative utterances like promising, in which saying something is doing something. These utterances are identified by quite particular criteria that distinguish them as assertions or constative utterances: (a) they are neither true nor false, but submitted to infelicities if produced by someone unqualified to utter them or in unauthorized circumstances. Then they fail or fall short,

or are empty and invalid. (b) They do what they say: to say "I promise," in effect, is to make a promise. Finally, and above all, (c) they have the meaning of performatives only in locutions in the first person of the indicative present: to say "I promise" is to make a promise; to say "he promises" is to state that someone does an action that is that of making a promise. What is interesting about this inquiry for our own research into the discourse about action is evident, for an intention, for which the preceding analysis showed its particular conceptual character, takes on its meaning of being an intention only in some declaration of an intention ("I intend to . . .") that presents all the features of a performative: the intention may fail, but it already relates to action, and it is meaningful only in the first-person singular of the indicative present.

Our interest in a theory of speech acts grows if we consider that the distinction between a performative and a constative utterance is subordinated to another distinction that applies to every utterance, including constative utterances. This further distinction is introduced by Austin in the closing lectures in How to Do Things with Words. It is the distinction between: (a) locutionary acts, which state the content of a proposition (for example, that Pierre opens the door): it is the act of saying something; (b) il-locutionary acts, which is what one does in saying something: I assert, command, wish, that Pierre should open the door; and finally (c) per-locutionary acts, which are those that do something through saying it: in giving an order, I cause fear, intimidate. Whereas the illocutionary act acts by means of another's recognition of its meaning, the perlocutionary act acts as a stimulus that leads to behavioral effects. This architecture sketched by Austin has been worked out in greater detail by John Searle in Speech Acts. To the locutionary act, which he prefers calling a propositional act, Searle attaches the double function outlined by Peter Strawson in Individuals: an identifying reference to "what" discourse is about and a predicative act that bears its meaning, "what is said" of a logical subject. This first set of acts of discourse is already of great interest for a theory of discourse about action, for the identifying reference and above all the predication function here in a specific way: "Brutus killed Caesar" is a function with two arguments, the action is said of both figures. This requires placing actions in a propositional category close to that of relations (Peter

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(Noteller than Paul), as Anthony Kenny has demonstrated in *Action, Emotion, and Will.* But it is above all at the level of illocutionary acts that the discourse about action differs from all other forms of discourse. Willing, in particular, so close to giving an order to another or the promise made to oneself, seems to be the psychological face of a series of illocutionary acts that have a determined linguistic structure. The advantage of linguistic analysis is its being able to connect this psychological condition, such as a desire or belief, to the sincerity condition of a promise and to make this one of the rules of a language-game whose other rules also need to be spelled out. For example, the illocutionary force of stating an intention corresponds to a certain propositional structure. One finds in this structure an action verb and not a state, referring to the future not the past, and to same person who says what he or she will do, and not to the third or second person, as with a wish or a command.

I have said enough to prepare a comparison with the phenomenology of the will. Nevertheless, I will not leave behind this cycle of analyses without having posed again the questions that point to the reference of linguistic analysis to phenomenological analysis. What is the principle behind sorting illocutionary acts into five classes in Austin, into seven, or ten or more? What is the necessity for these linguistic distinctions? And in what language does the philosopher do (he theory of language?

(3) But let us also consider, albeit more briefly, the third cycle of works in linguistic analysis applied to language about action. They deal with the argumentation in which the discourse about action gets articulated.

We can draw the necessity for this new approach from an earlier remark: one important aspect of the intentional character of action is that an action be done with the intention to. This, we recall, was one of the three meanings of the word “intention” according to Elizabeth Anscombe. Now, the intention “with which” one does something designates another action linked to the preceding one by a syntactical connection of the form: “to do P in order that Q.” In fact, every developed intention includes, beyond a semantic core (to do P), a syntactical articulation with another action. It is difficult to find an intentional criterion for an isolated action. On the contrary, a chain of actions certainly constitutes an intention. An intention then is the teleological form of a chain of means and ends whose syntactical connection is the linguistic expression. In this way, the

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grammatical analysis of intention leads straight back to a reactualization of Aristotle's "practical syllogism," which codifies and formalizes the syntactical and not simply the semantic character of "intention." But it is not just the practical syllogism that is rediscovered in this way; it is the whole strategic aspect of action. And here, the analysis of ordinary language yields to a semi-formal analysis that is next entirely formalized through these syntactical considerations. With the semi-formal analysis, we are still in the neighborhood of ordinary language. With the formal analysis, we leave it behind completely. By semi-formal analysis, let us mean those theories of argumentation, like those discussed by Chaïm Perelman, that owe more to rhetoric than to logic. There the formalization is incomplete by necessity, because the decision is itself one factor in the reasoning. Conviction takes the place of logical constraint, and the concern to influence others is combined with that of justifying the chain of action. Here argumentation remains mixed with motivation, for which it provides a discursive framework. The expression "discourse about action" takes on its strong sense in this framework. So we have not yet completely left behind the analysis of ordinary language. The same thing does not apply to mathematical theories of decision-making and game theory. There one does study strategies, as the economist or military strategist understands them. But one avoids considering real situations, real conflicts, and real decisions. One starts from "models" issuing from a formal theory in the mathematical sense of the term, that is, a body of theorems deduced from a group of axioms. The theory of decision-making is here the application of some calculation to some possible state of affairs. It is not therefore a reflection on actual reasoning at work in real behavior. Owing to its use of models, game theory is the most noteworthy form offered by the analysis of strategy in games of chance. We have left the analysis of ordinary language behind.

II

We shall now turn to the confrontation between linguistic analysis and phenomenology that is the goal of my presentation. What is at

\[12\] In *Intention*, Anscombe stresses that the practical syllogism does not belong to ethics but to the theory of action in general. Its major premise does not necessarily contain the statement of a norm but only of a "character of desirability," an orekton. One argues on the basis of these characters of desirability.
issue will be to locate the respective levels where things converge and
where they diverge.

At the beginning, we spoke of the reasons to prefer the linguistic
approach over the phenomenological one: (a) linguistic analysis
avoids the difficulties of any appeal to introspection, namely, its
inference to some feeling, to intuition (we recalled, in this regard,
Wittgenstein’s critique of private ostensive definitions and the eventual
extension of this critique to phenomenology as a mode of
internal perception”) – to which linguistic analysis opposes the
investigation of public utterances in which experience is expressed;
(b) in claiming to grasp an essence on the basis of an example, phe-
nomenology encounters the problem of an appeal to intuition a
second time; it comes down to seeing “the essence” through the
singular “example” – to which linguistic analysis opposes the analy-
ysis of the meaning and reference of utterances. But do these criticisms
exhaust the resources of phenomenology?

I want to show in what way the difficulties of linguistic analysis
point, in turn, to phenomenology, but to a phenomenology that will
have passed through the critique of linguistic analysis.

We need to recall here the aporias of linguistic method. They stem
from this method’s inability to reflect on itself or to say what lan-
guage-game is being used to talk about ordinary language. This
inability to reflect on itself is conveyed by an inability to demonstrate
that the language described is anything more than a contingent lin-
guistic configuration; at the limit, anything more than a particular
diachronic form of English.

This difficulty affects the analysis of conceptual expressions
following the first method as much as the analysis of illocutionary
acts following the second method. This latter method seems more
suited to a systematic ordering of illocutionary acts. In the end, it
runs up against the impossibility of classifying everything, estab-
lished as a dogma by Wittgenstein, for whom, we recall, the “family
semblances” among language-games prevent any relationship
in terms of genus and species. This difficulty is that of passing
to the transcendental. Can such a shift, which Strawson made
in Individuals regarding “basic particulars” (which for our concep-
tual organization are bodies and persons), be applied to the catego-
ries of language that govern discourse about action, for example,
for intention and motive? For responsibility and imputation?
For ordering, warning, wishing, abiding by, etc.? How can
we assure that linguistic analysis is in fact a conceptual analysis?
That the unavoidable fact of the form of a language is somehow
valid de jure?
Linguistic analysis leads to phenomenology by other features than its own aporias. It also leads there by what is most efficacious about linguistic analysis. In a word, the conception of language implicit to it differs radically from that of philosophical structuralism. The elucidation of ordinary language is in no way the exploration of a closed system where the words only refer to other words. Nothing is more foreign to language analysis than this odd idea of a closure to the universe of signs. In Austin’s words, in his excellent essay “A Plea for Excuses,” we want to clarify language in order better to analyze experience. It is a method, therefore, that goes from the analysis of utterances toward the analysis of experience. This is why Austin at one point risked calling his method a “linguistic phenomenology.”

So the question arises whether phenomenology’s lived experience is the implicit but not thematized referent of the analysis of ordinary language.

What confirms this hypothesis is that linguistic analysis stems from a reaction against Russell’s logical atomism and the early Wittgenstein’s “picture” (Bild) theory. For ordinary language philosophy it is not a question of reformulating ordinary language following the axiomatic requirements of a “well-formed language.” It is a question rather of placing oneself within ordinary language in a way that exhibits what it really means, precisely as ordinary language. In this regard, the inquiries of the later Wittgenstein, in his Philosophical Investigations, along with those of Austin, Hampshire, and Anscombe, represent a revolution comparable to the one that led Husserl to oppose a descriptive science of lived experience to the mathematical ideal of definitude and saturation. For my part, I see the two sides as corresponding term by term: on the side of analytic philosophy, between well-formed and ordinary language; on the side of phenomenology, between “exact” and “inexact” essences.

Still more radically, analytic philosophy lends itself to a comparison with phenomenology not only by what it refuses, but by what it does. In both cases, it is a question of clarifying things: of clarifying utterances, of clarifying the essences of lived experience. We shall return to the differences between the term “clarification” on each side, but first of all we need to emphasize the kinship of this

14 Austin, “A Plea for Excuses,” 182.
operation. To clarify is to distinguish, to put in words: this is not that; to make lists, inventories; in short, to institute differences. Phenomenology is a whole art of making distinctions, hence of noting differences. This is what distinguishes it from every dialectical construction, which is an art of passing from one thing to another, of compositions. In this sense, English philosophers and phenomenologists are equally opposed to dialectical method; this is what brings them together. So we have an art of distinction, a technique of clarification that places the two enterprises on the same plane of discourse.

I do not underestimate the distance between two theories of meaning: the one closer to a definition in terms of usage, the other to a definition on the basis of an intuitive grasp of a meaning. But the recourse to use, on the one side, and to intuition, on the other, puts us on guard against the same pretensions and the same illusions, which we can call, on the one side, a logically perfect language and, on the other, a *mathesis universalis*.

All these reasons invite us to look for the point of contact between these two methods with greater precision.

At first sight, the task seems doomed to failure. In a word, to arrive at phenomenology coming from linguistic analysis, what has to strike us is the subordinate and apparently inessential position of questions about language in relation to an investigation into lived experience, aimed at some essential intuition more than at a correct use of language.

Yet this difference in principle, if it is properly understood, does not render the two strategies incomparable. If linguistic analysis does not lock itself inside a closure of language but remains open to experience, conversely a descriptive eidetics of lived experience has linguistic implications, precisely because it is an eidetics and not a reflexive coincidence wherein one merely revivifies what has been experienced, without thinking about it or talking about it.

Let us try to put the accent on the difference between phenomenology and linguistic analysis where it belongs.

Let us say, first of all, that if lived experience takes the place that language occupies elsewhere, this lived experience is not being alive for itself. Promoting *lived experience* to the rank of a "phenomenological field" is linked to a prior philosophical act of "reduction" of the natural attitude. Lived experience is not therefore a wholly natural experiencing. What is it, then, if not a realm of meaning, where one meaning only refers to another meaning and to the conscious awareness for which there is meaning? This shift in looking from the thesis of the world to that of meaning is not unrelated to
the movement brought about by analytic philosophy when it says it
adds nothing to the facts but only leads to knowledge of the facts.
Can we not say that phenomenology thematizes what the philosophy
of language does without knowing it does it or why it does it? This
comparison imposes itself all the more if, as I believe we may, we
interpret the phenomenological reduction not as a loss of something,
as the subtracting out of an ontological density, but as taking a dis-
tance, as an act of making a difference, on the basis of which there
are not only things but signs that designate them — in short, if the
phenomenological reduction is the birth of the symbolic function.
Then it is the ground of what analytic philosophy [accomplishes],
when it turns away from facts toward speech acts.

Someone will say — and not without reason — that the effect is not
the same on both sides if analytic philosophy considers speech acts
and phenomenology considers lived experiences. Yes, but what is the
lived experience that issues from the reduction if not an eminently
sayable meaning? It is remarkable that the recourse to lived experi-
ence never gave Husserl the occasion to advocate the ineffable.
Straight off, the so-called "residue" of the phenomenological reduc-
tion offers itself as a structured field and lends itself to what he calls
eidetic analysis. Phenomenology’s first axiom, once past the thresh-
hold of the reduction, is: "that it is just part of the sense of everything
contingent to have an essence and thus an eidos that is to be grasped
purely, and this [eidos] stands then under truths of essences at various
levels of universality."15 The goal is not to "relive" but rather to
speak about the eidetic content (eidetischer Gehalt) of lived experi-
ence. Setting the world at a distance opens for us the task of discern-
ing essences and their interconnections. It is this notion of a Gehalt,
of an eidetic content, that turns phenomenology toward linguistic
considerations, but by grounding these, first in a prior act of reduc-
tion, then in an act of grasping an essence. It is the fundamental
sayability of lived experience that allows a theory of speech acts. To
me, here is the thesis that has to be substituted for the unfortunate
theory of a "picture" as well as for the definition of meaning as
"use," which will never allow defining the correctness of any usage.

This is why phenomenology works at a different strategic level
than does linguistic analysis. Linguistic analysis wants to clarify

15 Edmund Husserl, Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological
Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology,
trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), “§ 2: Fact and
the Inseparability of Fact and Essence,” 11.
speech acts, phenomenology wants to clarify the grasping of essences. Not that Husserl ignores the ambiguities of language. But they appear less redoubtable to him than does the lack of clarity having to do with "how things are given." There would be no problem of truth if things were not given with degrees of proximity and distance that affect how they are given. For Husserl, this is not just a question of language but, if one may put it this way, one of looking. All the weight that English philosophers place on language is placed on acts of eidetic insight." The whole tactic of drawing on examples, in that of imaginative variation, stems from this struggle for proximity.

Finally, what brings Husserl close to the linguistic analysts is the conviction alluded to earlier: that clarification cannot end with mathematical essences, in the sense of the definitude and saturation of Hilbert's mathematics. The descriptive eidetics of lived experience is not a mathematical eidetics. It is a "rigorous" (streng) eidetics in that it tries to reach the kind of intuition that belongs to "inexact" essences. This is what leads to the comparison of ordinary language analysis and Husserl's "descriptive eidetic discipline."

There is more: I am tempted to carry the resemblance between the two approaches even further. Why does Husserl say that lived experience is structured, has a meaning, is sayable? Because it is intentional and it is always possible to make explicit the meaning of lived experience through the objectivity that it intends. I do not want to separate the central theme of phenomenology - namely, that all consciousness is consciousness of . . . - from the method of phenomenology, namely, that there is a descriptive science of lived experience. For if there is discourse about lived experience, it is because lived experience has a relational structure, because it presents both the difference and the relation between the transcendent and the transcendental. Starting from there, there is not just the lived through but also the thinkable. To say that phenomenology is a descriptive eidetic science and to say that it deals with intentionality is to say one and the same thing. As a result, it is possible to say that consciousness lives in speaking about what it intends. It is possible to speak about the cogito through the cogitatio and about the cogitatio through the cogitatum, which Husserl calls "objectness" or noema to oppose it to the noesis, that is, to the field of consciousness in which and for which there is meaning.

This conception lies at the base of any confrontation with the analytic philosophy of language. For what needs to be set over against the speech acts that linguistic analysis considers is not the phenomenologist's lived experience. Rather, it is lived experience, but
taken in its “noematic content” (*noemtaischer Gehalt*), as a noema, as an “object.” Therefore it is vain to oppose a theory of lived experiences to one of speech acts. A useful confrontation is possible only at the moment where a descriptive eidetic science finds its center of gravity in the notion of a noema. The science of lived experience is a science of noema. And this noema is what makes possible the sayability in principle of lived experience. Just as Husserl speaks sometimes of a “noematic utterance” at the end of a series of implications, starting from the reduction, passing through lived experience, the essence of lived experience, the intentionality of lived experience, he thereby rejoins what is the starting point of analytic philosophy—namely, the plane of speech acts. Husserl ends where Austin and the others begin. This is why, for him, speech acts are “expressions,” that is, a supplementary layer to the meaning (*Sinn*) attached to the noema.

III

It still needs to be shown what sort of “linguistic phenomenology” stems from the conjunction between the analysis of speech acts of *linguistic analysis* and the eidetic analysis of “noematic” contents of consciousness that allows doing justice to Pfänder’s phenomenology of the will.

Pfänder wrote his phenomenology of the will before Husserl had established the basic fundamentals of descriptive analysis. Therefore we must not ask of him what we do of the Husserl of the *Logical Investigations* and especially of *Ideas I*, but we can ask him about what is precisely lacking in Husserl: a description of *willing* in a direct apprehension of this phenomenon. It is noteworthy that Husserl himself did not deal with affective, axiological, and volitional phenomena, except as one “stratum” of lived experiences erected on the basis of “objectifying” acts. His phenomenology is essentially a phenomenology of perception, of seeing, in the narrow sense of sensory sight or in the broad sense of intellectual insight. Pfänder, however, goes directly to what he calls “the consciousness of willing in general,” which is nothing other than “consciousness of ‘striving toward’” (*Bewusstsein des Strebens*) and which includes “wishing, hoping, desiring, envying, fearing, detesting, etc.” Pfänder analyzes it by turning toward its correlate: “that toward which we strive,” anticipating in this way Husserl’s correlation of noesis and noema. This analysis of the “contents of objective consciousness” leads him in turn to reveal the “relation of the I” to the contents of
It is at the heart of this relation of the I to something that he isolates the “intending” (Meinen) or “relation of the I to what is not present.” So, the “representing” (Vorstellung), which, for Husserl, will be a prior objectifying act, is reached as one component of the “intended” of the “striving toward” (Streben). More precisely, it is on the “intended” (Gemeintes) of the “striving” that Pfänders apprehends the “represented” (Vorgestellte). The “not-present” (nicht-Gegenwärtige) is thus reached straight away in its full amplitude of meaning, as the object of the “striving” and not solely that of objectifying acts (perception, presentification), and the temporal features of past and future are directly discerned on the correlate of this “striving.” As for the “representation” so enveloped in the “intended” of the “striving,” it is described as the “representation of some goal” on the basis of the intended meaning that runs through it. The pleasure-displeasure relation is in turn unfolded starting from the essential moments that make up this representation of a goal: “representation of a goal” and “represented pleasure” and in an essential relation internal to the “intending” that characterizes “striving toward.” The same thing applies to the relations between “striving” (Streben) and “being repelled by” or “having an aversion toward” (Widerstreben). They belong to the very meaning of “striving.”

It is through a procedure of tracing meaning back that Pfänders passes from “striving” to “willing in the strict sense.” The significant difference lies in the “belief (Glaube) in the possibility of realizing that toward which one strives through one’s own action.” In this way, a connection as well as a difference is established between “being conscious of” and “believing in” (the possibility of impossibility). To believe that I can realize through my “own doing” the “aspiring toward” (Erstreben) is what distinguishes the willed from the simply wished for.

It is on this fundamental relation between Streben and Glaube that Pfänders establishes the relation of ends to means that allows incorporating into the description the important concept of motivation that will be taken up in greater detail in the essay from 1911. And it is its belonging to the sphere of Streben and Wollen that separates motive and cause. In 1911, Pfänders will say that “it is necessary to separate the reason for willing from its cause just as strictly as the reason for knowing is to be distinguished from its cause,” that “the foundation of willing is completely different from the causation of willing,” and that “from a theoretical point of view, these two elements must therefore be clearly differentiated.” By this date, Pfänders had become aware that what he was doing was not a “psychology”
but rather a "doctrine of voluntary acts analogous to logic." It is the epistemological status of this doctrine of voluntary acts that I want to consider in concluding, by showing its dual relation to linguistic analysis, on the one hand, and to Husserlian phenomenology, on the other. We can first ask whether this "science", which would be for the voluntary what logic is for knowing, is not tributary to a linguistic analysis bearing on expressions about willing. Pfänder comes close to granting this: the act of the will, he says, "gets expressed linguistically in propositions of the form 'I want P' and 'I do not want P.'"\(^{16}\) These propositions (Sätze) are projects (Vorsätze) in which are expressed "the practical proposition belonging to each individual."\(^{17}\) Therefore it is through the linguistic grille that the analyses of the "act of the will" (Willensakt) can and must pass. It is in an implicitly linguistic sense that we today can read Pfänder's definition: "the act of the will is an act of practical pre-posing accompanied by a determined voluntary intended, that proceeds from an I-center (Ich-Zentrum) and, spreading from the self (Ich selbst), destines it for some future determined act of behavior." Everything the analysis of illocutionary acts has shown closely corroborates Pfänder's definition.

It is equally through a linguistic analysis close to that of Anscombe, Hampshire, and Melden that the relation between the will and its motives is recognized. The relation of the will to what "precedes" it, in effect, divides in two: "determination by motives" on the one hand, "determination by strivings" on the other.\(^{18}\) To the former correspond the idea of a "reason for . . ."; to the latter, the idea of a "cause." And it is in language that we first find these differences. In this regard, Pfänder's vocabulary is of the greatest interest for linguistic analysis: "to be intellectually listening to imperatives," "recognition" and "approbation," "taking a stand on," "founding," "upholding" and "educating," "holding back," "taking hold of something."\(^{19}\) Language turns out to be the conservatory of the difference between motivation and other relations. "The positing of practical imperatives" is one thing, "the emergence of certain aspirations" another. The vocabulary of the one does not coincide with that of the other. For example, the sequence of expressions just cited is opposed to another series of expressions: "to produce an effect" versus "to motivate." Language remains the guide when we affirm

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\(^{16}\) Pfänder, "Motive und Motivation," 134.
\(^{17}\) Pfänder, "Motive und Motivation," 135.
\(^{18}\) Pfänder, "Motive und Motivation," 141.
\(^{19}\) Pfänder, "Motive und Motivation," 141–4.
that "to be determined by motives" is something other than "to be drawn or pushed by stimuli."

But, at the same time, Pfänder's analysis verifies our initial working hypothesis: every phenomenology is linguistic insofar as the distinctions of ordinary language guide it; and it verifies our second hypothesis: linguistic analysis does not have its ground in itself but in an analysis of the noematic contents of consciousness. To be sure, Pfänder did not elaborate the transcendental conditions of this analysis. At least he did recognize later in the epoché - as a suspension of belief - an essential step in the phenomenological approach.20

But he did more than just attend to, then to recognize the import of Husserlian phenomenology. By going straight to the Streben and Wollen, without passing through the detour of "objectifying acts," Pfänder thematized the same notion of act that, in Husserl, is only recognized in its full scope with difficulty owing to the primacy of perception and seeing in the theory of intentionality. Here is where I see the principal service that today this reading of archeo-phenomenology can render to post-Husserlian phenomenology: it can help us break out of the framework traced by the perceptual model. In effect, the extension of the phenomenological model to feeling and willing can help redirect its philosophical line, drawn more and more toward a kind of neo-Kantian idealism by the paradigm of vision and the metaphor of light. If a luminous world presents no resistance and in this sense is ideal - an "arduous" world is necessarily more real, with a reality for which existing is resisting. It is no paradox to say that Pfänder is all the more ready to render an account of a "harsh" world in that he went directly to the conscious character of Streben and Wollen. To a cogito that is a "gaze" corresponds a world that gets dissipated into an impalpable spectacle. To a cogito that is a "doing" (tun) corresponds a world that is as much an obstacle as a clear path. Pfänder's greatness, when reread today, is his having reached directly, through a phenomenology of willing and motivation, the core act that makes a conscious subject a responsible subject.

20 Cf. in this regard Herbert Spiegelberg's remarks concerning the place of Pfänder in the phenomenological movement in his Introduction to the English translation of Pfänder's work, Phenomenology of Willing and Motivation and Other Phaenomenologica (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967).
II

Semantics of Action
The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought

I would first like to say something about the preoccupation that animates this essay. A meditation on symbols, whether it be that of Iliade, Jung, or even Freud, or that of Bachelard, comes at a certain moment of reflection, it responds to a certain situation of philosophy and perhaps even of modern culture, which it attempts to make sense of.

I will say initially that this recourse to the archaic, the nocturnal, the oneiric – which is also, as Bachelard says in his Poetics of Space, an access to the birth of language – represents an attempt to escape the difficulties of the problem of a starting point for philosophy. We all know the exhausting flight that lies behind thought in quest of the first truth and more radically still in search of a radical starting point which would not at all be a first truth. Perhaps it is even necessary to have experienced the deception that attaches to the idea of a philosophy without presuppositions in order to accede to the problematic we are going to consider. Contrary to philosophies of some starting point, a meditation on symbols starts from the fullness of language and from meaning already there. It starts from the midst of language that has already


occurred and where everything has, in a certain way, already been said. It means to be thought with all its presuppositions. For it, the first task is not that of beginning but instead, from the midst of speech, to remember itself.

Yet, in opposing the problematic of the symbol to the Cartesian and Husserlian search for a starting point, we bind this meditation too tightly to one precise stage in philosophical discourse. We may need to look more widely. If we raise the problem of symbol now, at this period of history, it is in connection with certain features of our "modernity" and like a riposte to that "modernity." The historical moment of the philosophy of the symbol is one of forgetfulness of the signs of the sacred. This forgetting, we know, is the counterpart of the grandiose task of feeding people, of satisfying their needs by mastering nature through a planet-wide technology. It is the obscure recognition of this forgetfulness that moves us and nudges us to restore an integral language. In the very age when our language is made more precise, more univocal, more technical, in a word, more fit for the overall formalizations called precisely symbolic logic (we shall return below to this surprising equivocation of the world symbol) — it is within this same age of discourse that we want to recharge our language, that we want to start from the fullness of language. This, too, is a framework of "modernity," for we, we moderns, are people used to philology, to exegesis, to the phenomenology of religion, the psychoanalysis of language. So, it is the same age that develops the possibility both of emptying language and of filling it anew.

Therefore it is not regret for some submerged Atlantis that animates us, but the hope for a re-creation of language; beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again.

"The symbol gives rise to thought" — this sentence that enchants me says two things. The symbol gives; I do not posit its meaning; it is what gives meaning, but what it gives has to be thought, has to be thought through. Starting from the giving, the positing. This sentence suggests therefore both that everything is already said in an enigma and yet that it is always necessary to begin and to begin again in the dimension of thought. It is this articulation of thought given to itself in the realm of symbols and of thinking laying things down and taking them up that I want to surprise and make sense of.

But, first, I would like to propose a quick set of criteria of the symbol, first in the form of an enumeration, then with those resources, of an essential analysis of symbolic structures.
The Diverse Realm of Symbols

In order to delimit a domain, it is a good idea to begin with an enumeration. Albert Béguin, in the preface to *L'Ame romantique et le Rêve*, conjures up “the plots of different mythologies, of folk tales from every country and every time, of the dreams that pursue us in the unconsciousness of the night, as in the distraction of our days.”

This text nicely indicates the three zones where symbols emerge.

Bound to rites and myths, symbols first constitute the language and to be sacred, the word that speaks about “hierophanies,” to use Mircea Eliade’s language. Let us refer here to the first example Eliade meditates on in his *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, that of the sky: the symbol of the most high, the elevated and the immense, the powerful and the well ordered, the clairvoyant and the sage, the sovereign, the immutable – this symbol is inexhaustible and applies across the three cosmic, ethical, and political orders. The sky is just one example among those Eliade interprets. They all have the function of fixing “the exemplar models of all ritual and all significant human acts.” Far from being some fantastic projection, the late allegory of some human action, they institute and enable it by sacralizing it.

The second zone of emergence: the nocturnal, the oneiric. We know that for Freud the symbol does not designate every representation that stands for another thing, that disguises and dissimulates, but only that sector of oneiric representations that surpass an individual’s history, the private archeology of a subject, and that plunge into the image-laden depths belonging to a culture, even into the folklore of humanity taken as a whole. Jung has taught us to discern in these symbols not so much infantile, instinctual projections of the psyche as themes that anticipate our possibilities of evolution and maturation. Their discovery belongs less to a method of reduction of obstacles than to an exploration of our potentialities. Jung’s philosophical interpretation, which sees in this the representation to oneself of psychic energy or of archetypes, is less important than this very discovery. Jung’s psychological Platonism ought not to embarrass us any more than does Freudian metapsychology. What is

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essential is that, in Jungian therapy—which no doubt is addressed to another type of individual than is Freudian therapy—the symbol provides themes for meditation capable of pointing the way and guiding one's "becoming oneself," Selbstwerden. It is this prospective function that I will retain and attach to the cosmo-theological function of symbols discussed by Eliade, for whom human beings have to be reintegrated within an already existing sacred totality.

Third zone of emergence: the poetic imagination. Bachelard has shown that the problem of imagination is not that of the image, even of the image as a function of absence andihilation of the real. This image-representation is still dependent on the thing it makes unreal. It is still, to use Sartre's terms, a procedure for making objects present in some way. "The poetic image," says Bachelard in the Introduction to The Poetics of Space, "places us at the origin of the speaking being." And again: "it becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses." This word-image is therefore no longer an image-representation, but what I am calling a symbol. The sole difference from the preceding two situations is that the poetic symbol—for example, that of the house, whose meanings for poets Bachelard explores—is surprised at the moment where it emerges as language, where it turns language into an emergence, rather than being restored to a place in a stable hierarchy under the guardianship of myth and ritual, as in the history of religions. At bottom, we need to understand that what is born and reborn in the poetic image is the same symbolic structure that inhabits the most prophetic dreams of our innermost becoming and that upholds the language of the sacred in its most archaic and stable forms.

**Structure of the Symbol**

This first, apparently disparate enumeration of examples borrowed from the history of religions, the psychoanalysis of dreams, and the investigation of the poetic imagination thus seems to make manifest a certain convergence. It prepares the way for an intentional analysis that alone can provide the unifying principle for this whole inquiry.

I shall propose therefore an analysis aimed at essences that finally will consist in distinguishing the symbol from a series of neighboring structures and be oriented toward a more or less intuitive grasping of an identical core meaning; [and] I shall distinguish in succession

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5 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xix.
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[...] the symbol from the sign, then from allegory, then from the symbol itself in the sense of a logical symbol, and finally from myth.

(1) That symbols are signs is certain. They are expressions that communicate a meaning, which is stated by the intention to signify carried by spoken language. Even when the symbols – as Eliade says somewhere – are elements of the universe (the heavens, water, the moon) or things (a tree, piles of stones), it is still within the universe of discourse that these realities take on a symbolic dimension (a word of consecration, of invocation, a commemorative myth). As Dumézil tellingly puts it, “it is as a sign of logos and not of mana that that today is the object of research [in the history of religions].” The same may be said regarding dreams: even as a nocturnal spectacle, a dream is originally near to spoken language, since it can be recounted, communicated. But to say that the symbol is a sign is to draw too large a circle, one that now needs to be made tighter. Every sign intends something beyond itself and stands for this something, but not every sign is a symbol. I will say that the symbol harbors a double intentionality. Let us take the example of the pure and impure that Moulinier considers in the ancient Greeks. There is a first or literal intentionality that, like all signifying intentionality, assumes the triumph of the conventional sign over the natural sign: the stain, the dirt – words that do not resemble the signified thing. But, on the basis of this first intentionality is erected a second intentionality that, across the physical dirt, intends a certain human situation within the sacred. This situation, intended through the first-degree meaning, is precisely that of being soiled, impure. The literal, manifest meaning therefore intends beyond itself something that is like a stain. So, in contrast to perfectly transparent signs that say only what they mean, symbolic signs are opaque, because the first, literal, patent meaning itself analogically intends a second meaning, which is given nowhere other than through the symbol. (We shall come back to this in order to distinguish the symbol from allegory.) This opacity is the very depth of the symbol – which is inexhaustible, as we shall say.

But let us better understand this analogical connection between the literal and the symbolic meanings. Whereas an analogy is a

non-deductive reasoning that proceeds in terms of four proportional terms (A is to B as C is to D), in the symbol I cannot objectively the analogical relation that binds the second meaning to the first one. It is in living in the first meaning that I am led by it beyond it the symbolic meaning is constituted in and through the literal sense, which brings about the analogy by giving the analogous term. As Maurice Blondel said, “Analogies are founded not so much on conceptual resemblances (similitudines) as on an inner stimulation, on an assimilative solicitation (intentio ad assimilationem).” In effect, unlike a comparison we make from outside, the symbol is the very movement from the first meaning that makes us participate in the latent one and thus assimilates us to what is symbolized, without our being able to intellectually dominate this similitude. It is in this sense that the symbol “gives.” It gives, because it is a first intentionality that gives a second meaning.

This brings us near to the second criteria concerning the analogical relation in a symbol, but it may, however, be helpful first to focus one more time on the first criterion. We must not say that the symbol is a return to natural signs. No, it presupposes a conventional language that has broken with any sonorous resemblance. The analogical correspondence lies in the second intentionality, which is therefore not between a signifying word and a signified thing but between a first and a second meaning.

(2) Our second criterion — which has to do with the distinction between a symbol and an allegory — extends our comments on the analogy brought about through the literal meaning. Jean Pépin has done a good job of elucidating this problem. In an allegory, the first signified — that is, the literal meaning — is contingent and the second signified, the symbolic meaning, is sufficiently external to it to be directly accessible. Between the two meanings, there is a relation of translation. Once the translation has been made, one can set aside the no longer needed allegory. It must be said that the dimension of the symbol over that of allegory took a long time and much effort to be conquered. Historically, allegory was less a literary and rhetorical procedure for the artificial construction of pseudo-symbols than a way of treating myths as allegories. This was the case for the Stoic interpretation of the myths in Homer and Hesiod, which consisted in treating these myths as a disguised philosophy. To interpret them

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was to pierce the disguise and in this way to make it unnecessary. In other words, allegory was more a mode of hermeneutics (or of the enigmas of signs, symbols, allegories, and myths) than a spontaneous interpretation of signs. It would be better to speak, then, of an allegorizing interpretation than of an allegory. Symbol and allegory are not on the same level. The symbol precedes hermeneutics, the allegory is already hermeneutical. This is so because the symbol gives its meaning in another way than by translation. We could say that it evokes it, that it "suggests" it (in the sense of the Greek verb that means "to suggest" and that gives us our word "enigma"). It gives its meaning as an enigma and not through translation. So I will oppose the transparent giving of the symbol to the translational giving of allegory.

(3) Is it necessary to say that the symbol in question here has nothing to do with the logical symbol that uses the same name? But it is not enough to say this; we need to know why. It is even just the opposite. For logic, symbolism is the height of formalism. Formal logic had already replaced the terms of a syllogism, for example, by signs that stand for anything and everything (every B is C, A is B, therefore A is C), but with the syllogism the words "all," "some," "is," and "implies" had not been completely split off from the expressions of ordinary language. In symbolic logic these expressions are themselves replaced by letters or signs that no longer have to be spoken and on the basis of which it is possible to calculate without asking how they figure in a deontology of rational reasoning. They are even no longer abbreviations for known verbal expressions, but "characters" in Leibniz's sense of this term, that is, elements in some calculus. It is clear that the symbol we are concerned with here is just the contrary of a "character." Not only does it belong to thought bound to its contents, and hence is not formal, but the analogical connection that links the second meaning to the first meaning and the impossibility of giving the symbolic meaning other than through the operation of the analogy means that symbolic language is an essentially bound language, bound to its content and, through its primary content, bound to its second content. In this sense, it is the absolute opposite of an absolute formalism. This is why, from the start of this essay, I have spoken of the fullness of language. One may be surprised that the symbol has two such strictly opposite uses. Perhaps we ought to look for the reason in the structure of signification, which is both a function of absence, since a signification designates things "emptily," in their absence, and a function of presence, since it means to make present, to represent absence in two forms. The symbol carries these possibilities to the extreme. But this is not
our object in this essay and we shall not speak further about the symbol in the sense used by symbolic logic.

(4) Last criterion: how to distinguish myth and symbol? Poplin opposes myth and allegory, but he does not distinguish clearly between myth and symbol. It seems that the symbol can be a way of taking myths in a non-allegorical sense. Symbol and allegory would then be intellectual attitudes or dispositions as part of hermeneutics. Symbolic interpretation and allegorical interpretation would be two directions of interpretation directed toward the same [mythic] content. I shall always take symbols in a more radical sense than does Eliade. They are spontaneously formed and given analogical significations: for instance, the meaning of water as threatening in the flood and as purification in baptism, and in every primitive hierophany. In this sense, the symbol is more radical than the myth. I shall take myth to be a species of symbol, as a symbol developed through a narrative, as articulated in a time and space that cannot be coordinated with those of scientific history and geography. For example, Exile is a primary symbol of human alienation, but the story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise is a second-degree mythic narrative, putting on stage a play of characters, places, times, and marvelous episodes. It seems to me that this thickness of narrative is essential to myth without taking into account the explanatory sketch found in etiological myths, which further accentuates this second-order aspect. At bottom, I agree enough with Jaspers’ schema when he distinguishes between the primitive language of ciphers, which I am calling symbols, the language of myth, which mediates the primary symbols, and the third-degree, more speculative symbols, like, for example, the representation of evil as “war” in Heraclitus, or as “body” in Plato’s Phaedo, or, finally, as “hereditary original sin” in Saint Augustine.

A Philosophy of the Symbol

Having characterized the symbol by a method aimed at its essence, we are at the threshold of the properly philosophical problem. “The symbol gives rise to thought” – what does that mean? In a certain fashion, our investigation into the structure of the symbol has not facilitated an answer. If the symbol gives its meaning only through the momentum and transparency of what it intends, if the symbol cannot be translated, in short if the symbol resists all allegorizing exegesis, then it cannot give something to think about. It leads
Instead to a stupor of thinking. It is to this stopping of thought that
Heiling's interpretation of myths seems to lead.10

My problem therefore can be stated as follows: how can we think
starting from the symbol, without falling back into the old form of
allegorizing interpretation? How can we disentangle an alterity of
meaning, hidden, dissimulated, covered over, and already there, from
a symbol? I would like to try out another way, which will be that of
a creative interpretation, of an interpretation that respects the origi­
nal enigma of symbols, which allows itself to be instructed by it, but
that, starting from there, promotes meaning, forms meaning, in the
full responsibility of an autonomous thinking. The problem is to
know how thinking can be both bound and free, how the immediacy
of the symbol and the mediation of thought hold together.

I see the key, or at least the core of the difficulty, to lie in the rela­
tion between the symbol and hermeneutics. There is no symbol that
does not incite a search for understanding by means of an interpreta­
tion. How can this understanding be both in the symbol and beyond it?

I see three steps as leading to this understanding – three steps that
carry the movement that thrusts the life in symbols toward a
thought that will be thought that starts from symbols.

First Step: Phenomenology

The first step, which we can call understanding the symbol in terms
of the symbol, through the totality of symbols, is already a kind of
intelligibility since it surveys and assembles, giving the realm of
symbols the consistency of a world. But this is still a life devoted to
symbols, handed over to symbols.

I will offer an example drawn from Eliade's Patterns in Compara­
tive Religion: for Eliade, to understand a symbol is to replace it in
a totality homogeneous with that symbol, but vaster than that symbol
and that, on the level of symbols, forms a system.

We can draw from Eliade's own practice a certain number of
figures of understanding that indicate the passage from life in symbols

10 "Mythology is not allegorical! It is tautegorical [allegory leads to some­
thing else, tautegory leads to the same]. For mythology, the gods are beings
who really exist, are nothing else, signify nothing else, they signify only
what they are." This passage is taken from a French translation of Schelling's
courses: Introduction à la philosophie de la mythologie, trans. M.
to autonomous thought – for however close humans may be to their object, Eliade is already a thinker.

A first figure of understanding will consist in unfolding the multiple senses of a single symbol. Take, for example, the symbol of the sky. To understand this symbol is to grasp its inexhaustibility. It conveys the transcendence of the immense, an indication of order and of an order that is cosmological, ethical, and political at the same time. To understand it is to repeat in oneself this multiple unity, this permutation within one theme of all its senses.

Whence a second figure of understanding: it will consist in understanding a symbol through another symbol. Understanding will extend, more and more, following a law of intentional analogy, toward all the other symbols that have an affinity with the symbol of the sky – mountains, towers, and other high places. From there, we can easily pass to the symbolism of ascent, of a difficult climb, of a journey as in Parmenides’ poem, to Platonic anabasis, Pauline rapture, to Plotinian and Augustinian ecstasy, to Mount Carmel.

Third figure of understanding: one will understand a symbol in terms of a rite or a myth, that is, in terms of other manifestations of the sacred. For example, the symbolism of water is clarified by such symbolic gestures as those of immersion, wherein one discerns both a threat – the flood is a return to the undifferentiated – and the promise of rebirth: water is both what wells up and what fecundates.

We can also show – and this will be the fourth way of understanding – how the same symbol unifies several levels of experience or of representation: the inner and the outer, the vital and the speculative. Thus, the great symbolisms of vegetation have provided both a schematization of the most orgiastic experience of death and rebirth and a metaphysics that provides an image of an originary contrariety, even of an identity of contraries.

So, in multiple manners, the phenomenology of the symbol makes apparent a certain coherence, something like a symbolic system. To interpret, at this level, is to make this coherence apparent. To be sure, each symbol only reaches a partial totality – water says something not said by vegetative symbols, which say something not said by the sky; each one is the center of gravity of an inexhaustible yet limited possible thematization, but together they do speak of totality.

This is the first step, the first level of thinking that starts from symbols. Why not stop there? Because the question of truth has not yet been posed. If phenomenology can call truth the coherence, the systematic possibility of the world of symbols, this is a truth without
belief, a truth at a distance, a reduced truth, one that has expelled the question: Do I believe this? What do I make of these symbolic meanings, these hierophanies? This question cannot be posed so long as one remains at the level of a comparative approach, so long as one moves from one symbol to another, without ever being involved anywhere oneself. This step has to be just one step, that of an extensive, panoramic, curious but unconcerned intelligibility. Now we must enter a passionate yet at the same time critical relation with symbols. But this is possible only if, in leaving behind the comparative point of view, I commit myself along with the exegete to the life in a symbol, a myth.

I cannot avoid taking this second step in that the world of symbols is not in the end a tranquil and reconciled world. For instance, the sky symbolism has always involved a struggle against the hotter, more dynamic myths of fertility, fecundity, violence. Every symbol is iconoclastic in relation to some other symbol, just as every symbol taken by itself tends to thicken, to solidify into a form of idolatry. We must therefore participate in this struggle, this dynamic through which symbolism is prey to its own surpassing. It is only by participating in this dynamic that understanding can accede to the properly critical dimension of exegesis and become a hermeneutics. But then it is necessary that I quit the position—or, better, the exile—of a distant, disinterested spectator, in order to appropriate for myself an always singular symbolism.

Second Step: Hermeneutics

Here is where I come back to my initial remarks that I earlier set aside in order to consider the criteria for a symbol. In an age where the signs of the sacred have been forgotten, I said, we want to be summoned again. Is this to say that we can return to our first naivety? Not at all! In every way, something has been lost, irremediably lost: the immediacy of belief. But if we can no longer live on the basis of an originary belief in the great symbolic formations of the sky, vegetation, water, stones, the moon, we can, we modern people, in and through critique, reach toward a second naïvety. For we are the children of critical thought—of philology, of exegesis, of psychoanalysis—yet we do catch sight today of a critique that would be restorative, not reductive. In other words, it is in interpreting that we can again hear.

In this way we accede to a second level of the intelligibility of symbols: beyond the extensional point of view, as in the
Semantics of Action

phenomenology of comparative scholars, opens the field of hermeneutics properly speaking, that is, of interpretation applied in each case to a singular text. In short, it is within modern hermeneutics that the symbol’s giving of meaning and the intelligent initiative to decipher this meaning takes shape.

How does hermeneutics encounter this problem? What we have spoken of as a taking shape – the taking shape in which the symbol gives and the critic interprets – hermeneutics shows to be a circle. We can state this circle bluntly: “it is necessary to understand in order to believe but it is necessary to believe in order to understand.” This is not a vicious, much less a mortal circle. It is a living, a stimulating circle. It is necessary to believe in order to understand – the interpreter never approaches what a text says unless he or she lives in the aura of the interrogated meaning. As Bultmann puts in his well-known article on “The Problem of Hermeneutics” in Glauben und Verstehen, all understanding is

constantly oriented to a particular formulation of the question, a particular “objective” [its Woraufhin]. ... It is never without its own presuppositions, that is, governed always by a prior understanding of the subject, in accordance with which it investigates the text. The formulation of a question, and an interpretation, is possible at all only on the basis of such a prior understanding.11

And again: “the presupposition for understanding is the interpreter’s relationship in his life to the subject which is directly or indirectly expressed in the text.”12 In emphasizing this coincidence with the Woraufhin, with what the text talks about, Bultmann puts us on guard against a confusion that would consist in identifying this participation in a meaning with some psychological coincidence between the interpreter and “the meaningful expressions of life,” to use Dilthey’s expression. It is not a kinship between one life and life that hermeneutics requires, but thinking that intends life, in short, thinking along with the thing that is in question. It is in this sense that it is necessary to believe in order to understand. Yet, it is only by understanding that we can believe.

For the second immediacy we are seeking, the second naivety we await, is accessible to us only in a hermeneutics; we can believe only

12 Bultmann, Glauben und Verstehen, 491 Essays Philosophical and Theological, 241.
by interpreting. This is the “modern” mode of believing in symbols: both an expression of the distress of modernity and the remedy for that distress.

The circle: hermeneutics proceeds from the preunderstanding of what its task is to understand by interpreting it. Yet, thanks to this hermeneutic circle, even today I can communicate with the sacred by explicating the preunderstanding that nourishes the interpretation. Thus, hermeneutics, an acquisition of “modernity,” is one of the ways in which this “modernity” as a forgetting of the scared gets surmounted. I believe that being can still speak to me, no longer no doubt in the pre-critical form of immediate belief, but as the second immediacy intended through hermeneutics. This second naivety is meant to be the post-critical equivalent of a pre-critical hierophany.

This conjunction of belief and critique therefore provides the second interpretation of the sentence we are considering: “the symbol gives rise to thought.” And this conjunction is a circular relation between a believing and an understanding. So we see with what prudence we can speak of a “demythologization.” It is legitimate to speak of “demythologizing” if we distinguish “to demythologize” and “to demythicize.” All critique as critique “demythologizes,” that is, it always pushes further the decision between the historical (following the rules of a critical method) and the pseudo-historical. It is the *logos* of *muthos* that critique exorcizes (for example, the representation of the universe as a series of superimposed layers, with earth in the middle, heaven above, and hell below). As an advancing front of “modernity,” critique has to be a “demythologization.” It is an irreversible acquisition as regards truthfulness, intellectual honesty, and, in this sense, objectivity. But it is precisely in accelerating the movement of “demythologization” that modern hermeneutics brings to light the dimension of the symbol as an originary sign of the sacred. This is how it participates in the revivification of philosophy in contact with symbols; it is one of the ways of rejuvenating philosophy. The paradox that “demythologization” is also a reinvigorating of thinking through symbols is just one corollary of what we have called the circle of believing and understanding in hermeneutics.

**Third Step: Thinking Starting from Symbols**

I would like now to sketch out the third step in making sense of symbols. This will be the properly philosophical step, that of
thinking that starts from symbols. The philosopher participates in the realm of symbols through the intermediary of the phenomenology of religion, of myths, and of poetry, as we have discussed in the first part of this essay, and through the intermediary of the precise hermeneutics of singular texts, as I have characterized it. But its proper task involves more than this. What must it be, if it is not going to fall back into an allegorizing interpretation?

If finding a hidden philosophy in symbols, disguised behind the imaginative garments of myth, is excluded, one still has to do philosophy starting from symbols. What remains, to use an expression mentioned at the beginning of this essay, is a promotion of meaning, forming meaning through a creative interpretation.

I would like to develop an example that, we shall see, still remains close to the edge of a philosophy of symbols.

This example has the advantage of clarifying the role of symbolic knowledge for self-consciousness or, more precisely, for a philosophical anthropology, for a philosophical reflection of what it is to be human. I borrow this example from research that I will soon publish on the relations between limitation and evil (or, in a more incisive language, on the relationship between finitude and guilt). It is quite remarkable that there exists no other language than a symbolic language for guilt. This will be first of all the very archaic language of pollution, where evil is grasped as a stain, a blemish, hence as something that affects and infects us from the outside. This symbolism is absolutely irreducible. It is capable of innumerable transpositions and reprises in less and less magical concepts. For example, the prophet Isaiah evokes a vision of the Temple in these terms: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.” A modern person still talks about a tarnished reputation or a pure heart.

But there are other symbols of human evil: the symbols of deviation, of insurrection, of erring and perdition, which appear in the Hebraic context of the Covenant but that we also find in the Greek hybris and hainartema. And it is through the symbol of captivity that the Jews drew upon the historical experience of subjection in Egypt in combination with that of the Exodus, which in return symbolizes deliverance.

14 Isaiah 6:5 (NRSV).
What is most noteworthy about this symbolism is that these symbols do not get added to an awareness of evil, but are the originary and constitutive language for the confession of sins. Here, the symbolism is truly revealing: it is the very *logos* of a feeling that, without it, would remain vague, inexplicit, incommunicable. We are faced with a language that cannot be substituted for.

The symbol truly opens and uncovers a domain of experience.

This example can be pushed even further for it allows us to catch hold of the articulation of these primary symbols – stain, deviation, mug – and of those secondary and properly speaking mythical symbols in the sense, spoken of earlier, in terms of an elaborated narrative: the myth of chaos, of intermixture, of a fall. Their function is first of all to universalize experience through the representation of an exemplary human being, an *Anthropos*, an Adam, even of a Titan who enigmatically indicates a concrete universal human experience. It also introduces into this experience a tension, an orientation between a beginning and an end, between a fall and salvation, between alienation and reappropriation, between a separation and a reconciliation. At the same time, the symbol becomes not only a cipher of the look of human experience, but even a cipher of human depths, by indicating the suturing of the historical and the ontological or, in mythical language, of fall and creation.

So we have philosophers caught up by symbols, instructed by the phenomenology of religion and exegesis. What can they do starting from there? One essential thing, which they are responsible for in the autonomy of their thinking, is making use of the symbol as a means of detecting reality and, in being guided by a "mythics," for elaborating an "empirics" of the passions that finds its center of reference and gravity in the great symbols for human evil. Philosophers are not therefore supposed to offer an allegorizing interpretation of the symbol but rather to decipher human being starting from the symbols of chaos, of intermixture, and of a fall. This is what Kant did, for example, in his "essay on radical evil," where the myth of the fall serves to reveal our passions and flaws, as an instrument that radicalizes self-awareness. Kant does not allegorize; he forms, as a philosopher, the idea of an evil maxim behind every evil maxim that would consist in subverting, once and for all, the hierarchy between reason and sensory experience. I do not mean to say that

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Kant in this way exhausted all the possibilities for thinking starting from myth. I cite his attempt as a methodological model for reflection prodded by myth and yet responsible for itself. Without the revitalizing of thinking by myth, the reflexive theme will founder, and yet myth only gets inserted into philosophy as an idea – even if that idea is “inscrutable.”

And, since I am in a Kantian context, I will dare to speak here of a kind of “transcendental deduction” of the symbol. If it is true that the “transcendental deduction” consists in justifying a concept by showing that it makes possible the constituting of a domain of objectivity, the symbol employed to decipher human reality is “deduced,” in the technical sense of the word, when it is verified by its power to solicit, to clarify, to order a whole field of human experience. This is the case for the symbols and myths of evil, which make us sensible to a whole aspect of experience, to a whole domain that we can call the domain of avowal and that we too quickly reduce to that of an error or an emotion or a habit, or to passivity, or, finally, to finitude itself; in short, to one of the dimensions of existence that have no need for the symbols of evil in order to be opened and laid bare.

If this language may seem overly stamped by Kant, I will say, with the Heidegger of Sein und Zeit, that the philosophical interpretation of symbols consists in elaborating the “existentials” that express the most fundamental possibilities of Dasein. It would be easy to show that Heidegger’s existentials all issue from the symbolic sphere. They are philosophically interpreted symbols – and starting from a sphere of symbols, an understanding of human reality is opened.

The example I have developed has the advantage of unfolding philosophical hermeneutics in the more familiar region of self-awareness. In return, it has the inconvenience of masking another aspect of the symbol, or more exactly the opposite pole of the symbol. Every symbol is finally a hierophany, a manifestation of the bond between human beings and the sacred. But, by treating the symbol as “revealing” self-awareness, as an anthropological index, we cut off one of its poles; we have pretended to believe that “know thyself” was purely reflexive, whereas it is a summons by which everyone is invited to better situate him- or herself in being. As we can read in Plato’s Charmides: the god at Delphi says, be temperate! But as divine, he says this enigmatically. For “be temperate” and “know thyself” are the same thing. Hence it is finally as an indication of the human situation at the heart of being, in which we move and

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16 Plato, Charmides, 165a.
The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought

The symbol, that the symbol speaks to us. Thus the philosopher’s task, guided by the symbol, will be to break through the enchanted circle of self-consciousness, of subjectivity, to pull down the privilege of reflection, to surpass anthropology. Every symbol points toward reintegrating human beings in a totality: the transcendent totality of the sky, the immanent totality of vegetation, of perishing and being born again.

To sum up, I will say that the symbol gives rise to the thought that the *cogito* is inside being and not vice versa. Second naivety will therefore also be a second Copernican revolution: the being posited in the *cogito* uncovers that the act through which it uproots itself from the totality still participates in the being that summons it in each symbol.

A philosophy primed by the symbol would thus be the contrary of an apologetics that claims to lead reflection toward the discovery of something unknown. It first installs human beings within its ground and, from there, charges reflection to discover the rationality of this ground. Only a philosophy nourished by the fullness of language can, it follows, be indifferent to the question of access and its conditions of possibility, and yet constantly concerned to thematize the rational and universal structure of its adhesion. This, to my eyes, is the power of solicitation of the symbol.

Allow me, in concluding, to repeat my opening sentence in another, more archaic, more enigmatic form: it is the formulation given by Heraclitus the Obscure: “The Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks out nor conceals, but gives sign [*sēmaineî*].”17

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The question of freedom can be taken up on three different levels, each of which draws upon its own type of discourse.¹

At a first level, that of ordinary language, “free” is an adjective that characterizes certain human actions presenting noteworthy features. They are intentional actions or ones done with a certain intention. We explain them by their motives, in giving this term the sense of “reason to act” rather than “cause.” They are assigned to a responsible agent, etc. To say that an action is “free” is therefore to prescribe how to place it in the category of actions that present these noteworthy features and, at the same time, to exclude placing it in the category of actions presenting contrary features, for example, those that are done under constraint. The expression “free” thus is a part of a universe of discourse where we encounter words like “project,” “motive,” “decision,” “reason for acting,” “responsible author,” etc. To define the word “free” is to connect it to this whole network of notions where each one refers to the others.

At a second level, that of moral and political reflection, freedom is not just a characteristic that distinguishes certain actions from others known not to be free. The word designates a task, an exigency, a value, in short something that ought to be but which is not yet the case. To reflect about freedom is to reflect about the conditions of its realization in human life, in history, at the level of institutions. It

¹This article was first published in 1971 in the Encyclopaedia Universalis, vol. 9: 979–95. – Editors’ note.
In another kind of philosophical discourse that the value of freedom can be articulated. This discourse does not consist in describing the class of actions taken to be free by ordinary language. It prescribes the road to liberation. As a result, the same word “freedom” figures and functions in a different conceptual network than in the first case. Here we encounter expressions like “norm,” “law,” “institution,” “political power,” etc. Set within this new context, the word “freedom” shows itself to be plural: one speaks of freedom in terms of “liberties”: civil, political, economic, social. By these liberties, one means not so much the power to do or not to do something – as was the case in the first type of discourse – as a certain number of rights to act in a certain way, which only exist if they are recognized by others and instituted in economic, social, and political institutions.

At a third level, that of fundamental philosophy, discourse about freedom stems from a question: how must reality overall be constituted for there to be something like freedom? This unique question can be formulated in two ways, if one relates it to the two preceding forms of investigation. What is reality if human beings are to be agents, that is, the author of their acts, as the first level of discourse will say in describing them? And what is reality so that a moral or political enterprise of liberation should be possible, as the second level of discourse will prescribe? This question – as simple or double – is, in the strict sense of the word, an ontological question: that is, a question about the being of freedom. It places the word “freedom” in a field of notions where we encounter expressions like “causality,” “necessity,” “determinism,” “contingency,” “possibility,” etc., which all have to do with modes of being. To set the word “freedom” among such modes of being is the task of this third kind of discourse.

We want to show here that this discourse is not independent of the first two kinds of discourse, for they already contain indications, indices, pointed toward the mode of being free. So it will be a question of developing these suggestions, implicitly contained in the first two sorts of discourse, and of linking them to a problematic, to a mode of questioning that stems from a properly philosophical dimension.

**Descriptive Discourse: What Is a Free Action?**

One part of contemporary philosophy – the ordinary language analysis of the Oxford school, Husserl’s phenomenology along with its French disciples – undertakes clarifying ordinary language in which
we talk about free action. For this type of philosophy, attentive to all the finesses and nuances of current language, freedom is not an entity, a species of being. It is a character, expressed by an adjective, that attaches to certain human actions. If therefore there is a language about freedom, it is first of all because there is a language about action.

**Language about Action**

Act, do something – these terms designate the vast domain of behavior or ways of acting by which human beings produce changes in their physical setting or social environment. Everyone understands the difference between changing things and simply considering them. To this major difference corresponds the distinction between the practical and the theoretical, found in most philosophies. If we understand what “to act” signifies, in contrast to simply “to perceive,” “to understand,” “to describe,” it is because ordinary language has accumulated, thanks to age-old experience, a storehouse of appropriate expressions that, in some way, mark out regions in the domain of action.

In this regard, habitual language has known this longer than has any philosophy. It has at its disposition a whole battery of expressions to speak not just of the opposition of the free and unfree, but also innumerable nuances that indicate degrees of freedom. It is interesting in this respect to listen to the language used for excuses. To say that one did something intentionally, inadvertently, without doing it deliberately, in spite of oneself – all these are expressions that modulate the signification of action from the point of view of degrees of freedom.

The first task for a philosophy concerned to get as close as possible to this “talk about doing something” is to do overall justice to the language about action. There would be no meaning to free and not free if there were not first of all a meaning to action per se. And there are two ways to misunderstand this language about action.

One can first of all confuse it with a language that resembles it in many ways but that, however, is deployed in another universe of discourse. This is the language that expresses action in terms of the movements that we observe in nature. But the language of action is not that of movement. A movement is something that happens that one notices; an action is something that one makes happen and knows how to do. Consider the two following expressions: “the
"muscles contract" and "I am raising my arm to indicate that I am about to make a turn." The first statement is a statement about a movement, that is, about an event that occurs in the world and that can be observed from the outside; the second is a statement about an action. It has the meaning of being an action for someone who speaks about it amid the action: for example, in order to give an order or in order to make sense of it to someone else.

But this recognition of the specificity of the domain of action calls for a second contrast: no longer between an action (that one does) and a movement (that one observes), but between the predicates that are attached to visible and, so to speak, public action, on the one hand, and the same predicates when reduced and applied to the state of some mental "entity," on the other, namely, the "idea" that exists only as internal to thought. This awkward construction of language is responsible for many mistakes in the domain of a philosophy of free action. We readily represent to ourselves an intention or motive as an "idea" divested of every physical and material characteristic, and ask ourselves why such an idea, stemming from thinking, seems to produce a movement, inscribed in matter. This problem of the passage from an idea to a movement is a preliminary obstacle to any reflection on freedom.

Yet a simple return to ordinary language and the kind of understanding it enables ends up dissolving – rather than resolving – the problem that stems from a shoddy construction in the grammar of our language. As just stated, for ordinary language an action is not a movement, and subsequent analysis will show that an intention (to do this or that) is not an idea in thinking that would precede movement and produce it through a kind of magical operation that transforms an idea into a movement.

There is, as well, a grammar of action, which has its own predicates and that cannot be derived from any set of statements about events – be they physical or mental – and their properties. In this regard, language offers some quite noteworthy constructions: for example, those of action verbs, which refer to an agent, and to the objects of the action (as the direct objects of transitive verbs), to its means, to its circumstances in space and time, etc. It is by using this grammar of action verbs that we are able to talk about what we do when we do something. One of the most interesting aspects of this grammar of action has to do with what in ordinary grammar we call "modes" (indicative, imperative, subjunctive, optative, etc.). Indeed, a good part of our statements about action make use of modes other than the indicative. As much as the latter fits
well with the description of observed movements in reality, the imperative, the optative (and eventually the other modes), fit the expression of action as something that one commands others or oneself to do, or as related to some form of desire, wish, or intention. English-speaking philosophers have thus been led to distinguish "performative" utterances from "indicative" ones. Something of the distinction being examined here between an event (that one notices) and an action (that one accomplishes) is reflected in this grammatical distinction.

**Intention and Motive**

Having said something about the grammar of language about action, how should we place "free action" within the network of notions that stem from this universe of the discourse of action?

The character of freedom is explained by some of the basic terms around which all the other expressions of this network gravitate. We shall consider some of them which, in mutually defining one another, also define what everyone calls free action.

The first term is that of *intentional* action. This expression is itself used and understood by interlocutors in terms of several different contexts. For example, in the three expressions: I have the intention to (do this or that); (some action was done) intentionally; (I am doing this or that) with the intention of (obtaining this or that result), we understand the intention only in connection with an action that the discourse mentions. What do we add to this designation of the action in saying that it is or was intentional? To answer this question, we have to interrogate the contexts in which this expression is taken to be meaningful.

Here is where the notion of intention calls for that of a motive: for example, in the expressions where one says that an action was done intentionally – those where one says that to act with this or that intention refers to the notions of a project and an end.

Let us consider therefore the connection between an intention and a motive. And to do so, let us examine the use of the term "intention." One uses it, generally, in statements that are answers to questions of the form: what are you doing and why are you doing it? In truth, the two questions really are one. The answer to the question what finds its full development in the answer to the question why.

We allege an intention only in cases where the answer to the question why invokes a motive that has the meaning for us of a "reason
to act” and not that of a “cause.” To call an action intentional, therefore, is, first, to exclude a certain explanation, the explanation in terms of a cause. Yes, there are motives that resemble causes; they are all those motives for which we can say they “look back”: I wreak vengeance because someone killed my father, express my gratitude because someone did something nice for me; I have pity because someone fell into misfortune. But, if it is true that the motive looks back, it does not “push” like a cause. It is not the past event, as such, that produces my current feeling, my present action, but a certain character of this event, judged as good or bad, to which the action responds. This is why we say: “out of” vengeance, “out of” pity. A past event motivates a present action only through the intermediary of some character of desirability, whether positive or negative, which is itself evaluated, interpreted.

This feature is all the more strongly indicated when the alleged motive is neither an antecedent nor a consequence of the action but a way of interpreting the action. I give you this or that reason why I acted; this means: I ask you to consider the action in a certain light, to place it in a certain setting, to consider it as... To allege a motive, in this sense of a reason to act, is to attempt to give a meaning capable of being communicated to others and understood by them. The motive makes the action what it is, that it has those characteristics, that it can be understood from that point of view, be attached to a set of psychological, moral, social, cultural meanings understood by others. In short, to allege a motive is to make clear to the eyes of others and to one’s own eyes what one is doing.

A first approximation of the notion of freedom results from this analysis of the notions of intention and motive in ordinary language. An action is recognized as free if one can account for it, to others and to oneself, by alleging motives that have the meaning of being a “reason to” and not that of being a “cause.” We can call those actions “constrained” that we cannot explain in terms of motives in this sense of being a “reason to” but can explain in terms of a “cause.” And since a great number of our actions lie between some “reason to” and some “cause,” these actions present to our eyes and to those of our interlocutors all the intermediary degrees of “free” and “constrained.” In this respect, for ordinary language, freedom and constraint are not absolute terms separated by an unbridgeable gap, but two poles between which we situate all the degrees of “free” and “less free,” of “constrained” and “less constrained.” The art of conversation excels, better than any philosophy, in playing with these degrees and nuances.
Semantics of Action

Intention and End

Which actions do we most readily recognize as free? Those whose intention presents a noteworthy feature that we generally express by saying that we are doing this or that “with the intention to.” Here intention designates not so much a character by which we render intelligible what we are doing – that is, some way of interpreting an action like a text that one makes comprehensible by replacing it in an appropriate context – as the long-term goal, that is, a subsequent result placed in the position of an end point, in relation to all the intercalary actions that serve as means to that end. An action is intentional, in the strongest sense of the term, when it is set in perspective in this way through a chain of means and ends, and receives from this chain an articulated structure.

In this regard, the statements that describe an isolated action (as with our first example: I am raising my arm) are barely action statements. They lack the character of discursivity that confers on the action “the intention with which” one does something. A true action statement includes at least two segments of action ordered in relation to one another: “I am raising my arm in order to indicate that I am about to make a turn.” Two statements articulated in this way make up not just a semantics of action but also a syntax of action: “I do P so that Q.”

What we are calling an intention, then, is much closer to a kind of reasoning than to an idea. It gets formulated in terms of a chain of statements that, taken together, designate the “order” of the action. What has been called, since Aristotle, practical reasoning expresses what is, in the formal language of logic, this ordering of an action in terms of some intention. It is not because such reasoning draws a conclusion on the basis of principles that it stops being practical and tips toward the side of theory or speculation; actual practical reasoning always has a starting point in something desired. It classifies, orders, stratifies, the desirability characteristics attached to successive levels of action. By so making desires accede to language through such “characters of desirability,” speaking subjects place their desires in a calculation of means and ends. Here is the first degree of freedom: to be capable not only of “suffering,” of “undergoing” desires, but also of bringing them to language by stating their character of desirability and by submitting the chain of intermediary actions to a calculation of means and ends. Desire is then no longer a simple “impression”; it is set at a distance, in the far-off position of some end, in relation to the set of ways and means,
of obstacles and instruments, that action has to pass through in order to "fulfill" the intention.

What we have described using the resources of an analysis of ordinary language is what the phenomenology of action, from Aristotle to the present, has called by different names. Aristotle called it "preference." In what was, no doubt, the first phenomenology of the will ever written—namely, Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*—he considers a series of concentric circles in which we place our action. The broadest circle is that of those actions we do voluntarily or willingly. They are the ones we do spontaneously, without being constrained to do so, either externally or internally. Among these actions are those that are simply wished for whose execution does not depend on us but depends on someone else or on chance and those that do depend on us to do or not do. What stands out among such actions are those that we can speak of as genuinely preferred because they have been deliberated on before being performed. But human beings do not deliberate over ends, only over means. Hence it is in articulating the means in relation to the ends that make up the actions that we can say they are, par excellence, our work.

We rediscover in what Aristotle says about "preference" those features that an analysis of ordinary language discovers in the notions of intention, motive, and end. The same work of rereading could be applied to the descriptive parts of Kant's practical philosophy. We shall refer to this in relation to the "second discourse" about free action. The notions of duty and law surely determine what Kant calls the objective will. But, for a being like human beings, whose will is affected by desire, the subjective will is a mixture of duty and desire. Concrete action thus presents those features that ordinary language recognizes in it. Kant calls "maxims" the practical principles whose "condition is regarded by the subject as holding only for his will," and he recognizes that in "a pathologically affected will of a rational being there can be found a conflict with the practical laws cognized by himself."² What Kant here calls a maxim or practical subjective principle is what everyone calls the intention in which one acts. It is also what, in another philosophical framework, Aristotle called "preference."

Project and Decision

Modern philosophy has, in general, emphasized other features of free action for which it adopts a different vocabulary. It readily speaks of a “project” to designate the anticipatory character of an intended action, in this way putting the accent on the “thrown forward” character of intention above the function of explanation, of legitimation, of justification of motives. At the same time, it accentuates a feature already emphasized by the Scholastic philosophers and by Descartes, namely, that the rational side of the calculation of means and ends is the counterpart of an irrational character attached to initiative, the setting in motion and ending of deliberation. This feature, supported by the metaphor of the sword that cuts the Gordian knot, is better expressed by the words “decision” and “choice” than by the Kantian expression of a maxim. The “spurt” of a project is fully found in the sovereign act that the Scholastic tradition, before Descartes, stated as the power over contraries. No doubt, it was thanks to the reaction against Hegelian rationalism, and under the impulse of Kierkegaard, that modern philosophy, in particular in existentialism, has accentuated the character of there being an alternative: the “either . . . or” of free action.

A philosophy more attentive to ordinary language will correct these unilateral interpretations by restoring the whole network of expressions and notions that constitute the discourse of action. In a complete language about action, there are projects only because there are motives and there are decisions only because there are calculations. One decides on something, but one decides because. So the “irrationalism” of decision and choosing leads back to the “rationalism” of calculating means and ends. A language of action cannot function, therefore, unless all these expressions balance out: project and motive, decision and practical reasoning.

The Responsible Agent

The moment has come to introduce the last feature, the most difficult one to place in the network of action discourse. Here, too, language is a good guide. Just as we say “to decide on something” and “to decide because,” we also say “I decide.” The form of pronoun and
verb is one of the grammatical means employed by some languages to designate a noteworthy character of expressions about action, namely, that they mention at the same time what is being done or to be done, the reasons for doing that, the act that decides among the alternatives, and, finally, the agent, the one who acts. Language about action, we may say, is "self-referential." The one who acts designates him- or herself in stating his or her acting. This self-implication of the agent of an action in stating that action expresses a fundamental feature of human action. It is assigned or imputed to someone. Just as action discourse implies the distinction between action and movement, between the performative and the constative, between motive and cause, this discourse implies the distinction between an agent who is a person and the constant antecedent of an event in the world.

This assigning of an action to someone is the core of what we call responsibility and includes other features that only appear at the second level of discourse about freedom. Because action can be assigned to an agent, statements about the action can always be reformulated in a way so that this assignment of the action to the agent comes to the fore. It is always possible to say, "I did that," or "you did that." We can call this a judgment of imputation. Only an action can be imputed, not a movement. This characteristic of being able to be imputed to someone is one of the things we understand and presuppose when we hold an action to be "free."

To sum up, for an analysis that makes no use of moral and political considerations, consequently for an ethically neutral analysis, the epithet "free" refers, more or less implicitly, to all those characteristics we discover step by step in following the back and forth movement between one notion and another within the conceptual network of action. Free means intentional, motivated, projected, decided upon, imputable to an agent. We understand the word "free" by understanding each of these words, and we understand each of these words by understanding the whole network. To call an action free is to exclude one kind of explanation meant to set in motion another network, that of observable events in nature. It is, moreover, to place such action among those justifiable by a description that sets in play the whole conceptual network for intentional action.

It is the task of a both phenomenological and linguistic philosophy – call it a linguistic phenomenology – to clarify these concepts and to bring to light their interconnections.
Second-Level Discourse: Rational Freedom

From Arbitrary Freedom to the Political Field

An important and difficult text of Hegel's brings us straightaway to the second level of the problem:

the basis of right is, in general, mind, its precise place and point of origin is the will. The will is free, so that freedom is both the substance of right and its goal, while the system of right is the realm of freedom made actual, the world of mind brought forth out of itself like a second nature.

This text speaks of "freedom made actual" and its realm, which it calls the system of right. By this phrase, Hegel means the set of juridical, moral, economic, and political - institutions by means of which freedom ceases to be an inner feeling, the feeling of being able to do or not to do something, in order to become a reality, a work, what the text calls a "second nature." Our prior analysis therefore has not exhausted the problem of freedom. Intentional action, with which we identified free action, may be absurd or rational. It can take refuge in itself or produce works and institutions beyond itself.

What must be added to the preceding analysis therefore in order to bring about this change in level? First of all, we have to introduce the confrontation between two wills. The notions of intention, project, motive, and of a voluntary and responsible agent only bring into relation a free subject with his or her body and the surrounding overall situation. The juridical example of a contract (with which Hegel begins his Principles of the Philosophy of Right) well shows that arbitrary freedom becomes rational freedom when two wills, confronting each other about things - for example, in order to appropriate them, or to exchange their positions - mutually recognize each other and engender a common will. By so committing themselves to some relation between themselves, the two wills bind themselves to one another and thereby become free in a new way, which is no longer that of being able to do just anything at all, but rather that of being able to make themselves independent of their individual desires and of recognizing a norm.

Second feature: the preceding analysis lacked any consideration of a rule, a norm, a value, in short, of a principle of order (whatever it might be) that gives an objective character to a freedom until then locked into its own subjective point of view.

Third feature: as doubled action, normed action, free action makes apparent a dimension of reason that the philosophical tradition has called practical reason. Let us understand by this a reason that has effects in the world, a reason that is applied to producing a reality based on freedom. A freedom that has passed through the problematic of the contract and of universalization through some law accedes to a project of realization or actualization whose scale is different from and broader than one's own body. Its theater is the world of culture. It is in works, and not just in movements, not even in gestures and forms of behavior, that it seeks to be inscribed. It is human history that it wants to inflect. In short, it wants to "change the world."

These three new concepts already outline the new field of this second-level discourse about action: the doubling of willing, normed actions, realization or actualization in a work. Let us add a last feature: it is within the field of this problematic of rational action that a political philosophy can be unfolded. A political philosophy is distinguished from political science in that its guiding thread is a concept of realized freedom. The theory of the state stems from this theory of freedom, exactly to the extent that the relation of will to will, of arbitrary freedom to rules, of intentions to works, is articulated in it. It adds a new relation that first presents itself as a question: how can an individual's freedom recognize itself not just as its own singular freedom but as a power of decision on the scale of a whole community? This was Rousseau's question in the Social Contract. How to pass from the primitive freedom of the single individual to the civil freedom of the person in the city? Rousseau called this question "the labyrinth of politics." In effect, the power of the state and, in general, of society first seems transcendent, alien, even hostile, to everyone when it is incarnated in the figure of the tyrant. A philosophy of freedom, understood in the sense of rational action, can be achieved only if it can incorporate the birth of political power to the field of practical reason, the field of the realization of freedom.

Aristotle on Ethics and Politics

This passage from the first to the second level of problems is easily recognized in Aristotle's moral philosophy. His theory of voluntary
and involuntary action, in Book III of the Nicomachean Ethics, constitutes only one fragment of a broader inquiry into virtue and happiness. Thus, the analysis referred to above about “preference” has to do only with the psychological conditions of an inquiry into “excellence” (as the magnificent word arete needs to be translated, rather than as “virtue”). The two discourses about freedom are thus in the same relation as are preference and excellence.

And the inquiry into excellence brings in play all the relations we have referred to: the relation of one person to another, put in play by all the virtues, as one easily sees with those of justice and liberality; the relation to the norm or the rule, which is expressed in each virtue as the search for the just mean between two extremes; the promotion of practical reason, prefigured for Aristotle by the figure of the virtue of “prudence” (phronesis), which is wisdom in action. Finally, it is worth recalling that for Aristotle the architectural or, better, architectonic science which encompasses all these considerations on happiness, virtue, and the virtues, on the relation of preference to excellence, under the guidance of prudence, is called “politics.” So the discourse about intentional action is just one abstract segment lifted from the complete course of ethical-political discourse, with which the problematic of rational freedom gets identified.

It is through this last feature that Aristotle most clearly anticipates Hegel. This correspondence between the two philosophers is all the more striking in that, soon after the Stagirite, and no doubt with the end of the Greek polis engulfed by the Macedonian state, then by the Roman Empire, this great unity of ethics and politics was broken apart. This scission had many consequences. Henceforth, the philosophy of freedom was handed over to an irremediable process of psychologization. Encased within a psychology of “faculties,” it took refuge in a theory of assent or consent, for which the Cartesian analysis of judgment was the most brilliant success.

But, for all that this analysis is excellent as a phenomenology of affirmation and negation, of yes and no, to the same extent it bears witness to the loss of political dimension posited by Aristotle in his Ethics, as is indicated by Descartes’s refusal to take up in his philosophy anything that might have to do with customs, laws, or the religion of the kingdom. During this period, the other half of the great Aristotelian unity, the political complement of this psychology of assent, continued its separate existence under another heading, that of political philosophy. Everything said and written by Hobbes and Machiavelli – up to Spinoza in the Theological-Political
The great philosophy of freedom, once integrally glimpsed by Aristotle.

It was Rousseau’s glory, before Hegel, to have, if one may put it this way, repatriated for the philosophy of freedom the question of political power and of sovereignty. It is not sure that the contract is the true connection by which the will of each one engenders the general will. But at least the contract will have served, before Hegel, to reunite the great philosophy of freedom. The concept of the general will is here the witness to that effort to depoliticize the problem of free will and, if one may put it this way, to repoliticize it following the Stagirite’s clear design.

The Breakup of the Kantian Synthesis

Kant’s practical philosophy is a decisive intermediary between Aristotle and Hegel. Its strength, its truth, is to have attempted to think through the difference between arbitrary and rational freedom. To understand this difference is the object of the Critique of Practical Reason. If the Critique of Pure Reason is an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of objectivity in knowledge, the Critique of Practical Reason has as its object the conditions of possibility of a good will. These conditions are summed up in the relationship between freedom and the law. The law is what makes freedom thinkable, and freedom is the raison d’être of the law. To be free, it follows, is no longer just to be independent with regard to one’s own desires; it is to be capable of subordinating one’s action to the law of duty or, in Kantian terms, of submitting the subjective maxim of an action to the test of the rule of universalization: “Act in such a way the maxim of your will should always be valid at the same time as a principle of universal legislation.” There is no knowledge about freedom outside the awareness of this fundamental law.

All the difficulties of the Kantian philosophy of freedom are at the same time the counterpart of the strength and rigor of its analysis. Everything that Kant demonstrated is limited to this conjunction of freedom with an empty formal law, which took the place of Aristotle’s meditation on the “excellences” (or “virtues”) of action. The first difficulty is to reconcile ordinary human experience with this objective will, identical with practical reason, and entirely contained in the simple, necessary, and infallible relation of the spontaneity of freedom with the legality of duty. In order to bring together this
moral experience, it is necessary to add to the determination by the law the possibility to disobey, that is, a contingent, revocable relation of the will to duty. The meaning of freedom oscillates between the objective will, entirely determined by its relation to the law, and the arbitrary will, which reveals itself in the human experience of evil.

This first difficulty reveals one that is considerably more difficult. Using a method of isolation and abstraction, Kant dissociated the lived experience of the will in relation to the law and the notion of the will according to the law that corresponds to it. By purging human experience in this way of all its empirical features, Kant renders incomprehensible the very project of a "critique of practical reason," which was to explain how a representation produces an effect in reality. Freedom, in a word, would be nothing if it were not a kind of causality that produces effects in the world. The deep intention of a "critique of practical reason" is therefore to account for the production of some reality through freedom. But the result of the critique destroys its intention. The analysis only engenders divisions: the division between rationality and the principle of desires, the division between the form of the will and its object, the division between virtue and happiness. Contrary to Aristotle, who had tried to discern the profound unity between habit, decisions, and the norm at the heart of the virtue of prudence or concrete wisdom, Kant leaves us with the scattered fragments of the practical synthesis: on one side the sphere of duty, on the other the sphere of desire; on one side the objective will, solely determined by the law, on the other the subjective will, torn between itself and desire.

**The Hegelian Dialectic**

The Hegelian philosophy of freedom proceeds from the failure of Kantianism. How, in short, are we to surmount the antinomies into which the Kantian philosophy of freedom gets entrapped? To answer this question is at the same time to recognize the true nature of the discourse that fits this second level of the problem of freedom. For Hegel, this discourse has to be dialectical, that is, an art of surmounting contradictions by means of more and more concrete mediations and syntheses.

If we consider the past history of the philosophy of freedom from this point of view, we must recognize that it poses a series of questions that cannot be resolved without a dialectical method. We can sum up the dialectical situations implied by a discourse about rational action by following the progression of the Hegelian dialectic through
the levels linked together in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*.4

First of all, the human will is a transition between animal desire and rationality. Aristotle defined it as “deliberated desire.” This expression implies that the natural reality, summed up in the word *desire*, is negated and nonetheless retained in a higher-order reality akin to rationality. A decision thus requires a dialectical conception of reality, for which the root of desire is sublated into the energy of the decision. This is the first dialectical situation. In the Hegelian *Encyclopedia*, it is represented by the transition from a philosophy of nature to a philosophy of spirit.

Second dialectical situation: the Scholastics and Descartes conceived of judgment as the interaction between two faculties: the understanding and the free will. But this interaction is expressed in the language of reciprocal causality: the understanding “moves” the will and the will “moves” the understanding. We can see here the pre-dialectical expression of a much more fundamental relation that governs the mutual promotion of theoretical and practical reason. This dialectical situation had not disappeared with the psychology of faculties, or with the cosmology that supported it. The Kantian distinction between theoretical and practical reason just gives a new expression to this old problem. This second dialectical situation constitutes the essence of the philosophy of subjective Spirit in Hegel’s *Encyclopedia*.

The third dialectical situation corresponds to the transition from subjective will, as described in the first-level discourse on freedom, to the objective will, which is the object of ethical-political determination in Aristotle and in Kant. This dimension is lost in a simple psychology of decision-making, where only individual freedom is taken into account, while the political dimension emigrates outside the field of a philosophy of freedom and constitutes the heart of a political philosophy, under the heading of a theory of power and sovereignty. We referred above to this crack in the philosophy of freedom at the time of Hobbes and Machiavelli. This is why the dialectic of the two figures of freedom, as individual and collective, psychological and political, gets lost. Aristotle did not overlook this unity, but he did not have the logical tools to master the problem of

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the relation between a phenomenology of preference and a political philosophy. This third dialectic is at the center of what Hegel calls the philosophy of objective Spirit. It contains the genuine philosophy of freedom at the level of discourse about rational action. Here is where we rejoin the text of the *Principles of the Philosophy of Right*, which we placed at the head of this second section. To realize freedom in a world of culture, worthy to be called a "second nature," is the task of the philosophy of right. We shall recall just two or three of the fundamental dialectical movements that mark the transition of freedom at the level of the philosophy of objective Spirit.

The first threshold of realized freedom is the contract relation that binds one will to another in a reciprocal relation. The solitary will, which is limited to taking hold of things, is still an arbitrary will. With the contract, each will renounces its particularity and recognizes the other will as identical to it in the act of exchange. While the thing is universalized through the abstract representation of its value, the will is universalized through the contractual exchange of things. Hence, the thing mediates between the two wills, at the same time that the will of the other mediates between the will and the possessed thing. This is the first threshold in this meaningful history of realized freedom.

Only a will submitted to objectification in works is capable of recognizing itself as the author responsible for its acts. Here is the second threshold in the dialectic of realized freedom. Freedom is no longer actualized merely in things, as things possessed, but in works and actions that represent it in the world. Beyond a simple intention, the will has to pass the test of success and failure and bind its fate to some phase of history. There is no actual project without this test of reality, without that judgment exercised by other human beings and, finally, without the judgment of the "world tribunal." Freedom appears then as a dialectic stretching between an infinite demand, which reflects its unlimited power of self-affirmation, and the task of self-realization in a finite reality. Individuality is nothing other than this confrontation between infinite reflection and finite actualization. Only this freedom has the right to be held responsible for all that it has made but not for what happens by means of its action.

It is within this framework of thinking that the Hegelian philosophy of the will does justice to Kant and to the difference that Kant instituted between the will for the law and the arbitrary will. But it is not just the abstract rule, the law, that makes the difference between objective and subjective will; it is the concrete course of intentional action, in which the subjective and objective aspects are intermingled, desire and rationality reconciled, and the quest for satisfaction
bound to the quest for rationality. A mere moral philosophy of intention, cut off from the thickness of vital desire and subtracted from the test of reality, is only one abstract segment in the overall process of actualization of freedom.

And now the third threshold in the realization of freedom in the framework of the objective Spirit: a philosophy of realized freedom culminates in a theory of concrete communities in which the will is capable of recognizing itself. This objectification of individual freedom in the family, in civil society, that is, in economic life, and finally in the state realizes the Aristotelian project of a philosophy of individual freedom that would at the same time be a political philosophy. Rousseau and Kant are once again justified. No state, no political philosophy, without this equation of the sovereignty of the state and the power of individual freedom. The state which would be only an objectified will would remain an alien and hostile will. This was Rousseau's problem. Hegel resolves it with other resources than the contract, which belongs only to the abstract layer of free will.

To say that the discourse of rational action reaches its end in a political theory is to say that human beings have concrete duties, concrete virtues, only when they are capable of situating themselves within historical communities, in which they recognize the meaning of their existence. One may be as critical as one wants regarding Hegel's apology for the state. The problem he poses remains: does there exist a rational mediation between individual power, what we call free choice or free will, and political power, which we call sovereignty? If political life is that mediation, then the dialectic between individual freedom and the power of the state is at the heart of the problem of freedom. It is this mediation that in the end commands the whole discourse of rational action.

The Third Level of Discourse: Freedom and Ontology

The Being of the Act and the Ethics of Action

At the start of this article, we introduced the third level of discourse in the following terms: how must reality overall be constituted so that human beings should be agents, that is, the author of their acts, in the double sense of the psychological power and the moral imputation that the first two levels allow us to elaborate? This question opens a type of investigation that is not contained either in the description of intentional action or in the dialectic of rational action.
But these two discourses refer, by express indications, to a ground that exceeds both the descriptive features and the dialectical structure of human action.

Language itself testifies to this reference. Act, action, activity: these words say more than movement, gesture, behavior, operation, actualization, even more than practice or praxis. Or rather they signal, in human behavior, a depth of meaning that the two preceding discourses do not exhaust. We will say: the revelation of a character of being. Neither moral theory nor political theory does justice to this character of being, this mode of being. They, in effect, only make sense of free activity insofar as it is captured in a meaning susceptible of being recapitulated as something known. Yet this flight forward toward meaning, if one may express it this way, does not exhaust the meaning. Another dimension is hollowed out, which the metaphor of thickness or depth indicates, that of a ground or foundation. It is precisely the experience of free action that hollows out, better than does that of perception or knowledge, this third dimension. It is free action that reveals something of being as act.

This reference from ethical-political discourse to ontological discourse can be caught sight of in Aristotle’s philosophy, which is thereby the witness to all three discourses. Ethics, says Aristotle, bears witness that human beings have a work or task (ergon) that is not exhausted by the enumeration of competences, skill, crafts. The human task designates a totality of projects that envelops the diversity of social roles. This task is to live, in the human sense of the word “live.” But what is living for human beings? It is, the philosopher replies, the active life, rule-governed activity (energeia), activity that has a logos. We move here within the underlying conceptual network of ethics, where activity, achievement, act, are terms that “speak” of the inflection of ethics and ontology. “If this is the case,” continues Aristotle, “human good will be an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence, and, if there is more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete of them; but let us add, in a complete life.”5 Here is the point where ethics roots itself in a conception of the real where being is energeia, activity, a complete act. This energeia can be understood no longer in terms of the ethical-political field, but rather in terms of that of first philosophy. It is in this new discourse, in effect, that notions like “potentiality” and “act” which underlie the ethics of activity can be articulated.

However, Aristotle’s philosophy was not able to resolve the problem it had posed. Finally, the act in question belongs only to

5 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1, 7, 1098a15–19.
beings without potentiality or movement, eternal, divine beings. The divine analogue of this pure act has to be sought not on the side of virtuous or political action but in that activity without movement and fatigue that we call wisdom or contemplation. We must then admit: "for it is not insofar as he is man that he will live, but insofar as something divine is present in him. . . . If intellect is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life."6

So we have deciphered, underlying behavior according to Aristotle, the act - in the ontological sense of the word - in action - in the ethical-political sense. But this act, taken up into a properly metaphysical analysis, leads outside the sphere of human praxis. At the same time, metaphysical analysis constitutes more a limit than a ground of acting. A hiatus is hollowed out between the moral philosophy of praxis and the ontology of the act. We can thus ask whether this lack of mediation between the ontology of the act and the ethics of action must not be linked to another feature of Aristotle’s philosophy, namely, the absence of an express concept of freedom. But, if there is no concept of freedom in Aristotle, is this not because for him there are no concepts of subject and subjectivity? And if this lack is manifest for us, is this not because we belong to another age of being, a metaphysical age for which the fundamental mode of manifestation of being is subjectivity?

The Rise of Subjectivity

The entrance of subjectivity forces us to turn our attention to the fact that the ground to which the notions of act, action, and activity refer stems from a complex history. This history cannot, it seems, be reduced to a pure change in theory, which would itself be linked to a cultural change, much less to an ideological change. It is, in a certain way, the history of models of being, of manifestations of being. It affects not just the solutions but the problems posed. It emerges to the surface of the history of philosophy in the form of new ways of asking questions. The rise of subjectivity to the top of Western philosophy is one of those earthquakes that occur in the depths of thinking, of thinking being.

This is why the metaphysical history of the concept of freedom is, essentially, the history of its alliance with subjectivity. It implies

a series of thresholds that do not necessarily coincide with the progress in phenomenological description or even with the more significant articulations that have occurred on the ethical and political planes.

Three thresholds of the emergence of subjectivity have special significance for the deeper history of freedom. First, freedom has to be conceived of as infinite in order to become subjective, in the strong sense of the word. Hegel constantly emphasizes this conjunction of reflection and infinity. But this infinitude is unknown to Aristotle. For him, the power of choice is effective only within a limited field of deliberation amid finite situations. Deliberation bears on means rather than on ends. Virtue, as a mean between two extremes, defines the rules of finite action. A revolution occurred, therefore, which inverted the relation between the infinite and the finite. This first reversal, Hegel says in the *Principles of the Philosophy of Right*, marks the turn from the Greek to the Christian world:

> The right of the subject’s particularity, his right to be satisfied, or in other words, the right of subjective freedom, is the pivot and center of the difference between antiquity and modern times. This right in its infinity is given expression in Christianity and it has become the universal effective principle of a new form of civilization.7

After this, the metaphysics of the desire for God succeeds that of finite action. This turn can be recognized in Saint Augustine, for whom the *voluntas* reveals itself, in its terrible greatness, in the experience of evil and of sin. Freedom has the power to negate being, to “decline” and to “falter,” to “turn away” from God, to “turn toward” the creature. This redoubtable power – this “power to sin” – is the stamp of infinity on freedom. Perhaps there was no will and no freedom in Western philosophy until thought had been confronted with what Saint Augustine calls the “defective mode” of the will. This would be a way of explaining *a contrario* the absence of a concept of freedom – and even of the will – in Aristotle, if it is true that this absence is that of subjectivity and that modern subjectivity begins with the Augustinian mediation on free will’s power of defection.

A second threshold in the emergence of freedom as subjectivity is represented by the Cartesian *cogito*, for which the subject is the one for whom the world is a representation, a picture, deployed to its gaze. I am referring here, of course, to the interpretation Heidegger

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7 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, § 124, p. 84.
gives of certitude and the search for certainty in his well-known essay on the “Age of the World Picture.” This promotion of the *cogito* pushed to the center of a spectacle and raised to the rank of a first truth – had to affect the philosophy of freedom. On the phenomenological plane, the Cartesian will, the power to say yes or no, can continue to be envisaged in terms of the same frame of thought as that of the Aristotelian description of preference or the Scholastic description of the reciprocal action of the will and the intellect. The Cartesian novelty is not on the level of the theory of judgment and error. Freedom is more profoundly a dimension of the *cogito, sum.* Freedom is the very positing of the *cogito*, in that it uproots itself from doubt and assures itself of itself. It is the freedom of thought as such, “free thought” in the most basic sense of the term.

*The Antinomy of Freedom and Nature*

The third threshold in this conquest of subjectivity, as a fundamental mode of being, consists in the recognition of the antinomy between freedom and nature. This antinomy could not be conceived so long as nature itself was not unified in terms of a unique lawfulness, which did not happen prior to Newton, nor before Kant’s reflections on Newton’s ideas. Now, freedom is exiled from the field of nature. No systematic unity is now capable of embracing, within a unique cosmology, the notion of an effect according to nature and one of a free act, imputable to an ethical subject. Speculative thought had to be submitted to the trial posed by this antinomy. But this could not be recognized within a phenomenology of decision-making, except through the distinction between a motive and a cause, or in the discourse of ethical and political life, except through the distinction between moral obligation and desire. The antinomy could appear only on the plane of cosmology as the internal rupture within the very concept of causality. It is important that the third Kantian antinomy should have made apparent the scission between freedom and nature as a problem for reason in its work of thinking the integrality of causality. The thesis of freedom and the antithesis of determinism are opposed as incompatible manners of completing the series of

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phenomena, whether reason thinks of a "spontaneity of causes, capable of beginning a series of phenomena"—hence of a free causality—or if the series forms an endless series of antecedents and consequences, whereby free causality is excluded.

This scission is much more radical than any of those that appear in the practical field—between law and desire, between objective and subjective will. This scission is recognized only in the wake of a theory of transcendental illusion, that is, a reflective theory of reason's failures. Only a reason that proposed to totalize experience, at another level than that of the legality of the understanding, enters the problematic for which this antinomy indicates a failure. Therefore it is under the sign of illusion and of failure that the free will accedes to reflection. In the ruin of traditional cosmology, freedom discovers itself as what cannot be part of nature, as exiled from all of nature. This is the intellectual event announced by the dialectic of pure reason.

But is the antinomy of freedom and nature the last word for thought? Kant took it to be a work of reason (Vernunft) and not of the understanding (Verstand). The understanding, for him, orders phenomena, it works in terms of conditions. Reason poses the radical question of an origin and demands an unconditioned at the origin of the series of conditions. In this sense, it is reason that poses the radical question of a beginning to causality. And yet, in another sense, we can ask, with Hegel, whether a thinking that separates, that slices apart, does not remain that of the understanding. The Kantian antinomy, it seems, calls for another kind of thinking than critique, a thinking not limited to setting free and natural causality side by side, but that knits them together.

**The Calling into Question of Hegel's "Spirit"**

Here is where Hegel's philosophy comes in. We spoke above of the role the mediating activity of reason plays in it, successively surmounting the opposition of nature and mind, then that of the subjective and the objective Spirit, in the world of culture and in the state. But, at the level of the deeper history we are considering here, what has to be questioned is the very notion of "Spirit" (Geist), starting from which the dialectic constitutes itself. It is Geist that is dialectical, and freedom is dialectical as Geist. But we have no means, on the ethical and political planes, where we stand, to call into question the Hegelian Geist, since it was the presupposition, that starting from which all the mediations of free action could be thought. In
The question is whether Hegelian philosophy, despite its claim to be all encompassing, does not belong to an epoch, does not share the linitude of a mode of being, the mode of being of subjectivity. It would be in this sense that it completes Western philosophy. It completes it in the sense that it sets under the point of view of Geist not just the Kantian antinomies, but every antinomy of Western philosophy considered as a whole. Considered retrospectively from the point of view of Hegelian Geist, the whole history of philosophy is a struggle between the point of view of substance, illustrated by Aristotle and Spinoza, and the point of view of a free subject, illustrated by Descartes and Kant. Hegelian Geist means to be the reconciliation of substance and subject, the subjectivization of substance. In it, substance is subject. All the partial reconciliations of desire and rationality, of representation and volition, of objective and subjective will, of individual freedom and the state, are held within the limits of this major reconciliation of substance and subjectivity. It is at the level of this deeper history that Hegelian philosophy seems in turn to adopt a finite point of view. The coming of history to a new mode of being, with Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche, makes Hegelian Geist appear as limited and closed. So long as we stay inside it, everything that it recapitulates does seem to be contained in it. But we have ceased to stand inside it. And as a result, it appears as another reduction of the foundation, of the ground of being, indicated by the qualification “idealism.” To be sure, this accusation is often unfair and stems from a mutilating reading, as is the case for all its detractors, including Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche. Nonetheless, something important is glimpsed through the accusation of idealism, namely, that existence, human practice, the will as power, are inscribed, today, outside the enclosure outlined by the act of recapitulation into Geist. It is this excrecence – in the sense of a “growth” outside Hegel’s discourse – that has to be thought through today. What appears exorbitant today is the claim to reduce the appearance of freedom to discourse. If, after Hegel, this claim seems untenable, this is because the “crisis” that has occurred at the level of a deeper-lying history affects the very relation of freedom and truth. In a philosophy of spirit, the dominant question is that of truth, attained or actualized in each new moment. And, as the truth of each moment is in the following one, that is, in another moment where the contradiction of the preceding one is mediated and surmounted, the whole process can be considered from a retrospective
point of view that, starting from absolute knowledge, recapitulates the accumulated process. Then, every movement has its condition of possibility in the position of the philosopher, in his or her advance in regard to the whole development, in a word, as placed in an absolute position at the end of the process. This claim by the philosopher to situate him- or herself somewhere, both beyond and amid the process, can be questioned. This question is the basic event of the post-Hegelian epoch.

What therefore seems to have opened, after the failure of Hegelian knowledge, is an interpretation of all the signs that attest that the ground of being is an act, an interpretation that no knowledge can recapitulate. But these signs are to be sought nowhere else than in the play of reference though which our everyday experience of intentional action as well as our search for rational action on the ethical and political planes point in the direction of the being “in which we are, live, and move.”
Dealing here only with those problems having to do with philosophy, that is, problems about meaning and truth, we shall set aside contemporary discussions about myth in anthropology and in the comparative history of religions, as well as questions about the origins, evolution, and social function of myth.¹ It will not be a question therefore of placing myth on the supposed trajectory followed by religion from its most primitive forms to the higher religions, nor of asking how myth, considered as a social-cultural fact, is placed among social phenomena overall. Nor shall we take up the debate opened by the founders of religious ethnology concerning the question whether myth is prelogical and if the kind of explanation of things it conveys attests to a primitive mentality, irreducible to the logic of civilized peoples.

Myth will be envisaged here as a form of discourse that raises a claim to meaning and to truth. As philosophy is that other site of discourse where the question of meaning and truth is posed radically, what can be said about myth’s claim in relation to philosophical discourse?

The initial fact from which all the subsequent discussion will proceed is that myth lends itself to two opposite evaluations, as though two contrary “interests” of reason find themselves confronting each other. On one side, reason condemns myth. It excludes it

¹This article was first published in 1971 in the Encyclopaedia Universalis, vol. 9: 530–7. – Editors’ note.
and expels it. One has to choose between *muthos* and *logos*. This is how Book II of Plato's *Republic* begins before inventing its own myths. But today it is no longer a question of the myths of Homer, Hesiod, and the tragic writers. Still, the hostility of philosophy to myth is based on principle. To seek a foundation or ground, a raison d'être, means not telling stories. Myths have to be taken as allegories, that is, as indirect language, wherein genuine physical or moral truths are concealed. To grasp these truths beneath the veil of myth is to render the enveloping clothing useless, once it is seen through. This was the case for the Stoics when goaded by the young Plato.

This rationalist refusal of myth—endorsed by Christian apologists in their critique of paganism—was turned against Christianity itself by the rationalists of the eighteenth century. “Superstitions” were childish, or likely stories made up by priests in order to fool people. The positivist interpretations of the nineteenth century were inscribed in the same perspective, in that modern science is the heir of Greek *logos*. The myths discovered by the comparative history of religions, principally in two great areas, the Semitic, on the one hand, the Aryan and Iranian, on the other, along with the living myths discovered by ethnology—Australian, Polynesian, and Indian myths—end up classed under the Greek *muthos*, just as modern reason places itself under the Greek *logos*. The ancient philosophers’ judgment about Homer and Hesiod reappears in the modern scientific spirit when confronted with non-classical myths.

The modern critique stemming from Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, despite the fact that its argument differs from that of classical rationalism, is situated in the prolongation of this exorcism of myth by reason.

The paradox of this battle is that it has never been done with its adversary. Plato himself wrote myths. His philosophy proceeds from Orphic myth and, in a way, returns to it. Something is said to us by the myth that is not exhausted by its explanatory function; it is not just a pre-scientific means of seeking causes, and its fabulous function itself has a premonitory and exploratory value in regard to some dimension of truth that is not identical to scientific truth. It seems as though myth expresses a power of imagination and representation that we have not yet come to terms with when we limit ourselves to qualifying myth as “that master of error and falsity.”\(^2\) All the great philosophers have had to deal with this power of the imagination, whether they be Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Bergson, or Heidegger.

\(^2\) Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2005), fragment 82 (Brunschevig), 44a (Lafuma), 78 (Sellier), 12.
Whatever answer they may give to the question whether the kind of ontological imagination implied by myth is finally inferior to conceptual truth, their common reflections point toward a transcendental fantastique, for which myth is only one form of expression.

What is at stake is not just the status of myth, but that of the truth itself by which one intends to evaluate it. The question is finally whether scientific truth is the whole of truth, or if something is said by myth that cannot be said in a different way. Myth, then, would not be allegorical but “tauto-gorical,” as Schelling puts it. It says one thing, not something else. This is how, in the discussion about myth, the very question of truth hangs in the balance. This is the antinomy: from a certain point of view, muthos and logos are opposed to each other; from another point of view, they come together, following the old etymology that identifies muthos and speech.

The Language of Myth

If myth is first of all a form of discourse, it is within the framework of the semiological sciences that it has to be placed. These sciences, for which linguistics is the leading edge, provide useful models for all the human sciences. But there are two ways of situating myth in an expanded linguistics, two ways that, in a certain fashion, repeat on the semiotic plane the antinomy we have already spoken of as dominating the relations between logos and muthos. For instance, one will apply to myth in succession the structural model, issuing from phonology and structural semantics, which leads to accentuating the syntactical structure of a myth, then the model of a metaphorical process, which leads to emphasizing the internal play of its semantic contents. We will attempt to show that these two models, far from excluding each other, complement each other — and we shall put the accent on the modes of passing from one to the other.

The Structural Model

For Claude Lévi-Strauss, the most important representative of this school in France, mythology has to be considered as a

"mytho-logic," that is, as putting to work a kind of logic that can be understood only if one draws on the principal presuppositions of a structural model of language. According to this model, elaborated by Ferdinand de Saussure, Louis Trolle Hjelmslev, the structuralists of the Prague school, and the Russian formalists, linguistics must take into account only the rules for, not the events of, language. Furthermore, in the linguistic structure [langue] thus opposed to spoken language [parole], a structural theory will only consider the states of the system at some given moment—in other words, the synchronic constitution of this system and not its changes, its history, its diachrony. (This privilege granted to the system at the expense of its history is of the greatest importance for the following discussion.) In third place, structural analysis will consider in the system of the linguistic structure only those relations applicable to the opposition and combinations among the elements, that is, its "form" and not its "substance," as regards its semantics as well as its phonology. (This formalist orientation regarding explanation is equally of great weight in questions about myth.) Fourth, and last, the system has to be taken as a closed set, with no reference to reality or to the psychology or sociology of its speakers.

How then is myth situated in relation to the langue-parole opposition? At first glance, myth is on the side of speech in that it is a kind of narrative whose sentences succeed one another in an irreversible time sequence. But it is on the side of structure through the arrangement of its elements, which make up a synchronic system situated in terms of the reversible time of any system. It is the task of explanation to pass from the told myth in a successive time to the permanent structures that govern not only the successive units of the myth's narrative in a given version, but the whole corpus constituted by the set of versions and variants of the myth. This initial choice rests on the hypothesis that language, at all its levels, is homogeneous. In other words, the same laws of opposition and combination govern the smallest units of a sentence (phonemes, morphemes, semantemes) and the units of a larger size than the sentence that will be called, in the particular case of myths, mythemes (in order to underscore the homogeneity of all the constitutive units of language).

What are these mythemes? They are the shortest possible sentences, therefore predicative relations. Every narrative is made up of a chain of these sentences. In order to reveal the permanent structure that links them together (and, as a result, in order to apply to myth the second of the postulates listed above), one establishes matrices that allow us to read, like an orchestra score, the double-entry table
of mythemes: reading the vertical columns makes apparent the “bundles of relations” that the horizontal reading places in different combinations of relations.

Thus, in the reconstruction of the Oedipus myth, the mythemes come to be put in four vertical columns. In the first of these, one puts the relations of over-valued kinship relationships (Oedipus marries his mother, Antigone buries Polynices). In the second column are the relations of under-valued or devalued kinship (Oedipus kills his father, Eteocles kills Polynices). In the third column are placed the mythemes that negate man’s belonging to the earth, his autochthonity (the killing of monsters). In the fourth, finally, are those that somehow recall that man is in a way rooted like a plant (Oedipus’ lame foot).

If we now consider the combinatorics that stems from the oppositional relations among the bundles of relations, it turns out that the fourth column is to the third column as the second is to the first. This relation of proportionality states the structural law of the myth under consideration. In this way, the third postulate of structural analysis is satisfied: the elimination of “substance” to the benefit of “form.” The myth, in effect, turns out to be a logical tool that brings about mediations or connections between contradictory terms. These mediations themselves present reversals, permutations that make up transformation groups. One can say that the myth, in its logical function (one can already speak of “mythical thought”) “always progresses from the awareness of oppositions and toward the resolution.”

This logical construction lends itself to a mathematical treatment in that the permutation group at play can be placed under a law applicable to groups. One must then conclude that “the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction.” This logic finally is not different from our own; it just applies to different objects. At the same time, the fourth postulate is also satisfied: a system of signs is a closed system all of whose relations are internally dependent on one another. No reference to reality, or even to a speaker, is necessary for its intelligibility. This is surely the case here. The structural analysis of myth makes us leave wholly behind the classical argument concerning the degree of truth of myth


as an explanation of reality. This is not to say that anthropology gets completely enclosed in a structure, that of myth. It only means that what we call “reality” does not appear here as a myth’s reference, that is, as something about which the myth has something to say. Reality, and, in the first place, social reality, is itself constituted by a series of other structures: for example, kinship structures, the structures of groups and social classes, of the classification of plants, animals, things, events, functions. From structure to structure, homologous relations – that is, an identical disposition of the elements – can appear. The whole system of these structures, at the limit, would constitute the total social phenomenon. In a subsequent scientific phase, it would not be impossible to conceive of other homologies that could be brought to light by the semiological sciences and the systems that brain physiology and genetics will discover. This would be the long-term horizon of a structural explanation of myths.

When set against the background of a generalized structural explanation, some important features of this mytho-logic get reinforced. First of all, that myth, as a narrative, belongs to the set of semiological structures; next, the formal character of the system of oppositions and combinations that governs this overall semiotic domain; finally – and perhaps above all – the absolutely unconscious functioning of the regularities that assure the logical character of the system. If one emphasizes this latter point, one must then say that myth is not spoken by human beings, but rather that, as speakers, they take up and exercise over it only the apparent mastery that any speaker has over the meaningful effects of any semiotic system.

However seductive, solid, convincing, this explanation may be, what can be questioned is its claim to exhaust the intelligibility of myths. One has eliminated from consideration the myth’s claim to say something, something that may be true or false as a world view. What the myth says about the cosmos, about the origins of human beings, is, as such, out of question. The myth is not to be understood but to be decoded (meaning thereby through the converse operation of that which we use when, starting from a known code, we interpret a message; here we extract the unknown code from a known message).

But can we eliminate a myth’s intention, I mean, its claim to say something about reality? We can find in structural explanation itself the trace, and something like the scar, of the point of view it eliminates. Structural explanation rests, in fact, on a model of language that is only a partial model. Émile Benveniste insists in all his work on the necessity of constructing language on two systems of units,
These are, on the one hand, the units of *langue*, namely, phonemes and morphemes (or semantemes); on the other, they are the units of discourse which are sentences. This second kind of unit is irreducible to the first one. In a word, the units of *langue* belong to purely virtual systems, the second units are the basis for the real events that are acts of discourse. These acts—in grammatical terms, sentences—constitute the actual production of language as the infinite use of finite means. Whereas the system is virtual, the act of discourse is temporal and real.

With these second-degree units, language realizes diverse operations, operations that break the homogeneity between the verbal sequences longer than a sentence and the lower units presupposed by every structural analysis. The sentence, in fact, rests on operations of an irreducible kind, such as the identifying reference to singular things and the predicative connection through which the identified realities receive properties or predicates, or are placed in classes and genres. It is this double function of identifying reference and predication that assures the anchorage of language in reality. Through these functions, which are those of the sentence and that constitute the speech act, language says something about something, at the same time that it commits a subject of discourse capable of designating him- or herself as the “I” internal to his or her utterances.

Elimination of these aspects of language by the structural model has considerable consequences for the interpretation of myths. The metaphorical process (see below), as a transfer of meaning constituting the root of all indirect language, belongs to the same set of features as do creativity, reference, predication, and discourse’s referring to a speaking subject. The transfer of meaning which is at the heart of metaphor is a property not of the structure of language, but of the operation of discourse.

We may ask whether structural explanation does not make some implicit recourse to the meaning of its elements or relations. The contrary would be surprising, since myth is a discourse, that is, a set of statements, of sentences. And, in fact, one has to be able to understand each element of the myth as a sentence in order to relate it to the bundle of relations that constitutes the mytheme. It is further necessary that we should understand as a sentence that which in each column unifies the mytheme as a bundle of relations: the relation of over-valued kinship relations, of under-valued ones, of autochthony.

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and non-autochthony. Finally, the “difficulty” that the myth is supposed to resolve as a logical instrument still makes “sense.” It is a contradiction at the level of beliefs: beliefs regarding autochthony, regarding human birth from the union of a man and woman, etc. Even when formalized as “Is the same born the same or from the other?” the question underlying the myth is a problem concerning human origins, a problem that has a meaning as an ontological problem and not simply as the occasion for a logical game. Otherwise, the proposed correlation would lose all its meaning. Without something happening at the level of the contents themselves, would we understand this: “the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is the impossibility to succeed in it”? There would be no contradictory structure if the elementary sentences, if the second-order sentences that express the bundles of relations, and if the encompassing sentence that constitutes the aporia and the problem were not themselves meaningful, that is, if they did not say something about something. We may thus ask whether structural analysis does not rest on placing into parentheses the properly semantic function of myth as a narrative about origins.

This critique does not mean that structural analysis is superfluous. On the contrary, one can affirm that it will henceforth constitute a necessary step in making apparent what we shall call the “depth semantics” of myth, which a surface reading of its meaning misses. It is, in fact, through the play of oppositions between the relations of over- and under-valued kinship relations, between an affirmation and a negation of autochthony, that a signifying intention situated at another depth level can be brought to light. As for this depth semantics, we can think that it is not radically different from the “thoughts” we can form at the level of a lucid conscious awareness. Just as there is logical thinking, according to Lévi-Strauss, there is a semantics, which here is that of an origin.

The Metaphorical Model

The second model of language can take over from the first one. We said it is the utterance as discourse that carries sense and reference: what one says and about what it is said. It is now necessary to place the metaphorical discourse that myth rests upon inside a “semantic”

7Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, 216.
Myth

framework, which we have showed is irreducible to a "semiotics." (This vocabulary is borrowed from Benveniste, who links everything that depends on the units of langue to semiotics and everything that depends on the units of discourse, that is, saying something, to semantics.)

Let us construct this new model by degrees: even before the metaphors we find in our language, which are rhetorical procedures, there is what Roman Jakobson calls the "metaphorical process." The theory of this metaphorical process prolongs a distinction made already by Saussure in terms of the mechanism governing langue. This mechanism, according to Jakobson, implies two types of combinations between signs. The first, which is syntagmatic, rests on the order of succession of the signs in some verbal chain. It is a connection in praesentia. The second process, which is paradigmatic, rests on relations of similitude constitutive of a sphere of association, from which I draw, as my discourse advances. At each instant, I have, in effect, a choice among all the words that might occur in this place in my discourse, but which exclude one another in terms of this place. This relation between terms is no longer in praesentia but in abstantia. Jakobson takes this as a radical dichotomy. He sees, in the first kind of combination, the principle for every kind of syntactical concatenation of a language and, in the second, the principle for every semantic concatenation. To the first type of combination, which recalls association by contiguity, corresponds on the rhetorical plane the procedure of metonymy. To the semantic concatenation, founded on similarity, corresponds what classical rhetoric calls metaphor. So the metaphors of our language are expressions, at higher levels of discourse, of a process that underlies all the operations of language, which we can call the metaphorical process. In this sense, metaphor is not something exceptional. It belongs to a fundamental procedure of language.

The second step in the direction of the specific problem of myth rests on the introduction of a more precise phenomenon, that of multiple meaning, commonly called polysemy. In effect, the words of ordinary language have more than one signification. Unlike technical languages based on univocity – that is, the uniqueness of the meaning of words – and on the independence of this meaning in relation to context, the words of ordinary language have more than one signification and receive their actual semantic value from the delimitation imposed by some context. This twofold feature is not a "vice" or "pathology" but a condition of its functioning. To speak of the infinite truth of our experience, a univocal language would have to be infinite. Moreover, this would be a private language, since
all its *this* and *that* would represent not just an infinite experience, but a non-denumerable plurality of private individual experiences. This is why a univocal language would not be a language that could communicate the whole of human experience. Finally, a wholly univocal language would be an instantaneous language. It would not reflect the cumulative process that characterizes a concrete culture. Only words capable of acquiring new significations through use, without losing their older ones, present this cumulative character, which is at once both synchronic and diachronic, and characteristic of a culture’s language.

How does this problem of multiple meaning lead to making sense of symbolic language? Because our words have more than one signification, because they are historical realities and not mere instantaneous differences inside some synchronic structure, because, therefore, they are the core of a cumulative process over time, polysemy constitutes the basis for the particular transfer of meaning we call “metaphor.” Metaphor is a rhetorical procedure. There is a fundamental “metaphorics” that presides over the constitution of semantic fields. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, had already called metaphor the categorial transgression that represents “giving the thing a name that designates another thing, the transfer being from the genus to species, or from species to genus, or of species to species, or according to analogy.” Metaphor oversteps the division into classifications. For example, we speak of old age as “the evening of life” and of youth as “the morning of the world.”

[But] metaphor does not just overstep the boundaries between genus and species; it precedes their cut as an “abbreviated comparison,” according to a remark of Quintilian. There is what we may call a “metaphorical abstraction,” which schematizes, before any conceptualization or logical classification, the perimeter of the signification of words. So, even before there would be a proper or a figured meaning, there is a process constitutive of semantic fields themselves. It is in a derivative sense that we speak, in rhetoric, of a transfer of meaning, starting from a proper meaning, toward a figurative meaning. The distinction of proper and figurative is a second-order distinction in relation to the mutual belonging of both of them to the same semantic field.

Let us now take the following step: how do we pass from the polysemy of our words to the symbolic character of our discourse? When I use a word that has several significations, I do not make use

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of all the word’s potentialities; I choose just a part of its signification. 
But the rest of its signification has not disappeared. It is, if one may 
put it, inhibited and hovers around the word. Here is the possibility of play with words, of poetry, of symbolic language. Instead of 
returning from the semantic amplitude of the words constitutive of 
the sentence just the single dimension reinforced by what the discourse 
is “about” – what we can call its “isotopy” – I can draw on the 
semantic richness of the contextual possibilities of other contexts at 
my disposal. For example, in poetic language, all the dimensions of 
the signification play together in a sort of semantic polyphony. 
Instead of the context filtering out just one dimension of meaning, 
it is constituted in such a way that the plurality of the meaning of 
the words is not only permitted, but even preserved and solicited.

There are therefore three things to distinguish in the functioning 
of symbolic language: the general metaphorical process of language, 
the phenomenon of multiple meaning or polysemy, and finally the 
contextual structure that, rather than furnishing a kind of filter, 
places the polysemy at the very level of the discourse as discourse. 
In this way is born poetic language, which is very efficacious for 
saying what cannot be said directly but only through the detour of 
indirect significations. What remains to be shown is that the implicit 
symbolic aspect of myth rests on such an architecture of significations that can only be accounted for through a theory of language 
considered as discourse and not just as a system of signs.

A metaphorical interpretation of myth supposes that one does not 
deal straightforwardly with the form of the narrative but that one 
lingers over the symbolic constitution of what is said at the base of 
mythic discourse. This is what structural analysis does in decomposing 
the myth into its mythemes. But structural analysis presupposes 
that the compositional unity of a mytheme is itself a structure. This 
is doubtful. As the above example suggested, a metaphorical process 
is already implied in the discernment of the bundles of relations to 
which the analysis in terms of mythemes refers. We can therefore 
assume that the side of structure and that of metaphor are as closely 
linked in the mythic utterance as in any language, following Jakobson, are the metonymic and the metaphorical process.

Just as these two processes are intermingled in different proportions in all discourse, where sometimes the metonymic process is 
stressed, sometimes the metaphorical one, in the same way the mythic 
universe seems distributed between two poles that designate the 
prevalence of the syntactical or the metaphorical factor. It is not by 
chance that Lévi-Strauss’s principal examples are borrowed from a 
geographical region characterized by anthropologists of a previous
generation as totemic, and not from Semitic, Hellenic, or Indo-European regions. The totemic cultural area seems characterized by a proliferation of logical constructions of a classificatory type. The totemists, as Lévi-Strauss as shown, excel in making distinctions and classifications of rocks, plants, and animals, and in complicated kinship systems. Even their social systems rest on classifications of exchanges, on refined transformations, that share the same taxonomic character as their myths do. The question arises whether the same structural approach found an appropriate object in totemic areas, a type of myth for which oppositions and correlations are less important than its contents. This is why, in this privileged example, the recourse to the metaphorical process can remain implicit and incorporated into a kind of syntactic process.

It is not like that at the other end of the mythic scale. Semitic and pre-Hellenic myths certainly do lend themselves to the same structural treatment, but the relation between the syntactic and metaphorical processes there seems reversed. The syntactic organization is weak, the correlation with natural and social classifications more flexible. On the other hand, the semantic richness of these myths allows for rebirths, reinterpretations in different social contexts. As a result, these myths have a different relation to time and to history. The totemic systems, so to speak, have a synchronic coherence and diachronic fragility. They do not resist the destructive action of time. For them, events act as a threat. This is why they serve with difficulty as a basis for a history susceptible of being assumed as a history. At the other end of the mythic scale, the relation of their internal organization to time is entirely different. For example, the theme of the Exodus in the Old Testament is rich with unlimited symbolic potential. This is why it could be repeated at different levels of a people's existence, and at different levels of discourse, since it can be represented in a type of historical narrative or celebrated in a hymn. So the theme of the Exodus has less affinity for classificatory systems than for an interpretive history, and, in the case of ancient Israel, for a theology of traditions. The great symbols stemming from the same cycle do not exhaust their signification in existing combinations; their signification remains virtual like that of an over-determined semantic field. It is a storehouse, a resource offered to endless new uses in terms of new structures.

We must not go too far, however, with this opposition. Just as the metaphorical process and the metonymic process are present in all discourse, albeit in varying proportions, explanation in terms of structure and symbolic interpretation can be combined in varying
proportions for each myth. That is why great importance must be attached to the way in which one explanation refers to the other through an internal exigency. Above, we showed this in linking symbolic interpretation to a depth semantics, which can only be brought to light through a prior structural analysis.

The Signifying Intention of Myth

Myth as a Story of Origins

If myth is a discourse, that is, a sequence of statements or sentences having both sense and reference, we must admit that the myth says something about something. It is this saying of the said that now needs to be isolated. We shall adopt here as a working hypothesis that myth is a “story of origins.” This character was not picked out but merely prepared by the structural analysis and the metaphorical interpretation. Indeed, the former is incapable of establishing the difference between folklore and myth, for this difference depends on the content, not the form. As for the metaphorical process, it does not tell us what the metaphor is about and, in this sense, remains quite formal. Here, we shall hold, with Mircea Eliade, that the myth as a story of origins essentially has an instituting function.9 There is a myth only if the founding event does not have a place in history but rather in a time before history. In illo tempore: it is essentially the relation of our time to this time that constitutes the myth, not the category of instituted things, whether these be the whole of reality – the world – or a fragment of reality, an ethical rule, a political institution, or even the mode of human existence according to this or that condition, innocent or fallen. The myth always says how something was born.

A number of corollaries are attached to this central definition. The first one has to do with the relation of “representations” to the instituting function. The latter is fixed, the former are variable. This is why the instituting function can be assumed by very diverse supernatural beings: gods, messengers, heroes, etc. In the scheme of a history of beginnings, their “figures” have a second-order function in relation to the instituting function. They are the dramatis

personae. Similarly, they are apprehended by what they do and not by what they are. The comparative history of religions is misdirected if it directly attacks these “figures,” these representations, by treating them as pure anthropomorphisms. They have to be taken up starting from the story of origins as one variable of the instituting function. What can mislead us is the fact that these figures are capable of taking on autonomy. We tell the story of the gods using articulated mythologies. We tell when and how they created, abandoned their creation, withdrew. We tell also how they fought among themselves or with monsters, titans, or even human beings. What is more, they are not just gods, but include all the divine beings, including the stars and other elements of the cosmos that may eventually take on autonomy in relation to the story of origins. Thus, the mythic universe presents a proliferation of forms of the supernatural: half-divine, half-human, heroes, abandoned sons of kings, saved from the waters; labors, sufferings, exploits, and ordeals. The same mythic intention can become invested in figurations of the supernatural that come close in turn to theology, cosmology, astrology, and the epic tale. We may speak in this regard of a figurative or representative expansion of the mythic universe. The philosophical evaluation of myth will rest on this aspect in the sense of “representation” as found in German idealism. But it is important, from the start, to link the dramatic form to the instituting function. It is only when this tie is stretched, even broken, that the myth loses its specificity among all the “narratives” submitted to structural analysis.

The second corollary has to do with the practical function of myth. Several schools of anthropologists have emphasized the close connection between myth and ritual. The myth, it is said, grounds the rite by establishing paradigms of action. For example, in the Old Testament realm, they have brought to light the tie between the great creation narrative and the New Year rite during which the myth was read and the king enthroned. What has been called, in the Scandinavian school, “the kingship ideology” is based on this filiation between myth, ritual, and royalty. This connection needs to be understood in terms of its principle. It is insofar as the myth institutes the connection of historical time with primordial time that the narration of origins takes on paradigmatic value for the present – here is how things were founded at the origin, and those of today are founded in the same way. Through its fundamental signifying intention, the myth allows itself to be repeated, reactivated, in the rite. This tie, like the preceding one, lends itself to an expansion of a particular style that turns ritualization into an autonomous process. Then it is the rite that supports the myth, or at least the myth seems
Myth

In nothing more than the narrative basis that institutes for the rite. We can then say that the myth belongs to the etiology of the rite. If, in other words, the myth can be ritually relived, it can be taken as an instruction that allows carrying out the rite and, in that way, repeating the creative act. There is a significant sequence here: first the fundamental story, then the paradigm, next the ritual repetition. But it is the relation between originary and historical time that grounds the whole sequence.

The third corollary has to do with the psychological implications of the myth, just as the preceding one had to do with its institutional implications. In fact, it is possible to account for the emotional values associated with the sacred, starting from the instituting function of the story of origins. The connection between historical time and primordial time develops its own affects, those that Rudolf Otto describes in his well-known work The Idea of the Holy. Otto places at the origin of the sacred the ambivalent feeling of fear and love with which mythical man turns toward the tremendum fascinosum. This emotional style proper to the sacred is comprehensible if we consider that the story of human origins emerges from historical time toward fundamental time, both through the act of telling the story through which one renders oneself contemporary with the origins and by the reactivation of the meaning of the story in ritual action. We can thus speak of an emotional reactivation as the complement of the representative and paradigmatic elements described above. "To live according to" a myth is to stop existing simply in everyday life. The recitation and the rite energize the kind of emotional internalization that engenders what we can call the mytho-poetic core of human existence.

With these three corollaries, the definition of myth as a story of origins provides a clear distinction between myth and fable. The fable institutes nothing, neither in its story nor in action, nor in terms of some depth of feeling. Only the myth does that.

The definition of myth as a story of origins is a limiting definition despite the forms of expansion we have spoken of: figurative, representative, pragmatic, emotional. It is this limiting character that we are now going to make apparent by comparing myth with other forms of discourse that also exercise an instituting function, but by other means than that of a story of origins. We shall consider in turn

the relation between myth and a “salvation history,” what German scholars call *Heilsgeschichte*; between myth and wisdom; and between myth and eschatology.

**Myth and Salvation History**

Salvation history, whose type is found in Hebraic literature, principally in the Hexateuch, rests on a narrative organization akin to myth, but different in structure and intention. Whereas myth relates historical time to a fundamental time, salvation history ties the confession of faith to the narration of acts of deliverance. The narrative in Deuteronomy 26:5–9 is exemplary in this regard. It is in no way a mythic narrative in the precise sense we have spoken of, but a “narrative-confession” that covers the history of Israel from the going down into Egypt up to the gift of the Land passing through the founding event of the Exodus. This grand sequence organized around a central event and delimited by two events whose temporality is clearly marked constitutes a structure that can welcome stories and chronicles of different origins that were in a way interpolated into the space of this grand narrative. For example, the saga of the patriarchs, as well the revelation of the Name at Mount Horeb, the revelation of the great legislative documents at Sinai, the march through the desert, come to be intercalated into the primitive infinitely extendible structure. It is worth noting how diverse non-narrative materials – theophanies, legislative documents, etc. – are drawn into the gravitational space of the ancient *credo* that began with the Aramean ancestor, the hero of the going down into Egypt. The redactors of the Yahwist (J) and Elohist (E) traditions extended the narrative schema backward in a way that encompasses, through the repetitive extending of the same form, the story of the ancestors, the sagas of the patriarchs, and finally the myths of origin.

It is thanks to this distending of the narrative form, through interpolations that enriched it, and through the attraction it exercised on other documents, that a discourse of a genre as different as that of the creation myths coming from Acadian, Sumerian, and Canaanite settings could be fused into the *Heilsgeschichte*. On the one side, we can speak of a *historization* of the myth in contact with the salvation history. The act of creation is placed at the head of the acts of deliverance as the first act of salvation. It is understandable how this was possible: the saga about the ancestors, in remounting toward an ever more primitive ancestor, allowed treatment of the creation myths as a preface to the history of the people figured by the patriarchs, a
history that, itself, served as a preface to the great recitation of the *ordo* about the Exodus. We catch sight of the suture of two forms of discourse in the call of Abraham, which closes the history of beginnings and inaugurates that of the patriarchs.

Yet, in return, we can also speak of a *mythization* of the *Heilsgeschichte* in contact with the stories about the origin. In the strict sense of the word, every myth is a myth of creation: once upon a time, the first time, god or the gods create. Hence the origin and the cosmogony coincide. But the myth stops being cosmogonic, in the precise sense of the term, if we consider the other creative acts, the beginnings and institutions, subsequent to the creation, like a continued creation. Bit by bit the anthropogony prolongs the cosmogony, itself incorporated into a narrative about origins. In turn, this cosmogony extends to the destructurations, the "decreations," that also inaugurated something, namely, the current malicious, suffering, mortal human condition. Whence the myths about intracosmic catastrophe, violent alterations, falls. Whence, too, the splitting of the origin: at the origin, perfect human beings versus current human beings as a result of an original catastrophe.

We understand how a *Heilsgeschichte*, even if it has an origin independent of any relation to the structure of myth, could undergo the recoil effect of the myth it incorporates. The liberating act could figure a new creation, a new beginning. The myth of the flood is interesting in this regard. It is a myth of re-creation, linked to a myth of decrepitude, destruction. Every narrative of regeneration plunges down therefore into the power of myth thanks to this deep kinship. Everything that begins in this world is the beginning of a world. We understand creation only through a re-creation, but, in return, every creation has the solemnity of what once began, *in illo tempore*. All the figurative and imaginative power, all the ritual exemplarism, and all the profound feeling of the sacred are in this way displaced toward a new creation. One of the most important problems in biblical criticism is understanding how the structure of *Heilsgeschichte* assumed the powers of myth (its representative, paradigmatic, and affective powers). The establishing of a people through a liberating act thus becomes the *historical* key to the proto-historic creation.

*Myth and Eschatology*

A second boundary to myth needs to be explored: its frontier with eschatology. Here, too, we are faced with two distinct forms of discourse, governed by two signifying intentions of a different character,
yet which can fuse in virtue of certain internal exigencies of their content and give rise to what we can call eschatological myths. In principle, myth and eschatology are two different structures. The connection of the former with *Heilsgeschichte* and of the latter with prophecy will help make this comprehensible. Myth and *Heilsgeschichte* have in common being turned toward the past. This is why they both take the form of a narrative. Gerhard von Rad was able to consider the major task of Old Testament theology to be to understand this dichotomy between the two great discourses around which are distributed all the other forms of discourse.\(^\text{11}\)

There are here, in effect, two very different manners of constituting tradition. On the one hand, one tells the founding events; on the other, one announces a new economy to history. Prophecy assumes narrative time, but breaks with it. It assumes it in the sense that the time of prophecy has to be the time of divine initiatives, that of a history with God. But prophecy breaks with narrative time, first of all, in that it is at odds with actual history but not with the constituted traditions. It speaks of an imminent event (the Assyrian threat on the horizon of the message of Amos and Isaiah, the threat from the North, the Babylonians for Jeremiah, the rise of Persia and Cyrus for Second Isaiah). The prophets apply the categories of salvation history in its canonic form to these looming events, but do so in order to crack open that history. A new intervention by Yahweh is imminent which will eclipse the old one. Therefore he is the god of liberating acts, but as initiating a new history. This history is represented analogically as a new exodus and a new covenant.

With this, everything past is in a way “metaphorized”: the promised land becomes the symbol of what has not been attained. A future accent, one of newness, overturns all the narrative categories. Indeed, a break is essential to instituting a new order, a break figured by judgment, the sign of the collapse of all security. Prophecy is first of all broken tradition, the exhaustion of the past salvation history, the “nullification” of what has happened. On the basis of this invalidation is proclaimed the irruption of new acts outside the salvific domain of liberating acts retold by the narrative confession. Hence prophecy is the contrary of narrative. And yet, it has to hatch a new compact with myth in the form of eschatology.

We have said above how myth and salvation history could coalesce to give, on the one side, the idea of a creation understood as

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the first act of liberation, and, on the other, the idea of liberation as
an act of liberation. Eschatology, above all in the late literature within the
Hebrew canon, projects a form of prophecy but outside history, as
the end of history. Whereas prophecy stays within intrahistorical
momentum, eschatology announces a new creation, coming from
that, on the occasion of a new cosmic catastrophe.

That this new structure should have been able to become mythol-
ogized in turn despite its quite apparent opposition between the
promise of something other and the repetition of the same is easily
understandable. If, for example, we place the accent on the newness
of creation more than on its antiquity, an origin myth can become
not just a foundational myth about the past, but one about every
foundation yet to come. Thus it has been seen that myth can
account the birth of new things in a world already there, and first
of all of a new humanity. In this regard, ritual is certainly a factor
in the “futurization” of myth. Meditation on the origin can turn
toward the future through the intermediary of the exemplary action
of a rite that makes the original situation recur in present existence.
In this sense, the memory of creation is immediately a promise for
the future. Through its exemplary character the myth is a model
for the creation yet to come. Every new birth recapitulates the first
birth; every beginning is a re-beginning. For example, in the great
New Year festival at Babylon, each New Year participates in the
first day.

We can therefore understand the filiation of meaning between a
myth of beginning and one of the end in the following way: all the
past beginnings are, to some degree, myths of the end if they are to
be myths about a beginning. There are multiple ends to the world
behind us, returns to chaos and emergences. There is even in the
theogony the end of some gods, “deaths of gods.” The enthronement
of Marduk is the end of older gods; Zeus signifies the death of
Chronos; Greek tragedy recounts the end of the wrath of the Erinyes
and the promotion of Apollo, the god of light. Every re-creation is
the end of some creation, of an age of the world. Thus the Flood is
both the end of a world and the emergence of a world. So the myths
of an end remain myths, inasmuch as they transfer to the end the
inaugural power of myth.

The counterpart is evident: insofar as eschatology borrows its
model from the creation myths, it fails to represent the inauguration
of a new era other than as the restoration of the originary one. In
this sense, we can say that the myths of the end are myths inasmuch
as they remain myths of restoration. We can thus ask if eschatology,
when it takes on mythic power, does not lose something of its
intended meaning, which is that of a radical opposition. The proclamation of the kingdom of God, as prophecy of a coming God, is not the repetition of origins, but something else again. In this sense, it is legitimate to say that we have reached the core meaning of the proclamation of the kingdom of God only by means of a demythologization, in the proper sense of the term, that is, through a return to the initial moment of prophecy, which places a slice of judgment and death between the repetition of the same and the promise of something other.

Myth and Wisdom

It is not certain that the twofold relation of the mythic universe to that of salvation history, on the one hand, and that of prophecy and eschatology, on the other, exhausts the possibilities of exchange between myth and other forms of discourse, themselves bearers of other modes of thought. The frontier with wisdom literature or, more briefly, wisdom needs to be explored with the same care. Even if this literature, in its redacted form, seems late in the history of traditions and of prophecy, it appears to have a discrete existence when it comes to myth. Before offering humans its counsel, wisdom represents an attempt to explore the universe in order to assume and master its immense diversity. In this regard, from this exploratory activity arise the classifications of animals, plants, stones, as well as those of peoples and events, and, more precisely, the binary classifications (male/female, heavens/earth, light/dark, animate/inanimate, breath/flesh, wild/domesticated, pure/impure, garden/wilderness, tree of life/sterile weed). In a general fashion, all these enterprises of naming created things speak the relation of our form of thinking to the universe.

The boundary between myth and wisdom is all the more uncertain in that myth, as structural analysis reveals, itself rests, at an unconscious level of thought, on a logic of classification. But we can say that wisdom does consciously what myth does unconsciously. We ought not to underestimate this sapiential activity. Ritual prescriptions themselves rest on such classifications, which indicate the common basis of religious and scientific thought. In naming, human beings seek a signification, an order. Through this sapiential side, myth stands not so much on the side of fable as directly tied to the infrastructure of thinking. The implications of this first degree of wisdom are considerable. In classifying, the mind makes a decision regarding the ambiguities of reality. It decides between resemblance
and difference, between kinship and opposition, between continuity and discordance, between yes and no.

On the basis of this putting things in order, the same exploratory procedures can be applied to human beings themselves, confronted with the apparent disorder of the human condition. The search for meaning here receives a more existential dimension, but without fundamentally changing direction. Insofar as the world as meaningful appears threatened, wisdom has an ethical import: to know the world is to be able to live in it by confronting its absurdity.

In this sense, we can say that the myths of origin themselves have a sapiential dimension, for understanding how things began is knowing what they mean now and what future they continue to open to human beings. The myths of a fall especially seem to have this function of restoring meaning to a situation of disorder and despair. They bring about a kind of reconciliation with the obscure zones of human experience. They represent the face of the night human beings have to live with. But always wisdom adds to the reciting of the origin the reprise of meaning in some current situation of menace and incertitude. So wisdom introduces a question into the heart of the power of myth: why is life not solely a blessing but also a curse? Why is there wilderness and not just a garden? Why work and not just leisure? Why wild beasts instead of a friendly nature? Why the pains of childbirth and not simply love? Why shame and modesty instead of the beauty of the naked body? Why laws that engender transgression and not just those that give life? Why death and not just the enjoyment of life? In responding to these questions, in offering a meaningful world to human experience, myth develops wisdom for living.

It is therefore by reconstituting the oppositions of myth with the other forms of discourse and by outlining the exchanges among these forms of discourse that we can reveal a horizon of meaning in which narratives, myths, prophecies, and wisdom aim at composing a total language where voice and gesture, recitation and ritual action, the subtlety of distinctions and the depth of feeling, memory and hope, would be reconciled. It is through its proximity with the other forms of discourse that myth draws its deepest signification, that of proposing, according to Jean-Paul Audet (who has done the most to restore the meaning of wisdom literature), a “totalizing appropriation” of the whole heritage of a community.  

Myth and Philosophy

At the end of this inquiry it is possible to return to the question posed in the introduction concerning the encounter between the world view borne by myth and the demands of philosophy. We will confine ourselves here to the problems posed by myth for modern and contemporary philosophy, while preserving as a guideline the initial antinomy of *muthos* and *logos* from Greek philosophy.

In fact, it is the same antinomy that modern and contemporary philosophy reinvents in multiple ways. One way of making it appear is to situate it at the level of *representations*, in the sense given this term by presenting the first corollary of the definition of myth as a narrative about origins. In effect, philosophy first encounters myth as a representation with an epistemological claim. The *muthos–logos* problem then becomes that of the "representation" and its "concept." If philosophy is thinking using concepts, there is a question whether the representation carried by myth can be considered as a prefiguration of some concept. Two answers turn out to be possible: either the representation can be reduced to a concept (but why then this detour, whose vanity has been demonstrated by ancient theories of allegory?) or, on the contrary, [the representation is irreducible] to a concept (but what then happens to the task of rationality?).

Kant’s and Hegel’s responses to this paradox are particularly instructive. In two different ways, these two philosophers attempt to maintain the primacy of the concept (it is true, in two different senses of the term), while doing justice to the representation. The two solutions they propose can be considered as two philosophical models that have not been surpassed. All the other discussions we are going to refer to presupposed in one way or another the polarity instituted by the opposition between Kant and Hegel.

The Kantian Interpretation of Mythology

It is not just in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* that we have to look for Kant’s answer to the question about the status of representation in the economy of philosophy.\(^{13}\) It is the whole

project of a philosophy of limits that gives meaning to this partial response. In a philosophy of limits, the claim to know absolute objects outside the sphere of sensory experience and scientific knowledge is crippled by illusion. In this sense, the mythic world falls under the Kantian critique of “transcendental illusion,” which envelops not only the classical proofs of metaphysics but the totality of supernatural positions found in a wide historical culture.

However, Kantian philosophy is not a simple-minded positivism. If there is a transcendental illusion, it is because reason does not reduce to the understanding and demands an unconditioned at the head of the whole series of conditions. This unconditioned can be “thought” but not “known.” This difference between thinking and knowing, joined to the critique of transcendental illusions, opens a possible interpretation of the world of myths. Myth, in effect, if condemned as an implicit metaphysics, is susceptible to receiving a meaning in relation to the unconditioned. But what meaning? For Kant, it must be an ethical meaning. The only transgressing of limits that does not mark a return to a transcendental illusion is the positioning of our freedom in its relation to morality.

On this practical ground can be unfolded “postulates” concerning God, immortality, and freedom. And it is against the background of these postulates of practical reason that philosophy can make some sense – “within the limits of pure reason” – of religious representations. Philosophy can and must do this as soon as it is confronted with the problem of evil. The possibility of overcoming evil is the possibility of freedom being a reality and not simply a requirement or a dream. Hence it is conceivable that a rational hope may be based on representations figuring the victory of the “good principle” over the “bad” one. Not only within its limits, but at its borders, philosophy understands what we can call the schemes or symbols of a “victory over evil” as “figures” based on a rational hope.

Of course, Kant did not reflect on myths in general but on Christianity. Nonetheless, extending the Kantian conception of “symbolization” to the world view presented above is not forbidden at the level of the imagination, at that of the demand for meaning that proceeds reason itself. In particular, it is in the Parerga of the Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason that we can find the kernel of a Kantian interpretation of mythology. By “parerga,” Kant means representations that no longer are within the limits of pure reason but rather at its borders. Therefore it is as a border-line knowledge that a philosophy of limits, which is at the same time a practical philosophy, can take up the mythic universe.
But the price to pay is considerable: myths are intelligible only insofar as they are stripped of all speculative implications and attached to the practical function of reason, that is, finally, to the conditions for the realization of human freedom. It is in this sense that we can say that Kant opens the way for an existential interpretation of myths.

Hegel and Religious Representations

Hegel opens another possibility. For him, religious representations are not beyond the limit prescribed by reason that censors itself. On the contrary, they fall short of a fulfilled knowledge, the self-consciousness of absolute spirit. Religious representations are thus not on the border-line of knowledge; they belong to the penultimate step of a long itinerary that is completed by absolute knowledge. What is more, the contents of religion and philosophy cannot differ, because there cannot be two forms of self-consciousness for absolute spirit as absolute. Religion and philosophy do not differ in terms of their contents but in terms of the degree of knowledge. Religion remains inside the sphere of representation; philosophy alone accedes to the concept. So Hegel breaks the narrow framework of Kantian practical philosophy and virtually restores the relationship of the mythical universe to its speculative truth.  

But what relationship? How is the antinomy for which representation must be either superfluous or unsurpassable overcome? What remains in Hegel's philosophy is the conception of a hierarchical organization of the world of representation and of a dynamism that carries representation toward the concept by an imperious movement of "sublation" (Aufhebung). What corresponds to the mythic world in his philosophy of religion are two degrees of what he calls religion: "natural" religion and "aesthetic-moral" religion. In both registers, the world of representation is plainly justified. Absolute spirit receives a substantial truth in and through representation that is continually reconverted into self-consciousness and into a concept. But it is always necessary to return to the starting point where spirit is a thing, a stone. For it is only in sensible representation that we unceasingly verify that spirit is not far from us, that it has the power

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To make itself known, that it makes itself known. But, at the same time, it is the task of philosophy to show that this alienation includes within itself the exigency of its being surpassed. We can thus attribute to Hegel the affirmation that “an idol must die so that a symbol can be born.” In effect, it is the death of idols that marks the path of the ascension from representation to the concept.

First of all, there is a death of natural representations, that is, of those we today call, with Mircea Eliade, “cosmic symbols.” Yet it is they that through their striking appearance nourish all the higher symbols based upon them regarding the absolute. The death of natural symbols is accomplished in Greek art and religion. Unlike cosmic and animal symbols, and even the geometrical symbolism of the pyramid and the obelisk, the Greek statue is already a “self.” But it is necessary to proceed to a second death, which is that of the Hellenic figure itself. This death of the Greek “statue” is indicated by the birth of comedy and the internalization of the self with the juridical person of the Romans. A great feeling of distress and emptiness comes with this. This is the occasion for Hegel to pronounce the famous saying that “God is dead,” borrowed from a Lutheran hymn for Good Friday.

It is against this background of death that the only manifestation stands forth that Hegel speaks of as “revelation,” as the revelation of the spirit’s being there, namely, the Christian incarnation. But, here again, a process of dying necessarily belongs to the community’s appropriation of the meaning of this absolute manifestation. The realm of representation, in effect, was not abolished with the incarnation. It just took a new form as an event, on the one hand, and as the community’s interpretation, on the other. This is why the whole speculative content of Christianity has to be interpreted in terms of the concept.

One could long discuss the question whether Hegel simply dissolved the mythic universe of representation, by situating it as the penultimate step of an itinerary that is completed in absolute knowledge, something Kant did not do with his philosophy of limits, which leaves the mythic universe outside as something that cannot be included within the circumspection of knowledge but which can be seen from its border.

It does seem that Hegel did pose a certain number of rules for modern hermeneutics that it has not surpassed. First, mythic representation has a meaning. This meaning is what renders the absolute manifest to us. Second, this meaning first of all inhabits material representations that give substantial plenitude to expressions of the absolute. Third, representation is not an inert picture; it is a dynamic
way of thinking that tends to sublate itself into a concept. In this regard, we can say that Hegel founded the principle that interpretation is not external to the object interpreted, but rather a requirement of symbolism that, in a way, precedes its exegesis. Representation, as Luther said of the Bible, "its own interpreter." Fourth, this movement of interpretation includes a mortal step. This ought not to surprise us. We have encountered the theme of the death of a world again and again as the condition of every creation of a new age. This death is not just that of what the representation says — for example, through the symbolism of judgment and God's wrath, which inverts the narrative about origins into the prophecy of the end — it is also what is at work in the contexture of representation: the symbol is a dying representation on the way toward the concept. Finally, the signifying direction, the arrow of meaning that runs through all these dynamisms, points toward the emergence of an exemplary symbolism which is consciousness itself inhabited by the absolute. In this way the character by which this inquiry into the intended signification of myth ends is justified and, if one may so put it, taken up by philosophy: that is, myth takes on meaning only within the polyphony of every form of discourse against the horizon of a "totalizing appropriation."

The choice between Kant and Hegel is embarrassing. Certainly we cannot take them together, just add them together. We can at least attenuate their differences by means of a kind of mutual rectification. On the one side, Kant's reduction of the world of "beliefs" to practice runs the risk of linking their fate to moralism. Here is where it is appropriate to recall with Nietzsche that "only the moral god has been overcome." But Hegel's claim to absolute knowledge is no less suspect. Where, in a word, does the philosopher stand? Outside the whole play of representation?

Might it then be possible to rediscover a meaning of ethics that would proceed less from the idea of duty and obligation than from the impulse that pushes the slave toward liberation? If we understand ethics in this way as the whole set of conditions for the realization of freedom, then all self-understanding is ethical and we can affirm that symbolic consciousness is the long detour by which the self discovers the conditions of its own establishment. Would it not then be the first function of myth to institute historical time?

In this regard, Kant is richer than one might at first think. The mythic world does not just extend our sense of duty, to which nothing needs to be added. It does not answer the question “what must I do?” but rather the question “what must I hope?” - a question inscribed in the demand of the will to attain its object. In return, can we not then say that Kant corrects Hegel? Absolute knowledge is not external to the whole process of representation. It is what serves it internally and assures the dynamism and work of sublation. So understood, the concept is not something added to the representation - it is its inner light. And this truth in search of itself is the consciousness of the absolute within us. If this were so, there is no room to choose between the purely practical interpretation of mythic symbolism and its speculative interpretation. Through its signifying intention, mythic representation aims at that totality of meaning that Hegel called the “concept,” and at the same time it offers the concept the aid of the schematism that Kant called “an art concealed in the depths of nature.”

16 “This schematism of our understanding with regard to appearances and their mere form is a hidden art in the depths of the human soul, whose true operations we can divine from nature and lay unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty.” Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Alan Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A141/B181. - Editors’ note.
My paper draws upon interdisciplinary research in that it tries to put semiology and praxeology into relation with one another. Each of the two parts that make up this essay will refer to the theory of action and the theory of symbols, in seeking to describe them and to make sense of their intersection. In very general terms, my thesis will be that there is no human action unless it has already been articulated, mediated, and interpreted by symbols.

Three comments concerning the terms used in my inquiry: [the first] has to do with the reference to action. Within the framework of a basically sociological symposium, it goes without saying that action will be understood in the sense of social action, that is, [first of all] as an action that has effects on the collective behavior of human beings, then as an action done in cooperation by several agents, all of whom have social roles. Nevertheless, I have not

1 Published in *Symbolisme religieux, séculier et classes sociales*, Actes de la 14ème Conférence internationale de sociologie des religions (Lille: CNRS/CISR, 1977). – Editors' note.

2 The expression “symbolic action,” which lies behind my title, comes from Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Forms: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941). It was picked up by Clifford Geertz, whom I also draw upon, in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). Geertz’s project is, in effect, to describe “human behavior as seen as symbolic action.” I have preferred a more abbreviated title in order to indicate that action is not, properly speaking, symbolic, since it is real, but that it is structured by symbols.
When it comes to establishing the criteria of action, as opposed, for example, to simple movement or even behavior, from drawing on the analysis of elementary actions done by singular agents capable of conferring a meaning on them. It will be precisely the task of the analysis starting from the opposite pole to make sense of how symbolic mediation is straightaway social mediation, in that the symbols themselves are meaning structures established at a social level, public meanings.

Second comment: from the discouraging polysemy of the word "symbol" I have made a rational choice. I have set aside as too poor the identification of a symbol as a simple notation. This definition recalls Leibniz's opposition between intuitive knowledge (through a direct vision) and knowledge through a symbol (that is, through abbreviated signs substituted for a long chain of logical operations). Something of this analysis does carry over to the theory of social symbols, however. I have also set aside as too rich the identification of a symbol with expressions with a double meaning as in the model of a metaphor, if only because its reduction to hidden meanings opens the way to esoteric knowledge. But this definition of a symbol too is not lost. It will be reintroduced when the time comes and in its right place, but starting from a broader definition. This broader definition is somewhat akin to the notion of symbolic form received from Cassirer in that, for him, symbolic forms are cultural processes that give form to all experience.

My third comment will state the reason for the division of my inquiry into two parts. The mediation of action by symbols of a cultural nature can be undertaken at two levels. There is a question, first of all, of a mediation immanent to action, prior to any constitution of symbolic action as an autonomous activity. Sometimes it even is a question of a structuring that totally escapes individuals and that, in this sense, constitutes the unconscious structure of a community. I shall designate this implicit symbolization as constituting symbolism.

But the productive activity of symbols can also find its language, even its specialists and its institutions, as is evidently the case with

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1 In introducing the expression "symbolic forms," I do not want to take up the Kantian way of doing philosophy that is connected to it, that is, the replacing of the postulate of "substance" by that of "function" or functional unit, nor the hierarchical placing of forms, from the level of thinking that uses language, passing through art and myth, to the culminating level of objective scientific thought. My choice of the term "symbol" implies no allegiance to these two axioms of critical idealism.
the aesthetic, moral, political, and religious symbols of a community, which constitute a distinct layer of that community's practice, discourse, and institutions. I will not say that these symbols are conscious or reflective, for the activities that bear them present features that are unconscious or pre-reflective. Instead, I shall characterize these symbols by the noteworthy relation they have with the preceding ones, namely, that of being their representation. The two examples I shall cite, that of narrative and that of ideologies, in different but converging ways pose the problem of a symbolic mediation we can speak of as transcending, so as to oppose it to the preceding level. I would like to call it representative, first to avoid the equivocalizations of the vocabulary of immanence and transcendence, next to orient attention directly toward the enigma of an activity that marks a gap in relation to what precedes it, even while referring to it, but according to modes that may run, as we shall see, from a zero degree of reflection to degrees of distortion. This will be the case with ideologies. But the representative function can take other routes than just distortion. The activity of narrating will testify to this. This is why the choice of the term representative symbolism seems to me able to pose the problem in its full breadth, without imposing in advance a solution to it.

Constituting Symbolism

It will not be a question at this first level of our inquiry of the modalities under which an individual, a group, a society, a culture, represent the symbolic condition of their existence. It will be a question of this symbolic condition itself. Starting from the theory of action, we shall first examine the implantation of symbolism in practice.

Action and Practical Signification

At this stage of our inquiry it does not matter if we speak of symbolic mediation or of the dimension of action's signification. When we take up our analysis starting from the semiological pole, we shall say what the term “symbol” adds to the term “signification.” The notion of signification is already presupposed by the choice of the term “action.” In ordinary language, the term “action” implies the difference between what someone does and what simply happens as an event. What happens is a set of empirically observable movements. The implicit logic of using the vocabulary of action means that we
understand as actions things like a greeting, moving a brick, etc. This includes accounting for an action through mentioning kinesthetic perceptions or physical movements of observable physiological occurrences. Instead, by entering the language-game of action, a speaker puts to use a network of intersignifying expressions. These are expressions like intention, motive, and agent, which figure in answers to questions like: what are you doing? Why are you doing that? Who did that? Intention can designate what one means to do ("I intend to . . ."), or the deliberate, reflective unconstrained way in which one does something ("I did it intentionally"), or the hierarchy of things that have to be done so that some desired result is brought about ("I did that with the intention that . . ."). As for motives, they serve to explain to oneself or to others why one does or did something, but through giving the expression "because" the power of introducing, not the mention of some regular antecedent (like a Humean cause) but a "reason for." This expression, in turn, has to be understood in a broad sense that can include both desires and beliefs. But desires and beliefs are mentioned as motives only through their character of desirability or credibility (in virtue of which we desire something or believe that . . .), which allows, for example, preferring some desire or belief over some professional obligation or moral duty. It is necessary therefore that all of these can be placed in the same field of motivation if they are to be submitted to axiological comparisons. It is this unity of the field of preference that is indicated by the term "motive." In invoking a motive, a speaker asks others to understand his or her intention, which is singular, in light of a class of dispositions, feelings, or maxims that constitute a new context for the understanding of action.

Finally, action refers back to its agent as "his" or "hers," as being in his or her "power." The agent is implied in questions like: who did that? Who had the intention to do that? What led someone to do that? So the agent is co-significant with the action, intention, and motive. The agent is the "basic particular" that can be identified and named using a proper name. In complex actions, like those that produce long-term and unintended effects, the author of these effects is not easily identifiable, nor is his or her responsibility easily measured. Attributing the part played by each of the participants in some collective action can also be very difficult to establish. So, in the end, the degree of intervention of individual, or even simply of human, action in a large-scale occurrence of collective actions (war, revolution, etc.) poses a gigantic problem. At the very least, none of these problems is deprived of meaning, even if their resolution is pretty much impossible. [But] why then does the problem conserve a
meaning? Precisely because we are committed by the language-game of action to seek the signification of action in the back and forth play of questions and answers having to do with the intentions (in the various senses we have spoken of), motives, and agents of the action. What we call the signification of an action is the set of answers we can give to the questions that bring in play the conceptual network whose nodal points I have been describing.

Someone may object that this description only applies to individual action. I would reply that the action of a body made up of numerous individuals continues to have a signification only if it is perceived — however confusedly — by its agents or actors. This axiom is the basis for what Max Weber conceived of as a comprehensive sociology, which I will adopt here as what counts as sociology for my own inquiry.

At the head of his investigation into the basic concepts of the system in *Economy and Society*, Weber first posits that human action is distinguished from mere behavior in that it can be interpreted and understood by its agents in terms of intended meanings, whether or not they are acknowledged. Every meaningless (*Sinnfremd*) action — such as a flood or a plague — takes us outside the domain of comprehensive sociology. This is the first threshold. Here is the second: what falls under the jurisdiction of comprehensive sociology is not just every action meaningful to some individual, but also those directed toward another person. Every variety of the meaning of “orientation” is allowed. Even the example of an accidental encounter as in a collision is not excluded. Behavior oriented toward others can be something other than a dialogical relationship. What is important is that an individual’s behavior in some way or another takes into account that of another agent and thus enters into a mode of plural action. Only a small part of this sphere of mutual action is personalized. The orientation in relation to others thus covers every sort of coordination among social roles, routines, prestige, cooperation and competition, struggle and violence. It is not a question therefore of hypothesizing the social above this field of significations and motivations. The social relation, says Weber, consists entirely and exclusively in the existence of a probability (*chance*)\(^4\) that a certain course of social action will be produced in some intelligible way capable of being understood. Recourse to probability is decisive in that it is meant to exclude the illusion of the existence of some subsistent entity.

\(^4\)Cited in English in the French text. — Trans.
Signification and Symbolic Mediation

The time has come to spell out what is specific to an inquiry into the symbolic mediation of action in relation to the preceding analysis. What does the symbol add to signification? I am not forgetting the general limitation imposed on this whole study by the definition of symbolism as a cultural process giving form to experience, nor the limitation belonging to the first level of our inquiry, which was deliberately limited to constituting symbolism, that is, to the symbolism immanent to action. I shall divide the pertinent features of the symbolism of action into two groups. The first group will suffice to define the immanent character of symbolism. The second group ensures the transition to representative symbolism.

(1) The term "symbol" first places the accent on the public character of signifying articulation. Symbols satisfy Wittgenstein's objection to every ostensive private definition. In the words of Clifford Geertz, whom I will often cite in this first section of my paper, "culture is public because meaning is." In this sense, symbolism is not in the mind; it is not a psychological structure meant to guide action. Symbols are structures established at a social level as a function in terms of which people do things that have to be understood as a greeting, a protest, a national day celebration, etc.

(2) The term "symbol" — or, better, "symbolic mediation" — signals the structured character of the symbolic group. A symbol is always part of a symbolic system. Geertz speaks in this sense of "an inter-worked system of construable signs," of "models of synergetic significations." The word "structure" had already figured in the preceding definition: "structure of meanings established at the social level." Before being a text [as we shall consider in our] second part, does symbolic mediation have a "texture"? To understand a ritual action is to place it inside a ritual, itself inside a cultic practice, and, bit by bit, in terms of a group of conventions, beliefs, and institutions that form the framework or fabric of a culture. It is the task of analysis to disentangle these structures of signification, to determine their social bases and their impact on other non-semiotic structures.

5Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 12.
6Other features are already implied in the above examples that will be considered below in points (4) through (6).
7Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 14
8Cultural patterns "are 'models,' ... they are sets of symbols whose relations to one another 'model' relations among entities, processes or what have you" (Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 93). — Trans.
The structural method, which we shall have more to say about, get grafted on at this point.

(3) The term "symbol" introduces the idea of a rule or, in another terminology, of symbolic control. Some authors, like Peter Winch, emphasize this feature by characterizing meaningful action as "rule-governed behaviour." Yet other features, in particular those that follow, add their own note which ought not to be neglected. But this function of social regulation does suggest an important comparison with the functioning of phylogenetic codes prior to cultural ones, namely, genetic codes. This comparison lends itself to analogies but also to sharp oppositions. We can say, on the one hand, in the language of informatics, that symbolic codes are to culture what genetic codes are to animal life. They are "programs" of behavior: like genetic codes, they give form, order, meaning, and direction to life. Yet, on the other hand, it is precisely in the zones not governed by our genes that cultural codes arise. They prolong their function by subverting their functioning. For these codes operate only on the condition of bypassing the resources of intentionality and signification. What is more, the rule-governed behavior of cultural configurations is not purely and simply superimposed on that governed by genetics, as though it came down to filling some "information gap" in our genetic organization. Paleontology, among other disciplines, allows us to say that tool usage, the liberation of the hand, and cortical development mutually condition one another, to the point where symbolic control has to be incorporated into "feedback" relations between technology, anatomy, and neurophysiology.


10 Cited in English in the French text. - Trans.

11 Cited in English in the French text. - Trans.

12 This is why, unlike Geertz, I hesitate to characterize symbolic mediation in terms of "extrinsic sources of information in terms of which human life can be patterned" (The Interpretation of Cultures, 216). Geertz borrows this "extrinsic theory" from Eugene Galanter and Murray Gerstenhaber, "On Thought: The Extrinsic Theory," Psychological Review 63 (1956): 218–27. I can see the reason for his interest in the term "extrinsic." It has a polemical value against an eventual reduction of cultural phenomena to their biological base. But that is not our problem here. On the other hand, in the opposition that interests us between constituting and representative symbolism, it collides with the characterization of constituting symbolism as immanent to action, which is fundamental to the point of view of this distinction.
The following points of symbolic mediation designate the insertion point in constituting symbols as representative symbols. The symbolic order, we have said, is rule-governed. The rule for rules, if we may so put it, is exchange. Exchange of goods, of signs, of women, says Claude Lévi-Strauss. By introducing the notion of exchange here, we refer to one of the oldest significations of the word “symbol”: the symbol as a sign of recognition reconstituted in common by two parties who each possess one piece of a broken symbol. But, above all, we deliberately enter into the semiological constitution of the social system. The rule of exchange has a broad impact: first, thanks to the rule, one thing can count for another and be substituted for it. Next, one sign can count for another and itself be equally substituted for. The order of “standing for” is that of generalized substitution. In this way, social orders do not just form a system along with other such orders, but can also “take the place” (Vertretung) of one another (which in French, at least, is one of the senses of the words représentant and représentation). By underscoring the semiological constitution of the social system in this way, we make apparent the close kinship between the system of social symbols and the semiological system par excellence, the linguistic system. This is constitutively semiological because the entities that carry meaning are in a way specialized for communication. It is this close kinship, this homology, which, more than any other, authorizes the transposition of structural methods from the paradigmatic case to derived cases of semiological systems. This is why today we recognize other symbolic systems than linguistic ones that lend themselves to analysis in terms of code and message, the unity of a code, and signifiers and signifieds. At the limit, these systems appear as closed systems of entities that relate to one another only in terms of relations immanent to the system. Future such research will have to establish the pertinent correlations between the diverse (linguistic and non-linguistic) semiological systems of a given society, insofar as these structures present real homologies. The limit of this approach is that of all formalism. It will be useful at this point to recall Wittgenstein’s warning: “to imagine [vorstellen] a language means imagining [sich vorstellen] a form of life.” And: “the term ‘language-game’ is meant to bring into prominence that the speaking a language is part of an activity

13 Or as such.
or of a form of life.” We must separate therefore the symbolic systems of action and what Clifford Geertz calls “the informal logic of actual life.” For it is in social action that cultural forms find their articulation. The coherence of closed symbolic systems is therefore not the major test of the validity of their description. The interpretation has to rest on the reading of “what happens.” It has to lead us to the heart of what it is the interpretation of. This is what the fifth feature makes possible.

(5) A symbolic system provides a context for the description of particular actions. In other words, it is “in terms of” or “as a function of” such symbolic rule that we can see some behavior as (signifying this or that). Giving a greeting is a symbol in that it permits seeing the greeting as the gesture of raising one’s arm in a certain way, in a certain environment, in a certain circumstance. In this sense, the symbol is the rule for interpreting empirical actions. But we need to understand this first use of the word “interpret” properly. Before symbols are themselves to be interpreted, they function as “interpretants” in regard to singular actions (as indicated by the expressions “in terms of,” “as a function of”). It is this particular action that counts as... hence is to be interpreted as... Let us stop a moment with this feature, which, by correcting the preceding one, reorients structural action toward a concrete interpretation. It is indeed human behavior that is in question. It is action that has to be seen as symbolic and, in this sense, as having to be interpreted. At the same time, we have reached the point of intersection between our first series of analyses and the present analysis of symbolic systems. In the vocabulary of action theory, it was in terms of motives and motivation that we characterized the understanding of singular action. To understand an action, we said, was to set it in the context of certain beliefs, dispositions, and feelings that constitute the classes of possible understanding (jealousy, hate, interest, feelings of obligation, etc.). It is this motivational context that, on the social level, appears as a symbolic context. We may thus say, using a homogeneous vocabulary, that culture is a context within which events, behaviors, institutions, and processes can be described in an intelligible way. Clifford Geertz, from whom I have more or less borrowed my definition, adds an adverbial adjective that interests me. He writes: “thickly

16 Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, 17.
He is drawing from Gilbert Ryle the notion of a "thick description" in order to say, for example, that a wink as a sign of recognition among conspirators does not rest at the surface level of visible movement but is embedded in the thickness of the gesture, where it can be read in function of a code that makes it count as . . . recognition. It is at this point that the meaning of symbol that we are taking as canonic, namely, as the interpretant of some behavior, points toward the two other senses we have set aside. As an interpretant of behavior, a symbolic system is also a notation system, in the double sense that it abridges, like mathematical notion, a great number of details about the action and prescribes, like musical notation, the sequence of executions or performances susceptible of making it real. But it is also as an interpretant governing a thick description that the symbol introduces a twofold meaning of the gesture, within the behavior for which it governs the interpretation. We can take the empirical configuration of the gesture as its literal sense, what "carries" a "figured" meaning. At the limit, this meaning appears, in certain conditions, close to a secret, to a hidden meaning that has to be deciphered, decrypted. For a foreigner, this is how every social ritual may appear. This is why every interpretation that has to cover a certain cultural distance and proceed to an actual translation of one language into another tends to get identified with such a decryption. This is why the other meanings of the word "symbol" are called for by the one we have taken as canonic in this investigation. But they remain subordinate and marginal and risk turning the concept of interpretation toward the esoteric and the hermetic.

(6) We are approaching the point where constitutive symbolism flows – as one says of a river – into representative symbolism. We have compared the semiotics of social symbolism to that of language; we next characterized symbolism as a context in which . . . and said that symbolism permits seeing as . . ., that is, describing behavior in terms of . . . Another expression is related to this, which is going to provide us with the transition to representative symbolism. We can say that symbolism constitutes the readability of action. Doing ethnology, says Clifford Geertz, is like trying to read a foreign, faded,
moth-eaten, incoherent manuscript, but one filled with transient examples of behavior configured by some symbolism.

To what point can we say that the symbolism of action is a discourse? The answer includes two phases. It seems to me that we must initially be prudent and not confuse the text that the sociologist or ethnologist writes - which is the sole real text - with the quasi-text of the culture under consideration. Yes, the ethnographical text is written using categories, concepts, and nomological principles that are the contribution of science. What we have called the symbols that are interpretants of action are constitutive of that action. What we are calling reading these interpretants is therefore a new act in which the interpretant itself becomes the interpreted, on the basis of the scientific criteria of the discipline in question. Certainly, the constitutive symbols of action lend themselves to this reading, which in reality is a reinscription, because the interpreted symbols themselves have a virtual readability, inasmuch as they function in the culture as interpretants, that is, as signification rules in terms of which some behavior can be interpreted. There is an intersection therefore between the immanent rules of readability of symbolic systems and the reading or, better, reinscription rules brought by the scientist. Furthermore, and this is the second half of the answer to the question whether a culture is a discourse: between the internal readability of the quasi-text of a culture and the ethnographer's reinscription rules are intercalated the representative symbols in which a culture understands itself.

It turns out that it is by abstraction that we speak of constitutive symbols. It appears that every semiological symbol is accessible to some specific reflexivity, which means, for example, that we can speak about one language using another language that becomes its metalanguage. A culture cannot make use of its symbols without their being reflected upon in a second symbolic order that functions as its metalanguage.

Hence, the description and interpretation of the constitutive symbolic systems of a culture is a struggle with and against its representative symbolic systems. It is precisely one of the functions of the conceptual apparatus contributed by the description to go beyond the solicitations of the representative symbolic systems in order to pierce through to the constitutive symbolic system. More than ever, description is a thick description.

But these two limiting comments do not prevent our speaking of a culture as a discourse. The end of description does remain, as Geertz says, a “conversation with strangers,” that is, making their interpretants enter into dialogue with our own interpretants.
Representative Symbolism

The final three criteria of constitutive symbolism suggest that, through its semiological nature, the symbolism most immanent to action tends to redouble itself, to reflect upon itself, and therefore to constitute itself as a distinct instance of action.

But we ought not to conclude from this that all symbolism is representative. This is why I would like, first, to insist that representative symbolism is rooted in constitutive symbolism. This first analysis will be in a way the counterpart to later developments, which will tend to dissolve constitutive symbolism into representative symbolism.

The Representative Gap

I suggest beginning our analysis with a discussion of a text from Marx that offers a clear account of representative symbolism under the heading of ideology, but at the cost of overlooking constitutive symbolism. In his critique of the Young Hegelians and of every hypostasizing of consciousness as an autonomous creative source of representations, Marx asserts the radical thesis that the whole order of consciousness and of representation comes down to “the life processes of definite individuals,” and he adds: “but of individuals not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they really are, i.e. as they are effective, produce materially, and are active under definite material limits.20 We ourselves have tried to speak of the representations of real action. But what we discovered is that before all representative symbolism, action is already structured symbolically. In one sense, Marx does grant this, when he goes on to say on the same page that “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior.”21 What we have called constitutive symbolism is not unrelated to what Marx here calls “the language of real life.” But if the world of separated

autonomous representation, which Marx calls ideology, is in fact preceded by a symbolism that is "the direct efflux of material behavior," it is no longer possible to purely and simply oppose real praxis – which designates what people do in reality – and the order of representations, which would express the way in which they appear to themselves. Nor would we understand how "they may appear in their own or other people's imagination," still less how they should be able to form illusory representations of their real condition, if the order of representation were not articulated on the basis of a symbolic ground immanent to action itself and coextensive with real praxis. What we need to understand therefore is not so much the passage from the real being of human beings in their praxis to how they appear in their representations, as the passage from constitutive symbolism (the "language of real life") to representative symbolism.

This change in the problematic has an important consequence. If the starting point for an analysis of representative symbolism is not a pre-symbolic stage of real praxis but the passage from one symbolism to another, then the modes of this transition do not lead at all to the reversal by which Marx, in the same text, defined ideology: "if, in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises from their historical life-processes as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical-process."\(^22\) Not only is the ideological reversal not one of the passages from one symbolism to another, but ideology itself, as we shall say below, cannot be entirely defined by the inversion of the real into an imaginary illusion. Rather therefore than taking this reversal as the canonical form of the genesis of representative symbolism, I suggest adopting the more neutral term of a gap, whose use is current among contemporary theorists of rhetoric and poetics. What is the gap in representation? That is the problem.

This gap, it seems to me, is required by the very nature of action. On the plane of individual action, motivation is the first thing that requires agents to retrospectively represent to themselves the reasons for that action and that they should coordinate these reasons with a symbolic order represented itself in a distinct way. Moreover, the anticipation characteristic of a project implies that agents represent to themselves the chain of means and ends, and that they inscribe

\(^{22}\) Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, 14.
these representations in a discourse of action that includes a specific semantics. So individual action is represented to itself insofar as it is spoken of. To which we can immediately add: and insofar as it can be written down. It belongs to the very structure of discourse that what is said gets detached from the act and event of saying it, and can be inscribed as an autonomous meaning. Action then becomes a text, in the precise sense of this word, open to multiple readings. It is no longer a question of the readability we spoke of earlier, which was an immediate, at the time, interactive readability, but of a deferred readability, something after the fact, thanks to the inscription of the speech act about action.

The social aspects of action in their retrospective as well as prospective dimensions converge on this inscription. First, remaining in line with the preceding remarks about the after the fact aspect, we can say [that, as a question of an] action that was the work of several agents as a body, with long-term consequences in which these agents no longer can recognize their intention or contribution ("I did not mean to do that"), the product of action, the done of doing has an autonomous destiny, wholly similar to that of a text in relation to its author's intention. In the same way, actions, in the substantive sense of the term (Tat, deed), become autonomous, sedimented, institutionalized. And in this way, distanced from their authors, actions leave a trace, an imprint on the course of things, which is like their inscription in history. These imprints are registered in turn in the form of dossiers, documents, archives, that complete the becoming-text of human action. It is on their basis that we discuss the importance of an action that does not necessarily coincide with its suitability in its initial situation. It is on [their] basis as well that human beings interpret the meaning of what they have really done, either to justify it, or simply in order to understand what has happened. In this becoming-text of action is born a part of the gap of representation.

23 Here the linguistic analysis of action rejoins the phenomenology of the will to show that the discourse of action sets in play: (1) the specific propositional forms characterized by a specific use of verbs, their complements, their circumstances, and a distinct temporal logic; (2) specific illocutionary forms whose study was inaugurated by the theory of "performative" utterances. Cf. J. L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); John Searle, Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969).
But it is above all in the prospective direction that the gap of representation gets constituted. Above, we emphasized the rule aspect and even (in a comparison with genetic codes) the programmatic character of the symbolism of action. Considered for themselves, these rules become *models for* engendering a series of actions. In terms of their rational aspect, these *models for* provide the premises for practical syllogisms. In turn, these practical syllogisms form formal chains, whose typology provides the theme of "strategies" in the sense of decision theory and game theory. We ought not to say, therefore, that representative symbolism is identical with ideology, above all if we mean by ideology a mystified representation of reality.

Someone may object that, in these highly formalized representations, we have abstracted the interests, tensions, and conflicts that underlie social action, and that these are the forces that twist social representations in the ideological sense we have been speaking of. That is true. But we no longer understand the play of these mystifying representations if we do not place them in relation to the whole group of representative symbols, in particular with those we have referred to that arise from what we could call a technology of action. So we are going now to consider, as an example, one category of representative symbolism — narrative symbols — which is neither technological nor ideological, and which for all that does contribute to the configuration of individual and social action. At the same time, it will give us the occasion to make more precise the meaning of the gap of representation.

**Narrative Fiction**

If I refer to narrative at this place in my investigation of representative symbolism, I do so in order to do justice to one fundamental function of representation, which is to forge *fictions* with a *heuristic* character. Narrative is an appropriate example in that it has as its referent precisely human action. What human beings have narrated above all is what the gods, the demi-gods, the heroes superior to ordinary people or the anti-heroes inferior to them do. But they tell this by inventing stories. Fiction thus provides a noteworthy example of a representative gap.

Aristotle, who was the first to offer a theory in his *Poetics*, dared to face the paradox that tragedy — in his eyes, the paradigm for narrative poetry — provides a *mimesis* of human actions only insofar as the poem rises to the dignity of having a *muthos*, that is, both a story and a plot. Mimesis is thus not the servile imitation one often says
It is but the transposition, the metamorphosis, of action into a narrative structure that is both fictive, because invented, and representative of what is essential. What mimesis imitates is not the reality of events but their logical structure, their signification. Aristotle does not hesitate to say that poetry is more philosophical than is history, inasmuch as history depends on the anecdotal and contingency. It is in this sense that the tragic poem is a heuristic fiction. It constitutes a kind of narrative model that has the virtue of "redescribing" human action, as is also said elsewhere of scientific models in relation to a logic of discovery.

What Aristotle says about the tragic poem can be extended to other forms of narrative, from the folk tale to the novel. First of all, to μυθος, correctly interpreted as plot, corresponds a characteristic that seems common to every category of narrative, namely, that the narrative joins together an aspect of configuration and one of succession. This latter is easy to identify. It is the episodic and properly chronological dimension of narrative. When we follow a story whose ending we do not know, we ask, and then? What happens next? A well-made story contrives to bring about its surprises and plays with the contingency of events. But, at the same time, narrating does not consist just in adding the episodes one after the other. It is an activity that constructs meaningful wholes out of disparate elements. To this narrative activity corresponds, on the side of the act of reading, an effort to "grasp together" the successive elements. As a result, the art of story-telling and its counterpart, the act of following a story, requires that we are able to extricate a configuration from a succession. Every narrative, in this sense, seems to place in competition the episodic and the configurational dimension, succession and form, sequence and consequence. Here, then, is an example of representative activity in which symbolism can be assimilated to fiction, in the strong sense of a forged, an invented representation. The gap of representation is the gap of fiction. The poet, the storyteller - and perhaps the historian, inasmuch as the historian’s history is, to use an expression of Collingwood’s,\(^{24}\) an “imaginative reconstruction” - in constructing the plot, invent a course of events other than what happens in reality.

Yet we cannot say that so transforming reality means deforming it. It is quite simply to form it. To Aristotle’s mimesis corresponds this prime function of all narrative activity, which is to construct a network of practical schemes as a function of which we interpret

real human action. It is the role of fictions in general—of pictorial fiction as well as narrative function—to reorganize "the world in terms of works and works in terms of the world," to quote Nelson Goodman. Fictions refer to the real mode of action insofar as they redescribe reality using the symbolic structures of fiction.

It is easy to understand what makes this structuring function indispensable. On the one hand, human action is, in many regards, "diverse," in the sense that the possible plots describing it are innumerable. On the other hand, it is hardly probable that we should be able to master this "diversity" by constructing a priori a logic of possible narratives that would put in play only the combinatory resources offered by a few simple segments of action and the roles of a few basic actants that correspond to them. Between an overly "long" diversity and an overly "short" logic, narrative fiction intercalates its schematism of human acting. By means of the grid of told stories, we construct a narrative reading of our own life and of those communities to which we belong. The narrative gap is the condition for this reading of real action that is at the same time a rewriting of it.

Ideology

It is within the broad range of representative symbolisms that it is now possible to situate ideology. Its mystifying role, among others, presupposes the general idea of a gap between representation and the order of action. We have accounted for the sources of this gap in terms of the very structure of action. What is more, this role presupposes the more particular idea of the heuristic function of fiction, with which the theory of fiction has acquainted us. The dysfunctions of representation are grafted to its positive structuring role. What we now must add is that ideology itself exercises other functions than just that of pure dissimulation. In this regard, Marx's short-circuit between real life and its inverted image is unintelligible. Already, the mediation of constitutive symbolism and that of the non-pathological forms of representative symbolism has begun to make comprehensible the passage from fiction to illusion. But what needs to be said right now is that ideology exercises other functions than mystification.

Ideologies are first of all schematic images of the social order. In this regard, no human group can avoid giving itself an image of itself. The memory and recitation of a group’s founding events constitute the basic core of this image. Ideology begins with the distance in regard to this beginning which has to be repeated in order to perpetuate its initial energy beyond the period of its effervescence. It is in this gap, characteristic of every after the fact situation, that images and interpretations intervene. It may be that no social group lacks this indirect relation to its self-representation.

We approach ideology’s function of dissimulation if we note the schematic, simplifying, idealizing character, along with the inertia and resistance to criticism, of such consolidating ideologies. But it is when ideology is mobilized by the claim to legitimacy of some system of authority and domination that it begins to swerve in the direction of dissimulation. Ideology then comes to serve to fill the void between the claim to legitimacy stemming from a system of authority and domination and individuals’ spontaneous belief in the validity of this claim. In filling this abyss, ideology conceals it. Here is where the mystifying career of ideology commences.

The question is not how to negate the mystifying use of the social imaginary. It is rather one of correctly understanding it. In particular, it is important to make the best use of the classical theories of ideology in the sociology of knowledge. As is well known, these are theories of interests or tensions. The first ones, Marxist or Marxist in inspiration, place the accent on the function of legitimation assumed by ideology to the benefit of a group or class in power. Ideology then appears as the rhetoric of domination. The second ones, following Talcott Parsons, emphasize ideology’s cathartic function, in both the medical and the moral sense, as a symbolic way of handling conflicts and tensions. But, as Clifford Geertz notes in an essay titled “Ideology as a Cultural System,” a just diagnostic of the social determinants of ideology does not take the place of an explanation of how it operates.26 One has not said anything, in particular, when one has simply affirmed that an ideology “expresses” the interests of a group or a class. By what magic is an actual or expected advantage transmuted into an “idea”? Between some tension and its symbolic resolution, the connection is no less enigmatic. This transmutation is not rendered any more intelligible by the metaphors of a mirror reflection or an echo by which one all too often contents oneself in commenting on the relation of expression between a class interest and

ideology. Without the intervention of an “autonomous process of symbolic formulation,” the transposition of an interest or tension into an “idea” is not intelligible. What seems to distinguish the ideological process from other uses of representative symbolism seems to be its kinship with rhetorical uses of discourse. This is what was suggested above by the characterization of ideology as a rhetoric of domination. The figures of ideology are those of rhetoric, from metaphor to hyperbole, in passing through irony, ambiguity, and paradox. This comparison has its lettres de noblesse. Plato was the first to observe that “flattery” is the weapon of a tyrant’s friends and that it would be powerless without the aid of sophistry. And Aristotle teaches that, under the least perverse forms of this sophistry, rhetoric serves to manipulate the passions and aims at persuading its auditor.

This hijacking – this perverse use, in the proper sense of the word – of symbolism and discourse constitutes the blind spot of every symbolic system. There comes a moment when the mission of the sociologist and the philosopher is no longer to describe but to unmask and to combat the principle of lying that transforms the social imaginary into the power of illusion.
What kind of discourse about human beings can philosophers hold to that scientists do not have to appeal to?¹

This way of characterizing philosophy by its discourse reflects not only the linguistic turn that most contemporary philosophies have taken, it indicates as well the affinity philosophy presents with its theme, inasmuch as the least disputable feature of the humanity of human beings is their use of language articulated as discourse. Philosophical discourse thus arises in the space of reflexivity opened by the different discourses we use in speaking about the world, ourselves, and others. But this mediation exercised by the reflexivity of discourse in general between philosophy and its theme, when its theme is human beings, cannot proceed in a direct, that is, immediate and intuitive, fashion starting from this reflexive spontaneity.

With Kant, I hold that, far from constituting the first question philosophy can raise, the question “what is man?” comes at the end of a series of prior questions: what can I know? What must I do? What am I allowed to hope? I do not mean that these three Kantian

questions are the only ones capable of introducing the decisive question: what is it to be human? I am maintaining only that, if it is not to be trivial, the answer to this question has to come as the ultimate result of a series of preparatory steps. The itinerary I am inviting us to follow is certainly not the one outlined by Kant. It does derive, however, from one decisive feature of each of the three questions just mentioned: the implication of the personal pronoun I in each of them. It is an indirect and progressive construction of the meaning of the term I that I propose to present by simultaneously taking into account the resources of analytic philosophy and of philosophical hermeneutics, to cite just those philosophical disciplines I am most familiar with.

The successive steps of our itinerary will lead us from a highly abstract to a more concrete characterization of the sort of beings we assert ourselves to be in opposition to things and animals. As a matter of convention, we shall call “persons,” in the most neutral sense of this term, this type of being and ask through what progressive determinations a person may be called a “self.”

“From the person to the self” could have been the title of my contribution. Needless to say, the order of my presentation makes no historical claim, for it is governed strictly by the progression from one level of discourse to the next.

The Linguistic Level

The first level is that of linguistic analysis, in the philosophical sense of the term “linguistic.” This analysis is addressed to the universal features – or the most universal ones – of our language, when we speak in a meaningful way about human beings as persons and as selves. To that end, I will draw in turn on semantics in Frege’s sense and on what Charles Morris calls pragmatics.

(1) On the semantic plane, persons cannot be characterized as selves, inasmuch as, in Frege’s terms, semantics has only to do with propositions governed by the rules of an extensional logic, for which the attitudes of a speaker and more generally the circumstances of interlocution are not pertinent. Nonetheless, despite the narrowness of the field considered, what can be said about human beings as persons is not negligible. Why is this so?

Two universal properties of language have to be considered here. On the one hand, language is structured in such a way that it can designate individuals, on the basis of specific operators of individualization like definite descriptions, proper names, and deictics,
including adjectives, demonstrative personal pronouns, and the verbal tenses. To be sure, not all the individuals picked out by these operators are persons. Persons are individuals of a specific kind. But it is the singularity of persons that particularly interests us in the sense that these operations have a specific relation to the status of the person as a self, that is, as self-individualizing. The individualizing intention of these operators allows us, in any case, to designate a person as one person, and to distinguish him or her from all the others. Here we have a part of what we call identification. To identify a person as an individual constitutes the most elementary — and the most abstract — step in a philosophical discourse about human beings.

A more specific constraint is added to this first property of language which still stems from the semantic level, considered here from the point of view of its referential implications. Owing to this constraint, to which Strawson's class work *Individuals* is devoted, it is impossible for us to identify a given particular without classifying it as a body or as a person.² I will not discuss here the arguments for the constraint that we say, first, that bodies and persons are "basic particulars" to which we have to refer when we speak about the world's components, and, second, that these two classes delimit the only legitimate basic particulars. I take these arguments as given for what follows in my analysis and will limit myself to emphasizing just one point.

Three constraints are tied to the status of a person as a basic particular: first, persons must be bodies in order to be persons; second, the mental predicates that distinguish persons from bodies are attributed to the same entity as are the predicates common to persons and bodies, call them physical predicates; third, these mental predicates preserve the same signification when they are applied to oneself or to someone else — in Strawson's language, they are *self-ascribable* or *other-ascribable*. As we see, the person is not yet a self at this level of discourse, inasmuch as he or she is not treated as an entity capable of designating him- or herself. A person is just one of the things we talk about, that is, an entity we can refer to. Nonetheless, this accomplishment of language must not be underestimated, in that in "referring" to persons as basic particulars we assign an elementary logical status to the grammatical third person (he/she), even if it is only at the pragmatic level that the third person is more

than a grammatical person, more exactly, a self. This right of the third person in our discourse about persons is confirmed by the place literature assigns to its protagonists in most of our stories, principally through the category of *Er-Erzähling* (omniscient narration) familiar to German narratology.

That a philosophical discourse on human beings ought not to be confined within the limits of identifying reference posited by an extensional logic is already suggested by each of the three features of the person that correspond to the logical constraints applicable to the characterization of persons. First of all, the body that a person is, is not just one body among all the other bodies, but my body, my own body. The possession indicated by the deictic *my/mine* seems to imply a subject capable of designating itself as someone who has a body. Second, the conjoint attribution of physical and mental predicates to the same entity — to the person — seems to transgress the rules of attribution in the logical sense of predication to a logical subject. This odd form of attribution merits the name "ascription," if we take into account its relation to the idea of possession as well as its kinship with the moral imputation we shall speak of later on. Third, the kind of sameness that mental predicates preserve, whether they be "ascribed" to oneself or to others, already alludes to the distinction between oneself and others. Yet this distinction cannot intervene within the framework of a logical semantics.

(2) A second stage of philosophical discourse on human beings results from the transition from semantics to *pragmatics*, that is, to a situation where the meaning of a proposition depends on the context of interlocution. It is at this stage that the *I* and *you*, implied in the process of interlocution, can be thematized for the first time. The best way to illustrate this point is to place ourselves within the framework of the theory of speech acts and to take up the distinction between a locutionary and an illocutionary act. The illocutionary force of utterances like declaring, promising, warning, etc., can easily be made explicit by means of the intentional prefixes that contain the term *I*, which elevates the illocutionary force to the level of expression. These speech acts can be redescribed in the following way: "I declare," "I promise," "I warn." The advance in characterizing a person as a self is clear. Whereas at the semantic level, the person was merely one thing about which we speak, at the pragmatic level, the person is immediately designated as a self, to the extent that, through the intentional prefix, the speaker and the interlocutor are equally implied as designating themselves. But it not just the *I* and the *you* that are so brought to the fore through this process of self-designation. The structure of language is such that we can also
attribute to the third person—the one about whom we are speaking—the same capacity of designating him- or herself as someone who speaks and as someone who designates an interlocutor. Quotation is the ordinary means of bringing about this transfer: “he thinks,” “she thinks” signifies: some person says at heart: “I think.”

Narrative makes a massive use of this assigning of acts of self-designation to the protagonists of the told story. In drama, the quotation marks are indicated by the situation of the scene and the dialogue between the actors who incarnate the characters is directly presented. Strictly speaking, the third person—in the grammatical sense of the term—is not plainly a person except thanks to this transfer of the self-designation of someone who, in him- or herself speaking, says I to the person we are talking about. Thanks to this transfer, the pragmatics of I and you is grafted to the semantics of he and she.

This remarkable accomplishment of pragmatics does not prevent the act of self-designation from being filled with paradoxes. The first of these is easy to resolve. It stems from the ambiguity of the expression I. As a paradigm for the personal pronouns, the term I is empty, vacant. It is capable of designating anyone; its user designates him- or herself. But, when it is actually used by someone, the term I designates just one person, the one precisely who employs it. In the first case, I is a shifter in regard to which a number of virtual speakers can substitute themselves; in the second case, I designates a unique, non-substitutable perspective on the world.3

A second, more intractable paradox appears when we try to assign an epistemological status to the I in some situation of its use, hence to I as designating my non-substitutable perspective on the world. To the extent that the ego of an actual utterance does not belong to the content of any of its utterances, we have to say with Wittgenstein that the ego, as a singular center of perspective, is the limit of the world and does not coincide with any of the world’s contents. To express this paradox in other terms, the utterance as an act can be taken as an event produced in the world just like the fact that I walk

3Husserl places the expression I among the necessarily occasional significations. His analysis is not that far from Russell’s theory of “egocentric particulars.” This ambiguity can be avoided if we distinguish with Peirce between the I-type and I-token. But we need immediately to add that the type is one that must obligatorily be assigned to someone and that in an exclusive manner. This distributive function connects the token and the type. This structure is unique.
or eat, while the speaking self—the speaker of the utterance—is not an event. We cannot say that the speaker happens. This paradox is in no way an artifice that philosophical analysis creates. It finds an echo in ordinary language in the way we present ourselves to a stranger as being Mr or Ms so and so. What English calls “identifying oneself.” Identification, taken here in the sense of self-identification, rests on the adding to the ego a name drawn from a public list of possible names, given the rules and conventions of a given culture. Wittgenstein’s aporia in the *Tractatus* reappears in a new form in the *Blue Notebook.*

How can we connect the *I*, as a limit of the world, to a proper name designating a real individual belonging to this world? How can I say, “me, Paul Ricoeur”? To resolve this aporia it is necessary to introduce particular procedures capable of assuring the conjunction between the *I* as limit of the world and an entity within this world. In this regard, the way in which we connect, by means of the calendar, the absolute *now* of the lived present with some moment of physical time, that is, by *dating* it, by giving it a place in the system of every possible date, is the model for the sought-for intersection. The institution of the calendar is the sought-for connector. In the same way, we link the absolute *here* determined by the position of our own body to a place in geometrical space. We bring about this localization by constructing a map, which plays a role parallel to that of the calendar. It is using the model of dating and localization, corresponding to the deictics “now” and “here,” that we link the absolute *I* (and its non-substitutable perspective on the world) to the person intended through identifying reference. The procedure corresponding to dating by means of a calendar and localization by means of a map is *naming*. It rests on a number of social conventions equivalent to an *inscription* of the *I* on the social map of names and pronouns. Thanks to these inscriptions, an *ego* referring to itself is considered to be the same as one of the persons now existing in the world. The identification of the self we spoke of earlier is nothing other than this correlation between the designation of a self and a referential identification.

At the end of the first part of our voyage, a question arises concerning the relation between analytic philosophy and phenomenology: can we give a meaning to these three procedures of dating,

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localization, and naming without transgressing the boundaries of linguistic analysis? Are we not constrained to carry our investigation further into the sort of being that permits this double kind of identification as a person and as a self capable of designating him- or herself? The very notion of a singular perspective includes unavoidable ontological connotations. What is a singular perspectival position if not that of my own body? Now, corporality, that is, the fact that I am this body, that is, something in the world, is not an isolated phenomenon. It brings in a larger ontological structure, namely, my belonging to what Husserl called the Lebenswelt and Heidegger speaks of as in-der-Welt-sein. We have a certain preunderstanding of what this belonging to a world in a corporeal mode signifies. This preunderstanding is already at work in the paradoxes of ascription of predicates to that special entity we call a person. What we understand in this preunderstanding is the primitive fact that my body, as one body among many bodies, is a mere fragment of our experience of the world, and that the body as mine shares the status of being an ego as a limit point of reference on the world.

In my opinion, this convergence between linguistic analysis and phenomenology has to be understood as a reciprocal implication. The ontology of corporeality would remain an inconsistent claim if it were not articulated in a semantics and a pragmatics, and if the dual allegiance of my body to the world of events and to the self did not reflect language procedures linking the person as something about which we speak and the self implied by the reflexive properties of acts of discourse.

The Level of Praxis

In the second part of my presentation, I propose to make concrete the characterization of the person as a self, by tying the notion of a speaking subject to that of an acting and suffering subject. This characterization takes place at the point of intersection between semantics and pragmatics, inasmuch as it is an important feature of human action, as conduct subject to rules, to be governed by language and more specifically by most acts of discourse. Human action is action that is spoken about. On the one hand, we speak of actions as events occurring in the world. In this sense, the theory of action is one province of semantics and we do in fact talk about a semantics of action. On the other, we designate ourselves as agents, the agents of our own actions. The theory of action thus appears as a province of pragmatics.
But the theme of action is so particular that the theory of action has become an autonomous discipline in our day. Let us examine this autonomy of the theory of action, at the boundary of semantics and pragmatics.

According to logical semantics, actions are events of a unique kind. An event can be called an action in that it was done intentionally, or with the intention of doing something else, or as the accomplishment of a prior intention, which may itself be adjourned, suspended, even annulled. In this latter case, intention merits being called a "pure" intention, aimed at an action done by me, whose success is contingent, depending on internal or external circumstances.

The characterization of action as intentional in the three senses of the term (intentionally, with the intention that, and pure intention) poses numerous problems at the boundary of semantics. The principal discussion is concentrated on the question whether it is necessary to interpret intentions as reasons for . . . and whether in this case if they must be taken to be irreducible to causes in the Humean sense of this term – or if intentions, even when described as reasons for . . . have to be explained as causes. The difficulty goes as follows: it desires and beliefs are assimilated to propositional attitudes in order to satisfy the demands of an extensional logic, a logical gap opens between our propositions about action and our everyday experience of being able to do something and doing it, that is, making events happen. The difficulty may remain concealed so long as we treat intention as a feature of already done actions, hence using the adverbial form just cited: something done intentionally. Intention can then be taken as a modification of action as an event occurring in the world. The difficulty becomes more evident when we speak of the intention with which one does something. But it becomes frankly intractable when we consider as yet not carried out or even unfulfilled intentions, that is, "pure" intentions. Intention must then be treated as a species of the genus intentionality, as the paradigm of anticipation and of self-projection. These two features – temporality and personal commitment – once again require the mutual support of logical semantics and phenomenology. At the core of the mixed discipline resulting from this intersection, phenomenology would provide the general category of intentionality, taken with both its faces, noesis and noema, and semantics would have the task of articulating the noematic side of intentionality as a function of a logical analysis of action sentences.

A similar connection between phenomenology and analytic philosophy is produced at the boundary of pragmatics. The focus of
The question who poses in a new way that of the ascription of mental and physical predicates to the person considered as the subject of predication. The question is no less embarrassing for analytic philosophy than it is for phenomenology. It is a fact that, in the field of philosophy of action, the care given to clarifying the relations between what and why has covered over, if not rendered non-pertinent, that between the who and the what and why. This difficulty is particularly striking in Donald Davidson's treatment of the problem of action. Identifying reasons as causes leads to a drastic reduction of actions to kinds of events. The category of events, as something that occurs externally, does not indicate any affinity with the category of the self. It tends instead to exclude it. But this exclusion betrays one specific feature of action, namely, that it is part of the meaning of intention to make action depend on us as agents. Ordinary language confirms this assumption. An agent's power to act is ordinarily expressed by means of metaphors like paternity, domination, ownership (with this latter being incorporated into the grammar of adjectives and possessive pronouns). These linguistic facts require a new articulation in our philosophical discourse about the self. Husserl posed the problem in terms of an egology, the ego being called the "identical pole" of multiple and variable acts that proceed from it, or the luminous source of many rays of light. But Ichpol and Ichstrahle are only more metaphors.

How can we give a conceptual articulation to this intuitive insight? New aporias arise at this point: how are we to account for the double status of mental predicates as, on the one hand, keeping the same sense whether they are attributed to oneself or to another (hence as floating entities indifferent to any particular ascription) and as, on the other hand, actually attributed to someone who possesses them? Another aporia: what kind of relation exists between ascription and moral imputation? Do we attribute actions to someone in the way that a judge decides that something legally belongs to someone? But do not legal and moral imputation presuppose the confidence that agents have of being able to do something and the assurance that they have of being the author of these acts? And do not this

confidence and this assurance — when they are conceptualized — lead back to the third cosmological antinomy of the Kantian dialect of pure reason, which opposes the thesis that we can begin something in the course of the world and the antithesis that requires an infinite regress of the open-ended series of causes? As for a mixed model, like that of von Wright in his *Explanation and Understanding*, it rightly requires a close connection between practical syllogisms and systematic chains in order to justify the familiar notion of initiative as an intentional intervention in the course of the world’s events by agents endowed with reflection. But this same connection between teleological and causal segments seems to appeal once again to another type of discourse than that of analytic philosophy. A phenomenology of the “I can,” following Merleau-Ponty, seems required if we are to give a meaning to this belonging of the agent to a world itself considered as a practical field, made up of pathways and obstacles. Is the preunderstanding of our belonging to the world as a practical field not prior to the distinction between a semantics of action as an event and a pragmatics of the agent as a self who designates him- or herself? Once again, what makes the phenomenology of the “I can” more fundamental than linguistic analysis, be it semantic or pragmatic, is its close affinity with an ontology of the lived body, that is, a body that is also my body and that, thanks to this double allegiance, constitutes the bond between a power to act that is our own and a system of events that occurs in the world. Once again, equally, I readily grant that a phenomenology of the “I can” and an ontology of the lived body and of the world as a practical field cannot be articulated discursively without the aid of a semantics and a pragmatics of our discourse about actions and agents — even if this be at the price of the aporias that embarrassed Kant, Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty.

The Ethical Level

In this third and final part of my presentation, I propose to show how the moral dimension of imputation can be grafted to my earlier characterization of the person as a self. Moral imputation consists in a kind of judgment for which the person is responsible for the foreseeable consequences of his or her actions and for this reason
can be praised or blamed for them. This judgment rests on a prior description of the agent as owner and as the agent of his or her action, and, beyond this, on the identification of the person as a basic particular and as the self implied in the self-designation of the speaking subject. In this sense, the linguistic and practical aspects of the self are presupposed by the notion of moral imputation and responsibility. But new components are put in play by this notion. Some of them are simple expansions of the prior category of action; others require a specific treatment. As an expansion of the prior category of action I propose introducing three features whose ethical import is at least implicit. But we need first to consider the hierarchical structure of complex actions that merit the label “practices”: technical skills, crafts, arts, games, etc. Compared to simple gestures, such practices consist of chains of actions presenting relations of coordination and above all of subordination. Thanks to the structure of embedding, practices can in turn be inserted into life plans, putting in place professional life, familial life, leisure activities, social and political activities. To these “logical” structures of practices and life plans we need to add the “historical” character that practices and life plans owe to their belonging to the unity of a life unfolding from birth to death. We can call this second feature of complex actions historical, not only because the unfolding of a unique life has a temporal dimension, but because this temporality is brought to language in a narrative form. In this sense, we can speak of the narrative unity of a life. In this way, narrativity constitutes an immanent structure of action. As Hannah Arendt notes, it is in stories that the “who of action” can be spoken of, that is, recounted. Historical narratives in the sense of historiography and fictional narratives are grafted to this immanent narrativity, which means that a human life has one or more “life stories.” A third feature of action needs to be emphasized that we can also consider as an expansion of our earlier analysis of action. It has to do with the teleological structure of action. The connection between means and ends already points in the direction of this feature— as does the reference to practices and life plans on to the horizon of a “good life” as projected by individuals and communities.

Imputation and responsibility are synonyms, with the slight difference that it is actions that we impute to someone and it is the person who is said to be responsible for his or her actions and their consequences.

The new conceptual components that we now have to put in play are grafted to this logical, historical, and teleological structure of action, which allow us to speak of human action in terms of praxis. This first ethical component is in continuity with the teleological structure of complex actions. This is why moral doctrines that emphasize it themselves merit being called teleological. Nevertheless, a new factor must be introduced here: that of value or of evaluation. It is to the degree that practices or life plans are governed by precepts—technical, aesthetic, moral, political—that actions can be evaluated, that is, hierarchically ordered as a function of the degree to which they satisfy these precepts. In that the precepts governing the evaluative process remain immanent to practices, we can also speak, with Alasdair MacIntyre, of standards of excellence, which give the measure of degree of success or failure for a given activity. These standards of excellence define the immanent goods of a practice so that the practice we call medical practice, for example, immediately characterizes a physician as a "good" doctor. So it is the task of moral philosophy to elaborate an explicit typology of the implicit values of these standards of excellence. This is what leads to a virtue ethics.

Here is not the place to outline such a typology of values, still less to hastily construct its ethics. I need only within the setting of this presentation to show the potential contribution of these processes of evaluation to the constitution of the person as a self. Thus I will say that it is in evaluating our actions that we contribute in a noteworthy way to the interpretation of ourselves in terms of ethics. As Charles Taylor emphasizes in his *Philosophical Papers*, human beings are self-interpreting animals. But this self-interpretation is neither simple nor direct. The enrichment of our concept of the self resulting from this indirect process of evaluation applied to action is considerable. The self, that is, the "who of action," does not consist solely in the self-designation of the agent as the possessor and author of his or her actions; it implies, moreover, self-interpretation, as a function of the success or failure, in terms of excellence, of what we are calling practices and life plans. Self-esteem is itself an evaluative process indirectly applied to ourselves as selves.

The second ethical component of moral imputation appeals to a consideration we have completely left out of our earlier analyses. I

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mean the *conflictual* structure of action as interaction. That all action is interaction could have been derived from our earlier analysis of action as a practice. But the important fact is not that action has a dialogical structure, but that a special asymmetry is tied to every transaction. The phenomenon that needs to be emphasized here is the fact that, in acting, someone exercises power over someone else. Hence interaction does not simply confront agents equally capable of initiatives, but agents and patients. It is this asymmetry in action as interaction that opens the way to the most important ethical considerations, [for] with power comes the possibility of violence. Not that power as such implies violence. I am saying only that the power exercised by someone over someone else constitutes the principal occasion for making use of the other as a tool. There is the beginning of violence, of murder, and of torture. My thesis, thus, is that it is violence and the process of victimization engendered by violence that invites us to add a deontological dimension to the teleological dimension of ethics. The latter opens the field for an ethics of virtues, the former for an ethics of obligation that I see summed up in the second formulation of the Kantian categorical imperative: “act always in such a manner that you treat the humanity of yourself and of the person of others not simply as a means but as an end in itself.” I insist on this point. It is not desire but violence that forces us to confer on morality the character of being an obligation, either in the negative form of prohibition: “you shall not kill,” or in the positive form of a commandment: “treat the patient of your action as an agent like yourself.” Once again, I confess that this is not the place for a complete justification of this concept of obligation. We shall have to leave it unanalyzed along with the complex relations between a teleological and a deontological foundation of morality. Still, it is up to us to disentangle and make explicit the new feature of the self – its ipseity – corresponding to the deontological stage of morality. If self-esteem constituted the subjective correlate of the ethical evaluation of actions, respect constitutes the subjective correlate of moral obligation. But, whereas self-esteem only implies me, me alone, respect immediately presents a dialogical structure, parallel to the conflictual structure of interaction. We must go so far as to say that when I esteem myself, I respect the other as another, as another person. It is the other in myself that I respect. Moral *conscience* is the witness to this internalization of alterity in self-respect. We must observe, however, that respect does not abolish self-esteem but includes it. This complex relation may give the key to a correct interpretation of the strange commandment to love my neighbor as myself. This commandment,
to me, implies that one interpret self-esteem and respect in terms of each other.

At the end of this rapid voyage, I would like to make two final comments. First, the successive steps of our inquiry ought to be taken not in a successive fashion but rather in a cumulative one. The ethical dimensions are grafted to the practical dimensions, in the same way that these are to the linguistic dimensions. We must be able to describe a person as a basic particular and the self as the subject of discourse designating him- or herself, if we are to be able to characterize actions as intentional events and agents as the owners and authors of their actions. And we have to understand what the power to act signifies if we want to apply a moral judgment of imputation to actions and hold a person responsible for him- or herself. This is the internal linkage of the system of presuppositions that, in my opinion, structure one of the possible philosophical discourses about human beings.

Second, it comes down to philosophy and not to science to elaborate this system of presuppositions, inasmuch as it concerns the conditions of possibility of every empirical science that studies human beings, not the facts that come from these sciences. Notions like a basic particular, self-reference, power to act, imputation, and responsibility can be taken to be transcendental conditions for what we call the human sciences. Philosophy, in this sense, is a long note placed at the bottom of the declaration that one can only pronounce in fear and trembling: “Here we are, we humans, we mortals!”
III

Hermeneutics of the Self
The complete meaning of my title will not appear until the end of my presentation. It has as its horizon the notion of ipseity or selfhood. My contribution stems from reflection on the twofold definition that Louis Dumont proposes for “individual” in the short lexicon he adds as an appendix to his *Essays on Individualism*. In the empirical sense of the term, he says, the individual designates an “indivisible sample of the human species, as encountered in all societies.” Therefore it is a universal idea applicable to every culture. In the moral sense, it designates “the independent, autonomous moral, and, thus essentially non social being, as encountered in our modern ideology of man and society.” This being the case, I asked myself whether and how it was possible to justify the gap between these two, apparently so distant, senses of the term “individual.” I thought one might account for this duality of meaning by reconstructing, degree by degree, the stages through which the concept passes from one pole to the other. In truth, the gap is, at first, greater than indicated by the definition I just cited. In this first sense, an individual

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1 This text was written for the conference “Sur l’individu” held at Royaumont on October 22–4, 1985, then published along with other papers from that conference in *Sur l’individu* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 54–72. – Editors’ note.
is an indivisible sample not only of the human species, but of every species, in the logical sense of this term. The course the concept takes therefore is from logic to ideology, across the stages where the individual progressively reveals him- or herself, if I may put it this way, as more and more human. This course is not historical — even if it is not wholly ahistorical — but systematic. I shall present here just the first segments, which will leave us about halfway along the entire itinerary that I envisage developing further elsewhere. But Emmanuel Levinas’s contribution has already filled in the missing part of my development.5

Let me immediately indicate how I shall proceed. I shall consider three stages of the problem, connected by two transitions. The first stage is properly speaking epistemological and has to do with the problem of some individual in relation to the species in the logical sense of the term. Here I shall speak of individualization, along the line worked out by the French epistemologists Jean-Claude Paris and Gilles Gaston Granger. The first transition will occur with the taking up of the same problem by pragmatics, but in such a way that interlocution, taken into account for the first time, distinguishes the human individual from an individual in general, thanks to an “I say that,” “I affirm that,” in other words, on the basis of propositional prefixes containing the word “I.” The second step will consist in extracting, so to speak, this “I” from “I say that,” in order to reach the saying I. I shall place this moment under the heading not of individualization in the epistemological sense of the term but of identification. How does someone identify him- or herself in saying I? The second transition will consist in a brief inquiry devoted to a theme I have dealt with elsewhere, that of a narrative identity. The narrative operation will lead from pragmatics, which does not take into account time or those transformations that take time, to the problematic that will be the object of my third stage, namely, the ethical implications of acts of discourse. I shall then give a prominent place to one of the more remarkable of these acts of discourse, the promise, whose function is to make me commit myself. A responsible subject will then posit itself, in the sense of being a subject of imputation. It is at this stage that we shall have truly to deal with an ipse, a self.

5Emmanuel Levinas was one of the participants in the colloquium for which this text was written, although his own text was not included in the publication of its proceedings. — Editors’ note.
I will not conceal the presuppositions of this analysis. First of all, it gives primacy to language, and more precisely to certain universals linked to the functioning of language. In doing this, I do not think I am opposing an anthropological approach to the problem. On the contrary, when Louis Dumont introduces notions like “individualism” or “holism,” in order to apply them to different cultures, he proposes for his analysis the validity of some universal terms. We can therefore attempt to find a humus, if I can put it this way, for these universals. I thought it would be in the dimension of language that we could find them. In the first place, the individual is spoken of, then a speaker says that, finally, a responsible subject speaks for him- or herself. Second presupposition: at each of the stages that we are going to consider – individualization, identification, imputation – a noteworthy correlation unfolds and becomes more precise, namely, the correlation between self and others. There is, to be sure, an “other” already at the beginning, but it is only along the course of our development that this “other” becomes another “person,” in that the individual becomes an ipse.

Individualization

I begin therefore with the first, properly epistemological stage, which I shall deal with as briefly as possible, in that it is evidently in the second and third stages that the problems that interest us here are met head on. This first stage consists in discerning the procedures by which we individualize something in general, taken as one indivisible sample of a species. The choice of this starting point is not innocent, in that starting from language, as I am doing, avoids falling into the pitfalls of a substance ontology. One could, of course, start, in Aristotelian fashion, from the question: what is this (tote ti)? One might then be tempted to answer: an entity (in Greek: ousia). It is in order to avoid or, at least, to put off the moment of having to confront the problem of substance and substantialism that I have privileged the question of knowing how language designates the individual. The second presupposition is that the individual can be spoken about and continues to be spoken of. We are not condemned to the alternative: either the conceptual or the ineffable – what I would call, broadly speaking, the Bergsonian alternative. Language, as we shall see, includes arrangements that allow us effectively to designate an individual. Final presupposition, which I share with Pariente’s Le Langage et l’Individuel: to speak of individualization is not so much to seek the status of the last term of the process as to know what is
the ultimate discernible, indicated through the process and no
degrees. Indeed, in every natural language, specification—that is, finally, classification—stops somewhere. But it stops more or less high or low depending on the domains denominated. For example, in one language, one will have a word to say “running gazelle,” and another to say, “grazing gazelle,” etc. Other languages will stop elsewhere. The result is that the process of individualization is grafted to that of classification at different levels of specification, which is what individualization amounts to.

What resources does language have for proceeding to this designation of an individual when the specification stops? How does language continue on beyond such classification? Logicians have identified three operators of individualization, which belong, moreover, to three different procedures. We have, first of all, definite descriptions, that is, expressions like “the inventor of printing,” “the first man to walk on the moon,” in short, “the such and such.” Next we have proper names: Socrates, Paris, the moon. Finally are those expressions that one calls more precisely indexicals: the personal pronouns, demonstratives, adverbs of time and space, of manner, the verbal tenses. Let me emphasize: at this stage of our investigation, the human individual is not privileged in any way. In individualizing, the designated individual is something whatsoever. And, if our examples do privilege a human individual (the first man to . . ., Socrates, I, you, etc.), this is because we are individuals of this particular type, those, specifically, who individualize things. But this reflexive function will not appear before the pragmatic stage of our investigation. In the stage we are currently considering, language is taken in terms of its referential function, that is, its designating of something. (I note in passing that in analytic philosophy this problem has to do with semantics, which, unlike the semantics of French semioticians, is immediately designative; it connects sense and reference, to use the Fregean distinction; the sense is a sense in terms of the reference, which is why the chosen examples are preferentially examples of real designation, where the name is taken as a label for the thing; in short, designations always refer.) Moreover, in logical semantics, one places reflexivity in parentheses, owing to the paradoxes introduced by including the positing of a speaking subject in the meaning of statements. One tries, in other words, to deal with statements apart from their being spoken or their speaker.

A word now about each of these three procedures. Definite descriptions consist in the constituting of a class containing a single individual, through the intersection of particular logical classes. For instance, in the expression "the first man to have walked on the moon," one takes the class of human beings and combines it with the class of those who can walk and with that of everything that has to do with the moon. This intersection determines an individual and just one individual. What is remarkable is that the other is already implied in a certain sense. The first man to walk on the moon is one man to the exclusion of every other one. Generalizing: the individual implies a minimal alterity, through exclusion of all the others. I shall say nothing here about the discussions raised by this notion of a definite description. They have to do with the fact that such descriptions still have some relation to classification. (We spoke a moment ago of a class with a single individual member.) But, even if this is so, it remains true that the end of this procedure is not to classify but to designate, in that no information is provided thereby. For example, in the example cited earlier, the description of the inventor of printing has yet to be given. If one makes use of a process of description, it is in order to point something out. We can even speak of ostensive designation, but as in continuity with description through classification.

As for proper names, we have to understand here logical proper names, which can designate, as I said, the Seine, the moon, and, of course, human beings. Their indispensable function in language is to designate, in a permanent way, the same thing, unlike the indexicals, whose designative value, we shall see, shifts. The proper name allows assigning a fixed designation to the same thing in its multiple occurrences, in space and time. Its logical function is relatively simple: it consists in establishing a one-to-one relation between a phonetic sequence and a singularity in our field of experiences with multiple occurrences. There is, to be sure, nothing in common between the eight letters of the name "Socrates" and Socrates. But, precisely, the proper of the proper name — if I may so phrase it! — is not to institute some kind of homology. Its function is just that of designation, namely, to singularize one and just one individual to the exception of all others. The task remains to us, after having learned the individual's name, of informing ourselves and others of its properties, its characteristics. If Peter Strawson were here, he would explain to us how this process agrees with his analysis of the logical proposition. This, in effect, according to him, has two functions: to identify what one is talking about and to characterize it using predicates. The proper name is connected to the first function, identification. Further
or subsequent information attaches to the second function, characterization; but the two operations are correlated in the proposition.

The third class, the indexicals, is the one that most interests us here. It contains, as I said earlier, the personal pronouns (I, you, etc.), the deictics, that is, signs meant to show or point to, which include the demonstratives (this, that); and adverbs of place (here, there, over there), of time (now, yesterday, tomorrow), and of manner (thus, differently). Unlike proper names, indexicals have an intermittent function; furthermore, they designate different things in each case. This is anything near to the speaker, as we shall see better in a moment with pragmatics; now is the moment when one is speaking, etc. What is important here is that no privilege attaches to I or you. The indexicals can appear in any order. Russell, for example, in one period, undertook to construct the complete series starting from this. If one follows this line, one ends up saying that a statement is a this and I designates the bearer of this utterance, that now designates the moment of this utterance. But the same Russell, at another time, constructed the whole series of indexicals starting with I, in order to deal with what he called egocentric particulars. Pariente, on the other hand, holds that the base point is finally the this as a singular occurrence in language.

Even though, at this first stage of our analysis, the human individual is not distinguished from individuals in general, it has been useful to consider that language has resources beyond stopping at classification and conceptualization. Language disposes of specific procedures of designation, distinct from predication, for intending a single individual, to the exclusion of all others. A second comment at this stage, these procedures offer no noteworthy unity beyond their common intending, their designation of singularities. There is nothing in common to the functioning of the proper name, definite descriptions, and indexicals. What the personal pronouns – I, you – add is not yet marked, as will be the case in situations of interlocution.

First Transition: Through Pragmatics

The I and you come to the fore with the pragmatics of language. I hold in reserve the question of he and she, owing to the disagreement I have with Benveniste on this point, which I shall speak of later. One talks of pragmatics – the word has nothing to do with pragmatism – in terms of the framework of the distinction received from
Charles W. Morris between syntax, semantics (which we have seen is taken in its referential sense), and pragmatics. This latter takes up the conditions of interlocution, at least insofar as they are constructed using language. This does not entail — let me add parenthetically — that language is some kind of prison house. It consists of those arrangements at our disposition for free or constrained uses. In this regard, language is more comparable to playing a musical instrument where it depends on each person to play his or her own tune — and to do so well!

Let us consider how, from the crowd of individuals, pragmatics extracts the speaking individual. The first thing to note is that the speaker figures immediately in a situation of interlocution: to speak is to address oneself to... The speaker right away has an interlocutor, sometimes called an allocutor. We are going to rediscover here, although in a different combination, some of the instruments we have already considered — namely, definite descriptions, proper names, and indexicals — but grouped differently, in virtue precisely of the primacy of the speaking subject and his or her allocutor, the one spoken to. Let us set aside, for reasons of time, the definite descriptions and, to a certain point, the proper names. (It is a point debated among theorists whether proper names still belong to semantics or already to pragmatics; I shall say in a moment why, in my opinion, they have to be placed on the side of pragmatics.) What remains are the indexicals. With pragmatics, a new constellation appears, where the indexicals get dissociated from the group of the other operators of individualization to enter a new category, one brought to light by Austin, namely, that of speech acts (also called illocutory acts or illocutions). Their analysis is the heir of the earlier theory of performatives, that is, of expressions that are not limited just to saying that something is, but that do something in saying what they say: when I promise, solely by virtue of saying I promise, I effectively commit myself to do something. As we have already seen, the promise has an implication that surpasses the theory of speech acts and sets us on the way to ethics. The theory of illocutory acts is born from extending a reflection on performatives as opposed


to constatives. In a way, in a more dissimulated fashion, they are speech acts with an illocutionary force. For instance, when I say, using the well-known example in English — that “the cat is on the mat but I do not believe it,” an absurdity occurs, which has to do not with the content of the judgment but with the contradiction between an explicit declaration — “I do not believe it” — and the implicit belief in the bare assertion, whose illocutionary force resides in the non-explicit prefix “I declare that (the cat is on the mat).” This applies to all the implicit prefixes corresponding to different illocutionary acts: I declare that, I swear that, I warn you that, etc., where the I figures for the first time but as so to speak encased in a most often unspoken prefix. Made explicit, these prefixes are variants of the expression mentioned in my introduction: I say that. The I is implied twice over: first because the I say that remains most often implicit, but also because the I rests in a way captive of the complete prefix, without its reflexivity, however virtual, being put to use. Thus, I remains implied, in the suggested sense, rather than posited and affirmed. This is why it will be necessary to take a further step in order to pass from I say that to I say that (to myself).

What problems does pragmatics leave unresolved? Some well-known paradoxes having to do with the reflexivity of language will make them apparent.

First paradox: the I — we are going to see that saying “the” I makes a difference — has the odd property of sometimes designating just whoever is speaking and who in speaking designates him- or herself, but sometimes just the single I, the one who I myself am, Paul Ricoeur. In this first usage, the I is a shifter, as one says in English, that is, a mobile term, which changes attributes each time someone makes use of it and applies it to him- or herself. To this substitutability is opposed the indelible character of the anchorage of the I in use, riveted to a unique perspective on the world. (I borrow this term “anchorage” from Granger.)9 As regards the first sense, the I, as Benveniste emphasizes, remains empty, unlike general terms, until someone makes use of it, makes use of it by making use of the whole of language as his or her own. Then, the shifter stops being a mobile term and expresses an insurmountable anchorage. Such is the amphibology of the I, which sometimes designates who is speaking and who in speaking designates him- or herself, but sometimes just me, Paul Ricoeur.

Second paradox: in the dialogical situation of interlocution, the I and the you, although both themselves anchored, exercise reversible roles. This second paradox differs from the first one, which opposes the substitutable to the nonsubstitutable. This one opposes anchorage to reversibility. When I address you, you understand I. And when you speak to me and say you to me, I understand I. Beyond the substitutability of some I, there is a reversibility of I and you, both of them anchored down.

One may, it is true, make use of the distinction introduced by Peirce between type and token – type and sample, if one wants: there is an I-type and an I-sample, where the I-sample is truly anchored, whereas the I-type is vacant. We need to add, moreover, that writing and I know that some here are quite concerned about problems that come with writing – further complicates things. When I read a text that contains the term I, I find it already dissociated from its writer, even though this writer, as a speaker, was an anchored I. But the I finds itself unanchored by the fact of having been written down and no longer spoken, so that it can again become a shifter, we may say, but in another way, namely, that it becomes once again vacant. In return, reading, as symmetrical to writing, establishes a kind of re-anchoring, in that the one who reads the work, in reading I, becomes, in Proust's words, the reader of him- or herself.

But these paradoxes are less intractable than the real aporia brought out by Wittgenstein, namely, that the privileged point of perspective on the world that each speaking subject constitutes is, in a certain way, a "limit of the world," and not one of its contents. In truth, the subject is atopus, with no assigned place in the world about which he or she speaks. Granger cites in this regard an extraordinary text from the Blue Book: "by 'I' [in I see] I didn’t really mean L. W., although for the benefit of my fellow men, I might say: 'it's now L. W. who really sees,' even though that is not what I really mean." And a bit further on: the word I "does not mean the same expression 'the person now speaking.' But that doesn’t mean that 'L. W.' and 'I' mean different things. All this means is that these words are different instruments in our language." We recognize the habitual Wittgensteinian pirouette, which leaves the reader hanging! For my

part, I find this paradox extraordinarily interesting. We cannot get out of it except by admitting a certain correlation between this I who, in a certain way, does not belong to the world about which he or she is speaking and a certain event in the world that is spoken of. It must be so since, as Recanati puts it so well in *La Transparence et l'Énonciation*, when I speak, I do something, just like when I break my leg.\(^{12}\) Saying something is in this sense an event that occurs. In this saying both statuses of the I participate, as situated in some way outside the world, and as consisting as one of the ostensively designatable singularities within this world. Upon reflection, this correlation turns up for all the indexicals. I showed this in volume three of *Time and Narrative* when I dealt with "now." *Now* expresses the correlation between the lived time of the I, with its lived present, and the cosmological time in which events unfold, with its specific moments.\(^{13}\) I showed that the invention of the calendar and of calendrical time is the instrument for this correlation. The phenomenon of *dating* is what results. This correlation between the lived present and some particular moment of universal time has its parallel in the space between the *here* determined by my body and a particular point among all the points of space determined by geography. When, in riding in a car, I say, "here is where the department of Haute-Saône ends," *here* designates in an auto-designative way the place where I am. But that this place is Haute-Saône depends on what a map says. Therefore it is necessary to place in correlation my *here* and an objectively specifiable place. Thus this mixed procedure of *localization* corresponds point by point to that of dating. And does not the same thing apply for the I? Must we not put in correlation the lived, anchored I and a slice of the world's history? Here is where, it seems to me, the proper name assumes its function — beyond that described earlier — of fixing the identity of an individual across multiple occurrences. The proper name, moreover, serves to anchor the subject in the world, inasmuch as it indicates the inscription of my name on the list of births (and deaths) maintained by the state. This notion of *inscription* (here, as a civil state) is of the greatest importance, for it extends beyond the social phenomenon of public registers. It overlaps every use of the indexicals — in particular, the two phenomena we have mentioned before coming back to proper names, I mean dating and localization. Dating, the connection between the lived


now and some moment, is a fact of inscription, that of the inscription of lived time on world time. Similarly, the connection between here and some place in the world, localization, is also a fact of inscription. In this latter case, we see better that the correlation is assured by the lived body, the organ that anchors an I, which, from being a vacant I (a shifter), becomes me, someone. When I say, “me, Paul Ricoeur, born in . . . on . . . ,” I at the same time designates my unsubstitutable existence and my civil status. This double designation constitutes what I have called anchoring.

Identification

With these remarks, we pass to the problem of identification and, beyond it, to the problem of ipseity. Until now, we have so to speak only marked a point for the individual thanks to referring to the saying and the said and to the saying of the sayer. What we need to do now, if I may put it this way, is to leave behind the I as a prefix of I say that in order to turn to the saying of “saying I.”

How shall we enter this new problematic? I propose starting from one of Heidegger’s analyses in Sein und Zeit introduced by the question “who is Dasein?” This is a question taken up in a different way by Hannah Arendt, who speaks of the “who of action.” The question who? brings us for the first time into our new problematic. As distinct from the question what? (the medieval question of quiddity), [it] makes us move well beyond pragmatics.

The advantage of this starting with the question who? is that it opens the full range of personal pronouns, which the relation of interlocution reduces to I and you. We recall in this regard that Benveniste identified the third person with the non-person. Here, I have to say that I resist, in that a great part of narrative literature, including the novel, is a literature written in terms of he and she. I do not see why the he and she would not be a person. Evidence for this is the artifice of quotation, the use of quotation marks, by which it is always possible to attribute to a character in the third person thoughts in the first person or thoughts and words addressed to the second person. By suppressing the quotation marks, one can easily write (and understand): he/she thought that . . . Through the artifice of quotation, the I can figure in descriptive phrases in the third

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person. In the end, there is nothing extraordinary about this procedure. For example, its frequency has been noted in the art of biblical narrative: "God says in his heart: I shall destroy the cities of Baal." God is spoken of in the third person, to whom are attributed words, that is, thoughts in the first person. In contemporary literature, the quotation marks fall away and we obtain, as with Joyce, what is called free indirect discourse (the equivalent of the German *erlebte Rede*). These more and more refined procedures in contemporary literature attest at least that the third person is a person.

If the question *who?* has this virtue of underscoring the preponderant role of the third person, in particular in artistic narrative, it is because this question allows an answer using any one of the grammatical persons: "*who* did this? Me, you, he, she!" In this way, the question *who?* receives the response *me* in confession, the response *you* in accusation, the response *he/she* in narrative description. By this bias, we accede explicitly for the first time to the problematic of the *self* (*ipse* in Latin, *Selbst* in German, *soi* in French). If, indeed, all of the personal pronouns respond to the question *who?*, the reflexive version of all these pronoun-responses is the *self*. For instance, Michel Foucault deliberately chose to title one of his last books *The Care of the Self*.15 It is true that in French the word *soi* seems just to be the third person! But, in my opinion, it is the indicator of an answer to the question *who?* when reflected upon. French partly corrects this unnecessary reduction through the aid of the determinative *même*, which can be added to all three persons: *moi-même, toi-même, lui-même/elle-même*. Unfortunately, the adjective *même* introduces in turn a new equivocation which may be interesting for the coming discussion with Emmanuel Levinas: namely, the fact that the word *même* translates both the Latin words *idem* and *ipse*. *Idem*, that is, the identical in the sense of extremely similar; *ipse*, that is self-identical, in the sense of not being someone or something else. One partially avoids the double equivocation of the same and the identical by putting together *soi* and *même* as a single term: *soi-même*. A similar expression is found in one lovely text from Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, a text, by the way, cited by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*:16 “But what could be nearer to me than myself [*meipso mihi*]? . . . For at least, I struggle over it and over myself

16Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 9, p. 69.
As the Latin term suggests, it is necessary to subtract the problematic of the reflexivity of the same (ipse) from that of the identity of the same (idem). This reflexivity of ipseity is partially masked in French, at least by the function of simple insistence of the même in the expressions moi-même, toi-même, lui-même/elle-même. In reality, this function of insistence proceeds from the reflexive function, not in the sense encountered earlier, whereby the said reflects the saying, but in the sense that the saying reflects the sayer. So we are confronted with a strong form of reflexivity, which is no longer simply pragmatic reflexivity. To this reflexive function is joined the function of distinguishing the self, which is expressed by its grammatical form as being a complement: care of the self. It is in this sense that we have been able to speak from the start about a subject who designates him- or herself [qui se désigne lui-même]. Finally, a fourth feature: to these functions of reinforcement, reflexivity, and distanciation is grafted the distributive function, which allows us to resolve the earlier paradox, that of type and token; I mean the fact that the term I is both a vacant term capable of designating anyone who designates him- or herself in saying I and the expression of an anchoring, a single time, of the one who says what is said. What links this shifting character of the “shifter” to this anchorage of the I each time it is used is the distributive function expressed in German by the je in jedesmal, which is translated into French as à chaque fois [and in English as each time]. The function of this each time is to distribute the self among every instance of the personal pronoun. I want to cite in this regard a very interesting text of Heidegger’s, from the beginning of his analysis of Dasein: “We ourselves are the entities to be analyzed. The Being of any such entity is in each case mine.”

Thus there is a “mineness” which is not necessarily a “sameness” in the sense of idem, which allows distributing the self among all the persons through the intermediary of “each time.” In my opinion here is where the possibility resides of saying “the” I, das Ich, “the” cogito, das Ich Denke: that is, of putting a definite article before the first person, where the definite article indicates the distributive function of the self.

18 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 9, p. 67.
Second Transition: Narrativity

I have to move more quickly now. I would like to say simply why and how I move through a transition to narrative in the direction of the ethical determination of the self. As soon as I say I, up to here taken as the prefix in I say that, this prefix steps out like the big bad wolf, that is, as soon as one passes from the I say that to the I, this I gets placed in a story. And everyone has, distributively, in each case, his or her story. But what is it to have a story? Using the vocabulary of Greimas's semiotics, it is being able to pass through a series of actantial transformations. In this role, the I is treated as an agent, or better an actant. He or she is what he or she does. We have already anticipated this subject of doing something without emphasizing it. If, in fact, saying is doing, the one who speaks is a doer of discourse; as a doer of discourse, he or she is an actant. At this level is posed, in the strongest sense, the problem of identification. The actant identifies him- or herself by what he or she does. In this regard, all the modelings of doing, registered by narrative semiotics, are important for this process of identification: what I can do, what I want to do, what I know how to do, what I must do – everything expressed by these different model expressions indirectly designates the actant’s doing something, precisely by these modelings. In the end, it is along the course of an able to do, knowing how to do, wanting to do, having to do, that a story unfolds. As we see, the narrative semiotics referred to here still allows our analysis to remain on the plane of language’s universals. Certainly, everyone has a different story and can tell that story using innumerable different plots. So the notion of the individual can clothe itself in the ideological signification I mentioned at the beginning referring to Louis Dumont. But to the idea of a possible course of an able to do, knowing how to do, wanting to do, having to do, is attached a universal presupposition, thanks to which we can say that someone identifies him- or herself. Not, again, in the sense of an idem, that is, something that never changes, but precisely in the sense of an ipse, susceptible of unfolding a narrative course. Such an ipse can “repeat,” in becoming aware of

itself, what happens to a character in the narrative, that is, he or she can enter into the concordant discordant relation characteristic of every dramatic structure. In this course of some narrative, the identity of the *ipse* does not reduce to the substantial identity of an *idem*, in the sense of something unchanging, but combines a basic mutability. It is the mediating function of the narrative to hold together the anecdotal mutability of a life and the configuration of a story.

The configuring act of narrative thus offers the process of identification the decisive mediation of the narrative structure. In this regard, in her *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt offers an addition of great importance to this analysis. She divides what we ordinarily call action into three degrees: at the lowest degree, she places “labor,” whose role is to transform things and to dominate nature; at the second degree, “work,” which leaves behind cultural monuments; finally comes action properly speaking, which grounds itself and whose trace is preserved only through the narrative made of it. What is thereby preserved is what Hellenists and Latinists know under the name “glory,” “renown.” Today we would say the memorable character of a life. Articulated in a narrative, the *memorable* is uprooted as far as possible from inexorable forgetting. It thus is up to a narrative to tell the “identity of the who.” Here is the narrative solution to the problem of identification.

At this stage of our meditation I would like to place a lovely text from Proust, borrowed from the closing pages of *Time Regained*. Evoking his future readers, Proust writes:

> For it seemed to me that they would not be “my” readers but the readers of their own selves, my book being merely a sort of magnifying glass like those which the optician in Combray used to offer his customers – it would be my book, but with its help I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves.20

To read oneself, that is what I will call the refiguration, not only of time, not only of action, but of the agent him- or herself through narrative.

Well, it is at the end of this second transition, guided by the question of identification, and no longer that of individualization, that we truly reach the threshold of ipseity.

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Imputation

I want to point out, in the few minutes that remain to me, the ethical aspects of the self. I will be brief, in that my analysis leads to the threshold of the work of Emmanuel Levinas. I will limit myself to discerning the imprint of language on the care of the self. (Let me one last time express my admiration for language! Who was it who said there is no miracle in language, language itself is a miracle? Yes, language gives me the instruments for all those ideological operations that oppose us to one another, but, prior to that, they find a humus of, if you prefer, a ground already established in language.)

Here is how, while resting at the level of the universals of language, we reach the threshold of ethics. It is remarkable that, if every actant relates to objects as “value-objects” — to stay with Greimas’s vocabulary — in short, if it is in terms of evaluation that I relate to the world, it cannot be that I do not evaluate myself as soon as I value anything, that is, as soon as I prefer one thing to another. I refer here to Aristotle’s analysis of preference in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. To prefer something is to place it above something. In this sense, every preference implies a hierarchizing function. Here we see a fundamental structure by which a historical community’s own meanings take on an ideological function. I see this hierarchizing function to be based in language; once to prefer is to say: this is better than that. The self-evaluation that accompanies every evaluation rests on a fundamental feeling, self-esteem, which makes me say, in spite of everything, it is better that I am rather than not being. Here, more than ever, the relation to the other is originarily correlative with the relation to oneself. The esteem of other people and the exchange of esteem through alterity are thus operations originarily conjoint with self-esteem. That self-esteem and esteem for others are constructed in language, before any ideological usage, is attested to by a specific illocutionary act, one we have already encountered, namely, that of the promise. What a promise does is to construct, in its being said, the making of a promise. To promise is to place oneself under the obligation to do what today one says one will do tomorrow. The relation to other people is evident here, in that it is always to others that I promise. And it is other people who can require me to keep my promise. More fundamentally, it is another person who counts on me and expects that I will be faithful to my promise.
In this sense, the promise testifies to what I shall call a strong ipseity, constituted through self-constancy in spite of changes of heart and even changes of intention. Whatever it may cost me, I will do it! But this strong ipseity, again, only occurs with an allocutionary counterpart, in that the commitment of a self to itself has others not just as witnesses but also its audience. Here we have the for others of strong ipseity.

In concluding, I would like to say very schematically how I envisage the passage to the ideological field of individualism, in short, how, from the ethical aspect of ipseity, one can pass to the problem of the ideologization of the individual. We must, I believe, introduce an intermediary link in the chain, namely, a consideration that we might call the cosmopolitics of individualization. It is always in a social setting that there are obligations. By this, I mean simply to underscore one aspect of John Rawls’ theory in his Theory of Justice, which was not mentioned yesterday, namely, the fact that there is no mutual obligation among individuals except against the background of obligation that is a quasi-contract and that relates to what Rawls, at the start of his book, calls the “cooperative scheme” of a given society. The complete problem of the promise, in other words, is not just that in saying “I promise,” I do promise, but that I must keep my promise. The obligation to keep a promise is in a way the promise of promising. But where does this promise of promises comes from? It presupposes that I am already in a society setting to which I consent to bring a fair contribution – a fair share – to the functioning of its institutions. There is here a very strong response to the paradox of promises, namely, that the principle of fidelity, in virtue of which one ought to keep one’s promises, does not derive from the promise itself. It is necessary to take into account the public dimension of any promise, which presupposes in turn a public space (a public space of appearance, Hannah Arendt would say). What makes a promise a promise is a reality that is not just dual but even triangular – namely, “I must keep my promise”; “You can require me to do so”; “one must keep one’s promises in order to augment everyone’s confidence in the cooperative scheme of their community.” In this triangle, ipseity finds itself assured through its relation not only to the allocutory pole of the you but also to the pole of fairness, which

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indicates the place of the third person. This third person is perhaps the third person par excellence, the true he or she.

The actors in the drama of individualism are now in place. Individualism as an ideology is born from the claim to engender the cosmopolitan dimension and public space itself starting from ethical ipseity, along with the agreement of its aspect of mutuality, but without the originary societal dimension. What we are to make of this is a job for an anthropology and a sociology of ideologies.
Narrative Identity

This paper takes up the question of narrative identity, that is, of the kind of identity the human subject attains through the mediation of the narrative function, where I left it in the closing pages of the third volume of *Time and Narrative*. In this earlier work I came to this notion at the end of a long journey, where the fate of the notion of *time* was principally what was at stake. I showed that human time is constituted at the crossroad of historical time, submitted to the constraint of cosmology through the calendar, and the time of fiction (the epic, drama, the novel, etc.), open to unlimited imaginative variations. At the end of this itinerary, I suggested that self-understanding was mediated by the *conjoint reception* – particularly through reading – of historical and fictional narratives. Knowing oneself, I suggested there, is interpreting oneself under the double guidance of historical and fictional narrative. But I did not go beyond this and left indeterminate what I mean by the term “identity.”

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It is this problematic of identity that I start from in this new investigation, which I am placing under the heading of the self or selfhood (French soi-même, German Selb, Selbstheit). There is a problem in the sense that “identical” has two senses, corresponding respectively to the Latin idem and ipse. According to the first sense (idem), identical means exactly the same (French extrêmement semblable, German Gleich, Gleichheit), and consequently immutable, unchanging over time. According to the second sense (ipse), identical means own (French proper, German eigen) and is opposed not to different but to other, foreign. This second concept of identity has a relation with permanence in time that remains problematic. My subject is self-identity in the sense of ipseity, without prejudging the immutable or changing character of the self. What I propose today was preceded by an exploration of reflexivity in three domains that are the object of much contemporary research: action theory, where the self designates itself as an agent, that is, the author of action that it takes to be dependent on itself; speech act, where the self designates itself as speaker, that is, someone who says something; and moral imputation, where the self designates itself as responsible.

With the narrative dimension appear aspects of the self that were not brought to light by the preceding inquiries. First among these comes the temporal dimension of human experience. If it is true that the agent, the speaker, and the subject of imputation designate themselves in the action, in saying what is said, in taking responsibility, this reflexivity, without being atemporal, does not take time into account.

The Connection of a Life and Narrative Mediation

I will introduce this narrative dimension from the angle of the concept of a life story. What is the self in which is reflected in a life story? At first sight, this concept makes us leave behind the plane of language upon which the earlier determinations of the self were unfolded. It may seem that we are handed over to intuition, to the immediacy of feelings, toward which “philosophies of life” point. In fact, this is not so. In order to give meaning to concept of a life story, our analysis is not devoid of every linguistic instrument. The linguistic dimension proportionate to the temporal dimension of life is narrative. If it is difficult to speak directly of a life’s story; it is possible to do so indirectly with the help of a poetics of narrative. The story of a life then becomes a told story.
This kind of detour through narrative mediation will appear to be not only useful but necessary if we pause for a moment over the difficulties, even the aporias, attached to a reflection that does not refer to time about what we have called a life story. The stumbling block has to do with its mode of enchainment, what Dilthey called the *Zusammenhang des Lebens*: the enchainment (or interconnectedness) of a life. The aporia consists in the fact that reflection is seeking a notion of identity that combines the two senses of this word: the identity of what is the same and the identity of what is similar. How can a human being remain mostly the same, unless in him or her over time some immutable core escapes change? Yet everything in human experience contradicts this immutability of a personal core. There is nothing in our inner experience that cannot not change. The antinomy seems both inevitable and unsolvable. Inevitable in that the designation of a person by the same name, from birth to death, seems to imply the existence of such an immutable core. Indeed, a proper name applies to the same thing in its diverse occurrences, unlike the demonstrative, which in each case designates a different thing situated in the neighborhood of the speaker. But the experience of corporeal and mental change contradicts such sameness. As inevitable, the antinomy seems furthermore to be insolvable in the terms it is posed in, namely, inappropriate categories for the enchainment of a life. These categories are the ones Kant laid out under the heading of relation, at the head of which comes the category of substance, which schematizes “real permanence in time,” defined as “the real in the appearance, which as the substratum of all change always remains the same.”³ To this category and this schema correspond, on the level of judgment, under the heading Analogies of Experience, the principle (*Grundsatz*) of permanence stated as follows: “in all appearances that which persists is the object itself, i.e., the substance (*phaenomenon*), but everything that changes or that can change belongs only to the way in which this substance or substances exists, thus to their determinations.”⁴ If so, the notion of the interconnectedness of a life undercuts this categorization, which is valid only for the axioms applicable to physical nature. For we do not see under what rule the mixture of permanence and non-permanence apparently implied by the interconnectedness of a life can be thought.

And yet we do have a certain preunderstanding of this rule, much as the notion of an interconnectedness of a life orients thinking toward a certain mixture of permanent and changing features. It is precisely at this point that narrative offers its mediation. This is what we are now going to try to show. We will proceed in the following manner: Starting from the identity that the plot confers on the narrative, we shall pass to the identity of the character in a narrative, in order to reach in the end the identity of the self as it is principally refigured in the act of reading.

Narrative Configuration and the Identity of a Character

Our guideline is that the narrative constructs the enduring character of a character, what we can call this character’s narrative identity, by constructing the kind of dynamic identity of a well-told story. It is the identity of the story that makes for the identity of the character.

This coordination between told story and character was first affirmed by Aristotle in his Poetics. It even appears so close that it takes the form of a subordination. It is in the told story, with its unity and completeness conferred upon it by the operation of emplotment, that the character conserves over the course of the story the identity correlative to that of the story itself. This correlation is not refuted by the modern novel, which confirms Frank Kermode’s axiom that in order to develop a character, one has to narrate more.

Therefore it is in the plot that we have to seek the mediation between permanence and change, before attaching it to the characters.

I will recall the basic lines of the theory of narrative I proposed in Time and Narrative. Next I shall extend them to a theory of the

5 In the first volume of Time and Narrative I discussed this primacy of emplotment (muthos) over character (1: 36). In the sequence of the six parts of tragedy, plot comes first, before its characters and “thought” (dianoia), which, along with the plot, make up the “what” of the imitation of an action. Aristotle pushes the subordination to the point of saying: “tragedy is essentially an imitation, not of persons but of action and life” (Aristotle, Poetics, 1450a16–25). This latter hypothesis will draw our attention below, when we refer to the disappearance of the character in some contemporary novels.
character that until now I have only sketched. Taking as my guide the tragic model set out by Aristotle, I characterized the type of dynamic identity that the *Poetics* assigns to the *muthos* of tragedy through the competition between a demand for concordance and the recognition of discordances that, up to the end of the narrative, threaten its identity. By concordance, I understand the principle of order that presides over what Aristotle calls the “arrangement of the incidents.” It is characterized by three traits: completeness, totality, appropriate length. By completeness, we have to understand the unity of composition that requires that the interpretation of a part should be subordinated to that of the whole. As for the whole, it is what, as Aristotle says, “has a beginning, a middle, and an ending.”

Of course, it is thanks to the poetic composition alone that some event counts as a beginning, a middle, or an ending. In this regard, the ending of a narrative, which poses so many problems for the modern novel, is the touchstone of the art of composition. The same thing applies to length. It is only in the plot that the action has a contour, a limit, and, as a result, an extent: “length which allows the hero to pass through a series of probable or necessary stages from bad fortune to good, or from good to bad, may suffice as a limit [haros] for the magnitude of the story.” And this length must be temporal: reversals take time. But this is the time of the work, not that of events in the world. We do not ask what the hero was doing between two appearances that, in life, would be separated but which the story makes contiguous. All that is required is the necessity or resemblance governing the scope of the development, which is abridged in tragedy, longer in epic, and eminently variable in the modern novel.

It is the contrast to this requirement for concordance that defines, at least in the model of tragedy, the major discordance that, in the just cited passage, bears the name “reversal” or change of fortune. The peripeteia, with its double character of contingency and surprise, is the characteristic form of reversal in complex tragedy. Contingency, that is, the property of an event as having been able to be something else, even of having not occurred at all, is thus harmonized with the necessity or probability that characterizes the overall form of the narrative. What, in life, might be a mere occurrence apparently not coordinatable with any necessity, or even any probability, in the narrative converges on the unfolding of the plot.

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contingency is in a certain fashion incorporated into the necessity or probability of the narrative. As for the surprise effect, which produces astonishment in the spectator, it too is incorporated into the understanding of the whole told story, to the point where this produces in the spectator the famous purging of emotions aroused by the spectacle that Aristotle calls *catharsis* - in tragedy, the *catharsis* of the emotions of fear and pity. I reserved the term “configuration” for this art of composition that mediates concordance and discordance, and governs the form of movement Aristotle calls *muthon*, which we translate as “emplotment.” I prefer to speak of configuration rather than of structure, to emphasize the dynamic character of this operation of emplotment. At the same time, the kinship between the terms “configuration” and “figure” opens the way for an analysis of the character as a *figure of the self*.

But one more word about the discordant concordance characteristic of the narrative configuration. In the preceding analysis, we essentially based ourselves on the tragic model elaborated by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. In volume 2 of *Time and Narrative*, I sought to generalize this model in a way that would allow applying it to modern forms of the art of composition, in the domain of the novel as well as that of stage drama. To that end, I proposed defining the discordant concordance characteristic of every narrative composition by the notion of a synthesis of the heterogeneous. By this, I meant to take into account the diverse mediations that the plot can carry out: between the different events and the temporal unity of the told story, between the disparate components of the action - intentions, causes, chance - and the enchainment of the story, and finally between pure succession and the unity of the temporal form, which, at the limit, can overturn chronology to the point of abolishing it. These multiple dialectics, in my opinion, make more explicit the opposition, already present in Aristotle’s model of tragedy, between the episodic dispersion of a narrative and the power of unification unfolded by the configuring act that is *poiësis*.

It is in relation to the emplotment from which the narrative draws its identity that we can account for the identity that now concerns us, that of the character. We have said this problem did not seem to preoccupy Aristotle, in that he was concerned to subordinate the characters to the action. But we can draw on this subordination in a useful way. If every story can be considered as a sequence of transformations that leads from an initial situation to a final situation, the narrative identity of the character must be the unified style of subjective transformations governed by the objective transformations that obey the rule for the completeness, totality, and unity of
the plot. This is what was meant by Wilhelm Schapp, in his book *In Geschichten verstrickt* [Entangled in Stories], when he said: "die Geschichte steht für den Mann": the story fits the person. It follows that the narrative identity of the character has to be correlative with the discordant concordance of the story itself.

It is this correlation that puts in play a narratology at a level of formality certainly superior to that attained by Aristotle's *Poetics*, but stemming from the same concern to model the art of composition. Vladimir Propp, in this regard, opened the way to all the attempts aimed at articulating a typology of narrative roles on the basis of a typology of sequences of narrative functions, that is, segments of action of a recurring character within some narrative corpus. The way he undertook to do this is worth our pausing to consider it. He sees the characters in the Russian folktale dividing into seven classes: the opponent, the donor (or giver), the helper, the sought-for person, the sender, the hero, and the false hero. There is no term-by-term relation between a character and a segment (or function) of action. Each character has a sphere of action that encompasses several functions; conversely, several characters can intervene in the same phase of action. A relatively complex system of combinations results from this intermingling of a constellation of characters and a linear sequence of functions. Things get complicated when the characters, instead of reducing to fixed roles, as was still most often the case with folktales or stories, transform themselves following the rhythm of interactions and the transmutation of states of things. It was in this way that, in the coming of age novel and the stream of consciousness novel, the character's transformation becomes what is principally at stake in the narrative. The relation between plot and character then seems to invert itself. Contrary to the Aristotelian model, the plot serves the character's development. Then this character's identity is really put to the test. Contemporary theater and the novel have, in effect, become laboratories where thought experiments take place in which the narrative identity of characters finds itself submitted to an unlimited number of imaginative variations. Between the fixity of the heroes of naive narratives and the loss of identity of those of some modern novels, all the intermediate degrees have been explored. With Robert Musil, for example, the possible at this point eclipses the real so that at the limit the "man without qualities" – in a world of qualities without

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men, says the author – becomes unidentifiable. The anchorage of
the proper name becomes derisory to the point of becoming superfluous. The unidentifiable becomes the unnamable. It is worth noting
that to the degree that narrative draws near to this annulation of the
caller, the novel also loses its properly narrative qualities, even when interpreted, as above, in more flexible and more formal ways. To the loss of the character’s identity corresponds a loss of configuration of the narrative and in particular a crisis in the sense of an ending. The same schism – to speak like Frank Kermode – afflicts the tradition of an identifiable hero as both a fixed and changing figure, and the tradition of configuration with its double valence of concordance and discordance. The erosion of paradigms strikes both the figuration of the character and the configuration of the plot. For example, in the case of Robert Musil, the decomposition of the narrative form paralleling the loss of the character’s identity means crossing the bounds of narrative and draws the work of literature in the direction of the essay. Thus it is not by chance that so many modern autobiographies, that of Michel Leiris, for example, deliberately distance themselves from the narrative form and link up with the least configured literary form, that of the essay.

We must not be misled by the signification of this literary phenomenon. We must say, even in the case of an extreme loss of the hero’s identity, we have not completely lost sight of the problematic of the character. A non-subject is not nothing when it comes to the category of the subject. This remark will be of the greatest importance when we transpose these reflections on the character to the field of investigation into the self. Indeed, we would not interest ourselves in this drama of dissolution and it would not plunge us into a state of perplexity if the non-subject were still not a figure of the subject, even if in a negative mode. Someone poses the question: who am I? and receives an answer: nothing or almost nothing. But

It is still a response to the question *who* simply brought down to the bare naked question.

**Appropriating the Character: The Refigured Me**

Having said this, what is the contribution of a poetics of narrative to the problematic of the self? Let us say successively what the narrative approach confirms about the preceding analyses and what it adds to them. It first confirms all the features characteristic of the person in a Strawsonian theory of basic particulars, and more precisely in the theory of action that constitutes its main chapter. Before anything else, the narrative art confirms the primacy of the third person in knowledge about human beings. The hero is someone about whom one speaks. In this regard, confessional literature and autobiography which derives from it have no exclusive privilege, not even any priority in the order of derivation. We have learned infinitely more about human beings by what German poetics calls *Erzählung*, third-person narrative.¹²

Another feature of the person that the notion of the character confirms: we can say that the character is also a body, inasmuch as, through his or her action, a character intervenes in the course of things and produces changes in it. Furthermore, a character is the hearer of physical and mental predicates, in that his or her actions can be the object of descriptions of behaviors and calculations of intentions and motives. Finally, and above all, the mental states of a character preserve the same meaning where they be self-ascribable or other-ascribable. The character in theatrical drama or the novel perfectly illustrates the equivalence of a double reading in terms of observation and psychical introspection. It is even thanks to this double reading that the exercise of imaginative variations referred

¹²Cf. the discussion of what Käte Hamburger says about the primacy of *Erzählung* in the second volume of *Time and Narrative* (65–6). Drawing on Hamburger, Dorrit Cohn, in *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes of Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), does not hesitate to affirm that the first order of *mimesis* is that of *other minds* (8). As for fictions that simulate a confession, like Proust-like novels, they are based on the same principle as narration in the third person: certain pseudo-autobiographies could also have been written in the third person, as shown by Proust’s *Jean Santeuil*, trans. Gerard Hopkins (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1955).
to above contributes to enriching our repertory of mental predica-
tates. Where did we learn about the twists of jealousy, the cunning
def of hatred, the modulations of desire, if not from characters com-
ning from poetic creation, for which it hardly matters whether they are
designated in the first or the third person? Our mental thesaurus is
in large part the fruit of investigations into the soul by the makers
of plots and inventors of characters. Characters also confirm in a
striking manner our hypothesis that, in order to attribute those
predicates we call self-ascribable to oneself, the person designated
in the third person must further be capable of designating him or
herself, and this comes about through borrowing from the reflective
operations connected to acts of language and in general to the pheno-
momenon of speaking. Through this graft of self-designation to the
identifying reference to a person, it is possible to put first-person
declarations into the mouth of a hero designated in the third person.
In order to make sense of this operation, we make use of quotation
marks: “X says in his heart, I will do A.” The narrative art illus-
trates in striking fashion this placing into quotation marks of state-
ments about the third person. This operation functions in different
ways in narrative properly speaking, ones where the narrator
recounts the adventures of his or her characters, and the live theater
in which, as Aristotle says, it is the characters themselves that “do
the action” before the eyes of the spectator. In the theater, characters
dialog, that is, can say both I and you. But, for the narrator, those
are reported words that have lost their quotation marks. The staging
— opsis — that Aristotle makes the last “part” of tragedy makes pos-
sible lifting the quotation marks. The theatrical illusion consists in
forgetting the quotational situation that makes up the representa-
tion. The spectators believe they are listening to real characters. It
suffices that the curtain falls, when the illusion disappears, for the
whole piece to return to its status being a told fiction. It is not the
same in narrative where the action of the characters is wholly
recounted. Nonetheless, among the things recounted, are thoughts
and discourses. The classic manner of reporting them is to quote
them in the first person, precisely by using quotation marks. This is
what Dorrit Cohn calls “quoted monologue.” The character speaks
and acts like a character in a play speaking in the first person and
conveys his or her present thoughts using the verb tense of the
present. But the modern novel has other twists, the most remarkable
of which is the well-known erlebte Rede or free indirect style, which
Cohn rightly calls “narrated monologue,” where the words are
indeed, as regards their contents, those of the character, but they
are recounted by the narrator using the time of narration (in
principle, a past tense) and the narrator’s point of view, hence using the third person. Unlike the quoted monologue, the narrated monologue realizes the most complete integration of the web of narration of the thoughts and actions of others. The narrator’s discourse takes charge of the character’s discourse by lending him his or her voice, while at the same time the narrator yields to the character’s tone of voice. The modern novel offers more complicated solutions to the same problem by mixing third-person narrative with incidents in the first person which have lost their quotation marks. These artifices do not prevent the discourse of the character and that of the narrator from constituting distinct poles of narration. These narrative techniques illustrate in a remarkable way the fusion of the third person referred to and the first person who does the referring reflected in the discourse. Narrative is the most appropriate crucible for this fusion.

To end our review of how the art of narrative takes up and completes the acquisitions of the disciplines considered above, I want quickly to point to the contribution of narrative to the moral evaluation of characters and therefore to the problematic of imputation. Aristotle already had observed that characters are either “better” than us, as in tragedy, or “less good” than us or equal to us, as in comedy. In any case, their fortune or misfortune appears merited or not merited. Even in the modern novel, where the moral qualification of characters is extraordinarily ambiguous, we cannot prevent ourselves from wanting good things to happen to the ones we value. It is understandable why this should be so: narrative understanding preserves a kinship with moral judgment, inasmuch as it explores the ways by which virtue and vice lead or do not lead to happiness or unhappiness. This simple alchemy of four ingredients clearly takes on more and more complex, ambiguous, even equivocal forms as we advance in the history of the novel and of theatrical drama. Just as in certain contemporary forms of writing a character’s identity at the limit seems to vanish, the norms of evaluation proposed by the narrator can appear themselves to escape every criterion of moral evaluation. This does mean, however, that a character completely escapes the problematic of imputation. On the contrary, we enter it, in the same field of experimentation as that of the character’s own narrative identity, thanks to the operation we have characterized by the phrase “imaginative variations.”

But the function of narrative is not limited to intensifying the characteristics of the self already brought to light by the earlier analyses. It also brings an absolutely specific element that launches the analysis in a new direction.
This specific character is linked to the *fictive* character of the characters in literary narrative. They share this fictive character with the narrative and its action. This results from the very definition of the plot as a *mimesis* of action. To speak of mimesis is to speak of at least two things: on the one hand, that the “fable” of the action (one of the possible translation of *mythos*, besides emplotment) unfolds in the space of fiction; on the other, that in so imitating the actual action of humans in a creative fashion, narrative reinterprets it, redescribes it, or, as I said in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, *refigures* it. It is this side of the problem of mimesis that we now have to clarify, no longer just from the point of view of the action, but from that of the character properly speaking.

A wholly original problem is posed in relation to those we have discussed to this point: that of *appropriation* by a real subject - in this case, the reader - of the meanings attached to the fictive hero of an itself fictive action. What refiguration of the self results from this appropriation through reading?

Several avenues are opened by this question. We can only consider a few of them here.

First reflection: the refuguration through narrative reveals an aspect of self-knowledge that far surpasses the framework of the narrative, namely, that the self does not immediately know itself, but only knows itself indirectly by way of the detour through the cultural signs of all sorts that make us say that action is symbolically mediated. The symbolic mediations that the narrative works are grafted to these symbolic mediations. Symbolic mediation also underscores the noteworthy character of self-knowledge as being a self-interpretation. The appropriation of the fictive character by the reader is the privileged vehicle of this interpretation. What it brings with it is precisely the character of the *figure* of the character, which means that the self, narratively interpreted, is revealed itself to be a *figured me*, a “me” who *figures himself or herself as this or that*. Here is a feature that considerably enriches the notion of the self as it results from identifying reference, from self-designation in the process of speaking, and finally from self moral imputation. The apprehension of the self that results now appears to be too simple, because it is not mediated.

Second reflection: how does this “me,” in figuring itself, make itself a *refigured* me? Here we have to consider more closely the procedures we have too quickly placed under the heading of appropriation. The reader's reception of the narrative is the occasion for a whole variety of modes of what we can precisely speak of as *identification*. We thus arrive at a, to say the least, strange situation.
From the start of our investigation we have been asking about what it means to identify a person, to identify oneself, to be identical to oneself, and now, along the trajectory of self-identification, is imposed identification in terms of another, a real other in the case of the historical narrative, an unreal other in the case of the fictive one. Here is where the characteristic of thinking we applied to fiction as epic, drama, or the novel takes on a strong meaning: to appropriate oneself through identification with a character is to submit oneself to the exercise of imaginative variations that become in this way imaginative variations on the self as self. Rimbaud’s well-known words are verified through this exercise: je est un autre.13

But this game can be equivocal and it can be dangerous.

It is not without its equivocations in the sense that two opposed possibilities are opened, whose long-term effects will only appear later. If, in effect, the passage through figuration is obligatory, it implies that the self objectify itself in a construction, that construction that some call precisely the “me.” But, in a hermeneutics of suspicion, such a construction can be denounced as a source of misunderstanding, even as an illusion. To live through a representation is to project oneself on a deceitful image, behind which one conceals oneself. Identification then becomes a means of entrapment or of flight. Within the realm of fiction, the examples of Don Quixote and of Madame Bovary bear witness to this. There exist several versions of this suspicion: running from Sartre’s “transcendence of the ego” to the assimilation of the ego with a fallacious imaginary diametrically opposed to the symbolic in Lacan. It is not even sure that this instance of the ego, in Freud himself, may not be, through the encounter with the theses of ego-analysis, such a potentially misleading construction. But the hermeneutics of suspicion takes on force only if we can oppose the authentic to the inauthentic. Otherwise, how could we relate some authentic form of identification to a model without assuming the hypothesis that the figuration of the self through the mediation of the other may be a genuine means of self-discovery, that self-construction might be a way of becoming what one really is? This is the meaning that refiguration takes on in a hermeneutics of recollection. Like all symbolism, that of the fictive model has a revelatory virtue only insofar as it has a power of transformation. At this deep level, manifestation and transfiguration turn

out to be inseparable. It does remain true that in our modern culture the hermeneutics of suspicion has become the obligatory route of the quest for personal identity.

But there is more: the exercise of imaginative variations of the self can be a dangerous game, given the hypothesis precisely that a value is recognized in the reconfiguration of the self through narrative. The danger stems from the sort of wandering among competing models of identification to which the imagination is exposed. What is more, not content to lose its way by going astray, the subject in question of identity is confronted, again by the imagination, with the hypothesis of a loss of identity, that Ichloskeit that was both a torment to Musil and the effect of the interminable cultivation of meaning in his work. By identifying with the man without qualities, that is, without an identity, the self is confronted with the hypothesis of its own nothingness. But the sense of this passage into emptiness has to be understood: the hypothesis of a non-subject, we said above, is not that of a nothing about which there is nothing to be said. This hypothesis, on the contrary, gives much to be said, as the immensity of a work like The Man Without Qualities bears witness. The phrase “I am nothing” must therefore guard its paradoxical form. “Nothing” does not signify nothing unless it is attributed to an “I.” Who is this I, when the subject say he or she is nothing? Precisely a self deprived of the aid of sameness.

In so expressing the degree zero of permanence, “I am nothing" makes manifest the total inadequation of the category of substance and of its scheme, permanence in time, to the problematic of the self. Here is where the purgative virtue of this thought experiment lies, first on a speculative level, but also on an existential one. It may well be that the most dramatic transformations of personal identity have to pass the test of this nothingness of identity-permanence, where nothingness will be the equivalent of the empty case in those transformations so dear to Lévi-Strauss. Many conversion narratives testify to such dark nights of personal identity. In these moments of extreme self-divestment, the answer “nothing whatsoever” to the question Who am I? refers, not to nullity but to the nakedness of the bare question. The dialectic of concordance and discordance, transferred from the plot to the character, then from the character to oneself, may then take up again, with a new hope, if not of success, of meaning.
The Paradoxes of Identity

It might be interesting were the psychiatrist to accompany the philosopher in his work when faced with a notion filled with difficulties and rich in aporias.¹ So exploring a few paradoxes seemed to me to have a didactic value appropriate to an inquiry where we might have the best chance of exchanging aporias. The form of a paradox fits an approach where apparently opposed notions or affirmations of meaning impose themselves with equal force and propose new paths of research as ways of “exiting” the aporia.

I propose examining three of these paradoxes.

The First Paradox Concerns the Relation to Time: The Temporal Structure of Identity

On the one hand, what we are looking for under the heading of identity are features that allow recognition of something as being the same. This can already signify several things: numeric identity of the same thing that appears several times; ontogenetic (or developmental) identity of the same living thing from birth to death (the acorn and the oak tree); identity of structure – one’s genetic code, fingerprints, blood group. What we seek through these features is stability,

¹This lecture was presented in Lille on October 12, 1995 during a session of the 14ème Journées de L’information psychiatrique, and published in L’Information psychiatrique 3 (1996): 201–6. – Editors’ note.
if possible the absence of change, the immutability of the same. Yet
the human person only partially satisfies this quest for identity as
sameness. Certainly, one says that the same person entered and left
again; that, in a photo album, it is the same man, the same woman,
who has become an adult, above all if one can establish a close
continuity between the phases of development of this individual;
and, of course, our structural identity, as coded in many ways, con­
stitutes an indisputable reality.

But, as soon as we pass to the psychological domain of impres­
sions, desires, and beliefs, to cite just the thinnest markers retained
in the discussion of personal identity by English-speaking analytic
philosophers, we are confronted with a variability that has served
arguments by philosophers like Hume, then Nietzsche, who deny the
existence of a permanent me, immutable in time. Moral philoso­
phers, too, can be found who deplore the instability of moods, pas­
sions, and convictions. And it is true: if we seek an immutable me,
one not affected by time, we do not find one. And yet we cannot
stop with this negative verdict. Despite change, we expect other
people to take responsibility for their past acts as their author, the
same person today as in the past. And we count on their keeping
their word in the future, that is, that they will bring today’s being
to tomorrow’s.

But is it a question of the same identity? The first version takes
substance as its model or the structural relation, immutable over the
passing of time, what we have called sameness. The second version
has as its model the self-constancy of a self that keeps its word. This
model of promise-keeping is exemplary inasmuch as it proposes an
identity in spite of time, for which I shall reserve the terms “ipseity,”
opposing in this way ipse-identity to idem-identity. We can expand
this, beyond the paradigmatic example of the promise, to that manner
of human life that follows itself and that allows memory as well as
projects. Dilthey spoke in this regard of the “interconnectedness of
life” (Zusammenshang des Lebens).^2

So we have posed the two terms of our paradox of identity in its
relation to time: on the one hand, idem-identity, despite time, is
substantial or structural; on the other, ipse-identity, across time, is
memorial and promising.

Sciences, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Fithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 2002).
There is a paradox because we are on both sides of this conceptual scission. We live this paradox in the mode of a question without an answer, at least an immediate one: who are we? It is important that this question be posed as who and not as what. The question what calls for a univocal answer in terms of idem-identity, according to the criteria mentioned earlier: numeric identity of development or of structure. The question who calls for an equivocal answer, a split answer, whose two extremes would be illustrated by the character that is the mark of the permanence of the idem and by the promise that illustrates the self-constancy of the ipse. We must not say that things are on the side of sameness and persons on that of ipseity. Persons are on both sides. This is why there is a paradox. We are characters and beings who make promises.

To better orient us regarding this aporia, I propose turning to the mediation of narrative. We have seen the problem is that of integrating time, hence history, into identity, or rather into its procedures of identification. This is what narrative does through the procedure I have called emplotment. This consists in composing a story with multiple elements that it binds together through links of causality, (rational or emotional) motivation, and contingency. A story presents an action from its initial stage to its ending through transformations that integrate time-spans of variable density, thick or loose, sudden or well established. Thus, a told story includes a stability capable of integrating changes. The most noteworthy of these are what Aristotle in his Poetics called peripeteia, that is, reversals in our expectations, which nonetheless contribute to the unfolding of the story but also to its intelligibility, in that episodes of recognition compensate for the peripeteia. So emplotment combines concordance and discordance in a noteworthy intelligibility, narrative intelligibility. Here is where we all, philosophers and psychiatrists, are interested in the same thing. The same procedure of emplotment works for the protagonists in a story as well as for the story told. We can say that the characters in a narrative, whether fictive or real, are emplotted along with the story told. We discover once again Dilthey’s concept of an “interconnectedness of a life.” It only takes on meaning in a narrative approach to the problem of identity.

Is the paradox of identity, as concerns its temporal dimension, then resolved? No, it is simply posed in terms whose interesting and fruitful dialectics have to be developed. Think only of the fact that it is possible to tell the same peripeteia along with the same events otherwise. The conception, reception, and acceptance of one or another version cannot be indifferent. Narrative is not innocent. Some narratives traumatize, others pacify, even heal. And the stories
we tell of ourselves differ from those told about us by others. Then there is the fact that identity based on the model of character and that based on the promise can be discordant to the point of a complete rent. I spoke earlier of an equivocal answer – and I added: of a split answer – to the question: who am I? Novelists have explored this dehiscence. I myself have been interested in Robert Musil’s novel The Man without Qualities (ohne Eigenschaften – without properties). The hero seeks his promise-making identity through the features of identity as sameness and does not find it. This snare is the origin of what we call – wrongly – a “loss of identity.” It is as though, in seeking to ground the answer to the question who am I? on features of permanence, immutability, the subject finds himself confronted with the enigma – and the threat – of an ipseity without sameness. As if ipseity takes refuge in a question – who am I? – with no answer. But there is still someone who questions. It is this laying bare of the problem that accounts for the suffering associated with the search for identity.

So this is the first paradox of identity: its “narrative resolution” opens the way to other, conclusive and inconclusive, dialectics.

The Second Paradox of Identity Has to Do with the Relation between Self and Others

Here, the same is considered not in its temporal dimension, according to its capacity to endure the test of time, but according to the polarity of same and other.

I want to insist and – if I may – plead for the paradox in favor of alterity, which in relation to recent discourse has become a discouraging banality. Alterity is precisely a problem inasmuch as it fractures a reflexive relation of the self to itself that has not only its moral but its psychological legitimation on the plane of personal existence and structure. There must first fundamentally be a subject capable of saying I in order to undergo the test of a confrontation with the other. I would like to start from the most basic form of the Cartesian cogito, from that enigmatic “interconnectedness of life” that makes a human life an unsubstitutable monad. I am deliberately speaking “Leibnizian” here. Leibniz is the thinker who caught sight of all the implications of a multiplicity of perspectives on the world. Each

mind does not see the same city from the same side. And the perspectives are not all superimposable. It is this feature that constitutes finitude. For Leibniz, to say “mind” is not yet to say consciousness, self-consciousness, reflection. The best illustration of this connection to a singular life is the untransferable character of a memory to another’s memory. Not only is my lived experience unique, we cannot exchange our memories. You will recall that for this reason Locke made memory the basis for the criterion of identity.

On this untransferable singularity of the pre-reflective mind are established all the degrees of self-reference meriting the title “reflection.” I will begin from the formulas of the form I can: I can speak, act, recount, hold myself accountable for my acts. The first capable human being is me. Continuing along the ascending path, we encounter the (legitimate) cogito, which I shall take in its enumerative formulation: “What then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, also imagines and has sensory perceptions.” To which Descartes adds: “the fact that it is I who am doubting and understanding and willing is so evident that I see no way of making it clearer.” To this ethically neutral reflexivity are grafted all the ethical formulations of a culture based on individual egos. In this regard, the most celebrated classical formulations abound, from Socratic examination ratified by the Platonic apology for the “care of the self,” to the Aufklärung’s exhortation to think for oneself, apart from any tutelage by some authority that claims to tell me how to think, to the Kierkegaardian and Romantic exhortation of the “singular individual,” and, why not, up to the late Foucault’s rehabilitation of the care of the self, based on a consideration of pleasure. Adding my own voice to these great ones, I would like to offer praise to self-esteem, as the melodic cell of a basic ethics founded on the wish for a good life. How can I not cite, at this crucial point, the start of the declaration that ends Bernanos’s Journal d’un curé de champagne: “How easy it is to hate oneself.” (It is true that what follows says something different that I shall return to in a moment.)

I think it is first necessary to push as far as possible this apology for the subject in the first-person singular (after all, Husserl did not

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take it to be a negligible or artificial task to posit solipsism as an unavoidable philosophical moment in order to give all its force to the theme of subjectivity). I do so in order to give the form of a paradox to the question of alterity.

Some will say, if we had begun right away with language we would have been spared the difficulties we have spoken of. In one sense, this is true. From the level of drives on, life is human only through the mediation of language. Human desire, it has been said, is desire of the other’s desire. And sexual desire, once past the threshold of rape, is demanding. Moreover, we have heard the human voice, that of the other, before speaking, and maybe even already in the womb. We have “been spoken” before we have ourselves begun to speak. And quite often memory, whose unsubstitutable, incommunicable character we have pointed to earlier, is based on facts recounted by others and borrowings from this stock of souvenirs of “collective memory,” for which individual memory, Halbwachs, in his last book, risked saying, is just one aspect, one perspective — turning the Leibnizian monadism into one of a higher degree.6 Pushing further yet the primacy of alterity over reflexivity, some will emphasize the dependence of personal identities on identifications with . . . heroes, emblematic characters, models and teachers, and also precepts, norms, extending from traditional customs to utopian paradigms, which, emanating from the social imagination, remodel our private imaginations, along the path, described by Bourdieu, of insidious inculturation and symbolic violence. After all, it is on the basis of parallel procedures that Freud wants to set up the superego and its double valence: repressive and structuring.

I think it is instructive to have driven to their extremes, first of all, the claim of singularity, of solitude, of autonomy, of self-esteem raised by the mel/, next that of alterity, pushed as far as the domination of the alien over the own. We have then named two poles: thinking for oneself and domination or rule of the other. Each person’s identity gets constructed between these two poles.

Someone will ask whether, at the end of this second journey, some mediation is offered, as strong as the one I proposed at the end of the preceding analysis under the heading of narrative identity. I believe that before setting off in search of syntheses which run the risk of remaining merely verbal, we have to clearly admit the

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conflictual character of the intersubjective structures that some think they can all too easily throw as bridges over the fault line that runs between the rival claims of the individual and of the so-called instances of socialization. It is a tragic vision - in the original sense of the term - that Freud gives to childhood: incest and parricide, even when purely a phantasy, constitute both the structuring threat and the test on whose basis arises the family circle, the primordial site of apprenticeship to the social bond. Furthermore, we have read René Girard's well-known descriptions of the mimetic crisis, where among human beings the relation of desire for some object clothes itself as envy as soon as it is mediated by competition with a rival. And other authors refer to the "identity crises" that mark the stages of growing up. Each one affects our perception of ourselves and of the social bond. Individualization and socialization develop along parallel paths, sometimes in synergy, sometimes in competition with one another.

This last paradox of identity no more admits than did the first one anything other than a pragmatic solution. It is education, in the broad sense of what the Aufklärer and the Romantics spoke of as Bildung - running from pedagogy to politics - that is the setting where a just distance between human subjects is conquered, midway between identification as fusional and the separation that can lead to hatred, mistrust, and fear.

The Third Paradox Can Be Placed under the Heading: Responsibility and Fragility

Under this heading, we encounter a paradox that leads us to think as much like judges in a criminal court as psychiatrists, for reasons having to do with a similarity between the situations that will appear in the course of this discussion.

The paradox runs as follows: on the one side, personal identity is something that is affirmed, claimed, attested to as the power to exist, to use Spinoza's vocabulary (which defines each "mode" of substance, which we can understand as each singular reality, by its conatus, its effort to exist and to persevere in being). What is thereby emphasized is the connection between affirmation and

power. We can transcribe this connection using two registers: that of the capacity to do something and that of imputability. But we are going to see that it finally comes down to the same thing: power.

The capacity to do something expresses itself in multiple domains of human intervention as a bundle of determined powers: the power to act on things or on other protagonists of an action, the power to gather one’s own life into an intelligible and acceptable narrative. I will sum up this panoply of powers into a single expression by characterizing human beings as capable. This first register of inscription of power is common to both the psychiatrist and the judge.

As for the second register, that of imputability, it seems at first glance to concern only the judge. We are going to see that this is not so. According to its strict definition, imputability signifies that an action can be assigned to the account of its agent as being its actual author. It is in this sense that a person can be incriminated, obliged to make recompense for a tort committed or to undergo punishment for his or her crime. But imputability is not just a juridical category. It completes the prior notion of capacity. First, because it too is a capacity – thus, theorists of the “law of peoples” define imputabilitas (Zurechnung) as the capacity (Fähigkeit) to be submitted to juridical obligation. Next, because this capacity is reflexively contained in all the forms of power-to listed above: to say “I can speak” is to be able to designate oneself as the one who utters his or her words; to say “I can act” is the power to designate oneself as the agent of one’s action, etc. This capacity of self-designation consists in what we can call a second-degree capacity. It is what we can give the name “responsibility” to in a broader sense than that of juridical imputation but with the same basic meaning. It is this responsibility that is affirmed in the attestation of the power that constitutes the first side of this paradox. It is on the same side as is narrative identity in the first paradox and first-person identity in the second paradox.

Over against this affirmation of power: the confession of our fragility. It is of no less interest to the psychiatrist, I said, than to the criminal judge. For it is the same fragility that gives rise to the difficulties in judging and punishing, and to the difficulties in caring for and healing. If responsibility could be expressed in the vocabulary of power, it is in that of powerlessness or of a lesser power that human fragility can be expressed. I have already made recourse to this vocabulary before an audience of other psychiatrists like you in
an essay titled “La souffrance n’est pas la douleur.” In it, I interpreted the multiple figures of suffering as a function of corresponding figures of powerlessness.

It is first of all as a speaking subject that our mastery appears threatened and always limited. This power is not complete nor is it transparent to itself. It is the inability to speak in its multiple forms that confronts the psychoanalyst. Whatever the interpretations given to the phenomenon of repression, it can be taken, as Lorenzer and Habermas propose, as a process of desymbolization of excommunication. Making the unconscious speak could constitute the most elementary characterization of the analytic enterprise. The unconscious can thus be designated – partially, it is true – as prohibited speech. That forces are in play that prevent this speaking is a consequence of the analytic experience and its specific discourse. But the inability-to-say, in all its forms, is the first mark of fragility. We could continue to enumerate the figures of this powerlessness by following the model of a table of powers. For instance, in the order of acting, to the incapacities inflicted by illness, old age, infirmities, in short by the course of the world, are added the incapacities inflicted on many occasions by relations of interaction – knowing that doing has two contraries: omitting (neglecting, forgetting) and submitting; to which can further be added the unequal distribution of power to act among the protagonists in some interaction. To this latter phenomenon are grafted all the abuses of power exercised as “power over,” which engender the multiple figures of victimization. As for the incapacity to recount, it draws together the effects of both the incapacities to say and to act, inasmuch as narrative is a mimesis of action in words. Besides the conflict between the compulsion to repeat and the “work of memory,” about which Freud spoke in his well-known essay, we

8 A paper presented to a conference on “the psychiatrist confronted with suffering,” organized by the Association française de psychiatrie, held in Brest in January 1992. The text of this paper was first published in a special number of the journal Psychiatrie française (June 1992): 58-77, then reprinted in Jean-Marie von Kaenel, ed., Souffrances (Paris: Autrement, 1994), 58-70. It is downloadable from the website of the Fonds Ricœur. – Editors’ note.


might refer to the difficulty— even the powerlessness— of survivors from the concentration camps to talk about their experience, overwhelmed by the incommunicable and in this sense unnarratable character of unsupportable memories. These forms of incapacity go well beyond the discordance that peripeteia oppose to our mastering a narrative or its strategy of emplotment.

The psychiatrist and the examining magistrate would know better than me how to fill in this table of incapacities that make human, fragile. My task here is rather to reflect upon the tenor of this paradox that is born from the confrontation between responsibility and fragility. It must not be confused with the old antinomy between free will and determinism, [which is so called] because it confronts two universes of discourse: a moral universe and a physical universe, as we see in the formulation Kant proposes in his rational cosmology. The paradox is not an antinomy because it unfolds in one and the same universe of discourse, that of human action. It is the same person who is responsible and who is fragile. Fragile responsibility, we might say, but also responsible fragility. What, in effect, threatens to paralyze reflection is the impact of one term of the paradox on the other.

Fragility insinuates itself into responsibility, into its heart, by imposing an ambiguous, split status on it, that of counting at the same time as a presupposition and as a task. To hold myself responsible is to believe that I can, for example, commit and keep my word, to the point where the other can count on my faithfulness. Responsibility, in this sense, counts as a kind of existential a priori without which we could not speak of my power or of imputability in the sense of self-designation of oneself as the author of one's acts. But, because of fragility, responsibility remains something to be conquered, acquired, cultivated, preserved. Education is defined in large part as an education in responsibility. Even in Kant we find the indication of this paradox: autonomy, according to the Critique of Practical Reason, constitutes an a priori synthetic judgment that binds freedom to the law (and under this heading, it is a factum rationis, with all the difficulties attached to this status). But, according to the essay “What is Enlightenment?” autonomy is what is at stake in a historical struggle against the spirit of submission and the state of “minority.” The well-known sapere aude is stated as the contenu of an imperative, the one which is the very condition

of possibility of imperatives. This is the internal paradox of responsibility.

But the same paradox insinuates itself into the heart of human fragility as well. It is the paradox of a responsible being in the two senses we have spoken of. Fragility does not abolish the presupposition of responsibility. At the same time, it means that the human subject, as the psychiatrist's patient or the offender before a judge, is exposed to their own responsibility, as a being who must, at high price, awaken or reawaken the latent resources of responsibility, must take charge of him- or herself. There is a moral reason for this task, before its being therapeutic or juridical: it is the dignity of the patient or the accused that is in play.

Where, we shall ask in concluding, hides the mediation between the two poles of the paradox of responsibility and fragility? Nowhere else than in the both personal and institutional handling of this paradox. There is no speculative outcome to this – only a practice clarified by knowledge of the dimensions and stakes of the problem. On the institutional level, one will surely think of the pursuit of programs of transformation, of what once was "confinement" in asylums and in prison; not only for the well-being of those so excluded but in view of hastening their rehabilitation and resocialization. In this regard, I am well aware that psychiatrists and judges, in different ways, are searching for new forms of the tutelary action of the state and of society, which would integrate both the dimension of responsibility and that of fragility.

On a more personal level, I have in mind the daily efforts of so many members of the medical corps as well as those of the judiciary to associate the patient and the accused with recovering that autonomy which, as the preceding paradox showed, constitutes both the presupposition and the task of the therapeutic and the judicial enterprises.

It is at this double price, of both institutional and personal investment, that the paradox of responsibility and fragility can be transformed from a paralyzing intellectual aporia into a goad for better practice.
The experiment I want to propose stems from my thinking about the possible relations between what Plato, in his so-called metaphysical dialogues, calls the “greatest kinds” – among which the last two are the *same* and the *other* – and the usage that hermeneutic phenomenology makes of the notions of “alterity” and “uncanniness.”

I

We must, I think, carefully distinguish the level of discourse we can call metaphysical by insisting on its meta-function, as what it is, from the level of discourse that comes from an understanding and interpretation of the human self. They are two kinds of discourse based on different rules. What I have just called the meta-function defines itself through a double strategy of hierarchization and pluralization applied to what Plato calls the “greatest kinds.” For Plato himself, there is certainly is a question of hierarchization

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1This lecture was presented to the inaugural Congress on Hermeneutics in Halle, Germany in 1994; and published in German in Rainer Breuninger, ed., *Andersheit-Fremdheit-Toleranz* (Ulm: Humboldt-Studienzentrum, 1999), 11–30, then in French in Renate Enskat, ed., *Fremdheit und Vertrauheit: Hermeneutik im Europäischen Kontext* (Louvain: Peeters, 2000), 11–23. – Editors’ note.
applied to the theory of forms, where what is at stake is the participation of the sensible in the intelligible, and of a second-order speculation on the "great kinds," one that bears on the conditions of possibility of the first-order predicative operation, and hence on the sort of participation among the Ideas that this predicative operation presupposes. But setting this hierarchization into play immediately implies a series of conjunctions and disjunctions bearing on the ideas on the second level and involved in this meta-discourse, namely, those of "movement," "rest," "being," "nonbeing," "same," and "other." The *Sophist* pushes this subtle argument so far as to introduce a supplementary hierarchy applied to these greatest kinds. This is why the meta-category "other" finds itself in fifth place. Plato says, "it pervades all of them, since each of them is different from the others, not because of its own nature but because of sharing in the type of the other" (255e). This is why it comes fifth and last. Plato emphasizes the dignity of this great kind when he says that "as applied to all of them, the nature of the other makes each of them not be, by making it different from that which is" (256e; cf. 258b–d). Here we have something that places us well beyond the naive essentialism of the "friends of the forms," which all too often has served as the paradigm for a self-proclaimed Platonism and its derivatives over the centuries. But why make such a fuss, one may ask? Because it is the high price we have to pay if we are to grasp what the sophist offers to thought from the simple fact that he exists among us: that is, the truth of falsity, in that the false, which "is" not, "is" in a certain sense. What we could call a phenomenology of truth and falsity thus finds the conditions of its own discourse in this most caustic of dialectics operating at the level of the greatest kinds. What I want to take up here therefore is a comparable detour in my own register, which is that of a hermeneutics of selfhood.

Plato was not alone in this attempted constitution of a second order discourse by means of a hierarchization and differentiation stemming from the meta-function of metaphysics. Aristotle's treatise on the categories of being flows from a similar function, as does his ordering of the multiple meanings of being at a still higher level. In this regard, the text I am going to cite from his *Metaphysics* E2 has to be placed on the same level as Plato's *Sophist*. Here is the passage:

"being" properly speaking has several meanings: we have seen being to be first the accidental, next to be the true (non-being being the false); furthermore there are the categories, namely, substance, quality,
quantity, place, time, and all the other meanings which “being” may have. Finally, besides all these kinds of being, there is being which is potential or actual. (1026a33–b2)

Having said this, what I wish to show is that hermeneutic phenomenology understands itself better when it places its own discourse under the aegis of this meta-function illustrated by the Platonic theory of greatest kinds and the Aristotelian one of the multiple meanings of being. I will even risk saying that in return for such an explanation of its own discourse in light of the second order discourse articulated by Plato and Aristotle, phenomenology interweaves the Platonic discourse of the same and the other and the Aristotelian one of being as potential and actual. I want to insist on my second assertion – that we not oppose Aristotle and Plato – as much as on my first one – that we not spurn the meta-function. In fact, in the last decade or so we have seen a remarkable return to Aristotle in the wake of Heidegger’s analysis of both care and conscience. This is why some have interpreted praxis and Sorge, and phronesis and Gewissen, in terms of each other. By going beyond these major concepts of the Nicomachean Ethics, it may even prove tempting to set this first-order hermeneutic discourse next to the second-order metaphysical discourse engendered by the Aristotelian recourse to being as potential and actual. I find such an enterprise perfectly legitimate – and even have attempted it myself – but only on the condition of our not losing sight of the Platonic dialectic of the same and the other. Otherwise, we end up reconstituting an unmediated ontology of identity where the notions of potential and actual would both in turn occupy the place of the same – traditionally occupied by the notions of substance or essence. My own thesis is that an ontology of the actual, inspired by Aristotle, but also by Spinoza, Leibniz, and Schelling, will satisfy the conditions for making use of the meta-function only if the dialectic of the same and the other continues to envelop all the greatest kinds akin to those that Plato spoke of as “movement,” “rest,” and “being,” as in the Sophist. I want therefore to show in my presentation in what way the phenomenology of alterity, placed under the sign of the dialectic of the same and the other, gets interwoven with a phenomenology of action, itself placed under the sign of the meaning of being as potential and actual. Through such an interweaving, a phenomenology of action can be freed from the concern to place itself under the sole aegis of the same and from having to reconstruct a dogmatic position barely distant from the
In order to go straight to the heart of the question, I will say that it is the function of the meta-category of being as actual and potential to "assemble" the scattered members of a hermeneutics of action, dispersed as they are among the registers of language, action, narrative, moral imputation, and politics, whereas it is the meta-function of the meta-category other to "scatter" the phenomenal modes of alterity. What we shall need to distinguish and articulate, therefore, on the one hand, is the function of assembling exercised by the meta-categories of being as actual and potential as regards the diverse manifestations of human action, [and, on the other hand], the scattering function exercised by the meta-category "other" on the phenomenal plane of the figures of alterity.

I want to dwell particularly upon this scattering on the phenomenal plane. But I want first to emphasize what it is that the meta-kind "other" scatters. This is precisely what the meta-kind actual/potential brings together, illustrating in this way a legitimate claim coming from the idea itself: for there to be an other, there has to be a same. If later we must speak of the other of the other, we will first have to speak of the other than the same.

In Oneself as Another, I placed the principal accent regarding the idea of the same on the close kinship between the multiple senses of the verb "to act." In close but differing senses, to speak, act, recount, and submit oneself to moral imputation can be taken as distinct modes of a more fundamental acting. But this latter "kind" is only given through speech acts (performative utterances!), practical initiatives and interventions (I can, I am capable of . . .), the emplotting of actions in narrative (to narrate a life), or the act of imputing the responsibility for speaking, or acting, or narrating to someone as their actual author. On the phenomenological plane, the diversity of these manifestations of acting is obvious. It is one thing to speak, another to do, another to recount, another to assign an action to someone's account as praiseworthy or blamable. What is more, the theories of discourse, action, narrative, and ethics are all assignable to different disciplines. Nevertheless, what we can call an analogy circulates among these different fields, one which ordinary language ratifies in how it talks about action. This analogy is reinforced by our insisting on placing the question "who?" at the head of our

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consideration of each of these different disciplines. "Who acts?" is thus the common question under which fall all the answers to the different modalities of acting we have listed.

All the contemporary attempts to reappropriate the Aristotelian idea of being as actual and potential graft themselves to this analogy of acting. I will not examine them here, my focus being, as my title indicates, on the side of the scattering of the figures of alterity on the phenomenological plane. But we do first need to do justice to the assembling function exercised by the meta-category of being as potential and actual. This also is the occasion to indicate more clearly the difference between our two levels of discourse: the first order discourse of hermeneutic phenomenology, and the second order one of metaphysics, taken in the sense of the meta-function exercised by the greatest kinds. In this regard, one could also suggest that it is a philosophical anthropology that brings about the connection between these two levels of discourse. In this sense, the idea of an analogy of acting, at the junction between the phenomenological scattering of the modes of acting and the meta-category of being as actual/potential, would stem from this philosophical anthropology and its mediating function.

II

The time has come to show how the dialectic of the same and the other stemming from the meta-function and the phenomenological experience of alterity gets articulated. Let us say straightaway that inasmuch as the privilege attributed to the notion of being as actual/potential finds a phenomenological warrant in a certain analogy among the manifestations of human action, to the same extent the meta-category "other" is expressed on the plane of hermeneutical phenomenology through those disjunctive operations that have their paradigm in the Platonic paradoxes culminating in the necessity and impossibility of attributing the same, being, one, and other to each other. I want to turn directly to the major expressions of these paradoxes on the hermeneutical plane of selfhood, encouraged in my so doing by the fact that already for Plato this dialectic consisted in a long detour, leading back finally to the initial question of the nature of the sophist and the consistency of his reputedly fallacious but actually existing as fallacious discourse. The hermeneutic phenomenology of selfhood provides a discursive justification of the same order as does this detour through the dialectic of the same and the other.
Why do I emphasize scattering so strongly here? Essentially, in order to prevent an uncritical reduction of the "other" to the alterity of other people. I had already proposed in *Oneself as Another* to take up the exploration of the varying field of alterity in terms of three directions: toward the *flesh*, as mediating between the self and a world, itself taken up in terms of its multiple modes of at-homeness and uncanniness; toward the *stranger*, as similar but exterior to me; and finally toward that other figured as my *heart of hearts*, and designated by the "other" voice of conscience addressed to me from deep within myself.

In the rapid exploration I am proposing here of these three different registers of alterity, I want to underscore the correlation we can establish between the assembled figures of acting and those of being-subjected-to, under the banner of the dialectic of the same and the other.

(1) Let us begin with the first figure of alterity: the flesh. This emblematic term covers a wide variety of lived experiences that we can dialectically relate to the registers considered in a phenomenology of acting, and which the category of the other disperses through its encounter with the analogy of acting. Being-subjected-to, suffering, have literally the same amplitude as does acting. This has to be emphasized from the start in order to give the word "flesh" a broader scope than that of the lived body or the living body. In truth, only the analogy of acting, projected on the correlate term "suffering," gives meaning to an analogy of suffering. But it is the disparity of forms of suffering that I want to discuss. And we may even, for similar reasons, suggest that this disparity among the forms of suffering projected on the plane of acting restores to it the diversity that the analogy of acting tends to cover over. This is why it is particularly appropriate to begin from the multiple forms of the question "who?": who speaks, who acts, who recounts, who is held morally responsible for the other — and by laying out the correlative figures of suffering that make the self a stranger to itself in its own flesh. *Own body, uncanny body*, we might say as a shortcut, all the while enlarging the varieties of flesh through this lived paradox.

Let us consider further therefore our sequence of questions. We first ask *who speaks*? And all our answers to this question lead to the same center, the phenomenon of being-able to speak. *I can* articulate my thoughts, address my words to others, reflect upon them in private, to the point of being able to designate myself as the author of my words, of what I say. But do speaking subjects exercise a mastery over themselves such that they can say everything about themselves, not to speak of doing so in full transparency to
themselves? Here is the first place where we can invoke psychoanalysis as a related discipline, one not reducible to phenomenology owing to its presuppositions and method of treatment. If we take into account the general characterization of the psychoanalytic cure as a “talk cure,” we can say that psychoanalysis designates, with the nominalized adjective, the “unconscious,” a fundamental inability to speak. Whatever interpretation may be given to the phenomenon of repression (and perhaps we need to hang on to all of them functioning in the multiple fields of acting and suffering), the leading and least contestable among them is the one that makes repression a process of desymbolization, of degrammatization, of excommunication, as Lorenzer and Habermas have proposed. Analytic experience verifies this a contrario by the place it gives to talking in its treatment of the patient, to the exclusion of any “acting out.” Making the unconscious speak may be the simplest and least sophisticated way to characterize the analytic enterprise. The unconscious, then, can be designated – only partially, it is true – as prohibited speech. That there are forces at work that prevent speaking, as the concept of repression indicates, comes from psychoanalytic practice and its specific form of discourse. Yet the phenomenologist can learn from what the psychoanalyst has to say about this inability to speak. Many different symptoms gravitate around this pole. Some are expressed using the vocabulary of non-mastery (impulses and compulsions), others in the register of exteriority (in the way the patient encounters them in different forms such as phobias, obsessions, jealousy, etc.). From this vast collection of synonyms I want to focus on the phenomenon of the strange, to which Freud devoted a well-known essay titled “Das Unheimliche,” translated into French as “Inquiétante Étrangeté” and into English as “The Uncanny.” What I want to retain from this essay is not the final reduction to a fear of castration so much as the semantic review that precedes it through which Freud himself lays out an uncanny and disturbing polysemy in terms of the word Heim – home, being at home – and the negation Un – not being at home. Thanks to this proliferating polysemy, Unheimlich can be used to characterize the unconscious itself, at least at the level of those symptoms that disturb, in the strong sense

of this word, the patient in quest of a less mutilated way of talking
and a path toward a resymbolization of the depths of his or her most
profound experiences.

Our second question, “who acts?” – in the sense of who is the
author of an action – sets in movement a new dialectic between
acting and not acting. One first thinks, of course, of those innate
incapacities that show that all ability stands out against a back­
ground of inabilities, and then in relation to those acquired incapac­i­
ties linked to illness, old age, and the other infirmities inflicted on us
by the world, as we say, over the course of a lifetime. More note­
worthy, perhaps, at least for our inquiry, are those incapacities
arising from the multiple relationships of interaction among people.
These present an especially noteworthy feature, namely, that an
action is not exhausted by its physical effects; it also affects other
actors who are touched by it or undergo it. Here we touch upon a
fundamental dissymmetry between action on the part of one person
and undergoing it on the part of another. The result is that “doing
something” has two contraries: not doing something (with all its
variants: to omit, neglect, forget, etc.) and undergoing something. It
was an axiom known to the ancients and taken up by Descartes at
the beginning of his treatise on The Passions of the Soul that “what
is a passion with regard to one subject is always an action in some
other regard.” Doing something thus turns out to be the power one
agent exercises over another, where “suffering” is its counterpart.

If we take another step, we next confront the important phenom­
emon of the unequal distribution of this power to act among most
protagonists in most relations of interaction. Violence grafts itself to
this inequality as the abuse of this power over another. In turn, such
violence takes different forms depending on the many different insti­
tutions that serve as the framework for the exercise of power and
which confer authority upon it. Physical violence therefore is only
the most visible and most disturbing form of the abuse of power.
Intimidation, threats, the coercion of belief or trust, are also sources
that can wound, which, when inflicted upon our power to act, make
it fragile, always threatened, and, in this sense, uncanny (unheim­
llich). It would be easy to bring psychoanalysis back on stage here
inasmuch as, according to its version of the “family history,” the first
disturbed relations are those between the young child and others

5 René Descartes, The Passions of the Soul, in The Philosophical Writings
Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Part I, § 1,
p. 328.
closest to him or her, the others one encounters at the dawn of life, the father and/or mother. The same structures appear in turn, depending on circumstances, as structuring and/or de-structuring, helpful and/or hostile, reassuring and/or terrifying. It was not by chance, therefore, that for Freud in the essay we have been considering, the paradigmatic example should be the symbolic threat of castration disguised under the appearance of the sandman who threatens to blind the young child’s eyes. It is surely examples like these which convey the sense of “being at home,” those of the nuclear family, of the family scene, which draw into themselves all the senses of the heimlich and the unheimlich.

I will not dwell too much more on the adventures of the power to recount things. They have to do directly with the problem of personal identity, thanks to the tight connection between the “interconnectedness of life,” in the sense Dilthey gave this term, and narrative. We should really speak first of the incapacity to recount things at the point where the questions “who is speaking?” and “who is telling?” intersect. It is this incapacity that the analytic experience struggles with, as Freud indicates in his essay titled “Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten”: remembering, repeating, and working through. It turns out that the difficulty of remembering, hence of being able to recount, runs up against the compulsion to repetition that forces the patient to keep on repeating his or her trauma and its symptoms, rather than remember them. With the idea of working-through, durcharbeiten, Freud presents remembering itself as a work, the same term he uses elsewhere to speak of a work of mourning. This work of remembering makes memory a creative activity in a way akin to narrative. But this work in turn does not cease recounting the very strangeness, the uncanniness, of the past itself. In one sense, I possess it, it is mine. This is so true that we cannot transfer a memory from one subject to another. A memory cannot be shared, strictly speaking; it can only be communicated, which is exactly what narrative attempts to do. Yet at the same time, memory attests to the absence of the past, as unrepeatable, over and done with, and hence impossible to change, at least as regards the material conditions of its events. Husserl too had glimpsed something of this uncanniness when he distinguished the immediate memory that still belonged to the present, what had “just happened,” from what can

only be made present through a “representative” transfer into the region of what had been but no longer “is.” Between the “no longer” of the remembered past and the “still” or “just now,” a gap opens that has to do with the feeling of the uncanniness of the past as past. This feeling is strongest in the case of childhood memories, in which the subject finds it difficult, as we have said, to recognize him-or herself. A subject is, in terms of his or her memory, the same and not the same. Narrative does not completely succeed in covering over this sense of uncanniness that affects the very meaning of the “interconnectedness of a life.” The partial cohesion that narrative does introduce, at the price of an unmasterable selectivity, can legitimately be accused of doing violence to the past. This is so true that a writer like Proust made more of those instances of involuntary memory than of those voluntary ones that stem instead from what we have called, following Freud, the work of memory. These involuntary memories, springing up in our consciousness, bring with them the uncanniness of what in some still intact way once was but no longer is. What I have called an incapacity to recount does not reduce therefore to just those pathological forms Freud placed under the heading of the compulsion to repeat; they include all the kinds of inadequacy affecting the attempt to master time through narrative as well as the subtle dialectic between proximity and distance, familiarity and unfamiliarity, that have to do with the play of memory. The paradox is at its peak in the case of the memory of the Shoah in its confrontation with the will not to forget, hence with the duty to recount and recount again, and with the feeling expressed by so many of its survivors of a finally incommunicable and, in this sense, unnarratable character to their memories, when these themselves have not been mutilated by a thousand inhibitions. With this insistence that there is something unnarratable, the incapacity to recount goes well beyond the discordance that surprising peripeteia oppose to any mastery of a narrative before themselves being integrated into the strategy of its emplotment. This type of uncanniness, linked to narrativity per se, reaches a supplementary degree of complexity when the incapacity to recount hooks up with a lack of self-esteem, even a self-loathing, which seriously undercuts the power of acting human beings to assume responsibility for their acts and to hold themselves accountable for them.

We have still to show how the uncanniness of the world itself is in one way or another mediated by that of the flesh. This uncanniness can sometimes don the repulsive aspect of Sartre’s “nausea” or of the young Levinas’s “il y a,” sometimes the numinous aspect of the “mystic,” in the well-known formula from Wittgenstein’s
Tractatus. Between the two, the cold feeling of the radical conundrum of Dasein, which is so well expressed by the term Befindlichkeit adopted by Heidegger. “Finding oneself there” is an example of the uncanny par excellence. It would be, no doubt, in a phenomenology of spatiality, too often eclipsed by that of temporality, that the multiple and dispersed modes of such uncanniness could be recognized and expressed. To remain faithful to the directing idea of this inquiry, that the dispersed phenomenology of suffering remains correlative to the assembling phenomenology of acting, we could take as an axis of reference the act of dwelling, in which acting and suffering combine, revealing what we have with Heidegger just called Befindlichkeit. This choice is all the more legitimate in that the expression unheimlich, which we took from Freud, refers to the Heim, the home, as the privileged dwelling place. In this regard, it would be the pair heimlich–unheimlich that would have to be considered. The heimlich side would be represented by the act of building, of constructing – a deliberate, planned act which once was the basis for nomads becoming sedentary and which today underlies the frenzied process of urbanization. But the heimlich side of the dialectical pair never succeeds in eclipsing the unheimlich side. It is felt and suffered today by every displaced person, but also cultivated (sometimes for itself) in an ethics of roaming, of uprootedness, for which the figure of Abraham could constitute the paradigm, opposed to that of Ulysses returning to Ithaca. Yet Ulysses himself wanders and lingers before returning to his home, and Abraham’s descendants return to where Abraham’s wanderings ended. Less dramatic, age after age, the ideology of the desert returns to haunt the imagination of settled, well-established peoples, only to weaken into the love of the countryside or to dissolve into the banality of exoticism. In this way, the action of dwelling and the passion for wandering intersect and intermingle. To advance this phenomenology of the heimlich–unheimlich still further to the level of being-in-the-world, it would be necessary to show how the multiple figures of the uncanniness of the flesh, on the plane of language, of action, of narrative, and of moral imputation, give rise to correlative figures of the uncanniness of the world which do not exhaust the dialectic of dwelling, extending between building and wandering.

(2) I turn now to two other broad classes of the experience alterity and uncanniness: others and the heart of hearts. I will be briefer, for these themes are better known. Nevertheless, I do have something specific I want to say concerning the correlation between acting and undergoing (or suffering), placed since the start of this inquiry under the aegis of the dialectic of the same and the other.
As regards other people, it is necessary to diversify the modes of alterity and of others as much as it was for the flesh, by pairing them again with the multiple figures of acting. In each case, we will see a note of uncanniness added to that of mere alterity. For example, at the level of language and starting from the question "who speaks?", it is not difficult to place in relation the capacity to say something with the alterity of the one spoken to, in the exchange of words. Uncanniness takes on several forms here. I shall refer first to the untransferable character of personal experience, and principally memory, which makes persons non-substitutable for one another even when they exchange roles. I understand I when you say you. And yet my point of view on the world is so singular that no one can really occupy my place. Whence the finally impenetrable character of the secret of each life, contrary to the capacity, which Dilthey liked to emphasize, of transporting oneself into an alien mind through the medium of expression of an alien experience. Advances in *Einfühlung* only hasten the withdrawal of the other person into his or her own ipseity. The coincidence between what you mean and what you say is forever unverifiable. We can only credit . . ., believe in . . . the other's veracity. The fiduciary character of the relation of interlocution is inseparable from this impenetrability of the secret of what we can call the other's ownness. This alterity colored with uncanniness surpasses the sphere of discourse and extends to that of action and that of narrative. Unfolding the modes of interaction, from struggle to cooperation, implies a permanent uncertainty concerning the division between the roles of helper or adversary on the practical level. This incertitude is even reflected in classical political theories about the alleged "state of nature." To what point are human beings wolves for human beings? And how far do the natural feelings of pity extend? We recall that Kant invented the remarkable concept of "unsociable sociability" in his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent*: "I understand by ‘antagonism’ the unsocial sociability of human beings, i.e., their propensity to enter into society, which, however, is combined with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society."7 This concept of unsociable sociability sums up the uncanniness of social relations which the state has the task of setting in order. And how could this

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uncanniness not be reflected on the plane where life stories interweave? The ultimate incommunicability of memories, which we just spoke of, means that life stories, however interwoven they may become, are never truly shared. It is finally on the level of moral imputation that these modes of alterity find their ultimate expression. Historians and jurists are well aware of this problem of sharing responsibilities in any complex interaction. How to assign to each person's account the part that comes about through this opaque interweaving of roles?

But the uncanniness of other people is not articulated only following the model of the flesh. It also has its own manifestations resulting from the distinction between the others of interpersonal relations and those of social relations mediated by institutions. Between the you manifested by a face and the third person to whom we are connected by the rules of justice, an immense variety of nuances get intercalated. Here is even where the variations on the theme of proximity and distance take on their full relief. We ought not to believe, in this regard, that proximity better characterizes interpersonal relations than social ones. Even friendship knows phases of proximity and distance, not just on the horizontal plane of exchange, but even on the vertical plane, inasmuch as the recognized superiority of a spiritual teacher engenders a paradoxical distance in proximity. An inverse paradox appears on the plane of relations to the most distant foreigner. Acts of compassion, those of a Mother Teresa, introduce an abrupt foreshortening of any distance, whereby the extremely distant becomes the extremely close. In light of this dialectic of the near and the far, we need to place the notion of hospitality, not only on the level of private life, but even more so on that of public life, even on that of the relations between states. (I am thinking here of the notion of "universal hospitality" formulated by Kant in his essay on perpetual peace.8)

This differentiated phenomenology of the other as others will allow the recurrent discussion of the theme of intersubjectivity to escape the sterile alternative of the merely perceptual criterion of appresentation of others, as in Husserl, and the moral criterion of the injunction inherent in the summons to responsibility, as in Levinas. Just as, for Levinas, the figure of the teacher of justice, which stands out against the background of the idea of infinity in

Totality and Infinity, does not coincide with that of the persecutor, the central figure of the theme of substitution in Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence. This contrast, which Levinas introduces at the very heart of his philosophy of the other as the other person, finds its rightful place in what I am here calling a differentiated phenomenology, placed under the meta-category of the other.

(3) The case of the heart of hearts is assuredly the most difficult one, in that it leads to the moral problematic, which I do not want to take up here. But it would not be out of place to try to isolate the pre-ethical features of the heart as the forum of the self's colloquy with itself (which is why I have preferred the term for intérieur to that of moral consciousness in order to translate the German Gewissen and the English conscience). We must, I believe, keep the metaphor of voice separate from the idea of a passivity or uncanniness beyond measure, as both internal and superior to one. It is certainly not a question of wholly dissociating the phenomenon of a voice from the capacity of distinguishing good from bad in some singular combination. In this sense, conscience, in the sense of the for intérieur is barely discernible from conviction (in German, Überzeugung) as the last instance of practical wisdom. It does remain this, however, to some extent, insofar as attestation (in German, Bezeugung) constitutes the instance of judgment that stands over against suspicion, in all those circumstances where the self designates itself, either as the author of its words, or as the agent of its action, or as the narrator of a story, or as a subject accountable for its acts. The heart of hearts then appears as the site of intimate assurance that, in some particular circumstance, sweeps away doubts, hesitations, the suspicion of inauthenticity, of hypocrisy, of self-complacency, of self-deception, and authorizes the acting and suffering human to say: here I stand. And yet, in this culminating point of the phenomenology of alterity and uncanniness – in the innermost certainty of existing as a self – a human being does not have mastery over him- or herself. It comes down to, happens like, a gift, an act of grace, which the self does not control. This non-mastery of a voice more heard than spoken leaves intact the question of its origin. In this regard, one already settles a constitutive indetermination of the phenomenon of the voice when one says with

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Heidegger that "in conscience, Dasein calls itself." The uncanniness of the voice is no less than that of the flesh or that of other people.

These have been a few lineaments of a phenomenology of alterity and uncanniness placed under the aegis of the meta-categories of the same and the other.

My starting point is Marco Olivetti’s assertion that “the shift in accent from ontology toward ethics characterizes in a significant way the ‘modern’ understanding of religion.”¹ In proposing the title “The Addressee of Religion: The Capable Human Being,” I want to do two things. First, to explore in a preliminary way, under the rubric of the capable human being, a region of human experience whose comprehension and explanation do not fall under what at first sight seems to be the obvious dichotomy between ethics and ontology. Next, to examine in what way religion addresses itself to this capable human being so as to transform our self-understanding of certain capacities stemming from the status I shall have attempted to characterize in the first part.

The Capable Human Being

I will adopt as a working hypothesis the thesis that the categories of the practical order have a legitimacy equal to those of the theoretical

¹This paper was presented in Rome in 1996 to a Castelli Conference whose theme was “religion between ethics and ontology.” It was then published along with other papers from the conference in Archivio di Filosofia 64 (1996): 19–34. – Editors’ note. [Ricoeur refers to the conference organizer’s introduction to the papers collected in this volume: “Philosophie de la religion entre éthique et ontologie: Introduction aux travaux,” 15–17. – Trans.]
order in constituting a second-order autonomous philosophy, under the aegis of a first-order philosophy that I will characterize summarily by the exercise of the “meta” function in philosophical discourse, a function that is illustrated by the “great kinds” in the last Platonic dialogues as well as by the multiple senses of being Aristotle speaks of in *Metaphysics E 2.*

But I have just pronounced the word that gives impetus to my discussion: the word “capacity.” This term stems from a type of discourse that I want to demonstrate cannot be included within any of the formulas of moral evaluation, either as a term for the wish for a good life, or as a term for moral obligation, or as a term for practical wisdom. On the contrary, analysis of the discourse of the capable human being reopens in an unexpected way the frozen debate between ethics and ontology. Within this domain of experience, is it not the whole structure of the philosophy of religion, assumed to oscillate between ethics and ontology, that gets shaken up? In order to prepare an answer to this ultimate question, let us look at the leading features of this domain of capacities.

Let us begin by recalling that we meet the question of the capacity to act before we enter the ethical sphere. A hermeneutics of selfhood encounters the idea of capacity on every level of its investigation. All the answers to the question “who?” – the central question of the problem of personal identity – lead to designating the self as the one who can: the one who can speak, who can initiate a sequence of events by his or her physical intervention in the course of things, who can pull together in a coherent or at least an acceptable

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2 In a paper titled “Justice and Truth,” in *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 58–71, which I presented at the celebration of the Centenary of the Institute Catholique de Paris, I cited John Rawls’ statement at the opening of his *Theory of Justice* that “justice is the first virtue of social institutions as truth is of systems of thought.” John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3. Here I am taking for granted this *de jure* equality of the just and the true. As a first approximation, this initial assumption appears to ratify, almost as a priori, what Marco Olivetti calls an ethical emphasis, even though what Rawls opposes to the ethical dimension is not characterized as something ontological, but rather as something theoretical. This ethical emphasis is further reinforced by Olivetti’s comment that love is situated at the margins of ethics, thereby qualifying it as required by meta-ethics. However, this capacity of love to affect the sphere of justice goes on to place the articulation of love above the ethical order of justice.
narrative the story of his or her life. Furthermore, it is important to note that to each type of ability – to speak, to act, to recount – there corresponds a type of inability, of incapacity, whose open-ended list gives content to the idea of fragility, of vulnerability, and which itself takes on a specific coloration once we cross the threshold of ethics. We cross this threshold with the idea of imputability. I deliberately say “imputability” and not “imputation.” Imputation is a judgment that consists in attributing to someone an action open to being morally evaluated, as good or bad, permitted or prohibited, just or unjust, as though that someone were its actual author. The idea of imputability is more radical. It expresses the capacity of an agent to fall under the judgment of imputation. Kant caught sight of its rootedness in a more primitive notion, that of “the absolute spontaneity of an action.” We find this within the framework of the third cosmological antinomy, which opposes free causality to natural causality. Our relation to obligation – to the obligation to act according to a norm, to the obligation to make up for harm done to others, to the obligation to suffer the penalty – presupposes this capacity to enter the circle of obligations that we name imputability. It is not by chance therefore that this concept appears within the framework of an antinomy of theoretical reason rather than within that of the Metaphysics of Morals and the practical reason that constitutes its backbone. This is why it will be the task of a phenomenology of moral experience to lift this notion from the antinomy in order to determine its true epistemological place. Kant himself suggests this by referring to “the whole content of the psychological concept” of freedom. From the perspective of such a phenomenology of moral experience, I want to propose something further that follows from the idea of imputability: namely, the capacity of an agent-subject to submit his or her action to the requirements of a symbolic order. I hold this capacity to be the existential, empirical, historical (or however one wants to call it) condition for the connection of a self to a norm, hence the condition of what is signified by the idea of autonomy in Kant’s philosophy.

3“The transcendental idea of freedom is far from constituting the whole content of the psychological concept of that name, which is for the most part empirical, but constitutes only that of the absolute spontaneity of an action, as the real ground of its imputability; but this idea is nevertheless the real stumbling block for philosophy, which finds insuperable difficulties in admitting this kind of unconditioned causality.” Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A448/B476.
The force of the adjective “symbolic” is meant to encompass within a single emblematic notion the multiple “presentations” that can give a figure to obligation: the ideas of an imperative and an injunction, but also those of counsel, advice, customs and traditions, foundational narratives dedicated to exemplary lives, and songs of praise to moral sentiments where respect is just one among many of such sentiments, along with admiration, veneration, culpability, shame, pity, solicitude, compassion, etc. Furthermore, the term “symbolic” recalls through its etymology that these figures taken together compose the schematism of obligation, in that they operate as signs of recognition among the members of a community. The richness in the symbolic order has its own specific fragility. This has to do first of all with the consistency of that order as an order. In fact, this order imposes itself both as prior, superior, and external to our intentions, projects, and decisions, and as expecting our recognition of this very superiority. A second source of fragility has to do with our ability to enter into a symbolic order, our capacity to recognize its authority. The difficulty people have in inscribing action in a symbolic order – above all their incapacity to make sense of the necessity or even of the core meaning of this kind of inscription which affects a number of people today, principally those whom the socio-political order excludes – underscores in a dramatic fashion the fragility belonging to our capacity to enter into the moral dimension of existence.

This correlation between a capacity and its fragility will constitute the basis for important developments in the second part of my remarks devoted to the insertion of the religious into the sphere of capacities and abilities. But first I want to say something more about two or three features of this capacity to enter a symbolic order.

First precision: above, I mentioned one of the origins of the term “symbol” – the symbol as a sign of recognition. A symbolic order is something that can be shared. Here we touch on a feature that distances us from orthodox Kantianism insofar as that philosophy gives a monological version of the connection between the self and the norm, in spite of the concept of humanity introduced by the second formulation of the categorical imperative. Every symbolic order straightaway has a dialogical dimension. Philosophers who have thought about universalism, such as Habermas and the communitarians, all agree on this, even if they do not agree about how to separate the universal and the historical. We can even take up in this regard the Hegelian concept of recognition in order to speak of this
The Addresser of Religion

Communalization of moral experience. To be capable of entering into a symbolic order is also, and correlatively, to be capable of entering into an order of recognition. But to talk of capacity is also to talk of incapacity – and the inability to enter into the process of recognition calls for an appropriate description that I shall not undertake here.

Second precision: another capacity belongs to the entry into a symbolic order, that of raising oneself above one's own particular point of view, of acceding to an impartial point of view. Here I am adopting the concept of impartiality that Thomas Nagel puts at the base of the moral life. He defines impartiality by the capacity (again the vocabulary of capacity!) to hold two "points of view": that of my interests and that of the higher point of view which allows me to adopt in imagination the perspective of the other and to affirm that every other life is worth as much as my own. We are, as the authors of our actions, capable of adopting these two points of view, at the price of the conflicts that give moral life its dramatic intensity. In one sense, Kant himself does presuppose this capacity when he requires the moral subject to submit his or her maxim of action to the test of the rule of universalization. He presupposes, if I can put it this way, the ability to do one's duty. We shall not lose sight of this presupposition when we come to speak of the support that religion adds to the moral disposition, to its Gesinnung.

A final precision: I propose taking as the most important aspect of the capacity to enter into a symbolic order an agent's capacity to place his or her action under the rule of justice. This capacity finds its elementary and still primitive form in the indignation that, in the voice of a child, is expressed by the exclamation: that's not fair! Such indignation bears witness to an initial elementary detachment as regards one's own self-interest. But it lacks the ability to elevate itself to the level required by the rule of justice, of distancing itself from a desire for vengeance, which has not yet been left behind. The capacity to take such a distance is presupposed by every contractual theory, including the fairness presupposed by Rawls in his fable of the veil of ignorance, which, as a kind of parable, accompanies the hypothesis of an original situation in which the contracting parties are called on to agree on the principles of justice. Rawls'
The fable happily combines the idea of a shared understanding, which falls under the heading of "considered judgments," and that of impartiality, here given expression in terms of the story of the veil of ignorance.

I shall end my comments here on the scale of our abilities. But it is significant that we should end our reflection with the idea of the capacity to place an action under the rule of justice. The payoff is twofold. On the one hand, the rule of justice is thereby placed at the peak of the hierarchy of the principles of practical reason, as we anticipated by adopting Rawls' formula that places side by side the virtue of justice and that of truth. On the other hand, the capacity to enter into a symbolic order takes on at this level the precise form of a capacity for fairness, for equity, with regard to singular persons in singular situations.

We may therefore take the capacity for mutual recognition, the capacity for impartiality, and the capacity for fairness as constitutive structures of our capacity [more generally] to enter into a symbolic order that gives the idea of imputability a concrete meaning.

We are now able to answer the question that I have been holding in suspense, that concerning the epistemological status of every assertion having to do with the abilities and inabilities of the capable human being. The answer to this question will occupy a strategic position in the overall argument of my presentation, inasmuch as it governs what follows in my discussion about the position of the religious in relation to ethics and ontology.

In order to give an overall response to a question approached in a scattered way in our review of the scale of abilities, I propose considering the reflexive formula in which are summed up all the successive answers to the question "who can do what?" This reflexive formula asserts a redoubled capacity, that of designating oneself as the one who can . . . (to which we must add: who cannot . . .). My thesis is that this formula is not as such an ethical proposition, either as expressing what is wished for as a good life, or in terms of an obligation or prohibition, or as regards practical wisdom. To be sure, the proposition "I am the one who can . . ." undeniably has a cognitive dimension, in the sense Marco Olivetti, in his opening presentation, gives the term cognition, namely, "the capacity to formulate statements corresponding to reality." In short, to designate oneself as the one who can . . . is to identify the sort of being I am. It is to say that part of the human condition is being able to apprehend oneself in terms of abilities and inabilities. Hence it is to say something that claims to be true. It is true that I am capable of taking myself to be capable of entering into a symbolic order, that I am
capable of recognition, of impartiality, of fairness. An ontological
dimension is thus attached to this cognitive truth claim. What is true
of the capacity to enter a symbolic order is true of the notion of
imputability in general in which all such capacities are summed up.
In that the judgment of imputation stems from the moral dimension,
so too the idea of an absolute spontaneity, and that of the imputabil-
ity which follows from it, fall on the cognitive and ontological side
thanks to the antinomy of causality.

Are we for all that really clear about the epistemological status
of the notion of capacity? No, for the truth claimed for self-design-
nation as one who can is not a scientific proposition capable of
being confirmed or disconfirmed by observable facts. It is a belief,
but a belief that, unlike a doxa held to be inferior to some episteme,
has to be understood as an assurance, a confidence, which
has as its contrary suspicion, not doubt, a suspicion that cannot be
empirically refuted, but that has to be overcome starting from a
posited assurance and confidence. I have given the name attestation
to this mode of belief whose correlate or reference is my ability to
do something. I attest that I can. The kind of being of a capacity
that will be the basis for the remainder of my remarks corresponds
to this extremely original truth-status of attestation. What is at
issue is a quite particular kind of truth. On the one hand, it is
inseparable from the practical moment of our ability to act; on the
other, it is distinct as having to do with the mode of being of the
being that I am as being able or not able to . . . This complex
mixture of subordination to the practical and of cognitive specific-
ity accounts for the enigma of the notion of capacity on the epis-
temological and ontological levels. And it is this enigma that rattles
the overly self-confident assertion of a dichotomy between episte-
ology and ontology. Assertions relative to abilities are existential
propositions arising out of practice, but these are existential propo-
sitions endowed with a truth claim and, beyond this, a specific
ontological import. That this ontology has more to do with the
ideas of potentiality and actuality than with those having to do
with substance, and with the whole sequence of transcendentals
that follow form the idea of substance, is the far horizon of this
problematic of power, ability, and capacities and incapacities, and
of the whole problematic of the capable human being. It is not just
the positing of an ontology of potentiality and actuality in relation
to one of substance that is at issue, but also its complex relation to
propositions within the practical order having to do with the good,
the obligatory, and the just. In other words, the complex status of
the existential propositions drawn from practice seems to me to be
the only one that really fits with the propositions of a phenomenology of the capable human being.⁵

The Word That Religion Addresses to the Capable Human Being

Our task is now clear: to show in what sense religion can be said to be addressed to the capable human being.

I want to consider several points: first, that religion touches human beings at the level of a specific incapacity, classically designated as fault, sin, moral evil; next that religion purports to bring help, and a remedy, to these injured humans being in liberating in them a buried capacity that we can call an originary goodness; and, finally, that religion brings about this regeneration by specific symbolic means that reawaken fundamental moral capacities that we placed in part one under the heading of the entry into a symbolic order. At the end of this discussion, we can attempt to return to the question posed by Marco Olivetti concerning the situation of philosophy of religion between ethics and ontology. My answer will follow from what has been said about the epistemological status of attestation, which we have seen has an affinity with the being of the capable human being.

For this discussion, I shall take as a point of reference, Kant's Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason.⁶ My choice of this text of Kant's seemed to me to fit well with a critical test of the thesis about the "shift in accent from ontology toward ethics," which Marco Olivetti has invited us to consider and discuss. At the same time, I hasten to say that I do not take this work of Kant as the final word, but only as one of the first words in the philosophy of religion stemming from the Enlightenment and characterized by Olivetti as a "moralizing philosophy of religion." It is precisely this characterization that will be called into question in the following pages. That is, I am not proposing to defend Kant's theses about radical evil and

⁵ If we were to look for a comparable epistemological situation in Kant, it would be found on the side of the postulates of practical reason, concerning which Kant says that these are existential propositions correlated with practice.

religion in terms of their substance; rather I shall confine myself to obstinately posing the question regarding to which universe of discourse these theses belong.

**Radical Evil**

That the status of the propositions presented in Kant’s text is not ordinary, however, must be presumed from the beginning, once it is said that religion adds nothing to moral philosophy. But we also know that the way of ontology is no longer available. Still, it is the first exclusion that interests me here. Let us begin by reading these lines from the preface to the first edition from 1793: “on its own behalf morality in no way needs religion . . . but is rather self-sufficient by virtue of pure practical reason.” It is true that an opening had been made within the field of practical reason, beyond the consideration of the moral law, within the framework of the dialectic of practical reason, under the heading of the “entire object of the will.” Teleological concepts, such as the highest good, the synthesis of virtue and happiness, etc., return in force with this concept. But for all that, we do not really leave behind the setting of the second critique, we just move from its analytic to its dialectic. Even the assertion of the postulates of practical reason, whose odd epistemological status I alluded to above, remains within the field of practical reason and does not stem from any form of religious discourse. The real turning point takes place instead at the beginning of the essay on radical evil with the recourse made there to a panoply of concepts that gravitate around the idea of a disposition. It is these concepts that I propose to connect to the network, or, as I began by saying, to the scale of abilities of the capable human being. The concept of a disposition (Gesinnung) constitutes in this regard the threshold concept. It pertains to what Kant calls the “admission” (Annahme) of maxims, which I will not hesitate to interpret in light of what I have spoken of above as access to a symbolic order.

It is in regard to this basic notion that the two key notions governing the remainder of this text are divided up: the “original disposition (Anlage) to good in human nature” and the “propensity (Hang) to evil in human nature.” The rootedness of the disposition to good in the teleological structure of human nature determines the

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7 Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, 33.
original character of this disposition. Taking up and prolonging the second part of the third Critique, Kant clearly connects this disposition to good with the three other dispositions he characterizes as “elements of the determination of the human being”: The predisposition:

1. To the animality of the human being, as a living being;
2. To the humanity in him, as a living and at the same time rational being;
3. To his personality, as a rational and at the same time responsible being.  

Note the hierarchical organization of these three dispositions. But, more than that, let us hold on to the connection between disposition and susceptibility, that is, capacity. Thus, we are told that the predisposition to personality “is the susceptibility to respect for the moral law as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice.” But also that “the subjective ground . . . of our incorporating this incentive into our maxims seems to be an addition to personality, and hence seems to deserve the name of a predisposition on behalf of it.” It is this group of dispositions that Kant tells us add up to a predisposition to the good. “They are original, for they belong to the possibility of human nature.” To this point, nothing has been said that could not be inscribed within the framework of a phenomenology of the capable human being.

However, the decisive turn comes with the introduction of the propensity to evil. It is fundamentally distinguished from the predisposition to good in that “it can be thought of . . . as brought by the human being upon himself.” The enigma of evil consists precisely in that this propensity, concerning which we know neither where it comes from nor why, remains a determination of the free power of choice that “must reside in the subjective ground of the possibility of the deviation of the maxims from the moral law.” Hence it is spoken of here and throughout this text in terms of the semantics of capacity, and in turn is apportioned into a hierarchy consisting of three moments: fragility, impurity, depravity – that is, as “the

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8 Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings, 50.
9 Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings, 52.
10 Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings, 53.
propensity to adulterate moral incentives with immoral ones.” Whether we speak of the last degree of this propensity as corruption or perversion, depravity remains a propensity *contracted* by the power of free choice. Everything said subsequently about human beings being evil by nature will not call into question the propensity to evil’s belonging to the circle of dispositions and therefore to that of the motivation of free choice, which justifies its being imputed to humans. Hence, even at the level of radical evil, the notion of imputability continues to bring about the connection between the plane of moral capacities mentioned earlier and the plane where the philosophy of religion is situated. Contracted evil, imputed evil, these two major qualities of evil will keep the theory of radical evil from obliterating the distinction between the radical and the originary, between the propensity to evil and the disposition to good. I will take this occasion to say that this differentiating of levels between the disposition to good and the propensity to evil allows us to articulate a wisdom-based exegesis of the biblical narrative of the first sin. The narrative presentation is in fact spread across the temporal succession of the two states of innocence and guilt, which Kant proposes to think of as one being superimposed on the other, as though they were two different quasi-geological levels. The limits of the narrative form, which was the only literary form available in the setting of the composition of the Pentateuch, have the effect of concealing the paradoxical structure of the relation between what in the language of Wisdom we could name as the originary goodness of *creation* and the historical depravity of human beings.

Having said this, we must not minimize the kind of rupture that the idea of *radicality* introduces into what I have called above the scale of capacities. The propensity to evil certainly stems from the same categorization as do the degrees between what we have seen articulated in terms of the disposition to good, to which are attached the hierarchy of degrees of the propensity to evil: fragility, impurity, depravity. But the idea of radicality also gives the propensity to evil a specific dimension whose counterpart will be seen when we undertake to characterize the impact of religion on the entire regime of capacities. Without ever really touching the originary character of the disposition to good, the radicality of evil situates its root outside the reflexive reach of the origin of our abilities in what the same Kant earlier called “the absolute spontaneity of an action.” Can we not say, therefore, that radical evil consists in a crisis of imputability and, at its base, in a wounding of this absolute spontaneity of an action, a primitive, but not originary, wounding? With this, the attestation by which we affirm the truthfulness and the ontological
component of our ability to act is taken in default. The radicality of evil simultaneously plunges both imputability and attestation into the abyss. I find such a *mise en abîme* of attestation expressed in Kant’s text concerning the confession of the inscrutability of the origin of evil. Inscrutability sets an absolute limit to the reflexive reappropriation of the imputability of evil, which nevertheless must be reaffirmed, if radical evil has to be assigned to our use of free will, albeit at a more fundamental level than the one on which each of our maxims of action gets articulated. By distinguishing between a rational and a temporal origin, Kant removes the narrative from the reflexive apprehension of the source of evil, or at least he relegates its presentation as an event that occurred at some specific moment of time to its figurative representations. The “always already” of evil is not some “past” that we can date.

Having preserved the discontinuity between what is radical and what is origin, we must also admit a discontinuity of another order between the primitive maxim that inverts the order of priority between the law and desire, and the maxims of action that mark the progression of action. The confession that “there is no conceivable ground for us, therefore, from which moral evil could first have come in us” indicates this other discontinuity which distinguishes the radical from the ordinary everyday level, without for all that abolishing the imputability of a choice that, although radical, remains [the work] of freedom. This *mise en abîme* on the plane of attestation, indicated by inscrutability, implies a reworking of discourse and the recourse, observable in different cultures, to myths and to the interpretation of myth through sapiential language, such as I myself proposed in the *Symbolism of Evil*. Kant himself willingly turns to this discursive exigency, as he explains in the “General Remark” that follows the section on radical evil. It assigns this detour through myth and its philosophical exegesis to the *parerga* of the philosophy of religion. And this mythical treatment of radical evil offers a major

11 “The rational origin, however, of this disharmony in our power of choice with respect to the way it incorporates lower incentives in its maxims and makes them supreme, i.e. this propensity to evil, remains inexplicable to us, for since it must itself be imputed to us, this supreme ground of all maxims must in turn require the adoption of an evil maxim” (Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, 64).

12 Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, 64.

theme for interpretation in the philosophy of religion, that of captivity, as though evil were something that takes the power of free choice hostage. This radical impediment is what the paradox of the bondage of the will attempts to express. For it is a paradox: free, hence imputable; bound, hence itself not free to act. What is signified in this way is an incapacity that affects the very heart of imputability, without, however, being able to destroy it.

The Mediations of the Christian Religion

It is this primitive, but not originary, situation of the captive will that the religious, at least in the Judeo-Christian tradition, confronts. With this, the philosophical site of discourse about religion is determined. It is not ethical, inasmuch as religion adds nothing to what the morality of duty requires, nor ontological, at least insofar as the traditional discourse of ontology does not seem capable of taking up the connection between the truth dimension of attestation and the practical one of our ability to act.

I will continue to draw on the testimony of Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* in this second part of my presentation. My sole goal is to establish the epistemological status of the basic propositions of religious discourse.

A first remark is called for. The discourse of religion takes place at the turning point between the disposition to good and the propensity to evil, hence at the heart of the system of imputability. This intervention of religion in the field of imputability is spoken of in terms of "supernatural cooperation," "assistance," "a reduction of obstacles." We do no violence to the Kantian philosophy of religion if we say that the whole problematic of religion is summed up by human beings' reappropriation of their originary goodness in spite of or in the face of their propensity to radical evil. Even if not explicitly acknowledged by Kant, this problematic has to be expressed through a sequence of paradoxes, which have not been recognized by the protagonists of the theological arguments concerning the status of that assistance for which we are not the origin but whose acceptance depends on us. This paradox of *alterity* and *ipseity* will be at the heart of the following considerations. But let us already note that its status is not acknowledged owing to not having recognized the specificity of the place where the religious intervenes and the paradoxical structure of its process of regeneration. If it is true that religion has as its unique theme the restoration of the alienated capacity of the power of free choice, then, as I have suggested in the
title of my presentation, it can be said that religion has as its addressee the capable human being, and its proper status results from this fundamental relationship.\(^\text{14}\)

This paradox of alterity and ipseity – alterity for its basis, ipseity for its admission, its welcoming – is unfolded starting from the center of the process of liberation that takes place in the ground of human existence, pointing to the mediations constitutive of the religious. In effect, the philosophy of religion, at least from a Kantian perspective, is distinguished from every enterprise of rational theology in that it is mute about the divine origin of the process of regeneration. This philosophy of religion does not speak of God, but rather of the historical mediations that religion offers to the process of regeneration. These mediations are those of representations, beliefs, and institutions. I shall not dwell here on what causes a problem for a rational philosophy, according to Kant: that is, not so much the specificity of these mediations as their institutional corruption, which leads him to end his book with the problem of false worship. It is as though what most preoccupied him was the spread of radical evil by those very means that religion puts in service of the project of regeneration. It is instead the Kantian argument that I discussed in one of my essays in \textit{Figuring the Sacred} regarding the Kantian hermeneutics of religion that I want to take up again here.\(^\text{15}\) I want to consider therefore, albeit unfortunately in a very succinct manner, the connections between the historical mediations considered and the very project of liberation of the power of free choice. It is thanks to this connection that we can affirm that, following the title of my presentation, religion has as its \textit{addressee} the capable human being.

This address to the capable human being can first be discerned in the symbolic mediation discussed at the end of Part II of Kant's book. These pages have for their theme the representation of the good principle in its struggle against the bad one. As I put it in my earlier essay:

\begin{quote}
It brings on stage a dramaturgy whose protagonists are more than human. The good and bad principles are there represented, in a
\end{quote}

\(^{14}\)Kant's "General Remark" at the end of Part I clearly states this in its title: "Concerning the restoration to its power of the original predisposition to the good."

quasi-theatrical sense of this word, as personified hypostases of the powers that fight one another in the human person’s heart. On the one side is the archetype of the human being “as well pleasing to God,” on the other side its antitype. If it is true that at the root of this dramatization we ought to be able to designate the existential conflict in which like the reconquest of a lost power, it seems that we have not direct access to this existential conflict, except by way of the representation of a superhuman conflict.\textsuperscript{16}

It is within the framework of this dramaturgy that Kant refers to the Christ figure, in which he discerns the representation par excellence of the good principle as the idea of a human being pleasing to God. We cannot represent this ideal except in the idea of a human being willing not only to execute in person all human duties, and at the same time to spread goodness about him as far wide as possible through teaching and example, but also, though tempted by the greatest temptation, to take upon himself all sufferings, up to the most ignominious death, for the good of the world and even for his enemies.\textsuperscript{17}

Yet Kant admits, despite his critique of traditional christologies, “we are not its authors but the idea rather established itself in the human being without our comprehending how human nature could have even been receptive to it.”\textsuperscript{18} The inscrutability of the archetype of the good intention is the retort to the inscrutability of evil. At most, we can draw near to it through the resources of analogy. Speaking of the sacrificial love of the Christ of the Gospels, Kant says, “we always need a certain analogy with natural being in order to make supersensible characteristics comprehensible to us.”\textsuperscript{19} This note clearly refers back to the well-known § 59 of the \textit{Critique of the Faculty of Judgment} dealing with analogy.

The question then arises of the \textit{efficacy} of this representation for which Christianity serves as the bearer and the guardian. This is where \textit{belief} takes over from representation. Despite all the polemics about justification that have raged since Luther and maybe since Saint Paul, what is at stake in the whole process is the effective liberation of the power of free choice. Becoming free – or in

\textsuperscript{16} Ricoeur, “A Philosophical Hermeneutics of Religion: Kant,” 82–3.
\textsuperscript{17} Kant, \textit{Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason}, 80.
\textsuperscript{18} Kant, \textit{Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason}, 80.
\textsuperscript{19} Kant, \textit{Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason}, 83n*. 
Paul’s words, “having been set free from the law of sin, you have becomes slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6) – it is stated at the beginning of Part II, is the highest prize human beings can win. Here representation has to clothe itself with power. Belief is the dimension of this efficacy of the representation. We cannot reproach Kant for having become caught up in the antinomies arising from the theologies of extrinsic or, as sometimes said, forensic expiation, and more generally with the polemic between justification by faith and justification by works. But we can only regret the fact that he did not take the full measure of the unsurpassably paradoxical character of the whole project of liberation of the power of free choice wherein, let me repeat, are intermingled the alterity of outside aid and the ipseity of an admission. This paradoxical character of the regeneration of the power of free choice seems to fit well with the agonistic representation of the combat between the good and the bad principle belonging to the symbolic mediation explored in Part II of Kant’s book.

With the institutional dimension of religion we come to the most polemical part of Kant’s text, as its title indicates: “Concerning service and counterfeit service under the dominion of the good principle, or, Of religion and priestcraft.”20 This verifies our earlier comment that Kant is preoccupied above all by how radical evil contaminates worship through the figures of fanaticism, clericalism, and, even worse, through the contribution religion makes to the state of tutelage condemned by Enlightenment philosophers. But readers ought not to allow themselves to be misled by this argument. They need instead to uncover the core meaning that implies that there is a problem of true worship. This core meaning is nothing other than that the project of regeneration, hence the liberation of the power of free choice, of the emancipation of goodness, must possess an appropriate institution that would be both the guardian of its symbolic grounds – in the case in question, the representation through Christ of divine aid – and the historical vehicle for the adhesion of faith that contributes to the efficacy of this symbolism. This necessity for an appropriate institutional mediation on symbolic grounds and for the dynamics of belief has a double implication. First, there is the implication that a community dedicated to the emancipation of the good ground of human beings is irreducible to any political

20 Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, 151.
organization. In this regard, the religious community as it should be in terms of its vocation stands apart not only in relation to the properly moral level of the kingdom of ends, as it is inscribed in the third formulation of the categorical imperative, but in relation to every political project of founding a state based on law, a cosmopolitan state. As we read in "Toward Perpetual Peace,"

the problem of establishing a state, no matter how hard it may sound, is soluble even for a nation of devils (if only they have understanding). . . . For the problem is not the moral improvement of human beings but only the mechanism of nature, and what the task requires one to know is how this can be put to use in human beings in order so to arrange the conflict of their unpeaceable dispositions within a people that they themselves have to constrain one another to submit to coercive law and so to bring about a condition of peace in which laws have force.21

For this reason, no political philosophy and more generally no philosophy of culture is sufficient to the demand for a community that aims only at the regeneration of the will by specific public means.

The second corollary is even more significant. It is not sufficient to fall back, as many Romantic thinkers do, on the idea of an invisible church. If we can speak of a Kantian ecclesiology, it must be a paradoxical one, resting on the dialectic between the invisible church, inadequate to the project of historical visibility of the enterprise of regeneration of the will, and the visible church, afflicted with all the stigmata of false worship. Kant, to be sure, did not formulate the paradox of this dialectic in appropriate terms, but his effort to identify the "marks," the "traces," of affinity between the historical institution and the sought-for community stem from a veritable hermeneutics of the institution, one perfectly homogeneous with his hermeneutics of representation and of belief, all of them summed up in the paradox of justification, wherein the alterity of outside aid and the ipseity of adhesion confront one another. It is not by chance that the notion of a schematism of analogy reappears in Part IV. Kant, indeed, is not searching for an invisible church, but for signs

of a genuine religious community in visible churches. And these signs are themselves visible.

The "Place" of Religion

We can now attempt to answer the question of how the threefold retort of religion to radical evil—on the levels of representation, of belief, and of institutions—is situated in relation to ethics and ontology. This apparent alternative is at the origin of the theme of our conference: the philosophy of religion between ethics and ontology.

To what degree does our discussion of the capable human being give us some direction? [To a certain degree], I would say. If it is really true that all the notions brought up in Book I stem from ideas having to do with a disposition, whether it be a question of the predisposition to good or the propensity to evil, and if the idea of a disposition extends to the fundamental region of the primitive maxims of a free will par excellence expressed by the idea of imputability—or, as I have tried to say, the capacity to enter into a symbolic order—the capture of the free will by the principle of evil introduces a discontinuity in this scale of abilities. An inability of ability is given to think about. In recognizing its inscrutability, we confess that it escapes the testimony of conscience that we have called attestation. The inscrutability of the origin of evil constitutes a crisis for attestation. This is why we have only symbolic representations, myths about this entry of evil into the world, that is, at the heart of our very ability to act. It is this specific inscrutability, affecting the inability of the most fundamental ability of imputability, that decides the epistemological fate of every statement about regeneration and about the pathways to regeneration on the planes of representation, belief, and institutions. I suggest saying that here it is hope that takes over from attestation.

Attestation could accompany the confession of evil so long as the propensity to evil remained homogeneous with the cycle of dispositions, hence of capacities. It falls by the wayside as soon as the question of the origin of this propensity draws the confession that this origin is inscrutable. Hope is then the appropriate epistemic category for the religious rejoinder to the unavailability of the bound will and to the inscrutability of the origin of this incapacity. This affinity between the problematic of regeneration and the category of hope is so close that it is affirmed beginning from Book I of Kant's text, hence within the very framework of the essay on radical evil,
and in the immediate neighborhood of the reiterated affirmation of the incomprehensibility of its origin, “of its origin in time.” Within the immediate context of the arrival of this unexpected guest, the line of continuity is assured by the rejection of the idea of some basic form of corruption, which could be nothing other than one affecting the original predisposition to the good, and by the consideration of the idea of a “fall through seduction,” something that would make us victims of an evil, fundamentally bad seducer. This is why Kant declares: “And so for the human being, who despite a corrupted heart yet always possesses a good will, there still remains hope of a return to the good from which he has strayed.” The rest of the work is then placed under the sign of this hope, which I would like to define by the goal of the liberation of this originary goodness.

We could then reinterpret the three mediations of the religion upon which the remainder of the work is built as privileged mediations of hope. Considering more precisely the representation of the Christ figure in the Christian tradition, it is possible to take the schematism of analogy which Kant refers to with regard to this representation as the schematism of hope, which leaves hope both with a language and a figuration. The paradox of belief, which confronts the alterity of aid with the ipseity of adhesion, can in turn be taken as the paradox constitutive of the efficacy of hope. Finally, on the level of the institution, the dialectic of the visible and the invisible church can be taken as constitutive of the church as both an institution and the historical embodiment of hope.

Hope, therefore, is not a marginal category in the context of Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason. What is more, to take the full measure of its pertinence to Kant’s philosophy of religion, we have to return to the dialectic of practical reason. We have already referred to the directive idea of this dialectic, [the idea of] the “whole object of practical reason.” This [object] is the goal of an intention, a demand, an exigency, that of the highest good. The Absicht aufs höchste Gut, which serves to structure the conciliation between virtue and happiness, already has something to do with hope, even though it still relates basically to morality – to its dialectic, it is true, no longer to its analytic. A step is taken in this direction with the well-known postulates, whose complex epistemic status we spoke of earlier, as beliefs bearing on objective realities, yet ones subordinated to practical reason. Now it is their relationship to hope.

22 Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, 64.
23 Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, 65, italics added.
that needs to be emphasized. Each of these postulates constitutes one link in the chain of conditions for the actualization of the vow of practical reason: the “augmentation” (Erweiterung) they express does not constitute an extension of knowledge but an “opening” (Eröffnung) that we can take as the philosophical equivalent of hope. Thus the “postulated” freedom, the capstone of the doctrine of these postulates, is a freedom that can, a freedom capable of existing at the heart of a free totality. This integral and integrated freedom anticipates the regenerated freedom, the freedom liberated from the yoke of the bondage of the will in Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason. I cannot resist the pleasure of citing one more text that crowns the evocation of this fulfilled freedom and where the idea of capacity is elevated to a high point. Kant is discussing an expression brought up at the beginning of the Dialectic, that of an Aussicht, a “perspective.” He then says, this is “a view into a higher immutable order of things in which we already are, and in which we can henceforth be directed, by determinate percepts, to carry on our existence in accordance with the highest vocation of reason.”

Thus I wrote in my 1968 essay, titled precisely “Freedom in the Light of Hope,” for another Rome Castelli Congress: “This is what we will supremely; but that we should be able to do what we will, that we should exist according to this supreme vow -- that is what can only be postulated. Postulated freedom is this manner of existing as free among freedoms.” This freedom is nothing other than freedom in the light of hope. To it religion offers the mediation of representations, belief, and institutions.

Our initial question – that of how religion is situated in relation to ethics and ontology – consequently receives the following precise form: what is the status of hope – of its Erwartung – in relation to ethics and ontology? I said above that it takes up the attestation of our capacity to act, but that it is separated from it by the abyss of inscrutability of the origin of evil. But it is indeed from such

26 In my 1968 paper I go on to show in what way the two other postulates – immortality and God’s existence – reinforce this connection between the postulates and hope.
attestation that it takes it up, beyond the night of unknowing. In designating religion as the *retort* to the confession of radical evil, we inscribe it in continuity with attestation. This rediscovered continuity is assured in the end by the original disposition to good, in which the hierarchy of our capacities culminates, and to which religion promises deliverance. In other words, it is the definition of religion as deliverance of the good that situates hope as the prolongation of the attestation by which conscience bears witness to this power to act, for which imputability constitutes its moral core. Yet to place hope as a prolonging of attestation does not mean weakening its specificity. It would not be out of place here to suggest that it is not so much a question of attestation as of testimony, in order to take into account the reconstruction that Jean Greisch has proposed of the relation between attestation and testimony. And here we might also welcome the admirable pages Jean Nabert devotes to testimony in his *Désir de Dieu*. But there is not time to pursue that line of thought further here.

Finally, that hope is inscribed outside the alternative of ethics or ontology is what is so wonderfully indicated by the untranslatable modal form that clothes the third of the questions posed at the end of the second section of the transcendental theory of method in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. What can I know? What must I do? What am I permitted to hope? In this way, hope is distinguished from knowledge and duty in that the *dürfen* of the third question is distinguished from the *können* of the first one and the *sollen* of the second. At the same time it unites them, as Kant states in the same text: "The third question – if I do what I ought to do, what may I then hope? – is at once practical and theoretical." Is this an ambiguous answer? An unacceptable one? Or is it not rather the opening to a dimension alien to the dichotomy that set in motion our common quest? Here the reader is invited to ponder.

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The prize with which I have been honored by the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, and for which I extend my sincere thanks, is motivated by the humanism attributed to my life's work by these generous benefactors.¹ The reflections that follow are devoted to examining some of the bases of this humanism.

My title is twofold: it designates, on the one hand, the capacities that a human agent attributes to him- or herself and, on the other, the recourse to others required to give a social status to this personal certainty. The stakes shared by both poles of this duality are those of personal identity.

I identify myself by my capacities, by what I can do. The individual designates him- or herself as a capable human being – and, we must

¹ These remarks were prepared for the ceremony at which Ricoeur received the Kluge Prize at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, on December 20, 1994. Ricoeur was unable to attend in person owing to poor health, so they were presented as a video recording (available online at http://www.loc.gov/loc/kluge/prize/winners.html). They were published in French as “Devenir capable, être reconnu,” in Esprit 7 (2005): 125–9 and the Revue des revues (December 2005) of the French Diplomatic Service. – Editors’ note.
add,] as a suffering human being, to underscore the vulnerability of the human condition.

Capacities can be observed from the outside, but they are fundamentally felt, lived in a mode of certainty. This latter is not a belief, considered a lesser degree of knowledge. It is a confident assurance, akin to testimony. I am speaking here about attestation: attestation relates to the self as testimony relates to an event, a meeting, an accident.

It is possible to establish a typology of basic capacities, at the intersection of the innate and the acquired. These basic powers constitute the primary foundation of humanity, in the sense of the human as opposed to the nonhuman. Change, which is an aspect of identity — that of ideas and things — reveals a dramatic aspect on the human level, which is that of a personal history entangled with the innumerable histories of our companions in existence. Personal identity is marked by a temporality that can be called constitutive. The person is his or her history. In the typological outline I am proposing, I consider in turn the capacity to say, the capacity to act, the capacity to recount, to which I add imputability and promising. In this vast panorama of capacities affirmed and exercised by the human agent, the main accent shifts from what seems at first a morally neutral pole to an explicitly moral pole, where the capable subject attests to himself or herself as a responsible subject.

A few words about each of these capacities. By “the power to say” I mean a more specific capacity than the general gift of language expressed in the plurality of languages, each with its morphology, lexicon, syntax, and rhetoric. The power to say is the ability spontaneously to produce an intelligible discourse. In discourse someone says something to someone in accordance with common rules. “Saying something” is the sense; “about something” is the reference to the extra-linguistic; “to someone” is the address, the basis of conversation. By the “power to act” I mean the capacity to produce events in society and in nature. This intervention transforms the notion of events, which [are not then just] what occurs. It introduces human contingency, uncertainty, and unpredictability into the course of things.

The “power to recount” occupies a preeminent place among the capacities inasmuch as events of every kind become discernible and intelligible only when recounted in stories; the age-old art of recounting stories, when applied to oneself, produces the life stories articulated in the works of historians. Emplotment marks a bifurcation in identity itself. Identity is no longer simply sameness. In self-identity, change is integrated as peripeteia. We can then speak of a narrative
identity: that of the plot of a narrative which remains unfinished and open to the possibility of being recounted differently, and also of being recounted by others.

Imputability constitutes what is clearly a moral capacity. A human agent is held to be the genuine author of his or her acts, regardless of the force of organic and physical causes. Imputability, assumed by the agent, makes him or her responsible, capable of ascribing to him- or herself his or her portion of the consequences. If harm is done to others, the way is opened to reparation and to final [penal] sanction.

Promising is possible on this basis. Human subjects commit themselves by their word and say that they will do tomorrow what they say today. The promise limits the unpredictability of the future, at the risk of betrayal. The subject must keep his or her promise – or break it. He or she thereby engages the promise of the promise, that of keeping one’s word, of being faithful.

II

At first sight these basic capacities do not imply any claim to recognition by others; the certainty of being able to do something is private. To be sure. Yet each of them requires a vis-à-vis. Discourse is addressed to someone capable of responding, questioning, of entering into conversation and dialogue. Action occurs in conjunction with other agents, who can help or hinder. Narrative assembles multiple protagonists within a single plot. A life story includes a multitude of other life stories. As for imputability, frequently raised by accusation, it makes me responsible before others. More narrowly, it makes the powerful responsible for the weak and the vulnerable. Finally, promising calls for a witness who receives it and records it. What is more, its end is the good of others, if not aimed at wrongdoing and revenge. What is missing, however, in this listing of how others are implied in the private certainty of the capacity to act is reciprocity, the mutuality which alone allows us to speak of recognition in the strong sense.

This mutuality is not given spontaneously; that is why it is sought. And this demand is not without conflict or struggle. The idea of a struggle for recognition is at the heart of modern social relations. The myth of the state of nature accords to competition, to defiance, to the arrogant affirmation of solitary glory, the role of foundation and of origin. In this war of all against all, the fear of violent death would reign supreme. This pessimism concerning the ground of
human nature goes hand-in-hand with praise of the absolute power of a sovereign who remains outside the contract of submission made by citizens delivered from fear. The denial of recognition is thus inscribed within the institution. An initial recourse to reciprocity can be found in a feature just as original as the war of all against all — in a natural right in which an equal respect would be recognized by all the parties to the social compact. The moral character of the social bond could then be held to be irreducible. What natural right does not recognize is the place of struggle in the conquest of equality and justice, the role of negative conduct in the motivation leading to struggle: lack of consideration, humiliation, disdain, to say nothing of violence in all its physical and psychological forms.

The struggle for recognition is pursued on several levels. It begins on the level of affective relations tied to the transmission of life, to sexuality, and to descendants. It is at its height in the intersection of the vertical relations of a genealogy and the horizontal relations of conjugal ties within the framework of the family.

This struggle for recognition is pursued on the juridical plane of civil rights, centered on the ideas of liberty, justice, and solidarity. Rights cannot be claimed on my behalf unless they are recognized in the same way for others. This extension of individual capacities belonging to legal persons concerns not only the enumeration of their civic rights but also [their] application to new categories of individuals and powers previously scorned. This extension is the occasion for conflicts [stemming from] exclusions due to social inequalities but also those arising from [those] forms of discrimination inherited from the past that still afflict various minorities.

Disdain and humiliation, however, infect the social bond at a level that surpasses legal rights; this applies to the social esteem having to do with personal values and to the capacity to pursue happiness in accordance with one's own conception of the good life. This struggle for esteem occurs in the context of different spheres of life. For instance, in the workplace, the struggle to prevail, to protect one's rank in the hierarchy of authority; and when it comes to housing, neighborly relations and questions of proximity, together with all the many encounters that make up daily life. [It is] always personal capacities that demand to be recognized by others.

III

The question then arises whether the social bond is constituted only in the struggle for recognition or whether there is not also at its
origin a sort of good will tied to the resemblance of one person to another in the great human family.

We have an inkling of this in the dissatisfaction that the practice of struggle leaves in us. The demand for recognition expressed in this struggle is insatiable: when will we receive sufficient recognition? This quest involves something like a bad infinity. Yet it is also a fact that we experience actual recognition in a peaceful mode. Its model is found in the ceremonial exchange of gifts in traditional societies. This ritualized exchange is not to be confused with the market exchange consisting of buying and selling in the context of a contract of exchange. The logic of the exchange of gifts is a logic of reciprocity that creates mutuality; it consists in the appeal to give in return contained in the act of giving.

Where does this obligation come from? Some sociologists have sought a magical force in the item exchanged that makes the gift circulate and makes it return to its starting point. I prefer to follow those who see in the exchange of gifts a recognition of each by the other, a recognition unaware of itself as such, and symbolized in the thing exchanged which becomes its pledge. This indirect recognition would be the peaceful counterpart to the struggle for recognition. In it, the mutuality of the social bond would find its expression. Not that the obligation to give in return creates a dependence of the receiver with regard to the giver, but that the gesture of giving would be the invitation to a similar generosity. This chain of acts of generosity is the model of a genuine experience of recognition without struggle that finds expression in all the truces of our struggles, in the armistices that, in particular, constitute the compromises issuing from negotiations between social partners.

In addition to this practice of compromise, the formation of the political bond that makes us citizens of a historical community perhaps does not stem solely from a concern with security and the defense of the particular interests of this community, but from something like a “political friendship,” one that is essentially peaceful. A more visible trace of the ceremonial exchange of gifts remains in the practices of generosity that, in our societies, continue alongside market exchanges. Giving remains a common gesture that escapes the objection of calculated self-interest: it depends on the one who receives the gift responding to the one who gives it by a similar gesture of generosity. This disinterestedness finds its public expression in holidays, in celebrations with family and friends. The festive occasion in general is the heir in our market societies to the ceremony of the gift giving, interrupting the wheeling and dealing and tempering its brutality as it brings its peace into this sphere.
This intertwining of struggle and celebration is perhaps the indication of an absolutely primitive relation at the source of the social bond between the defiance of the war of all against all and the good will that arises from the encounter with the other, my fellow human being.


"The Individual and Personal Identity": Lecture presented to the conference “Sur l’individu” held at Royaumont on October 22–4,
1985; published along with other papers from the conference in *Sur l'individu* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 54–72.


“The Addressee of Religion: The Capable Human Being”: Paper presented in Rome in 1996 to a Castelli Conference whose theme was “religion between ethics and ontology.” Published along with other papers from the conference in *Archivio di Filosofia* 64 (1996): 19–34.

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