Jan Hartman

Knowledge, Being and the Human

Some of the Major Issues in Philosophy

Polish Contemporary Philosophy and Philosophical Humanities

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Volume 5

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Introduction

The task I have set myself in this concise treatise is to find a field in which there is still room to apply metaphysical thinking, i.e. that which goes beyond the domain of possible empirical experience. Admittedly, I suspect that this Kantian definition of metaphysics is not one that can be sustained without caveats, but let us at least accept it as a starting point for our discussion. In the first and second parts of this book, I follow the trail of modern philosophy, first by examining epistemological issues, and then, armed with conclusions referring to the nature and scope of possible cognition, I review the concepts of metaphysics and its cognitive aspirations. I have no reason to withhold from readers the results of these analyses. In terms of the question of knowledge, the position at which I arrive is scepticism. As far as metaphysics is concerned, the results are in accordance with the expectations of a sceptic – the whole metaphysical tradition is based on errors and sophisms. This has, I admit, already been said in philosophy more than once. I believe, however, that the version of scepticism presented on the pages of this book is both new and, to a certain extent, radical, such as the critique of metaphysics and its cognitive aspirations. Part three, coming after two radically critical and negative arguments, nonetheless has positive overtones. My deliberations on metaphysics have led me to the conviction that it is something that can be followed, albeit not in a strictly cognitive sense, with reference to the moral sphere, perceived broadly. This conclusion expresses the answer to the question of the possible arena of metaphysical reflection. I am not the first person to argue that metaphysics is possible only in the form of the metaphysics of morality. Yet this understanding of it, and the theses formed on that basis, are, I believe, original. In short, this treatise, which touches on many of the fundamental problems of philosophy, does not give new answers of a very general nature, but does offer many new arguments and outlines several novel concepts in terms of such issues as scepticism, metaphysical being, the importance of ethical judgements, the purposefulness of human life, and one or two more. This is why I decided that it was worth making a record of those deliberations to which I have devoted myself in recent years. At the same time I hope that others will find it useful to read a book inspired by such a process.

The continual reference to the relations between the form of philosophical statements and their heuristic preconditions, and in particular their aspirations to be “philosophical” or “metaphysical”, is characteristic of the style of the deliberations and analyses which the reader will find in this book. This means that I employ here – especially in my polemics – some of the methods of metaphilosophical analysis of issues presented in two of my most important

books to date: *Heurystyka filozoficzna* [Philosophical heuristics] (Wrocław: Monografie FNP 1997) and *Techniki metafilozofii* [Techniques of metaphilosophy] (Krakow: Aureus: 2001). To a certain degree, this book is a continuation of the project that began with these two books.

It is rare today for philosophical treatises to see the light of day. We have become unused to their particular style, so very different from the monographical works that we far more often write and read. The philosophical treatises written in modern times are characterised by a broad range of topics, far-reaching theoretical aspirations and presumed innovativeness on the part of the author, and finally the characteristic succinctness of the argument and lively polemics with other philosophers sewn into the main thread. This is a tradition that began with Erasmus of Rotterdam, Nicholas of Cusa and René Descartes. I trust that readers will not hold it against me for daring to aspire to these inimitable models. If I do this, it is not because of a lack of awareness that my pen does not come from the same stock as that of Descartes, but out of sentiment for our philosophical tradition.

My sincere thanks go to Dr Jan Piasecki and Dr Marta Rakoczy for their careful reading of the passages I submitted for their appraisal before the book took on its final shape. I also thank Professors Daria Nałęcz, Jan Woleński and Israel Bartal, as well as the other people who enabled me to spend the summer semester of the 2008/09 academic year at the Department of Polish History and Culture of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where I was able to write the first two parts of this treatise. If not for that opportunity, it would not have been written until a few years later, if at all.

Krakow, 30 September 2009

Part I
KNOWLEDGE.
A REVIEW OF THE ISSUE
OF SCEPTICISM

1. The importance of the questions of scepticism and dogmatism in the history of philosophy

Scepticism has accompanied philosophy almost from the very start. At times the matter has been brought to a head, such as Plato's dispute with the Sophists, as well as, in a curious way, the famous medieval dispute of the "dialectists" (i.e. philosophers) with the "antidialectists" (i.e. enemies of philosophers). Yet only in modern philosophy, in the search for metaphysical truth in the self-knowledge of understanding, has the problem become a fundamental one for philosophy – which does not mean that it has been treated in an impartial fashion, in accordance with the demands we place on the rationality of the philosopher. All too often, analysis has been replaced by tirades. Indeed, practically the whole of modern philosophy, up until the mid-20th century, was consumed by a fear of scepticism and dogmatism. How, then, to sail between the Scylla of scepticism and the Charybdis of dogmatism? This was a question that tormented Descartes, Kant, Husserl and many others besides. The answer that usually emerged was thus: trust what in your reason is its essential and own form of organisation, its a priori essence, and in this trust allow yourself to be led through the clear, unbiased experiencing of the *thing itself*, i.e. that which is clearly presented and cannot be different from how it is. The necessity emerging from apparently accidental experiences charmed us and made us deaf or indifferent to the sirens' song coming from the rocks. Dogmatism and scepticism, then, were treated as seductresses to whom one must not succumb; instead, we should follow the call of the absolute and irrefutable truth called the "transcendental grounds", "absolute idea", or simply "evident". Yet tackling matters like scepticism and dogmatism in this way – comparing them to temptations that a brave man should be able to resist – is not a theoretical position, and is at best a certain moral act, although combating dogmatism with irrefutable necessity would seem a philosophical perversity. Scepticism deserves to be treated more seriously than as a paradox or brain-teaser where we know that there *simply must* be a solution. Furthermore, scepticism can go significantly further than the claim that *every* proposition is dogmatic, i.e. lacking any fundamental and ultimate justification. *Petitio principii*, or "I beg the reason", may be a mantra which with a touch of ill will can always be repeated (rather like a child who always asks "why?"). However, condemning oneself to a pitiful futility, sceptical doubt can be expressed in a more radical form, once and for all: do we have any clear concept of knowledge, and is it possible to attain what is postulated by the concept? And is it even worth the effort? And if we are wrong in our elementary epistemological intuitions, then can we replace them with something else? This,

I feel, is the way in which we must look at this issue objectively – that is, theoretically – and to some degree this is what happens in today's philosophy. But as for the fascination with rational necessity, which we can know apodictically, then although it is hard to dispute that this happens in mathematics, logic and some formal analyses of the basics of language (for now I will not pass comment on the Kantians' claims of "transcendental deduction" or the "constitutive studies" of the Husserlians), the issue of the significance and value of the *verbalisation* of what is rationally indispensable and therefore in some way possessed by reason remains an open question: what value does discursive self-knowledge have?

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In its established sense, scepticism is a response to difficulties in defining the extent of reliable cognition, and even making any cognition reliable. To a certain degree it questions any cognition taking place at all, since the notoriously unreliable cognition ceases to be regarded as *ascertaining the truth*. Because, to some degree, it questions the very existence of cognition, scepticism (or at least radical scepticism) ceases to be a thesis in the normal sense of the word, i.e. a component of supposed cognition. This entirely unique and paradoxical heuristic position of the sceptical thesis, and the subject who presents it, is what arouses such incessant excitement in lovers of the truth. And it is hardly surprising that this question of scepticism formed the historical foundations of the theory of knowledge. Even in ancient times, it became a matter of honour for thinkers to demonstrate that the limited credibility of cognition does not remove all our chances or take away the philosopher's livelihood. Contrary to expectations, though, this issue was then, and has continued in modern times and up to Kant, to be viewed as being only in the field of critique of cognition; that is, as a subject of critical self-knowledge of a mind attempting to form justified general judgments. The result of the critique of cognition as a preparatory activity for further steps in building a system either gave or did not give us the foundations for such enterprises, and as a result suggested certain conclusions of a moral nature. If insights in terms of good and bad were also to be shaky and uncertain, or even unattainable, then our lives would turn out to be a path into the unknown, along which we tread out of curiosity, habit, and perhaps also tragic necessity, yet without any goal to which we might entrust not only our hearts, but also our minds.

In any case, no philosopher can remain indifferent to scepticism as a fundamental possibility – intellectual and moral – although there have certainly been some who, rather than give serious consideration to this, have instead been content to opt for simply ignoring the matter, claiming that the sceptical thesis

shows a lack of consistency or utter disorder and flippancy. And yet to disregard scepticism is itself intellectual flippancy. It is a reckless approach, and one by no means free of telling consequences. The answer to scepticism leaves an indelible mark on every philosophical system that forms it, even if it is a superficial and perfunctory one. It is even sometimes the case, in direct connection to the sceptical question, that (as in the case of Fichte) the whole of philosophy becomes a "theory of knowledge", from which the appropriate metaphysical concepts are derived (as the only cognitions validated by critique), proclaiming that the theory of knowledge is *the same* as metaphysics. Keeping these historical examples in mind as a warning, we must examine the sceptical question with the greatest care and in the expectation that everything we have to say in future regarding ontological matters will hinge on these very deliberations.

2. The right and wrong way to look at the problem of scepticism; the difference between ignoring and solving the problem

If there is no way of ignoring scepticism, our response to the suggestion of doing so must be as follows (I make no claim to originality on this point, merely offering a reminder of what we should remember when tackling the issue of scepticism at the appropriate level for the current stage of development of our profession).

The first possibility for bypassing the problem of scepticism can be worded as: "the sceptic, in questioning the reliable statement of anything, betrays himself by stating a certain thesis, thereby declaring that he has acquired a certain cognition; therefore, consistent scepticism means saying nothing". The response: if a sceptic cuts off the branch he is sitting on (as is consistently sarcastically stressed), then this is not the branch he wanted to sit on – it is a branch on which others wished to sit, and it is rather they who should worry about falling from it, and not the sceptic. Sceptics do not aspire to maintain consistency and avoid contradiction between the theses they argue or their theses and acts. If a sceptic claims that certain knowledge cannot be attained, this indeed results from the fact that his own thesis, too, is uncertain. It is precisely the uncertainty of certainty, of uncertainty of anything, and thus the universality of uncertainty, that the sceptic wants to *express* (and not necessarily to *communicate* as a thesis aspiring to any form of scientific importance). Furthermore, the fact that the sceptical "thesis" is uncertain (we do not know if

it is true or false) results in the uncertainty of any cognition. In the same way, the fact that the sceptical thesis is not certain (or "given credence" by anything) does not allow us to draw the practical conclusion that we can ignore it completely. Incidentally, with scepticism we are not usually talking about a lack of certainty of knowledge, in the sense that knowledge is only probable. Rather, presenting the question of the availability of knowledge at all in terms of certainty and probability (rendering reliable) is (according to the sceptic) not appropriate, since cognition *as such* cannot be certain, for which reason talking about rendering it reliable is in vain, even if it makes sense. In fact, we do not even know what we are talking about when we speak of certain cognition, as we have no inspiring examples in this respect (if we disregard trivial or curious cases such as tautologies of logic, projecting definitions and propositions communicating our own experiences, which are never something we have *found out* about and which we could throw into the treasure trove of science as a new and lasting acquisition[1]). If, though, the sceptical thesis is to be formed as such –

1 Of course, the "triviality" of these cases does not mean that they do not deserve fuller analysis. Apart from those that have been mentioned, there are several categories of paradigmatic statements of a categorical and reliable nature. As a whole these are the same opinions which are otherwise trite and undeserving of being uttered (although this is not always the case). These might even be sentences that can be attributed to science and derive from it (e.g. "the Earth orbits the Sun"). Certainly, one can try to stretch the epistemic qualities of trivial sentences somewhat beyond their usual scope of application (as the philosophy of common sense attempted to), but inevitably this will in any case leave us *outside* of philosophy, in the field of the banal. Scepticism is not about the fact that various things for various reasons *cannot* be denied without lapsing into extravagance. In a given culture, such sentences, or other ones, provide models of certainty, and reciting them has a value almost of phraseological enunciation (e.g. "Jesus rose from the dead" or "water boils at a temperature of 100^0C"). However, a free philosophical subject does not have any difficulties with parting with these "truths of daily life", and the price of conflict with language usage for him is not too high. With scepticism we will not go far by planning to make science or philosophy into a set of tautologies, a set of descriptions of experiences, a set of definitions or a set of truisms. The game here is not about such collections, and nobody expects that this is what knowledge (science or philosophy) should be. There would be no *Mathesis universalis* to be read as a philosophical work (notwithstanding the doubt as to whether anybody would read it), and its possibility, or the lack thereof, is not something we need concern ourselves with, as even if this were true, it seems unlikely that we would lose any sleep over the possibility of this calamitous threat coming true. The issue with scepticism is the reputation of philosophy (because there is no threat to either science or daily life), as well as what really is and can be done, but not fallacies and constructive games. The question of scepticism is one of the self-knowledge of philosophy, and not one of those sensitive matters of the mutual relations between philosophy and the rest of the world.

"we cannot know whether certain cognition is attainable, and therefore also whether this sentence is true", or "I know nothing for certain, except that I know nothing for certain except that I know nothing for certain… etc." – then the paradoxical enduring self-reflection or iteration by no means compromises scepticism, but perfectly expresses a genuine lack of trust in the possibility of attaining knowledge. And this is what scepticism is about; in other words, it is not necessarily about proving anything (specifically any variation of the sceptical thesis).

As a rule, the burden of proof lies with the person making a proposition as the defender of that thesis (and this was the approach of, for example, Sextus Empiricus in his strikingly modern writings – which today are treated rather too condescendingly). However, when this principle is, for whatever reason, evaded (for instance, in the belief that it is pointless or quite impossible, since the very essence of the *truth of scepticism* stands in the way), the obligation to prove shifts to the non-sceptics (let's call them epistemological optimists), and this argument is based upon the postulate of intellectual honesty and thoroughness to which the philosopher is compelled to adhere. If someone has, perhaps frivolously, challenged the trustworthiness of knowledge, and made an accusation, then the defenders of knowledge – if they fulfil this role in more than name alone – must spring to its defence. They are obliged to defend the "honour of science" (or philosophy), and thus may not follow the easiest path: to ignore scepticism, announcing that it is wholly a certain private declaration or insinuation. This is why it makes no difference if a sceptic says "I know that I know nothing" (if Socrates said something similar, his reasoning was no doubt different, with no thought to scepticism), or maybe "I don't know that I know nothing, and neither do I know that I know anything" – once sown, a seed of doubt requires an answer. Yet we should be careful to distinguish this from merely belittling the question. Only a *demonstration of the possibility* of knowledge is a serious response when opposing scepticism. And demonstrating the possibility of knowledge means defining what knowledge is, where its sources lie, what the claims of the cognitive subject to truth and certainty are based upon, how propositions are and can be validated – in other words, it means reflecting on the entirety of epistemological questions. Therefore, the *summa* of epistemology must not so much contain a chapter on scepticism, as be in its entirety an answer to the lack of trust in knowledge. This is why in this

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To anybody wishing to sit with one foot in the camp of the philosophical seminar and one at an elderly relative's birthday party, everything difficult seem rather silly and preposterous. Perhaps philosophy itself is a delusion. But this is something that we can learn only as a result of treating it seriously. *Catharsis* before the show is the preserve of clowns.

book, too, devoted to scepticism in particular, we will simply examine the question of knowledge *per se*. In short, it may be that a sceptic should say nothing, but the fact that someone is silent does not mean that anyone else is right – this is why esteemed philosophy must engage with scepticism, even to a silent sceptic, irrespective of whether or not he is listening.

The second argument in favour of solving the scepticism question through disavowing and ignoring it can be summed up as such: "The condition for the possibility of forming the sceptical thesis is the existence of knowledge. If our knowledge were not really credible for us, there would be nothing to question – sooner or later it would be refuted itself, without the aid of scepticism, and actually with the help of specific critical arguments directly referring to particular scientific theses. The procedures of falsification are helpful in the development of cognition, yet deprecating it in its entirety does not help anything and is not constructive. Scepticism was once necessary as a call for a cautious and critical approach, yet science today is sufficiently self-critical, and moreover, it is only the specialists in particular scientific fields who are competent to mark the boundaries of its cognitive possibilities and determine the cognitive status (including the degree and nature of cognitive value) of the claims it makes. Science is fact, just as it is a fact that, in our daily lives, we are constantly learning things and acting on the basis of that knowledge, and we are doing so effectively. Uncertainties should be presented where they are justified, but whenever they serve solely to sow doubt and undermine the achievements of others, they should simply be ignored. Science will do its own thing, and not be halted by any defeatism." Answer: the critical methodology which can be boasted by contemporary sciences came about largely as a result of the efforts of philosophers who displayed varying degrees of scepticism. It may be that they supported science in a way in spite of themselves, yet their services are irrefutable. Of course, lack of trust in knowledge can be an expression of defeatism, or even of envy towards science; however, even pointing out these shortcomings to someone cannot serve as an argument for *ignoring* the possibility of a (sceptical) statement of trust in science, in any other sense than the moral one. One may take issue with a sceptic, but a moral judgement cannot be a reason for ignoring the theoretical problem of scepticism, let alone serve as an argument against the theses of sceptics, whether these refer to cognition as a whole, or the examination of its various forms, procedures and epistemic claims. Furthermore, the circumstance whereby scepticism affects science (incidentally, as mentioned above, only seemingly), is, in a way, accidental. Nobody expects the outcome to be scholars infected with a sense of the absurdity of their work and the subsequent regression in the development of science. Neither can this be said even of philosophers – most of them too are not and will not be so

concerned about scepticism that they turn away from philosophy. Scepticism is simply an important cognitive issue – its constant *possibility* and *presence* demands that we constantly ponder the nature of knowledge, truth and rationality, and correct, or even just begin to build the right relationship with heuresis; that is, the sum of knowledge-forming processes (if such things really exist) and their results. This concerns scientific and non-scientific knowledge. Yet above all it concerns philosophy itself, and the various cognitive claims ascertained from its history. The status of philosophical beliefs, and even the very concepts from which they are built, are modified in the light of epistemological reflection, and reflection on scepticism is a fundamental part of this.

3. Paradoxes of the concept of knowledge and related concepts such as "truth" and "philosophy"

If we can consider it proven (sic!) that scepticism does not deserve to be ignored, and that bypassing the question of scepticism is not the same as real and serious engagement with it, let us move on to consider the matter of the nature and possibilities of knowledge. Scepticism is after all not a subject in its own right which can be isolated, but an initiation that triggers a whole spectrum of concepts referring to cognition. Of course, I do not intend to discuss in one book all the issues that arise as a result. My objective is to identify the true place occupied by the question of scepticism in philosophy, and place it in its most radical and, one might say, *pure* state, trusting – as many philosophers before me have believed – that shining a strong light on the fundamental epistemological issues will make it possible to appropriately, i.e. critically and purposefully, pinpoint and examine ontological and moral issues. I am not interested, though, in an ordinary "treatise with scepticism", paving the way to a triumphant storming of the fortress of metaphysics, but in getting the maximum yield from thinking about knowing, being and humankind, left by the cognitive self-critique that ties our hands. Therefore, we will ask rather "what can we say about…?", as opposed to "what?", "how?", or "why?" Of course, the question remains, "why do we need to say anything about…?" And it is the answer to this introductory question that is to be answered by a treatise on scepticism, or in fact a treatise on knowledge and truth.

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By knowledge, we usually mean either thematic awareness of something (especially when this is accompanied by an assertion), or some sort of content

which we hypothetically hold "in our memory", or finally an unspecified (albeit with entirely specific and cohesive prospects) sum of publicly available bearers of contents of belief (the learning contained in academic works, textbooks and encyclopaedias). Furthermore, the very concept of knowledge contains a normative and selective claim. To be precise, knowledge is an incomplete concept, without the specification "true and backed up by real proof", which means that knowledge is a denial of ignorance or supposed knowledge, or simply unawareness. However, when the concept of knowledge is complemented satisfactorily, i.e. united with the concept of truth and validity, it will lose its plausibility, becoming more a postulate than something real.[2] "True knowledge" – that which is "truly knowledge", which can never and under no pretext be questioned and invalidated – is a phrase with a persuasive load analogous to the expression "true philosophy", an expression that cannot be removed from the language of philosophy (which tries to be seen as part of or a type of knowledge), and is at worse seen as discomfiting and not used.[3]

2 At this point we cannot put too much effort into finding suitable words to describe the difference between "postulating" or "possible" and "real". The chain of intuitions connected with the *modus* of existence or modality of statement (possible, real, necessary) and the corresponding vocabulary proposed by philosophers seems most unsatisfactory to me. Basically, several trivial impressions are being addressed, dominated by the impression that something *really* is, *now*, *tangibly* or *in reality*, and something else does not have these values (is possible, desired, imagined, ideal). All attempts at shifting ontology to the point that the experience of authenticity (being, existing) has ceased to dominate in metaphysical discussions have come to nothing. This is best shown by a comparison of the popularity of the Hegelian concept of essence (little known, even in a simplified form) with Heidegger's supposed discovery of the "question of being", news of which has apparently spread far and wide. For now I will refrain from tilting at windmills, putting aside for later the debate about the wonders of *being*, a *direct self-presence*, *actuality* etc. As is always the case, in philosophy too: there's a time and a place for everything.

3 This discomfort is one that has been felt very strongly in philosophy for almost a century, and with time it has also infected science. It became a common conviction that the theses of science are in some sense temporary or subject to dismissal, that their content is marked partly by the conditions in which they are obtained and checked, connected with a specifically human point of view and human needs. At the same time, it is generally accepted that, in spite of a certain relativity or fallibility of the results of science, it gains cognition and its development is absolutely real. Unfortunately, like the sword of Damocles, above this social compromise hangs the principle of excluded middle. We know one thing about the current state of science – it will soon cease to be current, and by no means all the theses of contemporary science will be "saved", showing themselves as "special cases" from the point of view of a future, more general theory. The development of science is not a combination of the growth of knowledge

The postulating element that characterises the word "knowledge", which can be detected by pointing to the hypothetical correctness of the expression "true knowledge", is, however, not coherent with the normal usage of the word "knowledge", which places a strong emphasis on real possession of knowledge, suggesting, as it were, something akin to a promise that either it will be able to justify a certain conviction (a component of that supposed knowledge), or at least to identify the place where this kind of justification is available (in the "sources of knowledge" which can be opinions or contents of experience, or also being, which could become the "subject of experience"). When I say "I know" I have something different in mind from "I possess undoubtedly true knowledge", although I cannot deny that it is possible to replace the expression "I know" with "I possess undoubtedly true knowledge". It is a similar story with the use of the word "truth". When I insist that "I am telling the truth", I must *admit* that I may unhesitatingly add the word "absolute": "I am telling the absolute truth", even though I not only hesitate, but ultimately I never say this.

The postulating nature of the concept of knowledge (and likewise that of truth) and the lack of clarity it contains as to how real is, or should be, the existence of its designatum (sentences, and indirectly the contents of experience

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and the processes of translation (adaptation) of old theories on the basis of new, more general ones. There is no consolation after the loss of "absolute truth" and belief in the definitive and absolute status of scientific claims to be provided by any new methodology of sciences, discovering equally enticing charms in the hypothetical and fallible nature of the claims of science, but rather, simply, by the numerous and fascinating discoveries of contemporary science, as well as their marvellous technological applications. This is a successful consolation, yet it is not enough to satisfy the epistemology of science. For now it is bound to an alternative: either science is a certain practice which designates of its own accord the rules of conduct and the criteria for appraisal of its own achievements (sometimes calling these valuable achievements "truth"), or it is cognition, i.e. finding out the truth. The first option has a whiff of scandal, and is not accepted by the world of science. In the second case in spite of everything we are given to the idea of absolute truth on which classical binary logic is based, excluding the possibility that a sentence is only a little true, only on the basis of a certain theory, only momentarily etc. At best, we can obscure and distort this uncomfortable, even scandalous (being so metaphysical and so demanding) idea in various theories on the principles of recognising claims in science and the processes of change in theory. And yet, in spite of these distortions, the fact remains that when a scholar claims something, he claims that *such and such is*; when he announces a hypothesis, that hypothesis establishes that it *is such and such*, and that the thesis expressed in this hypothesis *is true*. And yet when a methodologist states that in the development of science some theories replace others, he cannot deny that we consider the current ones, as we (rather strangely) say, as "closer to the truth" than their predecessors.

or of cognisable being) is not the last of its functional peculiarities. Note also that the semantically justified specifications of "knowledge", like "true knowledge", "full knowledge" or "truly validated knowledge" are redundant, and therefore flawed! They are in fact pleonasms. And this is not just a matter of simple excess and superfluous words, but a complex and serious error. This is something that can be called an illusion of reference, i.e. the designatum of the name (in this case "knowledge") possessing attributes which can be attributed only to the concept expressed by this very name; that is, as the postulate it contains.[4] According to the concept of knowledge, "knowledge is true", meaning that the concept is formed in such a way that it appeals to truthfulness as a postulate placed against everything that could be regarded as a designatum of the name "knowledge", from which by no means results the existence of anything that could fulfil this postulate. This means that we may not state innocently that "knowledge is true" without adding that this is determined by the concept of knowledge. It would be better to say "knowledge should be true" or "a conviction that could be viewed as a piece of knowledge must be true". Otherwise (i.e. if the expression "true knowledge" could be accepted as a description) the expression "false knowledge" would have to make some kind of sense; that is, it would have to be the description of something that exists or is possible – and this is not the case. In saying that knowledge is true we invoke the postulate, and when we refer this sentence to some set of theses which we hold to be true, this is a logical and linguistic misappropriation, as we use the

4 With reference to simple concepts and names with things as their designata, no such errors take place. It is not hard to notice that while a cat has four limbs, the concept of a cat in general does not include limbs. More difficult, though, is the following fact: although the sentences "a cat has four paws" and "a cat really has four paws" are true, as too are the sentences "knowledge exists that a cat has four paws" and "I know that a cat has four paws", the sentence "the knowledge that a cat has four paws is true" is illogical and represents a kind of mild (and thus hard to notice) linguistic abuse, in terms of the correct use of the word "knowledge". A sentence can be true (even the sentence "I know that…"), and not "the knowledge that *x*", where *x* is a sentence. In spite of this, in attempting to define knowledge our intention is to do everything we can to give meaning to the expression "true knowledge", and even "knowledge is true", in the belief that this is the only way to protect the fundamental possibility of reliable cognition. An analogous case is transferring the conditions defined by the concept of God to theses about God. The conditions placed on the designatum of the name "God" include metaphysical perfection, and within this also necessary existence. This is why this name is used properly in the sentence "God exists", and improperly in the sentence "God does not exist". One cannot conclude from this that God exists. Based on the condition placed on the knowledge, that it is to be true, we also cannot conclude that there is even such a thing as knowledge (i.e. other than just in the concept itself).

expression "(this) knowledge is true" instead of the ordinary statement that certain sentences are true or reliable. The expression "knowledge is true" means one thing in isolation, and something different in sentences referring to a claim ("the knowledge that …, is true"). In the former case it is the construction of the concept that is meant (and this is not a thesis at all), and in the latter the sentences, although the way of speaking is somewhat unfortunate and misleading. Knowledge itself, which tends (for semantic reasons) out of obligation to be given "true character", cannot really *be* "true" (and have this predicate correctly applied to its description) – and if it is, then we do not know what possessing the characteristic of actually "being knowledge" as a characteristic applied to something whose existence is affirmed outside the actual concept would mean. This is all the more the case as truthfulness is just a criterion for deciding whether a given judgement or sentence possesses this characteristic (belonging to "knowledge") or not, but it does not explain what this characteristic is. Even worse, if we cannot even say whether true sentences are true knowledge or deliver true knowledge, then doubt arises as to the value of their being true sentences. What good are true judgements which are not components of true knowledge (assuming that "true knowledge" and "knowledge that is true" mean the same thing)? If we can, without damaging science, say that the predicate "true" is redundant in normal cognitive practice, since removing the word "true" from science will not cause it serious damage (it will be perfectly happy with a predicate such as "proven"), taking away the descriptive sense from the expression "true knowledge" and leaving just "knowledge" without any specification – i.e. removing the word "true", would practically mean the very concept of science being undermined, and in particular the concept of philosophy as "knowledge". We are therefore considering an issue of greater gravity than the otherwise important and related issue of "deflation of truth".

However, the redundancy of the term "true knowledge" is not only about the illusion of reference or confusion of the postulate (e.g. "knowledge should be a collection of true sentences") with the description (e.g. "sentences x…y are true and justified on the basis of true premises, and this is why they are included in knowledge"). This redundancy is even more general in nature. To use an analogy, the reason that we do not say that butter is buttery is not that this is self-evident or there is never any reason to remind ourselves of it, but that butter *is not* buttery – butter is not "like butter" (buttery), but it is butter – it is itself. In the same way, saying that knowledge is (ought to be) true appears to confuse identity with a certain relation of similarity or other. The hypothetical word "knowledgeous", were it to be coined, would not mean "possessing the characteristics of being knowledge", just as "buttery" does not mean "being

butter". "Knowledgeous" would perhaps be something that is true, adequately (on the basis of true premises and logically correctly) justified, but at the same time *is not knowledge*. I don't know what this might be. If true and adequately justified convictions are "like knowledge" ("knowledgeous"), then what is knowledge itself? Something, perhaps, that aspires to truthfulness and certainty, yet wants to be *something more* than "something similar to knowledge", i.e. "knowledgeous". By analogy, something buttery is spreadable or smells like butter, but is not butter itself – butter is, as it were, "something more" than just something buttery. And yet, in fact the predicate "knowledgeous" in a way does exist! If it means "*like* knowledge (similar to knowledge)", then this qualifies as a "true" predicate in normal English. Only true (and moreover justified on the basis of true premises) convictions are related to knowledge in a way that allows them to be called "knowledgeous". They are (potentially) a part of knowledge (although it would be hard to argue that there is a sum of true convictions, or in any case that this is anything more than a certain theoretical construct, i.e. concept) or something similar to it.

Why not assume, though, that the word "knowledgeous" could be defined as "being knowledge" (and not just something similar to knowledge)? Of course, we could construct such a definition, contrary to linguistic custom, according to which "being butter" is not "buttery", yet this would not help us to ascertain what the characteristic of "being knowledge" means. We are helped, however, by the observation made above of the semantic phenomenon whereby denominative adjectives are formed based on the relationship between the object to which we attach such a denominative predicate and the object which we describe using the noun that serves as the basis for formation of the adjective. This might be a similarity relation in certain respects ("buttery") or a functional relation ("bus" as in "bus stop"), a genetic one ("sea salt"), or another still. Adjectives are not there to state that things are identical, but to state that they are related. In the thought experiment using the word "knowledgeous", I assume that if the word "knowledge" has a specific meaning (and I suspect that it does not have a *specific* meaning), then the word "knowledgeous" would have to be created (defined) by identifying a certain "knowledgeous" relation (e.g. similarity) to what we call knowledge. If knowledge exists, what could the word "knowledgeous" mean? I maintain that it could mean "true". Of course, it could also mean "cognitive", "scientific", "certain", "academic" and many other things, but in each case there would have to be some relation to "knowledge". For if we are to stick to the principle that an adjective refers to a relation, and not something that is identical in nature, and therefore excluding the possibility that the word "knowledgeous" might mean "being knowledge", it remains possible that it might mean "passing itself off as knowledge" or "similar to

knowledge". Yet both these descriptions have the effect of disavowing, i.e. they are sceptical – whatever might be deserving of them will not be seen as (true) knowledge. The same would be the case, *a fortiori*, with the interpretation of the word "knowledgeous" as "academic" or "scientific". I therefore ask again: if the word "knowledge" is to have a specific meaning and a real designatum, then what else could the word "knowledgeous" mean? And I answer: "true" (possibly "certain"), or, very generally, "of epistemic value". As a result, though, the phrase "knowledge is true" means (or would mean) "knowledge is knowledgeous", and therefore that it is redundant. My argument can therefore be summarised as follows: if the expression "knowledge is true" made sense, then the expression "knowledge is knowledgeous" would also make sense, although the construction of redundant phrases violates the linguistic (and logical) rule that relational predicates refer – as the name suggests – to a relation, and not to things that are identical (otherwise the expression "knowledge is knowledgeous" cannot make sense).[5] Perhaps using a number of terms like "well justified", "scientific", "true", "certain" removes from view the redundancy and self-reference of these terms; in addition, their co-dependence can easily be subjected to structural analysis, which can lead to the creation of illusory epistemological conceptions, providing a certain system of definition for recognising some epistemic "reality".

If so, then the expression "knowledge is true" means something similar to "knowledge is like the truth" ("margarine is like (as good as) butter"). It would be better to say: "Knowledge is truth". But even this could be better expressed

5 It is worth mentioning here (following Hegel) that being identical is not a reflexive *relation*, as one might mistakenly assume on the basis of expressions with the form "A is A" ("a person is a person" etc.). In the concept of identicalness, this reflexiveness is lost. The phrase "A is A" points to the difference between recognising the link between things and concepts and direct expression as *identification* of something. The expression "it's a horse" is hypothetically deictic (directly presenting something specified). The expression "this is a horse" appeals to the performance of an operation associating a concept with an experience (meaning: "we can say (that) 'it's a horse'"). Furthermore, a phrase of the type "a horse is a horse" means that the content of the experience or concept is (in general) something specified, while the phrase "the horse is a horse" means that the specified content of the concept of something (e.g. the sight of a horse) must correspond to the content of possible experience of something (the concept of the horse), with it constituting the two-sided unity of the experienced and conceived. However, an abstract phrase of the type "each thing is identical to itself" gives a definitional condition in terms of the procedure of designing the definition of the so-called substance. This is a constructive, metaphysical use of language, not bound by a direct assessment of trueness. (These are only brief, declarative remarks – we will discuss these issues in the later parts of this book.)

with the simple (and empty) "knowledge is knowledge". An important semantic phenomenon is at work here, whereby the meanings of words concentrate their own developments (definitions) in themselves, and these therefore become inopportune – instead of expressing the performance of intellect that was behind the creation of one word, they disperse the concept into a multitude of different concepts, which the given word intuitively returns to one.[6] Essentially, every word, within a certain set of words closely linked in terms of meanings, manners of usage, typical contexts of usage or only frequent appearance in the same sentences, can aspire to become, as the result of specification or definition, a key word and good point of reference for the others. No single construction of such co-dependencies between words and concepts alone has a value (and they may even lead to the illusion of being something special and therefore more valuable than other potential, but incorrect ones); however, a review of all possibilities in this area has the value of a certain complete *insight*, which at least protects us from the aforementioned illusion. In any case, since we have such words as "knowledge", "truth", "certainty", and "cognition" available, then we can also potentially access a certain number of theories, some more refined than others, proposing a certain definitional system between these words. The formation of such a system always begins with an essential question ("what is truth?" etc.), usually accompanied by a translation into a predicate ("what does it mean to 'be truth', or 'be true'?", "what does it mean to be knowledge?" etc.). Yet the freedom to construct such sets does have its limitations. Some will be "more interesting" than others, and some will also be "more natural" than others. This will be decided by their accordance, or lack of, with the semiotic decisions of the creators of colloquial and philosophical languages, i.e. our ancestors. In the context of epistemology, it is important to recognise that cognition was placed at the centre of the set of concepts of this philosophical discipline. This discipline might have developed differently, but this was the way it happened. Perhaps we should regret this, as under the banner of a "theory of truth", this science could have had a greater popularity, since the word "cognition" is barely used in

6 Ignorance of this phenomenon contributes to the obsession, often encountered among contemporary scholars, of forming and polishing definitions. This made sense in Aristotelianism, which was by its very nature devoted to "defining", with its own metaphysical reasons, in the expectation that it was in definition (and defining) that knowledge could best be contained. However, Aristotelian scholasticism was rejected. If it continues to do rather well for itself in our intellectual life (just look at the popularity of such activities as classifying, describing and defining itself), this is because it has received unexpected support from the side of positivism, which, aspiring to precision and with no better models for it at the time (before the development of analytical philosophy), took on part of this scholastic habit of polishing definitions.

colloquial language. In any case, we must respect the fact that the concepts of truth and knowledge should be analysed in terms of the "theory of cognition", and not, for example, the concept of cognition in terms of the "theory of truth". Anybody who betrays this principle will have to wait a long time for his or her analyses to earn the interest of other philosophers, at least as long as it takes for the "theory of truth" (for example), part of which will be the "theory of cognition" (and not vice-versa) to be developed and widely recognised.

4. The psychological subjectivity of cognition

We are coming to the conclusion that the concept of knowledge is based on a postulate, establishing a field of ideals in the sphere of cognition, and perhaps even more than that – adding to or *repeating* the concept of cognition.[7] The concept of knowledge is expressed through the concept of cognition and vice-versa. If cognition, or "getting to know", is in fact grammatically closer to the process, and "knowledge" to the result, then this is no reason for drawing excessively far-reaching conclusions. This is simply the way things are – we might imagine a language in which "knowledge" is for example a gerund ("knowing") referring to a certain tight, passive-active state of a subject, and "getting to know" is a negating noun ("un-non-knowledge"). These are rather irrelevant circumstances which would become important if we were to decide to

7 As stated earlier, it often happens that certain words taken from colloquial speech or the language of philosophy are linked together in a group in order to illuminate one another, demonstrating the conceptual differences at play. What is forgotten, though, is that the selection of these words, including their grammatical forms and colloquial connotations, is something entirely accidental. For example, we might bundle together the words "thing", "substance", "something", "object", "being", "one", and who knows how many more words, and then look for the nuances of meaning that separate them or bind them together. Conducting ontology on such a random basis, which was fashionable in certain circles (Heidegger among others) in the past century, is a waste of time. It is not words that should lead our nose, but we that should know what we say and what we want to say. Whatever we cannot (yet) say is what we should learn to say. This is one of many tasks that philosophers face. And anything that we know about regardless, by simply using words, we know even without any additional revelations they may make (contrary to the naïve hopes of so-called linguistic philosophy, which explains – who knows why – the workings of the words of a language, which we know anyway. And yet the famous postulate to say nothing on a subject about which we cannot speak (clearly) in fact seems to contradict a philosopher's approach. If everybody took heed of this, there never would have been any language, and we would remain mere apes. On the other hand, there would be no talking of rubbish, something which chimpanzees are fortunately spared.

use the philosophical method involving the reconstruction of all fictitious but possible variations of individual words and expressions for thinking about knowledge and knowing. However, if we decide against such a fanciful piece of work, we should satisfy ourselves with the observation that we have a certain series of words – knowledge, cognition, getting to know, thinking, understanding, certainty, truth – which our language gives us in order that we can describe, without being monotonous, what we manage to think about *all this* (i.e. about knowledge, getting to know, understanding etc.). The way in which we use our intuitions here, and also which word we place at the centre of attention when referring the others to it, all depends on us. We should not, though, see our semantic decisions and persuasions (there is nothing easier than to suggest "intuition" to someone, as writers and phenomenologists know) as a serious achievement of thought.[8]

Let us return to our psychological examination of the subject of knowledge (whatever that means): getting to know means aiming for something – that is, for true and assured convictions. However, it does not seem certain that in getting to know something any specific aim is truly fulfilled,[9] and what satisfies

8 A far harder task than proposing a certain organisation of terms that we already know is adding a new one to the language and persuading others that it is truly instructive and necessary. In fact, all of our more abstract speech (and writing) propose certain "neologisms", which in a way means all the sentences we express (often new, expressed for the first time), rather than just new invented words. We take the sense of intellectual enrichment, the widening of conceived meanings, from words, descriptions, whole sentences and longer texts. The shorter the phrase we form, the greater the chance of it being remembered – of course on condition that it is a pertinent one. Philosophy can be regarded in this way – as stubborn "neologising", proposing new expressions – from single words to whole texts. The greatest of all philosophers would be the one whose every sentence could be a neat quotation. As we know, though, the ambitions of some philosophers go much further, even so far as to try to tell us that "it is not just about words, and words are not the most important thing". So what is?

9 At times, we are insistent in our desire to find something out or simply see something, or even experience it (particularly intellectually). What is important for us, then, is the *trueness* of this experience, meaning its subjective authenticity (as an experience of a certain intensiveness, as opposed to an idea or illusion), or reliable information that will help us to make the right decision. We can, however, distinguish "authenticity" and "reliability" from what we are supposedly interested in with "pure", or theoretical, cognition, and which we call (absolute) trueness. This distinction is based quite simply on negation: learning the truth is not the same as staying well-informed or a full experience saturated in quality. So what is it? Pragmatism will reply: nothing – theoretical cognition means informing oneself in the context of activity and experience harmonised well with activity; true is that which "works out in practice", and is itself part of this practice. It is not a consistent position, because in essence it does not negate

us in our convictions does not always have anything to do with justifications and any sort of reference to the truth. Moreover, convictions have an unclear and variable relationship with the mind, which possesses, expresses, remembers them etc. More specifically, they exist as opinions or judgements; that is, in some proposed interintellectual sphere of meanings, which is in ontic terms, as suggested by the evocative intuition drawn from philosophical tradition, very distant from that intellectual life of which we are conscious or which is based upon consciousness. It seems that subjectivity is in no way filled with convictions, or even more so of justifications for convictions.[10] And something

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the meaning of the idea of "pure cognition", suggesting merely that there is no such thing – this is therefore scepticism that would rather not be scepticism. Any conclusions on non-existence are extremely problematic, because what are we actually talking about when we say "there is no *x*", if there is no *x* (which we "know" but "without knowing" that)? This was of course observed by Parmenides and Melissus (who developed around this semantic phenomenon the interesting and enlightening dialectic game connected with the words "being" and "not-being", which culminated in neo-Platonism with the important discovery that absolute omniscience of being could not have the form of awareness of something as it would not encompass any distinctions). Notwithstanding the fact that the expression "there is no pure knowledge" is paradoxical – the very thesis of pragmatism (about truth and the essence of knowing) essentially makes a claim – albeit inconsistently – to some suprapractical trueness and suggests that there is something like "compliance with practice" or at least "neatness or convenience of practice" that can be known and judged. If this judgement is not to be cognition in the absolute sense, but just in the pragmatic one, then it would appear that the judgement of the value according to the practice of knowing and believing in a given case would only be good for an exclamation like "it's good!" or "it's working out!" We might somewhat mischievously describe the pragmatic conception of truth (knowledge) as a "hooray, onwards and upwards theory of truth".

10 Husserl's analyses might suggest something different. But one of the doubts raised by phenomenology is the assumption that something's presenting itself in a given way is the same as our harbouring the thesis (conviction) that what is presenting itself exists in such a way. Husserl even tries to convince us of the existence of a "natural attitude" whereby we harbour the thesis that "the world exists". Yet this natural attitude is not something that I have experienced. It is a construct appointed with a specific rhetorical objective, that of promoting a "transcendental attitude" as a position from which one can critically discern the nature of that "natural attitude", validate it (as essential) in order later to return to it (as if at this moment the philosopher were returning "home" "from work"). This construct serves to scorn those ("naïve objectivists") who, not having scaled the heights of criticism, accepted "natural attitude" in philosophy, rubbishing the latter's calling to apodictic and definitively consolidated knowledge. Yet we do not live in any "natural attitude" or harbour a thesis about the existence of the world, unless there is someone who has deluded us with his sophisms and forces upon us the meaningless declaration that "the world exists". If this will make someone happy,

that seems absolutely exceptional is a genuine aspiration for theoretical convictions, followed by possession of them in the memory together with the appropriate justifications. The *vita contemplativa* was always regarded as a privilege of aristocrats of the spirit, although for them, too, it was in a way insufficient, lacking in the necessary soteriological complement. Only when we are called upon for rational communication do we laymen of the spirit put on our "Sunday best" convictions, so to speak, setting out our views and, at least hypothetically, taking on the duty of justifying them. Before this, in the intimate refuge of our own minds, we "know what we mean" – and do so in such an apodictic way that we are not even concerned with telling ourselves *what* it is that we actually know.

If the real element (as opposed to the postulated one) of knowledge were of a psychological nature (mental acts, memory reserves etc.), then the prospects for justifying the possibility of cognition as the formation of true judgements would be extremely doubtful. Our minds are rather a breeding ground for ideas, learned statements, learned sensory-linguistic reactions ("modules"), scraps of messages, suppositions and other fuzzy contents, which are, to varying degrees, remembered, taken on board and rarely demand our attention, particularly of the critical kind with which we revise our thoughts. For some reason, though, it is these very peculiar situations that philosophers are interested in, when we want to learn something out of pure curiosity (thirst for knowledge) and are keen to know the truth and validate it, and then remember that truth and communicate it publicly. This may happen to mathematicians, but notably it is not something typical of philosophers, who are very often much more interested in the suggestiveness, coherence, simplicity, beauty or grandeur of ideas than in painstaking analyses of concepts. And these analyses do not promise anything like ideal knowledge, i.e. certain, essential cognition, attaining conclusive arguments and in recognising them finding one's own irresistible validation. When it does seem that we have something akin to perfect knowledge, more often than not it turns out that this perfect cognition, which calls itself pure, critical, speculative, simply philosophical or that in some other way gives itself the glory of the conclusive word, is not recognised for its epistemic values. Instead, it is recognised because of its grandeur, beauty, evocativeness, versatility, or even just because it is good at explaining and offers confirmation that we hold the right views, follow the right religion and in general are leading the kind of life we should be living. This is why, assuming we do not happen to be specialist historians, we are not all that interested today in the great systems

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I too can say that "the world exists", but the meaning of this sentence in colloquial language is highly problematic. This is a question to which it will be worth returning.

of 19th-century German philosophy. These spectacular constructions leave the majority of philosophers cold, to such an extent that they do not even claim them to be false (or even true) – quite simply these theories are not even considered in this fashion. They are rather too "personal", and too much rooted in their era, which they expressed and judged, pointing the ways for the future, a future which has already been and gone, albeit somewhat differently than expected. However, if, in spite of this, collective, international cooperation in the sciences ensures that the *spirit of truth* and faith in the progress of knowledge can be maintained (though not without a certain touch of scepticism, since as just about every scientist likes to remind us that "we actually don't know how it is"), then in fact this is just a certain state of mind; it is, therefore, a social and psychological phenomenon. The gravity of science results from its great practical significance, its importance as a certain social and institutional structure of global reach, and not from the general consensus within it regarding the epistemic and heuristic values of scientific results – for example the scope and conditions of their validity. As we know, few scientists are interested in these issues, and even if they do provide an opinion on them, it is without the sense that these are also scientific questions, and often even without an awareness of the existence of the remarkably complex theory of science that philosophy has to its name. Moreover, science too often disregards and forgets about its previous phases (usually shared with philosophy, at least until the 18th century), expecting to gain cognitive benefits only after a critical reading of contemporary works, which can certainly boast impressive reserves, making science into a power that is incontrovertible and needs no external validation. To a certain degree, this qualified break from the past and satisfaction with the here and now also concerns analytical philosophy, which mimics the scientific model of academic relations and scientific heuresis. In this case, unfortunately, there remains a sense of importance and gravity as well as the accompanying sense of *doing science*, i.e. professional activity, based on competence and research, consistent and collective activity, only in circles numbering no more than a few hundred, which are loosely connected with other academic circles. The "positivist effect" gained in such conditions is therefore limited – just right for feeling good in the company of colleagues from the same group, but nothing more. The hearts of scientists and the rest of the academic world remain cold.

So what are we actually looking for in our quest for knowledge? Is it not a certain public benefit, a certain good that we might present to others (or to ourselves, as long as we are able or desire to imagine ourselves objectively and in a socialised way – as a *persona* or *ego*), like a costume, character, services etc.? After all, if we take matters literally, possessing knowledge would have to mean some kind of filling of the memory, some succession of psychological

experiences, and at most some appropriation of texts (spoken and written) expressing knowledge in a more abstract meaning, and at the same time something of our own (understood, stated, and ideally simply created by ourselves). But can text be desired? Can even the meaning of text be desired? It is certainly easier to desire the possession of something valuable in one's memory, or a certain pleasure of knowing something, contemplating something; but do any of these things become valuable for us at the very moment when they fulfil the conditions we place upon knowledge: that it is true, that it is justified, that these justifications are real and true, and that as a result we are closer to something important for us? It could be just this last condition that is of interest for us; it is a shame that its significance in defining knowledge is entirely secondary.

We must therefore ask: what distinguishes someone who possesses (some) knowledge from someone who does not? What is knowledge for? Why indeed knowledge? Why must it be truth rather than falsehood? Why reality rather than appearances and illusions?

These types of questions are of great importance in philosophy, although they are practically only addressed in ethics (why should I be good?) The question "why ought I to be good?" only has the external form of a theoretical question, and asking it is simply an expression of using the freedom to contest the semantic condition placed on the word "good", which holds that "good" means everything and only that which ought to be. However, the issue is not so straightforward with the question "why should I know something?"[11] Here we are dealing neither with a paralogism nor with semantic anarchy which could be shrugged off with some untheoretical phrase such as "stay stupid if you like". The truth is not defined by duty – there is no *obligation* that is established semantically, i.e. in the construction of the concept of truth, to aspire to it, even if by truth we understand something valuable. On the other hand, it is hardly as if the users of the word "truth" have something in mind whose value should be left to purely private, subjective judgement, like the taste of different foods or a person's beauty. More apt here is an analogy to possessing things: we might ask "what would I want material possessions for?", but this is a strange question and possibly an insincere one. For almost all of us would want to have lots of possessions or money. Yet there are people who really do believe either that

11 Naturally, duty and good can be rejected, and this possibility is certainly not a trivial matter for philosophy. However, it is not an intellectual act, and no argument is of any use here. Rejection of knowledge, on the other hand, is by the same token an intellectual act, as it is an activity of a sceptical approach. Rejection of good demands punishment (if it leads to a crime), and rejection of the idea of knowledge demands a serious response – as we saw above.

possessing is not worth the trouble, or that the value of things, though in many cases objective, is in fact an illusion, or even that aspiring to have material possessions is in itself harmful. The same suspicions, then, can be levelled at truth (knowledge). Is the allegedly existing knowledge an illusion? Does it not lead to pride? Is it worth the effort, as there will be no certainty anyway? And even if "truth" means something and can sometimes be known, is it not in fact better not to know too much? In this way we come to the sceptical position, and at the same time to the "question of scepticism". But we encounter it not only from the side of asking about the credibility of cognition or its boundaries, but from that of the much more radical questioning of the value of knowledge, not only as possibly possessed (and this possibility, the very existence of knowledge, is placed in doubt by scepticism), but as an ideal to be seized. Do we even know what it means when we talk about the ideal of cognition (knowing the truth, possessing knowledge)? Whether this can possibly be defined, not by pointing out that "knowledge is what I have in my head right now",[12] but with the help of concepts?

5. "Thirst for knowledge" and wisdom

The thirst or desire for knowledge is something real, reminiscent of the desire for possessions. It is no coincidence that we talk of "possessing knowledge". As I mentioned, this is no common, ordinary desire, but rather something exclusive and exceptional. However, the way in which it is manifested sows doubts as to whether desired knowledge is the same thing that epistemological conditions

12 Confusing an argument or definition with something simply observed or experienced is truly a gross logical error. A "deictic definition" is one in name only, but this is a name that should be treated with a pinch of salt. And therefore saying that only something that directly manifests its truth is really true, that is something obvious, sounds rather like a bad joke (or a foot tapped impatiently). We can always turn the predicate "true" into "evidently true" or "certainly true" – these will only be redundant strengthening phrases rather than definitional attributes. The concept of evidence merely reminds us that truth of judgement is something which we *learn*, so something which is in a certain manner experienced. But it is not exploratory. Descartes may have had something different in mind – that a "truth-related experience" (not his phrase, of course, but a phenomenological one) in which we become convinced of something through our own effort or with own eyes is somehow more noble or more worthy of recognition than a truth experience which, for instance, accompanies reading Francisco Suárez with understanding. And yet this is not an idea that is striking for being particularly perceptive. In any case, the so-called evidentiary conception of truth evidently does not say or explain anything important.

suggest – conditions of truthfulness and sufficient justification. People with a thirst for knowledge are either seized by a passion for learning and remembering, with time becoming (given the necessary skills and a good memory) erudite, or they devote themselves to experimental research. Erudition seems to be a value in itself, and although the truthfulness of the erudite person's message is of course not a trivial matter, it is mostly expressed in the concordance of the remembered messages with the source. The person gives information from memory together with its source, which can then be checked. This is information of the type "in place *x* it says that *y*". This must indirectly serve as a justification for that person – critique of the sources is what makes her convictions credible, and thus turnsthem into knowledge. It is somewhat different, although not entirely so, in the case of the cognitive passion of a scholar who stubbornly conducts research, observations and experiments. His horizons of "truth" are defined by the accepted method and its knowledge-forming, i.e. heuristic, value – the soundness of the cognitive procedure (or the versificative/falsifying one) suffices as a criterion for success. In both cases knowledge turns out to be the result of inquisitiveness and consistency rather than a blessed state of mind which the scholar owes to his wisdom, or his thinking, unerring in the pursuit of the truth. And yet the state of learnedness and the "heurecal" state, i.e. the certainty of the value of one's own discovery, are not the same as possessing reliable cognition. This conveys the classical distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Although philosophy is supposed to aim for wisdom, i.e. a certain synthesis of reliable knowledge and moral qualifications, it is not the wisdom of the philosopher that we are measuring by referring to its works. Perhaps it is even with a certain disbelief and scepticism that we treat the very ideal of the wise man.

This is a matter of no small importance. I have yet to meet a lover of wisdom who has claimed to have achieved success by becoming wise. I have also yet to meet one who complains of being too dumb, or of taking too long to reach his objective.[13] So what might be that "lack-of-thirst for knowledge" of

13 As no one else seems keen, I can throw my hat into the ring and declare that I am wise, and this is the case thanks to philosophy. If by any chance I am the only one who has taken on this burden, I can report that this is not the burden of anything that can be called knowledge: what weighs one down is rather a certain fundamental – although somewhat vague in terms of its subject – immodesty, which we must reveal to the world by calling ourselves philosophers, and all the more wise people (because "sage" in fact has very little to do with philosophers). And as for the famous observation that nobody thinks they are a fool or not fairly sensible, the scope of this should be limited to people with some kind of qualification. In other circles there is a certain self-criticism of this kind worthy of note. However, the thesis, popular among philosophers, that everybody

which we may suspect those who are not devoted to research and do not seek erudition (philosophers usually do not belong to either of these categories)? Not to desire knowledge means disavowing erudition (or at least education) and the passion of a scientist. And what might be strange about failing to devote oneself to the exclusive activities of erudite or scholarly individuals? Perhaps, though, there is another type of inquisitiveness – that of the philosopher. But what is it that we philosophers expect our philosophical deliberations to lead us to? Perhaps we want to forge a suitable judgement for ourselves, one that is free from chance, versatile and bound together with other insights. A judgement on what? On "the question of knowledge", i.e. in terms of significant cognition in general, cognition of everything worth knowing. Are we, however, aspiring here to conclusions with the form of theses, convictions, which would be valuable in themselves or even with the caveat that they would be combined with their justifications? It would appear that the work of a philosopher does not necessarily aim for a limited number of sentences that are the conclusions of his deliberations. This is not true from either a psychological or a heuristic point of view. The fact that most sentences have the grammatical form of statements by no means proves that philosophy is about making concrete statements inferred from other supporting statements and premises. In philosophical texts we value diverse forms: from individual words, definitions and questions to statements and whole series of associated sentences. A philosopher ought to speak justly, judiciously, wisely and instructively, seeing phenomena and concepts in terms of their associations and causes. Such a discourse is reviewed in and of itself, in the experience of thinking, and receives additional confirmation in debate that includes other intelligent and competent people. That is all. Yet this does not result in the attainment of knowledge, either in the sense of irrefutable judgements or in that in which cognitive success (knowledge) is the result of the inquisitiveness of the erudite or scholarly person. As a whole, it seems that philosophers generally do not set themselves such a goal – the pursuit of knowledge. This certainly may have been the case, and in the 17th century quite often, but even then philosophical theorems did not seem to be more important than the rest of the writings of, say, Spinoza. Furthermore, in the 17th and 18th centuries the semantic field of the word "philosophy" was different from today (even taking into account the considerable differences in this respect between the various European languages), encompassing the natural sciences too. Descartes and Leibniz devoted a great deal of attention to issues which today

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in fact has the same amount of reason is so obviously false that it is amazing. People are just as different in terms of their ability to be guided by the laws of logic as they are in terms of their height or good looks.

appear to be philosophical (rather than scientific), even considering it to be crucial for science to solve them; however, they put most of their cognitive efforts into the service of the exact sciences.[14]

These remarks may seem trite, although we may note that the banality of remarks usually leads to their content being ignored. And ignoring in this case involves viewing the matter as a moral issue, if not a sentimental one. Today, several supposedly praiseworthy characteristics, such as "openness", "dialogism" or "aporeticity", are attributed to philosophy. The explanation as to what this actually means is entrusted to semi-literary, sentimental "hermeneutic" discourses, and the right opportunity for this is provided by occasional speeches. This is a shallow, irresponsible and inconsistent process. If the truth "is on the horizon" and questions "return eternally", then there must be some definitive form of knowledge (truth), albeit one that is inaccessible to humans and their language. In our desire to reconcile ourselves with the fact that there are no conclusive cognitive solutions, we speak of this insolvability as if there were in fact something to solve, and this solution were still something desirable. Yet we do not believe at all, and, moreover, do not want to believe that there is such a thing as eternal truths which we are simply incapable of reaching. We value our own minds too much to allow all their dignity to be exhausted in a stubborn effort to stretch for something beyond their reach. Apart from this, we cannot seriously consider the possibility of concluding the work of philosophy simply because all the important questions have been solved. Yet we nonetheless, from the point of view of the heuristic organisation of philosophical life, continue to behave as if the "ultimate solution of all philosophical questions" were something both possible and desirable. The falsehood contained in leading the

14 Philosophers raised on the German classics too easily forget today that the concept of philosophy as a science that is important, fundamental, yet at the same time distinguished in its unique dignity, a science *par excellence*, yet a distinct one, independent from anything other than reason itself, by its nature independent of any other knowledge – in fact, preparing and judging other forms of knowledge – was derived from the 19th century, but was never universally accepted, and from the beginning of the 20th century began to lose its meaning. Adhering to this idea paralyses any attempt to communicate in wider circles, even just philosophical ones. Philosophy as the self-understanding of reason and pure speculation (development of a Notion or transcendental deduction) is as much an already fulfilled enterprise as an anachronism. The fundamental element in contemporary "philosophical self-knowledge" today is the conjunction of two facts: that the "Science of logic" *exists*, and that as a whole we do not remember what it contains. We must get used to this fact and talk to each other as if Hegel had never existed. Otherwise philosophy will turn into a "Hegelian seminar" (or something similar), with its extremely unphilosophical atmosphere of worship and of utter dependence.

life of a philosopher in such an uncritically accepted manner is neither in keeping with philosophical self-knowledge nor in accordance with the requirements of intellectual honesty.

The only thing that is undeniable is that the limit of philosophy is the death of the philosopher, and more specifically all philosophers. This is its real limit: the degree to which thinking is an aspect of life or a certain figure in its internal contents. This claim can be countered with another, in a way that is equally undeniable and yet that belongs to an entirely different order, which states that the limit of philosophy is absolute knowledge (whatever the meaning of this enigmatic term, in every sense of the word "absolute", that which is absolute is a limit and goal). Both of these observations have a strangely "wisdomified" character, as expressed by the sense of helplessness that consumes us when we hear them. What can we do? Everyone dies, and in the end we will die too, and with us some day human cognition will also die. And this will die in some chance moment, just as the moment of death is by chance empirical. What can we do: absolute omniscience, absolutely comprehending all differences and general unity, and this comprehension in their necessity, united, incidentally, with freedom (for otherwise we would not be satisfied), a comprehension ultimately reconciling subject and object, finiteness and infinity, generality and detail etc., comprehension that would be for us as much knowledge as self-knowledge, is for us impossible, and therefore has no specific meaning for us; it is just an idea as an idea. The inevitability of death and impossibility of absolute knowledge; this is the clasp – iron and golden – that holds our philosophical "unhappy consciousness". What luck that this is just a game of concepts which, ultimately, we invented ourselves and can simply ignore! The "existential situation" of the philosophising I, discovering my own impotence faced with absolute cognitive aspirations described by concepts stated in advance as "regulative ideas" or other impractical postulates, can be countered by dangerously trivial (because in their triviality they are glaringly true) observations like: "our possibilities may be smaller than we might like, and our life short (*ars longa, vita brevis*), but nonetheless our research efforts lead to certain comparative successes: a certain partial, incomplete and imperfect knowledge is possible". And yet, if we counter the metaphors of "horizons of truth", not to mention "absolute idea", with those of "partiality" or "progress" we will not become more credible, apart from for ourselves. For what does "partial knowledge" or "imperfect knowledge" really mean? These terms sound to us convincing and satisfactory, even *real*. But they are only impressions, similar to those which not so long ago stirred up in us hazy "horizons" or dramatised "authenticity". From here, we have a long way to go to a "theory of philosophy" to rival the existing "theory of science".

If it is no trouble for us to close the door on the arsenal of grandiose ideas with which we are shamed by the pompous tradition of great narratives about the calling of philosophy (I will not concern myself with these here), as we are still left with quite some faith in ourselves, then the attempt to disavow the very *possibility of knowledge* as a certain idea logically preceding all cognitive efforts, attaining meaning in the light of hope that emanates from it, could indeed be somewhat dangerous for the intellectual's morale. This is why it is the issue of scepticism that has always, from the Sophists to Husserl, been the most important "internal question" of philosophy, with which one had to get to grips in order to be confirmed in the role of a philosopher. Every philosophical system, starting with Plato, via Kant, and finishing with the aforementioned Husserl, debunks scepticism. Even neo-structuralism (Jacques Derrida) in a way locks horns with scepticism, showing that the statements made by sceptics are the same as all those circulating in the parade of philosophical sayings bequeathed to us by metaphysics.[15] But scepticism is undergoing a revival, gaining an ever fuller self-awareness, i.e. an ever more radical expression of its guiding intentions. In the name of this same eternal Affair – dealing with scepticism – allow me to remind you of the questions that radicalise questions on the boundaries and credibility of cognition and the criteria of truth: does the word "truth" have a specific meaning? Does the sentence "knowledge is possible" have a specific meaning? Can we strive for knowledge? Is it worth aspiring to knowledge?

15 In the bewildering excess of senses (meanings), seething over and spilling in all directions, there can no longer arise the permanent significant structure that any truth must be. Joining the anarchic and rhapsodic life of meanings in all ways associated with each other and denying each other, the philosopher's mind can only find some respite (a sense of meaningfulness?) in one thing: in silent camaraderie with all creatures; love is everything for the living apparitions falling into the abyss of non-existence, the puppets dreamt up by metaphysics that "we" are, whatever the meaning of this grossly metaphysical word "we". Anyone who has read knows who we are talking about. The sentimentalism and exaltation of (part of) the philosophy of the late 20th century is something moving, but it is hard to reconcile with it the curious philosophical "superconsciousness" (supposedly exceeding the speculative self-knowledge of pure reason). Ultimately, the concepts of love, friendship, forgiveness, equality, justice, hospitality (to cite those last lifebelts to which a certain philosopher clung) can be deconstructed just as easily as any others (not to mention the fact that, in giving someone love and forgiveness we put into practice a certain moral blackmail and apply reverse psycho-metaphysical violence). The only consolation is in the radicalisation of scepticism, known as nihilism: "hell is in us," calls the revolutionary pessimist – "there is no *us*!" replies the anonymous echo of recent philosophy.

6. Eliminating the concept of knowledge

Our discussion so far leads us to reject the idea that the word "knowledge" has a specific meaning going beyond defining a certain range of ways in which intelligible contents exist. This range comprises the contents of consciousness, remembered contents, and the meanings of sentences and whole texts. We should note that these are in themselves indifferent towards their truthfulness or the validation that may be behind them. The thing that might make them into knowledge (especially truthfulness) is not contained in them, is not a component of this content and cannot be affected by the cognising mind as that which subjectifies the contents which it holds. Whatever the way in which propositions or states of consciousness (acts of the mind) are entitled to truthfulness and true validation, this is in any case nothing that comprises part of that (true) content. Neither truthfulness, nor existence, nor beauty is the moment of the content. Predicates of this kind, i.e. "true", "existing", "real" or "beautiful", do not refer to something's own substance, meaning a certain unity of contents; they are secondary attributes, to an extent judging or valuing. Affirmative, valuing or *quasi*-valuing attributes (predications), such as "is true", "is real" or "is beautiful", do not communicate any content from the range of this unity or wholeness of the meaning that they are affirming, but rather communicate the affirmative relationship of the subject to this content. The sentence "these propositions are true" is no different in meaning from the sentence "these propositions belong to knowledge", yet knowledge is a postulated category. Knowledge, then, does not exist outside the entirety of propositions *judged* to be true and the cognitive *movement* that accompanies them – a statement of convictions, their justification, polemicising, teaching etc. At best, knowledge exists "substantively" (i.e. as something that is one and specific) in the form of a certain *postulated* unity of qualified (seen as of at least potential value) cognitive and communicative processes, and especially their results. The moment of the truth does not appear here as a component of this differentiated entirety of qualified cognitive contents, but rather passes through the processes of recognition of some (true) and the elimination of other (false) contents, which are of themselves directly only that which they are – certain contents which might become the contents of someone's intellectual acts in the *mode* of acknowledging or *rejecting*. Meanwhile, truthfulness does not appear as a qualification of this whole, or an affirmation of the entirety of propositions (contents) which would be accessible to the mind as the totality of "knowledge". There is no "true knowledge" as such, but just true propositions or sentences. However, the sum of these does not preserve their epistemic value, which has no meaning in isolation from the specific acts of its recognition (e.g. by means of

justification or intuitive, affirmative capturing). Therefore, there is no "knowledge" as "true knowledge", although this does not exclude the possibility that one thing or another can be "known", meaning to keep in one's intellectual possession with a well-justified belief of the truthfulness (and perhaps some kind of importance, such as usefulness) of this thing, or certain (more or less) defined content. This statement, incidentally, does not decide anything in terms of the value of our cognition, contrary to the claims of Plato, who accused the Sophists of belittling reason and confusing rhetoric with philosophy. What we cannot accept if we do not want to see lofty postulates as real concepts is the opposition of belief (*doxa*, *opinio*) – knowledge (*episteme*). The issue is not whether *episteme* exists and is attainable, but whether there is clearly no discussion to be had, as the concept of knowledge does not and cannot have a specific meaning.

There is no such thing as knowledge, even if there is a postulate of knowledge, which is for reasons that have been explained above, vague and based on redundant forms of thought in which elements of supposing, judging and describing flow into one thing, concealing the semantic inconsistencies in the construction and use of the word "knowledge". Let us repeat: there is no "true knowledge", and hence there is no knowledge at all. It does not and cannot exist. The assumed unity of cognitive practices and assumed unity of their results, known as science, philosophy or knowledge, remains solely as a certain assumption, a certain heuristic ideal reflecting the rational ideal of unity and cohesion of everything rational (which comprises a certain perceivable content), but nothing more. Knowledge is a strictly metaphysical concept – a postulated one, with a meaning of empty abstraction of the objective, and sometimes only empty abstraction of the *total* of supposed and actual cognitive actions. As such, the concept of knowledge does not contribute to what is presumed or established within it, i.e. "knowledge", but rather dazzles us with certain volitionally (affirmatively) marked and vague ideas. Here an analogy can be made to reality or the world, which are also characterised by this abstract additiveness (they are concepts of sets), containing unspecified projections of the mind imagining something ("reality" is "some" unspecified "that's all", including what I know and is in some way specified *for me*).

Saying "there is no knowledge" means much more and has a different meaning from saying "there is no table – there's *just* a cloud of atoms". The reminder that the substantive unity of a table is based on the powers of the subject capable of perceiving it, and doing so in the unity of its form and function, is of considerable importance for understanding the relationship between the concept "of that which is" and that of "that which presents itself". Saying "there is no knowledge", though, has a greater significance still for

understanding the link between knowing the content expressed in propositions and the recognition of these propositions (as true). Not only is there no knowledge as the supposed sum of true and truly justified propositions, but there are also no individual propositions as "knowledge". The very concept was constructed defectively and, so to speak, it does not belong to knowledge itself.

Since there is no knowledge (or rather "knowledge" in inverted commas, as we have proved the very concept to be false), and moreover can be no knowledge, then we can also consider ourselves free from the aspiration to knowledge. We must content ourselves with our individual cognitive ventures, i.e. acts of experiencing and thinking, and on each occasion refer to justifications or evidence specifically presented to us. The sum of our cognitive achievements is, however, a purely formal abstraction, and moreover one lacking in a specific meaning, something like a "collection of all small things". A certain intuitive comprehensibility of the concept of knowledge or the concept of a collection of small things does not dictate the coherence of these concepts, let alone their usefulness for philosophy.[16]

The consequences of abandoning the concept of knowledge are far-reaching. We are forced to part all at once with the satellite concepts, meaning forms or elements of knowledge, such as "science" or "philosophy". These concepts are just as mired in redundancy and the other paradoxes that have been discussed here, as the concept of knowledge. If we no longer have "(true) knowledge", "(true) philosophy" or "(true) science", then we are left solely with "true sentences (propositions)". "Epistemology without knowledge" is, meanwhile, something different from epistemology affirming the concept of knowledge. On this basis, we must regard as incorrectly formulated all questions that refer to the category of knowledge, including questions about the limits of cognition. These limits of accessible reliable cognition are nothing more than the limits of that mythical knowledge with which we are no longer concerned. It would make more sense to ask here "what can we know in a reliable way and what can we not know?" Perhaps the only sense that we can attribute to this question is as follows: "to what (kind of) questions can we give reliable answers, and to which can we not?" This way of addressing the matter allows us to avoid the vicious circle formed by the question "what can I not know?" and based on this question's premise that this "something" (something that I cannot know – the

16 We do not need to worry about the usefulness of the concept of knowledge in daily life. This is not something that depends on us, and all of us make use of the benefits of the word "knowledge". Philosophy is a different matter – here we have more to say, and greater power over our lexicon. We are well within our rights to be wary of incoherent and self-perpetuating illusions.

object of the question) can be described, and perhaps, contrary to its description, become the object of a kind of reliable knowledge.

If the fundamental questions of epistemology (questions of truth and validation of convictions) could be transformed into issues of theories of questions and answers, this would open very promising avenues. Epistemology would meet heuristics, i.e. the theory of cognitive and communicative processes guided by epistemic values. Since it is us asking the questions, and in a way it is dependent on us as to what expressions we see as linked by the heuristic relation "question – answer" with these at least partially random questions, in epistemology we would feel "at home", so to speak, i.e. in the area of human activities dependent upon and guided by us. And this would not be in the sense of some secretive and threatening transcendental subjectivity, the a priori rules of which we would supposedly be unwilling enforcers, but in the sense of something whereby we fundamentally know that we do it when we do it. Let us consider, then, the promising question: "To what kind of question can we give a reliable response?"

7. Cognition as posing questions and giving answers

From a grammatical point of view, every affirmative sentence can be assigned a question to which it provides the answer. Every question, meanwhile, can be assigned other questions, including universal questions (i.e. those which can be assigned to every question), e.g. "is question *x* well put?" or "are the premises of question *x* true?" A particular universal question, though, important in the context of scepticism, is: "is an answer to question *x* possible?" In fact, we only make limited use of the possibility of this kind of interrogative analysis of questions. As we saw earlier, we are interested not only in questions and answers, but also (and perhaps more) in particular definitions, a series of sentences and other textual wholes which may provide us with varying degrees of satisfaction. Answering questions is far from the only thing we do, or would like to do, in our intellectual life, and in addition many questions arise out of it whose role is rather to trigger discussion than to communicate an acute lack of knowledge in precisely this issue, and not another, posed in this way, and no other; there is also no lack of statements which offer potential answers to the questions that no one would even think of asking. A number of "linguistic games" are being played out here. But it is not always truth, and not only truth, that is at stake. Understanding something, articulating thoughts, grand words, associating apparently distant ideas with each other – these are just some of the valuable results of good philosophy. Yet we should avoid the temptation to

perceive the value of philosophy in the image of the virtues of literature. After all, we have questions and answers!

A question is an independent linguistic formula (sentence), in which the invocation to add another formula to complement it is marked as strongly as possible. However, this is generally the case with almost all expressions of language and almost all sentences. Essentially, there are few sentences which do not demand a continuation of the discourse, or simply bring it to a halt. "Shut up!" would be one of the clearest examples… As a rule, a statement demands to be complemented by another, which should make logical and succinct reference to the previous one. This is how a conversation takes place. So what is so special about questions? Apart from the fact that they are more insistent in their demand for a continuation of the discourse than ordinary affirmative sentences, they also narrow the field of appropriate following statements, i.e. in this case statements which are meant to represent "answers to a question". We usually consider that the more this field is narrowed (especially to "yes" or "no" in the case of so-called closed-ended questions), the more we are dealing with an epistemic, or cognitive context. There is a certain illusion here, though. The narrowing of the field of the following statement, i.e. that which can be seen to be an acceptable answer to the question, is never, even with closed-ended questions (referring to the law of excluded middle) apodictic. Although the question is a kind of "hint" for the person answering it, that person may choose to take a surprising departure from the range of concepts and expressions expected by the person who asked it. This often happens in philosophy, and if someone goes too far in a critical analysis of the premises and conditions of a question asked to them, they might hear something like "no need for the philosophy". For example, the question "is it Friday today?" might be met with the response that the question needs to be more specific – are we talking about the use of a certain naming convention or about locating the day in a series defined in a non-conventional way. This type of reasoning is entirely inappropriate in daily life (although there are exceptions here too), but in philosophy it is so natural that it is sometimes very hard to distinguish irritating and destructive know-all behaviour from diligent philosophising.

However, the restriction of the intentional character of a question, and therefore the strength of the specification of the field of response it contains, is not just about the fact that this force can usually be opposed without ruining the discourse. From the point of view of our problem – whether the cognitive character of a statement is determined by the fact that it is a response to a certain question – even more important is the fact that questions – both closed-ended and open-ended ones – can in fact be eliminated from language, replacing them with statements – based on the pragmatics (admittedly, rather impractical) of

language use. For example, instead of saying "what day of the week is it today?" we might say "it's Friday today", expecting our interlocutor to correct us if this is not the case. In this way, every statement would in a way become a question: the elimination of questions would therefore be, to be specific, the elimination of the difference between a question and a statement. In this language without questions, sentences beginning with "yes" or "no" (that is, confirming or negating the previous sentences), might be preserved. They too, though, could be eliminated, as every question in any case directly contains within itself a claim of truth, irrespective of whether it begins with the words "yes", "no" or "it is true that". Therefore, the elimination of the question mark, the words "yes" and "no", and the word "true" (expressions such as "that's true", "it's true that…") may be treated as one comprehensive reductive process resulting in a succession of statements.[17] Among other things, this thought experiment of a language without questions makes us realise that the element in language and communication that leads it to move from statement to statement does not just reside in the use of questions – questions simply concentrate this element to a greater degree than other expressions (and invectives, for example, have a similar character, also demanding responses in a similar way).

What is that element that ensures that a discourse does not die out? Leaving aside the perhaps innate human desire for conversation, in the very act of talking

17 In the metalanguage of this language (with no questions) the words "truth", "yes" and "no" could also be eliminated, albeit at the cost of the word "truth" being replaced with some affirmation of accordance with the criterion or definition of (unnamed) truth. For example, instead of the sentence in the metalanguage "the expression 'snow is white' is true in the English language" we would have to use, let's say, the phrase "the expression 'snow is white' corresponds to the actual state of affairs, that the snow is white". Or: "the expression 'the snow is white' is in accordance with other recognised sentences speaking of the snow and colours". The procedure of deflation of predicates is in all respects instructive. In a way it opens us up to the semantic theory of truth (simply linking the question of truth with the problem of the relationship between the language and its metalanguage), and more broadly to the fact that the predicate "true", or "true sentence", demands a definition in the metalanguage, and the expressions of the metalanguage are essentially "constructionist", i.e. they postulate or project certain concepts (definitions of expressions of lesser rank), on the basis of which expressions of language (e.g. "true") regain the meaning that they lost as a result of being taken out of the context of spontaneous use (in the first-order language). There is no epistemology without a postulative-constructive factor. This observation, trivial as it may be, leads to far-reaching consequences in understanding what philosophers do. It is one more argument in favour of the thesis which we will defend later on, that metaphysical theory cannot be deduced from epistemological considerations, as numerous philosophers have been trying to do for close to four centuries.

and its contents – linguistic expression – we can search for a certain general, not necessarily interrogative, *intentionality*, demanding continuation and complementation of a statement that has been already made with another statement. This also applies to a philosophical text, which after all runs on and on without end. Linguistic expressions are used as if they are continually insufficient, incomplete, and in need of something to be *added*, i.e. complemented with further expressions.[18] And all this occurs (usually) in the context of a certain practice and experience of the interlocutors taking place. We should accept that the form of the sentence, no matter how closed and giving the sentence a certain autonomic semantic functionality (the "meaning of the sentence", as it can be conceived out of context) does not determine everything about its status. The sentence belongs to a specific context, and hypothetically to many possible contexts, and finally to a collection of all possible sentences. Each change of context modifies the pragmatic situation, determining the range of sensible continuations of the discourse (following sentences), just like a change in circumstances modifies the application of occasional expressions. Therefore, if we treat a cognitive (philosophical) statement as a sentence or series of sentences, it will never be pinpointed definitively in terms of its meaning, and particularly of the pragmatic aspects of this meaning.[19] Sentences

18 This of course also applies to other activities. Life consists of repetition, and perhaps we should look at our various practices from this point of view, i.e. as a long series of similar activities which only appear to have separate meanings in the here and now, being in essence a regularly applied accent in the unending *process* of repetition (of words, gestures and impressions). This way of thinking was taken up experimentally by Kierkegaard, and in the 20th century by existentialists and some of the so-called post-modernists. Cognitive science also adopts this rather troubling perspective, studying cognitive and communicative acts as repeatable, more or less schematic *behaviours*.

19 A very interesting question is whether in the universal context (the set of all possible sentences – language *in toto*) a sentence can still have a meaning. If the context (finite, distinct from the universal context) significantly contributes to the meaning of the sentence, then taken in isolation, and therefore – hypothetically – in a universal context, the sentence loses that constitutive element of its meaning. The concern arises that metaphysical sentences like "every being possesses an essence" are spoken with the suggestion that their meaning is absolute in the sense that it is partly constituted by the universal context. Yet if the universal context does not have the power to contribute to the formation of meanings, then metaphysical sentences too do not have a meaning, but just a certain "ad hoc meaning" designated by the doctrinal or polemic contexts in which they are actually found. However, since when we say such sentences we do so with a claim to a validity going beyond any local context, their meaning (and therefore also their trueness or falseness) in a specific discourse (this local context) remains unclear, and thus *invalid*, not the one "that is really meant". Perhaps this is a wider phenomenon, at the basis of all dogmatism. For whatever we claim without a readiness

flow in the stream of communication, just like impressions and thoughts in a stream of consciousness. They might return in various contexts which modify them and modify the power and meaning of their assertiveness. This does not mean the straightforward and unambiguous intention of the statement (the claim that something is so, and not otherwise), but refers to the meaning of the sentence in the context of others, modified together with this context and the circumstances in which somebody deemed it appropriate to voice the given sentence.

For the concept of knowledge, which I treat very critically here, this entails an additional complication: the stability (unity) of a set of sentences that could be knowledge as something specific (substantive) is illusory. The unity of just a single sentence, after all, is already based on a postulate. The expression "that is one and the same sentence, spoken in different contexts" is as problematic as the expression "that is one and the same object, in spite of the changes taking places within it".[20]

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to change our mind, we harbour the hope that in the collection of possible sentences there will be such that will repel any counterargument made in response to our statement. Since only God has the full set of possible sentences in His head, the final argument of the dogmatic can be summarised as follows: "God knows I'm right". Are metaphysical sentences spoken with the same faith?

20 The instability of the symptoms of thinking that expressions, propositions, sentences, acts of speech and texts reaches so far that the suggestion has been made that the meaning of expressions is always determined ad hoc and is subject to constant changes – in the process of diversification. According to this structuralist conception, meaning is a process of dynamically changing relations between bearers of meanings. Since these relations can be diverse (and variable), they should be understood in a more abstract way, as any *difference* occurring. In this way language and its use, and together with it linguistic processes, including publicly recognised cognitive processes (science, philosophy), become one large permanent process of diversification in which signs (words) tend to refer to each other rather than to something that is not a sign. The search for something metaphysically (and not only relatively, functionally) permanent has led logicians to the "syntactic" idea, instructing them to treat sentences in logic as general sentence-forming functions, comprising permanent elements (functors) and variable ones. But what kind of permanence is this? Why should the functor of the conjunction be "the same" in every sentence in which it figures? An ad hoc response to this question is to describe the tautology (the thesis of logic) as an "inscription". Unfortunately, reasoning presented as a series of inscriptions occurring after each other according to the rules of logical consistency, or even "transformed" into each other, is just a series of signs, and not a thought (meaning), while the guarantee of the substantive specificity of the sentence (thesis) that the "inscription" was supposed to be is extremely illusory – for there is nothing more representational (accidentally empirical) than an "inscription" (a certain colouring of paper) and nothing more unstable than the shapes of written signs.

Language, viewed at this primitive level of internal dynamism based on powerless *intentionality* directing one expression to the next and in a way forcing it, does not yet differ from the lowing of cattle or barking of dogs – one sound leads to repeating and imitating of the same individual or others. Apart from this, though, the stream of statements motivating the next statements is a stream of meanings, very often communicated assertorically. Intention and assertion, unlike questioning, cannot be eliminated from language. A language constructed entirely from exclamations, commands and expressions of internal states would not lead to any linguistic disputes (i.e. able to be expressed in language) and could not develop, while fundamental to our language is its very capacity for development.

Let us assume that the elimination of assertions would lead to the demise of language. But what would be the cost of eliminating questions (and therefore answers too) from the language? Would it be possible to preserve in such a language an ideal of *knowing*, and hand in hand with it a desire to *communicate cognition* as a privileged way of motivating acts of speech, and especially motivating the following statements that would be an acknowledgement of the "cognitive" statement or a conclusion formed on its basis or another form of developing it (but not a response to a question)? It appears that, in this language with no questions or answers, the equivalent of the linguistic expression of cognition and communication of cognition known to us in the form of declarations of views, arguments and polemics, would be more caustic and divided enunciations of sequences of thought. It is as if from the *Summa Theologica* we removed the interrogative sentences; that is, the titles of the questions – although, even if denied its interrogative "contents", the work of Thomas Aquinas would after all still contain the same weighty metaphysical theories.

Therefore, the proposal to define epistemology as the science of what questions can be answered and what cannot turns out to be alarmingly misplaced. Cognition can do without questions, and if it does not, then the restrictions placed on us by assumptions and the form of various questions are not absolute in character. Part of the answer can always be to change the question, along with a justification for this change. This is why the idea of "knowledge" as a set of questions and answers, alluring as it may sound, is an illusion. Yet this is not just an illusion of someone who wanted to make it easier to follow epistemology, having become aware of the problematic nature of the concept of knowledge and the overwhelming reality of the linguistic practice in

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Is the proof of the claim correct in terms of the physical unity of the series of signs enabling it to be recorded? This would be a major disappointment for logic…

which questions and answers fall. It is more – it turns out that the game of asking questions and giving answers is a certain linguistic subculture that can theoretically be eliminated without any foreseeable cognitive losses being borne. If the presumed "knowledge", and within this also "philosophy", is bound up in some fundamental way with the game of questions and answers (and such suggestions can be heard extremely often, together with praise of grand and brilliant questions), then it is all the worse for it. And for us too, since this treatise is dedicated to "problems" or "issues"; that is, the answers to certain questions. Right now we are interested in scepticism, referring to such questions as "does the word 'knowledge' possess a specific meaning?" or "is it worth striving for knowledge?", posed in the light of the sceptical lack of trust in the whole of cognitive culture. Perhaps, since questions mean less than we might suppose at first glance, our questions, too, are "silly questions"? As we know, ask a silly question and you'll get a silly answer. Unfortunately, if sceptical questions cannot be ignored, then we must accept the fact that the answers to them will be "silly", meaning that they will remain in the same uncomfortable, awkward context in which the questions were asked.

And so: to what kind of question can we give a reliable answer? For all questions we can get an answer that is reliable to the extent that we have faith in the criteria when it comes to assessing how true and dependable those who provide the answer are. It is somewhat naïve to expect that the response to a question about good and bad questions will in some way guarantee us the appropriate level of methodological and epistemological self-knowledge. This is a question that is neither better nor worse than the question about the nature of truth or the definition of knowledge. All philosophical questions are only opening gambits, and as such can be deleted from a philosophical text without taking much from its content and value.

8. The "realism – idealism" debate and the supposed defeat of scepticism by the transcendental method

The point where the dispute between scepticism and cognitive optimism ignites is the famous wall of subjectivity; that is, the question of the impassable boundaries of immanence marking the horizon of possible certainty. All that I am conscious of is my own experiences and the perceptions they contain. Therefore: "how, on the basis of perceptions, can we make judgements on things?" We ask such a question every time we become aware of the subjective nature of any cognition. It was posed by the Sophists, more recently by Hume, and above all by Kant. The answers went in two directions: the first is "realist"

(the mind is an active being, with a relationship with other beings, and "cognition" is the name of the way it functions; there is no other concept of cognition than what we do by knowing, nor any other measure of the value of cognition than that which cognition itself establishes as its rules; see Aristotle's *On the Soul* or Thomas Aquinas' *The Disputed Questions on Truth*); the second direction is "idealist" (the difference lies in the strong emphasis placed on the need to test the way in which subjectivity and its categories of experience are a medium for the constitution of objectivity and its ontological categories; see esp. Fichte's *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* and Cassirer's *Substance and Function*). According to the greatest philosophical doctrines, especially of modern times, the alternative – "absolute certainty in immanence – complete lack of guarantee of the value of cognition of any transcendent (extrasensory) being" – is false, as the totality of being/knowledge (being/essence, I/not-I, things-in-themselves/phenomena etc.) is at the same time the subjectivity (subjectivity of the transcendental I, absolute spirit, God etc.) and the objectivity (the world, reality, nature etc.). The nature of being, therefore, is subjective-objective, and even neutral, in relation to this opposition (e.g. "the second positivism", some neo-Kantians, Russell at a certain point of his work). This is a matter that has been discussed much in philosophy, but one that we cannot ignore. It has come to be thought in certain circles, especially in German philosophy, that the great idealistic systems and the polemics that take place in them[21] have once and for all banished the spectre of scepticism. This is not the case.

21 I am thinking here particularly of the great "parallel tradition" in relation to German idealism, namely voluntarism and its continuation, the so-called philosophy of life (from Schopenhauer to Bergson). The difference with the "two systems of German idealism", those of Fichte and Schelling (the Hoene-Wroński system is faithful to the latter) involves the emphasis being shifted from a cognitive to a voluntary-active function of original, subjective being. Voluntarism leans the discourse towards a certain irrationalism (and at least intuition) and naturalism, strongly enhancing corporality as a substance of life and all human activity, including cognition. American pragmatism and transcendentalist hermeneutics (Schleiermacher, Dilthey) can also be assigned to this broad current of philosophy. Although the lines are very much blurred, we can say roughly that Hegel occupies a separate position here, like neo-Kantism and existentialism. Regardless of this, the problem of the conclusive validation of knowledge, key to philosophy from Descartes via Fichte and Hegel (from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* era) to Husserl, with time became less significant (as it was reckoned to have been examined from all sides) in favour of the question of the possible unity of experience of the thinking human I with the "inner life" (Bergson said "duration") of all reality. Unifying the philosophising I with being (that is, defeating one's own alienation and being enclosed with one's own thoughts), became

Now, any statements in which the subject communicates the occurrence of experiences and their content are indisputable, just like that subject's communication of his very existence. However, the problem of immanence as a field of absolute certainty and possible source of reliability also of such knowledge which, departing from communication of immanent contents, in some consistent way leaves this space and moves to propositions relating to something other than the own mind of the person making them, is less spectacular than idealists or phenomenologists have come to think. The sentence "I see a red flower" is credible providing we have faith in the honesty and linguistic competences of the person who says it. Moving from this sentence to the sentence "this flower is red" is, fortunately (as we know from Hume and Kant), by no means as dogmatic as it might at first appear. Yet this is no straightforward matter, and it looks, in a somewhat simplified version, as follows. If we assume that only subjective sentences (communicating experiences) can be reliable, and even make sense (and this because nothing can be defined in terms of colour if we do not assume a seeing subject), then we have to accept the consequence which says that objects have certain colours, but there is no way to establish which (as we only have available subjective messages of various people about their experiences of colour perception), or that they do not have ("objectively", "in effect") colours at all. But both these possibilities are unacceptable. If colours were to have colours, but for fundamental reasons we could not know (reliably) which ones (and communicate this to others), then this possession of colours by flowers would lose its sense: we would not know what was being spoken about, speaking about colours without a specific colour. The concept of an "uncognisable colour" is an empty abstraction, and the concept of a "colour visible only to me" by definition is not what I am talking about (effectively making myself understood to others) when I say that I see a red flower. We cannot therefore insist that only sentences like "I see a red flower" are valid. In these sentences we refer indirectly to a given thing having a specific colour ("I see a red flower" means "I see a flower that is red"), and without this objective intention these sentences lose their meaning entirely. We can, therefore, critically

philosophers' greatest ambition post-Hegel, all the more so as Hegel himself was rather mysterious in this matter. This ambition guided Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Cohen, Bergson, and even Wittgenstein, to name but a few important examples. Of course, the "canonical sources" of this stream of philosophical tradition were the *Soliloquies* of St Augustine and Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Both these works speak of the loss and alienation of the philosophising I and the quest for some base for cognition and personal existence. In this context, the current of sceptical thinking did not lose its importance, although in the field of voluntarist philosophy it returned to its old (from Protagoras to Montaigne) ethical-existentialist channel.

expand the sentence "I see a red flower" into "I recognise the shape and colour appearing to me as a red flower beyond my perception, and I declare that not only am I presented with that which presents itself to me; that is, the phenomenon of a red flower, but I see something that is a flower and is red". Without the possibility of this expansion, the sentence "I see a red flower" would lose its meaning and power of comprehensible communication of anything. The second possibility – that flowers in fact do not have colours – must also be excluded on semiotic grounds. There is no concept of flower from which colour can be removed, a flower "in fact without colour". Of course, one might conceive of a colourless flower, but this will no longer be the concept which we invoke in the sentence "I see a red flower". If this sentence is to have meaning (and why should we deny it?), then this must be on condition that the sentence "this flower is red" also has meaning. Propositions giving a statement based upon the contents of an observation ("I see *x* such and such") make sense on the condition that their objectively stated derivatives ("*x* is…") make sense. Of course, this does not settle any metaphysical thesis about the manner of existence of "phenomenal things"; that is, "objects" (an ob-ject is what is made *ob*vious to a sub*ject*), let alone the sense of posing metaphysical questions and their heuristic status; we still do not know, then, what a flower is from the ontological point of view and whether it is even possible to examine it from this point of view. But the sense of objective sentences also means that in any possible metaphysics maintaining any contact with daily language, the sentence "the flower is red" must be recognised as being valid. The conditions of use of colloquial language cannot be without influence on theoretical language. It is of course possible to create an artificial language of metaphysics, in which sentences like "flowers do not have colours" or "it just seems to us that flowers have colours" or "in fact flowers don't even exist" will be valid, but this language and these theses will hang in a void – they will not teach anyone anything. The only exception might be the need to teach philosophy novices that the matter of things possessing properties is complicated, as some properties are determined by the conditions of perceiving and thinking. To this end we might need to create a certain isolated area of untypical statement (in the conditions of transcendental reflection, as tradition would have it) in order to practise the maximum critique and self-reflection of discourse, albeit on condition that within the same discourse colloquial speech will be validated, and at the end it will return to the channel of natural language and its laws.[22]

22 It is simply astonishing that the reasoning summarised here, explaining the validity of objectivist (or "realistic") language, repeated in various guises in philosophical literature at least from Berkeley to Dummett, via Hume, Kant, Schelling and Husserl, on each occasion is reconstructed by the various authors with a strange exertion and sense of novelty, as well as in a usually entirely imagined opposition to one of their

How, though, am I to know if someone who says "I see a red flower" or "this flower is red" has the same thing "in mind" as I do? Perhaps we see the red differently? The same rules of communication undermine the sense of sentences like "we do not know if there is one colour red or if everyone sees it differently". First, if we are to treat the sentence seriously, then the word "red" does not possess any (intersubjective) meaning.[23] We may well argue that the word "red" has no meaning, yet our success in communicating with the help this word gives belies such a supposition. Second, the idea of "red, which everyone sees differently, but uses the same name for" is completely empty, and contains nothing more than the idea of itself *per negationem*, i.e. the observation that, being one subject, it is impossible to become a second one at the same time and assume that subject's point of view. The sentences "we see colours the same", "we see colours differently" therefore make no sense,[24] unless they are referred to an effective experiment aiming to display possible misunderstandings in use of words. In this experiment we might find, for example, that someone has poor eyesight and does not distinguish colours well. But in terms of the uniqueness and indescribability of the experience of perception of a given quality, e.g.

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predecessors (this "wrong" predecessor tends to be Berkeley or another "idealist"). Kant, who gets the most credit here, also refused to look carefully at the writings of these predecessors, whom he rather excessively deprecated. In general the way in which philosophers treat each other (or rather used to, as today much has changed for the better) is somewhat arrogant. Even the greatest philosophers were prone to accept the most simplified, trivialised interpretations of the words of their predecessors, even commenting on other people's interpretations, without getting to know them first-hand. Even today, this is one reason why many prejudices linger on in the standard school interpretation of the history of philosophy (which is different in different countries). At times I have the impression, leafing through textbooks, that philosophy remains strangely *unknown*, almost cursed in books that few read and which are helpless against the curious violence of history of philosophy textbooks read by thousands.

23 An important service performed by Wittgenstein was to put forward the subject of private language. The most interesting component of this is the question of the possibility of "talking to oneself", i.e. internal dialogue. Are we able to split internally into two interlocutors, making use of the same resources of memory and experience? This type of internal *dia-logos* could take place in a language of little use in external communication. In any case, "talking to oneself" is not the same as "talking to no one", and objectivising phrases will be necessary in this case, as with a discussion of two people. But talking "to no one" is not a use of language at all, as it excludes the possibility of an act of understanding of the spoken words (or compliance with the rules of one or another linguistic game).

24 Strictly speaking, they make sense as long as they are grammatically comprehensible and express a certain paradox of a theoretical nature which is at that moment being explained.

colour, it is this that distinguishes *experience* from *communication*. However, the idea that everyone can see colours differently, when verbalised in colloquial language, has a certain (paradoxical, expressed in an immature way) theoretical content. This content is the observation that, being separate and mutually isolated subjects, in our cognitive lives we refer to subjectivity per se; that is, to a general, universal subject, which will performatively order *all contents*, ordering apodictically all ontic categories, logical laws, as well as all kinds of qualia. Yet this *intellectus archetypus* remains just an idea of reason. Saying that we cannot be certain of how others see the world is the simplest expression of the idea that the subjectivity of the human mind is not a subjectivity establishing the meaning of any being, but rather a peripheral subjectivity – observing, not credible and irrelevant. From the point of view of this "unhappy epistemological consciousness", sensuality appears as a positive side of this unreliability of particularistic subjectivity; that is, as one's own, private and familiar domain which nobody, not even the *intellectus archetypus* itself, can take away from us.[25] It is therefore with complete satisfaction that we can state that God (if He exists) does not see colours (and similarly also does not sin, or experience the pleasures associated with so doing). God conceives colours, but it is we who see them. And it is this individual *ownership of ourselves* (God is not me, and can't make himself become me) and of our experiences, conditioned by the finiteness and particularistic character of the human mind, that is experienced ambivalently as the incontrovertibility of the contents of our own experiences (nobody can snatch them away from us or dispute them!) as well as their complete unreality (we can't share them with anyone and make them credible by literally co-experiencing them with other subjects). Although these are general intuitions (analysed fully, but not until Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*), there is nonetheless a certain sense in expressing doubts on whether others see colours in the same way as we do. Sensuality is individual, and what is general are concepts. This truth, very briefly, is contained in our puzzle, which comes on the

25 According to the unerring Sextus Empiricus, science is impossible as "bodies are not meanings" (Against the Professors, 20, in: Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors*, trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949). This concise phrase contains the idea of the radical ontic dualism of the subject and the object, thought and being, which makes knowledge something incomprehensible and essentially impossible. Yet it by no means makes experience impossible, nor does it undermine its value. This value, though, cannot be described as "knowledge" or "science", as the *matematikos* would have it. From the very beginning – that is, the times of Gorgias – sceptics have not turned so much against experience and reason as against philosophy. Their activity is more political than epistemological. Yet it is the theory of cognition and knowledge that have become the battleground.

boundary between correct and comprehensible use of language, in saying: "How am I supposed to know that the colour red is the same for you as it is for me?" People somehow get by without philosophers…

As it turns out, the problem of "breaking through the wall of subjectivity" is not all that much of a mystery. The wall itself only grows in the notion juxtaposing subjectivity with that which is transcendent to it; that is, experience as "result" with phenomenon as "cause". In addition, either the wall is invisible or it is simply not there unless we remove the claim to conclusive validation for the by definition always subjective cognition. Since it is we who build the wall,[26] i.e. we bring up these ideas, we too can invalidate it. Rather than break through the wall, we withdraw to a place where there is none; that is, to the universal source of meaning – to the transcendental self, the rules of language or the domain of intersubjectivity, conducting some kind of rehabilitation of the "reality of the world", "objectivity", and at the same time "the possibility of intersubjectively valid knowledge".[27] Since this has taken place so many times and in so many ways, most frequently in the guise of the "debate between realism and idealism" (as if it were somehow possible to describe these "positions" in some other way than related to one another) or "realism with anti-realism", and on so many occasions since the beginning of the 19th century (Schelling) it has been declared that this problem is in fact just an ostensible one, and there is no difference now between subjectivism and objectivism – according to Kant's statement that transcendental idealism is empirical realism – I have the courage to say "Enough!" We all know everything and are familiar with the method of "breaking through the wall of immanence", "reclaiming the world" and "making objectivist language legitimate", so there is no sense in continuing to pretend that we are divided into "realists" and "idealists". This is

26 I cannot fail to share with the reader the overwhelming association I have resulting from the time and place in which I write these words: just a kilometre away from this building, that of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a high wall is being built to divide the Jewish and Palestinian territories – a construction which I observe almost on a daily basis.

27 By no means do I say this ironically. Texts written in this spirit are very valuable, especially when they serve not only to defend the integrity of the speculative system, but also to explain why it is possible to have great confidence in experience as well as science as experience put into practice. The basis for this confidence (which I share fully) is the growth over the course of social cognitive life of intersubjective concordance, functional unity of experiences, and conceptual definitions on many, ever more general levels – starting with individual experiences and finishing with general, constitutive cognitive categories. This work of objectivisation – that is, the gaining of importance through experience and the results of scientific research – is discussed by Ernst Cassirer's aforementioned outstanding work *Substance and Function*, in particular Chapter 6, "The Concept of Reality".

something to which philosophy has already given enough thought. But we could not ignore it entirely in a book devoted to scepticism, and this is why, like it or not, we discuss it here – albeit as succinctly as we can. "Idealists" believed that this discourse of the rehabilitation of objectivism on the basis of a critique of reason is a salvation from scepticism. They thought that, after "reclaiming the real world", the denial of the possibility of knowledge would start to make as little sense as denial of this "reality of the world". Unfortunately, although the concept of a real world does not allow the model use of this idea in the sentence "the real world exists" to be replaced by "we do not know if a real world exists", this does not mean that knowledge will also by definition be "cognition of the world that is". The fact that the world by definition cannot be an illusion does not show that the idea of certain knowledge cannot be an illusion. After all, it was we who created the concept of a real world, and we had the right to do this; but this concept requires negation of the idea of the "great illusion".[28] Yet the

28 If the world is the entirety of what we experience, and thus something unique and irreplaceable (we have no other concept of the world than that which we base on our own experience), then in the same world we find the measures of all reality and unreality. It therefore makes no sense to deny the world of reality. It is the common element of all discussions "rehabilitating" the real world. Yet the canonical character is understood in Cartesian terms, fixed in a scholarly framework: if the world is unnecessary and exists thanks to God, who is necessary (existing through Himself, as a result of His own nature), then by definition it is God who is the measure of reality and unreality of things. So the world is real (true) precisely because God created it – for there is no other "trueness", other "reality" than derivation from God Himself. Therefore, although in specific cases we can take illusion as the truth, as for the fundamental conviction that our cognition is generally a more or less perfect finding out of what the world is like, we can have no doubt. The "great illusion" that God could unfurl before us (for example using a supposedly malicious demon, which he would first have to create), is precisely what we call reality. But to call God's work of creation an "illusion" would be foolish and blasphemous, as God is the measure and source (legislator) of the truth and only the truth. This is a sophism, but a beautiful one. It goes together with the "proof of the existence of God" and can be summarised as follows: given that the world exists (really or unreally), it has its condition of possibility – ultimate reason, making its existence indisputable. This reason is known by the name of God. And since the world exists (in some way) and we possess the concept of God as the ultimate reason of the being of the world, we must therefore acknowledge the existence of God as creator of the world. Since God created the world, He created it real, as reality is the way of existence of that which is created. The error, I admit, is very hard to spot (as Roman Ingarden could testify, but that is another history). It consists in mistaking existence with "existence in a certain way" (e.g. real). The sentences "the world exists" or "God exists" are not shortened versions of the sentences "the world exists in a certain way (e.g. real)", "God exists in a certain way (e.g. absolute)". These

concept of certain knowledge is not something we can form in the same way, i.e. adding to the contents of this concept a condition that this knowledge will be possible (as otherwise there will be no knowledge – just as the world, if it were not real, would no longer be a world). Although we understand, and can only understand, the concept of knowledge as something that we know as finding something out about the world – which, being how it is, provides us with all measures and realities and the excellence of cognition – this concept cannot lead us to making conclusions about the existence of its object, meaning the existence of what we (inconsistently) call "true knowledge".[29]

"ways of existence" are nothing other than a certain kind of property (e.g. temporality or extratemporality). Yet existence is no property of anything, and so it cannot be an object of proof – one can prove that something possesses a property or not, but not that it exists or not. Therefore, all kinds of proof of existence are essentially just established by a certain linguistic rule (e.g. "we will use the word 'God' in such a way that the sentence "God doesn't exist" will make no sense in the language of our theory, and the sentence 'God exists by the power of His own being' will comprise part of the definition of the term 'God'". If we understand that the realism-idealism controversy is only a game of definitions, because "realistic sentences" and "idealistic sentences" coexist in the same dialectic discourse; that is, one less problem to deal with. However, the fact that sentences like "the world exists really", "the world is a spirit", "necessary being is possible, and therefore essentially exists" do not mean anything, being something like scraps left from a false ontological controversy, the paradox of "the great illusion", paralogisms of "proof of the existence of God", and at best the dialectic of the "dispute of realism with idealism", does not signify any further ontological wisdom. Alas, the whole of ontology still lies before us.

29 Just as with the concept of necessary being we cannot draw "conclusions" about the essential existence of necessary being, or from the concept of perfect being about the most perfect existence of perfect being. We can only affirm that in colloquial language the sentence "God doesn't exist" is on the verge of violating the linguistic rule ordering that we speak well of God (and therefore also that He exists). The paralogism associated with shifting the condition accepted in the construction of the concept to the object of this concept disappears only in the case of the concept of existence: owing to the concept of existence, "every something" (every object of a statement) exists. It is just a pity that nothing comes of this, as the word "exists" merely means the confirmation that a certain whole has been distinguished that then becomes the "object of cognition"; since everything exists (including knowledge as a correlate of the concept of knowledge), then affirming the existence of anything becomes absolutely trivial. There is thus no need to worry about speaking of "objective" (different from imagined) "red flowers", although this being, amply endowed in existence, remains a mystery. And this is not solved by distinguishing "ways of existence", being certain characteristics, or strengthening the concept of existence through the concept of reality. In saying that Black Beauty exists truly and really, in time and space, whereas Pegasus is a purely intentional and fabricated creation, we provide practical information (we can see and ride on Black

If the defence from scepticism were to be the construction of such a concept of knowledge that would assume the exclusion of scepticism, this would not be an argument, but a parody of one.[30] It would be rather like the general keeping his soldiers in a fort that nobody was attacking, and insisting that he was undefeated, while the enemy, steering clear of the fort, was ravaging the country.

Defeating "subjective idealism" on the way to establishing "transcendental idealism" or "absolute idealism", or "reinforcing realism" on the way to excluding idealism – these procedures are all just certain variations on the verbalisation of paradoxes associated with concepts such as immanence (subjectivity) or "absolute validity". They are significant as a comment on the differences in ways of using expressions (e.g. "I see", "I am sure that…") by typical language users and philosophers, as well as for realising to what degree rhetorical strategies in philosophy are dependent on the concept of "being philosophical" (the ethos of philosophy) and the position that philosophers

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Beauty, but not on Pegasus), but nothing is added to the metaphysical understanding of what these horses are; the fact that, let's say, Black Beauty can be seen from all sides, and Pegasus (perhaps) not (like Bucephalus), tells us more about ourselves than about Pegasus and Black Beauty. Yet if we say that something (e.g. knowledge) does not exist, we are of course thinking in terms of it having characteristics which we usually ascribe to it or would like to (like "trueness"), if that were consistent – the knowledge which we desire (true etc.) exists (e.g. in our imagination, dreams, concept), except that it is not something coherent and valuable, rather like a square wheel, existing in the interesting sentence "a square wheel does not exist". We will of course come back to these matters; this note is meant only to indicate that the status of claims undermining existence and the possibility of knowledge (or vice-versa) for now remains unclear, until we consider fundamental metaphysical issues.

30 The same, of course, goes for the supposed dispute between realism and idealism: if the solution to this dispute is to be the creation of a concept of reality which excludes it being in the form of the I (or excludes it being of a space-time nature in its essence), then it becomes a parody of itself. Except that the so-called "dispute of realism and idealism" itself is a game of paralogisms (as we showed above), whereas the question of knowledge and matter of scepticism are real. Even if we hold a view of the low status of being of the world or claim that the world does not exist in any specific "such and such a way", since all ideas about ways of existing (including those on reality) only belong to a concept, the world will still remain for us "the only one". But if we do something similar with knowledge, i.e. reduce it to a concept and perceive ourselves (or rather the transcendental I available to us) as the touchstone of its importance and value, then this "only one" knowledge that we have and which provides us with all criteria for assessing the value of cognition will cease to be knowledge at all, and remain but an idea. The world cannot be "compromised", but knowledge about it can. Subjectivity is our problem, not the problem of the world.

imagine they occupy in relation to the rest of the population. Each discourse of "critical philosophy" finishes with (as is always clear from the outset) an unconditional confirmation of existing relations: the validity of science, the distinguished position of philosophy as a supplier of the ultimate validation of science (and sometimes also religion and political authority), as well, of course, as the ultimate dismissal of the doubts of sceptics. And although these discourses call themselves critical and make a pretence to absolute self-reflection (reflexivity), they are usually lacking in quite ordinary (and not transcendental) criticism, i.e. looking from afar at their actual sense and their (often political) functions.

The idea of immanence closed in itself and the question asked in this context about the validity of objective propositions (i.e. about objects) does not attract the "danger" of scepticism to us, but neither is the "transcendental validation" of cognition a solution to the question of scepticism. In this whole "culture of idealism", it is made falsely and basically frivolously from the outset. However, the fact of the subjectivity of cognition, its fundamental belonging to the personal immanence of the thinking I, although contrary to expectations it does not embroil us in the supposed (and to put it slightly more politely, dialectic) controversy of "realism" with "idealism", is still of fundamental significance for epistemology and the issue of scepticism. Yet this is no longer about the question of "breaking through to the side of transcendence", but about the very understanding of subjectivity. We must look more closely at this matter. And that means returning to the reliable Descartes and to his *cogito*.

9. The question of the cogito (subjectivity) and scepticism

What is the basis of the special status of the sentence *cogito ergo sum*? Briefly, it is the fact that it makes sense (it is effective as a speech act) and its negation does not. The old joke whereby someone knocks at the door and is met with the response "I'm not in" is known to everyone. Stating something is an act which involves the communication of the existence of the subject of the act, and subjectively (for this subject) involves the person making the statement validating his own being; the subject exists in and through his own acts. Therefore sentences like "I don't think", "I experience nothing" cannot be anything but unreliable and self-defeating, invalidated by the very act of saying them. *Cogito ergo sum* essentially only voices the thought that as a subject I exist in my experiencing and I-am-the-certainty-of-myself. This is no philosophical thought, but a simple expression of consciousness of oneself. The

simplest way I can put this is "I am a conscious being". I can also make a valid generalisation: "consciousness exists – I am an example of this", if this does not bring a statement of further-reaching metaphysical connotations. In both cases these are transformations made in accordance with normal use of language, and yet with no basis, if we are to treat them as metaphysical theses, and not simply as a public declaration of one's own existence by the speaker in a certain generalising stylisation that is adequate for the public nature of communication. But do I, by saying *cogito ergo sum*, actually find something out, and does *cogito ergo sum* really express any knowledge?

Cogito… is certainly undeniable. Yet this does not mean that it has the status of knowledge which there is no doubting. It is lacking a fundamental factor, which is a certain specific content which can be doubted or denied. Saying "I think, therefore I am" does not introduce any new content in comparison to the exclamation "conscious!" or "I exist!" One might say, as Descartes did, that there therefore exists something called consciousness, and that the existence of this involves its being conscious (thoughts), but, as has often been noted, this development only establishes (postulates) a certain metaphysical object, a certain substrate presumed empty, to which can be ascribed the fact that one thinks and exists. Descartes establishes the substantial I (thinking substance, *res cogitans*), which thinks, i.e. he establishes the difference between the subject doing the thinking and the fact of thinking; that is, thinking as an activity of this subject. Unfortunately, in observations like "I think", "I am", "I feel", "I am what I am", "I see what I see", I confirm my being, or rather confirm and affirm myself, but I do not make any observation that could be treated as an element of knowledge. The sentence "a thinking being exists" is not a conclusion from the premise "I think". This is because the sentence "I think" does not include content, and at best one assumes that it is a parable of no-nonsense judgement from which it will be possible to find out what the subject actually thinks. Only from the sentence "I think that…" can we draw any conclusions, but "I think" on its own does not have a specific meaning.

To reiterate: the sentence *cogito ergo sum* is lacking in content that might be denied, confirmed or invalidated; the content that every judgement which claims a status as an element of knowledge has. Even worse, one could say that it is lacking this very thing of which it boasts. That is to say that it is not just the lack of content that makes it impossible to deny it effectively, but also obvious pragmatic and linguistic reasons. Sentences lacking in semantically correct denial, such as analytically true ones, do not contain information, but at best certain postulates, findings, exclamations or hints. Nobody will enrich anyone's (even their own) knowledge in any respect by

announcing "I am!" or "I see!" It is necessary to add who you are, what you see etc. So Descartes adds: I am – a thinking substance. But there is no interference. Consciousness of oneself does not necessarily contain any agreement on the manner of one's own existence.[31] There is nothing in it except the direct consciousness-of-oneself, which is by no means certainty in terms of any metaphysical truth, or even certainty of the truthfulness of any general judgement (because in effect the sentence *cogito ergo sum* remains valid only within the boundaries of being stated). As a consequence, those sentences seen as privileged which speak of the content of my own experiences do not in and of themselves have the status of knowledge. The sentence "I see a red flower" might be seen as a bearer of knowledge (in the sense which we invoke in, say, the sentence "he knows what he's saying") only as far as there will be conditions for deciding whether the person saying the sentence (a) knows the language (knows what he is saying), (b) is honest, i.e. does not want to mislead us (e.g. being blind and yet discussing colours), (c) the flower really is red. If any of these conditions is not fulfilled then there is no escaping the fact that the sentence "I see a red flower" means as much as the words of a song or gibberish, but is not one more or less reliable piece of information. Without doubt, knowledge, if there even is such a thing – that is if the concept of it is defined and consistent – must be something that can be justified. A condition of the possibility of justifying anything, though, is the possibility of placing the given judgement in doubt. The sentence "I think, therefore I am" does not fulfil this criterion; this is similar to all these

31 Of course, sentences serving to affirm ourselves (that is to affirm our own existence), such as "I exist!", "I think!", or even "I think, therefore I am", contain the grammatical subject "I". Yet there is no basis at all for drawing any metaphysical conclusions from this. The sentence "I exist" is true simply because it is stated by me. The sentence "I am a thinking substance" is far from true just because of being stated. We do not yet know what the word "I" is naming, if it is even a word which can be treated as a name (and it is in fact rather a certain indexical expression driven by pragmatics other than names). As with the question of "the existence of the real world", there is confusion here between the concept of existence and the concept of existing in a certain way. The fact that I exist, or simply the fact that I am, does not mean that there exists a substance capable of thinking, or soul, or anything like this. Existence (and non-existence) cannot be "proven", but just affirmed. "I am" is not a sentence that affirms the existence of a soul. As for the substantive I, there can be no question of proof, and at best ontological considerations can lead us to the conclusion that conscious subjectivity cannot be perceived in any other way than as substance. This may possibly be called an "indirect proof", but only metaphorically.

messages of our own observational contents (or immanent contents as a whole), which we objectively refuse to translate into sentences.

Our deliberations lead to important conclusions for understanding subjectivity. So-called pure immanence is not an area of undoubted cognition, and moreover, the contents of experiences cannot be communicated without intentionally crossing the "totality of immanence" or equating it (on the path to transcendental reflection) with "objectivity". An experiment of closing oneself in pure immanence as an area of the supposed indubitability of cognition (e.g. the "transcendental reduction" experiment) is thus an entirely vain safeguard against cognitive error and sceptical doubts. Particularly, it does not lead to any modifications in the cognitive value of objective sentences ("the flower is red" [32]) or, moreover, to any ontological determinations, such as on the substantial manner of existence of a subject or object. No ontology results from analyses of sentences like "I see a red flower", "the flower is red", "I am (someone)", I see (something)" etc. If somebody claims that objects are substances – that is, subjects of themselves – and that a person is also a substance, subjectifying himself by way of cognitive acts, particularly self-awareness (reflection), then they can claim this entirely independently from an analysis of the *cogito* problem. Such analysis will not bring anything to metaphysics.[33]

32 It does not matter if the philosopher changes the word "flower" to "phenomenon of the flower", "noema of the flower" or some other phrase meant to indicate that the "metaphysical status" of what were are talking about is unclear. It will in any case still be a flower.

33 It is worth noting how much the metaphysical views of some eminent philosophers are separate from and independent of their considerations in the field of the "self-knowledge of understanding" or analyses of "questions of idealism", and this in spite of declarations entirely to the contrary. Kantian metaphysics, for example, is entirely traditional. Nevertheless, every "critical philosopher" believes that he has deduced his metaphysical views, or at least justified his right to them, thanks to the criticism of cognitive powers and contemplation of the essence of philosophical cognition. We owe it to analytical philosophy that, after two centuries of subjective "metaphysicising" of French and German philosophers, it discovered that this was fruitless, i.e. that metaphysical convictions had not acquired the status of knowledge (science) only because they are "critical" (that is, allegedly inferred from analyses of the subject, its powers, actions and limitations). If somebody says to themselves "I am a ghost", then nothing can be done – they have dug their heels in and are a ghost. But one cannot claim that sentences like "I am a ghost" can be proved or debunked. It is just like with morality: the strictest discipline of social life alone does not make our acts or our selves morally noble. The difference between epistemology and metaphysics is like the difference between decorousness and morality – the illusion is possible that epistemology (analysis of the subject's powers) leads to irresistible metaphysical

10. Optimistic scepticism

Our discussion to date – at times somewhat painstaking, at times bifurcating, and yet still rather to-the-point – shows the ultimate incapacity of the traditional methods of dismissing the threat of scepticism, i.e. ignoring sceptical doubts on random pretexts or including the issues of scepticism in the context of "philosophy of reflection" (or whatever we want to call the idealist-transcendental tradition) and the crucial question of conclusive validation of knowledge. Moreover, if we are to treat scepticism radically – that is, as a dismissal of trust in cognitive practice viewed as a whole (as opposed to scepticism as a set of epistemological theses) – we must accept its main claims. For if radical scepticism undermines the possibility of knowledge, then it is true that as long as we are not using the term "knowledge" in a trivial sense, connected with a practical, situational context (I know that the train is arriving in a quarter of an hour, etc.), but rather to refer to scientific – or rather philosophical – activity, then we are unable to attach any specific meaning to it. We tested the semantic paradoxes associated with the expression "true knowledge" and reached the conclusion that this expression (like other similar ones) is semantically flawed. This could be shrugged off by saying "knowledge does not exist", yet an obstacle is the extremely dubious status of theses about non-existence per se (and perhaps also theses about existence, which we will discuss shortly, in the next part of the book). This is also why I restrict myself to the statement that the word "knowledge" does not possess any *specific* meaning. This means that the concept of knowledge is habitually unclear, inconsistently constituted and paradoxical. The flaws of the concept of knowledge are connected with the following characteristics of its supposed designatum. First, knowledge is never current, since it is a postulate of reason, and the real element of knowledge has the nature of a being that is intellectual, that is changeable and labile, linguistic (labile, as a result of the contextual constitution of meanings of language and their variability, or disappearance with the universalisation of this context) or social (cultural). None of these categories is suitable for attributing to the concept the epistemic predicates (starting with truthfulness) that would qualify such a product as "true knowledge". Specifically, knowledge, according to its regulative, albeit muddy concept formed by the efforts of philosophy, should be of a public character (intersubjective, social, and even ideal), while cognition, in its epistemic values of truthfulness or validity, is manifested subjectively, as well, as Michael Polanyi puts it, as personally. Even if

consequences, but epistemology will never replace metaphysics – similarly, if someone acts with decorum that may at times fool us with its closeness to morality, but it is in fact just a surrogate of it.

knowledge were to be an "idea", and therefore "rational generality", its truthfulness could be conceived exclusively ontologically, as truthfulness of "true ideas", which (irrespective of metaphysical difficulties) is far from being an epistemic qualification. These circumstances are highly problematic for philosophy (as something aspiring to create knowledge), as well, to a lesser degree, for science, which is (or at least appears to be) content to keep to those epistemic criteria which it designates itself. Second, to recall an old argument of the sceptics, knowledge is a concept containing a reference to a certain universum (that is, the total sum of all truths that can be discovered), whereas the idea of such a universe is inconsistent and unspecified as long as we do not possess this entirety of truths, collected one by one, and do not specify the place of each claim (and the meaning of the sentence that expresses it) in this universal epistemic context, which is the condition of fully understanding and authenticating it; such a procedure is circuitous, though. Third, the concept of knowledge is tightly bound with the context of the linguistic game in which questions are asked and answered, while the privileged epistemic status of interrogative sentences and truthful sentences following questions (answers) is illusory.

Unfortunately, philosophy, which aspires to be some kind of knowledge (prospective "true knowledge") is habitually dependent upon illusions connected with the concept of knowledge and accompanying concepts (like truth or certainty), and this is why in general it is an unsuccessful enterprise, unless it revises its goals and defines them in categories other than these principal epistemic values. In short, philosophical theses cannot be true in the sense of creating "knowledge", even when they are deemed to be just approximate – truthfulness, after all, does not belong to predicates of degree. For philosophical statements we therefore need to establish some other status than making claims to truthfulness.[34]

34 Of course, the word "truth" or "true" has a correct application in language. In appropriate contexts various sentences, both colloquial and academic, can be validly judged as true. But philosophy is not interested in "relative truth", the best proof of which is the very oxymoron "relative truth" – its paradoxical construction shows that philosophers refer to the possibility that there is no "true knowledge" as if to the threat of anarchy that must be stifled in an embryo. It is the easiest thing in the world to say that scepticism "relativises truth", and "relative truth" is a contradiction. And yet, as we see, scepticism in philosophy can be defended from afar, bypassing "relativism" and without contradicting day-to-day and scientific cognitive practices. "The flower is red" still, and "matter consists of atoms" – yet the sum of this type of sentences does not give any additional quality that might be described as "knowledge".

Scepticism proves to be an appropriate and legitimate position. Yet this does not necessarily mean a destructive or defeatist one. In a sense, as the history of sceptical tradition from Sextus Empiricus to Odo Marquard shows, scepticism can be liberating and fruitful. Particular cause for optimism is provided by freedom from the paradoxes of idealism and the obsession with ultimate justification of beliefs which weigh so heavily on modern philosophy. These burdens were taken on by philosophy partly out of fear of scepticism, which it saw as intellectually and morally unacceptable. Unjustly. Scepticism can be constructive and creative, and even – in my personal view – indispensable for philosophy, constituting the only certain (sic!) safeguard against the paralogisms of the epistemology of the past (still seen in today's philosophy) and dogmatic one-sidedness in ontology.

It is worth remembering that the sceptical position in philosophy is a contemplative one, but it is not constantly critical. Its true meaning has been distorted by ideas accompanying the trivial perception that "the ultimate truth is unreachable for us". This expression renders, in a perhaps somewhat camouflaged way, the longing for the ideal of absolute truth, without suggesting any readiness for critical consideration and conception of this "unreachable, yet existing truth", or the consequences for philosophical thought which might result from being led by the mirages of knowledge and the illusion that knowledge is desired and striven for. It is these mirages that are the ideas meant to be regarded as representations of philosophy as perpetually contemplating. Such a mirage is the thought of "the truth on the horizon", the "eternal questions" which supposedly unfailingly powered the noble *perpetuum mobile* of philosophical thought, but also the less bombastic, more sensible sounding ideas of "fragmentary knowledge" or "progress of knowledge" (as if we are dealing with a certain *quantum* by which we are affected with the advance of intellectual conquests).[35] No, the sceptical, contemplative position means something else.

35 The metaphysics of progress is particularly seductive, and can easily dull our sceptical diligence. Progress is a march in a delineated direction. "Maybe absolute truth is unattainable, but progress towards truth and elimination of falsehood is possible" – so goes the briefest summary of the credo of heuristic self-knowledge of contemporary science. Luckily, scientists themselves can cope without this. Yet when it is philosophers who say such things, this is a cause for concern. For if "absolute truth" or "true knowledge" is some "point in infinity", then there is no progress that can efficiently bring us any closer, regardless of the direction in which we choose to move. Apart from which, how should we know that there is something that we ourselves say is "unattainable". Using the metaphor of "unattainable horizons" is thus entirely useless.

To philosophise sceptically means to philosophise universally, not more structurally than analytically, ably and flexibly in the use of resources of concepts and terms of philosophy itself as well as colloquial language, with an expertise of the inner logic (heuresis) of various well-known ways of thinking and reasoning. To philosophise extensively and critically, as well as in relation to conclusions one has reached before and the deliberations that have led there. It means avoiding the blind alleys of discourses "restricted" to their own concepts, dogmatic and leading astray with the absolutism of their constructive claims. Sceptical philosophy does not strive for knowledge. It is merely the practice of an intelligent, thinking life, and therefore an act of life itself, rather than a transcendent product of it. We might ask about its objective and value, but we should remember that this will be a futile and arrogant question, rather like the questions "why live?" or even "why be intelligent?" These are more pointless questions than the question of the sceptic about the value of knowledge (even if such a thing were possible). While knowledge would be something that would enrich people and make them better for *possessing* it (whatever that might mean), intelligence is a valuable aspect of their own personality. It is in and through intelligence that we become *wise*. The agility of a critical and lively mind, capable of competently, thoroughly and without trusting oneself unduly testing concepts and probing one's own experiences with the aid of these concepts, as well as communicating with others in a comprehensible and inspiring way – this is wisdom. Such wisdom is possible, and in this sense philosophy too is possible. Philosophy should be the construction and practice of intelligence. In the virtues of the philosophising mind itself, becoming stronger by thinking, it should see its objective and the criterion of its success and failure. We cannot "know" anything except for the meaning of the trivial – pragmatic or mnemonic – sense of this word. However, we can – and must – think and contemplate, broadening and perfecting human language – the colloquial and the theoretical types – giving humanity new concepts and, as a result of these concepts, a new intellectual life. Just as art expands our lives, allowing them to conquer previously uncharted areas of beauty and excellence, philosophy expands our lives in the field of intellectual experience of it. Thought liberates – from narrow-mindedness, ignorance and stupidity – and philosophy, as the practice of thought, liberates human intelligence, but does not construct a person through Truth. And yet, in its slow working an intelligent, contemplating mind finds – let's not be afraid to say it – the truth. The truth about ourselves, the truth of *human reason*. Yet it is not expressed in theses, but in experiencing the certainty that the human mind, incapable of "true knowledge" and reliant on the limitations of mind and language, understands and to a certain degree shapes this fragment and form of life that reaches its consciousness and is played out

there. By no means must this be a happy accomplishment. Wisdom does not always make us happy, but it always makes us stronger. In philosophising, I am more. In carrying out philosophy with others, we are more. Remember: “that’s how one philosophises with a hammer”.

As we can see, optimism and a sense of meaning are not the preserve of Platonists, Hegelists and sentimental philosophical men of letters, but are present in the sceptic too. Guided by these orders and mindful of what we might call the cleansing results of analyses devoted to questions of subjectivity, let us move on to matters of metaphysics.

Part II

BEING.
THE IMPOSSIBILITY
AND POSSIBILITY OF METAPHYSICS

1. The futility of transcendentalism

We already know that the immanent character of objects of experience understood as-they-present-themselves – that is as noemata – is no significant obstacle to statements expressed objectively. And all manner of "idealists" and "realists" supposedly know this too, claiming either victory over the idealism-realism problem, or that it is no longer anything more than an ostensible issue – yet they always seem to see this trivial content as a special discovery, as "good news" almost. They even see this – and have invariably done so since the beginning of the 20th century – as proof of their own philosophical wisdom. Yet the realism-idealism opposition is neither an apparent one nor one that needs "scrapping", but rather simply *marginal*, as it results from a certain artificially constructed heuristic figure in which the philosopher puts himself in the position of universal mentor of critical thinking, albeit invoking the sovereignty of "the people", i.e. the natural users of the language as the only source of the linguistic, and consequently also theoretical norm.[1] The role of the philosopher-king of criticism here is to sanction the right of the "natural users of the language" to express themselves "objectively" about the world. The philosopher stands in a wide-open field at dawn, raises his arms and calls "rise, sun!" And the sun rises. This is one of several tricks that philosophy has used in the last two centuries to defend its weakened authority.[2]

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1 The archetype of this invocation of the prerogative of day-to-day language is George Berkeley's comment, "we ought to *'think with the learned, and speak with the vulgar'*. They whom evidence convinced of the truth of the Copernican system nevertheless still say 'the sun rises', 'the sun sets', or 'comes to the meridian'; and if they affected a contrary style in common talk it would without doubt appear ridiculous. A little reflexion on what is said here will make it manifest that the common use of language would receive no manner of alteration or disturbance from the admission of our tenets. […] In the ordinary affairs of life, any phrases may be retained." (Berkeley, George, *The Works of George Berkeley, Part One* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 105.) We may find similar comments in the whole tradition of "idealism" or "transcendentalism", e.g. in Husserl.

2 It is worth taking the opportunity to mention the others. The most successful trick involves suggesting to the sciences that although they are free and deserving of the greatest respect, it is in their own interest to hand over to philosophers the privilege of justifying this dignity of science and even establishing new, strong foundations for sciences – in the form of transcendental criticism, fundamental ontology, "general methodology" or "logic of science". In this way philosophy is provided with a shelter in scientific faculties – with great benefits, incidentally, for the doubtless crucial research on sciences. Philosophy's second, until recently successful, "survival strategy" – this time in humanities faculties (hereafter and elsewhere called "philosophical") – entails philosophy

If we call that which we recognise "something given to our consciousness", a noema (an "intended" object), this is simply the consequence of a reflexive phenomenological-descriptive or transcendental approach. When Berkeley

being modelled according to the fashion of history or philology – i.e. adaptation of the methods, scientific techniques and criteria of scientific advancement of these fields. This philologisation or historicisation of philosophy brought certain positive results, such as the development of the study of the history of philosophy and the establishment of new philosophical trends (hermeneutics, neo-Kantian philosophy of culture), yet the stubborn self-thematicism of such philosophy and its conservative-sentimental, not to say opportunistic style led to a far-reaching degeneration and degradation of many philosophical milieus, surrendering to what is essentially the narcissistic cult, increasingly irritating to others, of the growing number of "greats of philosophy", "great thinkers", and finally also "eminent scholars", i.e. those professors who built their whole careers on extolling the wisdom (that is, "interpreting") those classics. The third strategy, thanks to which some philosophers are able to maintain a certain social authority (but not one which is cognitive or scientific) is entering an alliance with public opinion via newspapers, publishers and other media, of which they become permanent collaborators and sometimes, unfortunately, also hostages. In the role of mentor, commentator, essayist or even eccentric, a philosopher can do rather well for himself, particularly as it is in the interest of publishers and the media to form a certain aura of prestige around such a person. With the passage of time, however, constant exercise of rhetorical or sophistic art will degrade every philosophical mind. As we see, there is no innocent method for "promoting" philosophy. Even those who try to tempt a wider public with a most innocent "incentive to try philosophy", offering the famous message that "everyone is a bit of a philosopher", damages the discipline in the long run, taking away from it the scraps of gravity it retains in return for the fleeting and capricious interest of the wider public. I personally propose that we stop worrying about the fate of philosophy. We won't hold back a mighty river with just an oar. The heuresis and rhetoric of the *philosophical art* have been used up. But this should not make thinking more difficult; it should even make it easier. Too much of the effort of philosophers has gone towards reconciling theoretical concepts with a certain model of this "philosophical art" and fulfilling certain expectations connected with this, not necessarily of a cognitive nature (but rather political, social, and generally rhetorical). One reaches this conclusion on the basis of an analysis of the mutual relationship between the construction of philosophical concepts and the construction of the very concept of philosophy (and the philosopher). It is truly difficult in philosophy to find a theory whose claims to trueness are not connected, not mediated in their claims to "being philosophical". When we are finally freed from "talking about philosophy", our thinking will become less tortuous and to a lesser degree concentrated on ourselves. I give this assurance from the position of someone who dealt for years (entirely consciously) in "talking about philosophy", i.e. metaphilosophy. The metaphilosophical flame is where our conceptual tools need to be hardened, the extraneous influences that result from our aspirations to "pursue philosophy". Only when this happens is it possible to concentrate on unhampered thinking. It is this that I hope is happening on the pages of this book.

spoke of "sensory objects", Kant of "object-phenomena", and Husserl of noematic meanings, in no case did they mean a metaphysical thesis on the nature of certain objects, but only a *hypostasis of a meaning* which, as a meaning – that is a certain content – by its very nature must be thought of as something subjective (a "noema" or precisely "sensory object"), and at the same time as something uniform and contained in itself (thus a certain "object"). Stating this – that is the subjective essence of knowing and subjective validation of every objective meaning and all measures of truth and falsehood – tells us nothing about "being", though it does say something about the subject and cognition.[3]

3 The true antinomy of pure reason which we meet in the course of the development of idealism (from Berkeley, via Kant and Fichte to Husserl) can be viewed as the opposition of two legitimate but opposing transcendental reasonings. These are, in brief, as follows: 1. "Being which we can deem to be real must be something that possesses for and towards us a specific significance or meaning. The idea of the being itself as the 'ultimate reality', beyond the boundaries of possible experience, is by its very nature lacking in such a *meaning for us*. This is therefore a false and unjustified idea, dogmatically shifting to the philosophical level the natural and justified speaking in popular language of 'material things' as certain qualities manifested to us. The unbreakable and binding rules of judging and forming propositions demand that we accept sentences like 'the world exists really' (as transcendentally valid), but at the same time do not allow acceptance of empty formal hypostases, like a *thing in itself*, being the remnants of scholastic dogmatism." 2. "Transcendental reflection has the aim of validating those propositions whose rejection would equal the undermining of the very foundations of rationality and denial of the conditions of the possibilities of formation of sentences in which such rejection would be realised. The foundation of transcendental validation of a philosophical proposition is always a reference to certain logical rules, fundamental concepts for thinking, and even the conventions underpinning correct use of language, including the conventions connected with stating assertoric sentences such as 'the world exists outside of me'. If in a transcendental analysis we reach the conclusion that it is because the world is a 'phenomenon' that can be objectively and validly known (as cognition can in principle concern that which is given; that is, objects given to us as phenomena), then the validity of this objective existence of the world and the legitimacy of the results of knowing it are authenticated by a real, and not just imagined, abstract reference to a being itself as the foundation and condition of possibility. This is why the noumenal world, the world in itself, although it remains entirely outside our imagination – and the concept of it is also empty – must be reliably affirmed by transcendental reflection (and not just conditionally, in the area of reflection on the transcendental conditions of propositions). We may do this first by just marking the idea of the base itself in the phrase 'the thing in itself', but then we affirm the idea of reason, giving all our attention to our faith in the connection of thinking with being. We therefore affirm not only the philosophical category of 'the thing in itself', but also the idea of God (saying, subsequent to this

Similarly, the statement that everything that we have been able to communicate as a thesis of metaphysics has to remain in accordance with the rules of grammar and in general have a linguistic form in itself does not bring anything to metaphysical cognition. At best, this kind of idea can serve as a warning not to surrender too easily to cognitive suggestions and routines resulting from the course of normal processes of the constitution of meaning in subjectivity or from the grammar of a language and the popular dictionary. These are valuable warnings, but not more so than for example the observation that it is important to concentrate hard when pursuing philosophy, or to take lots of liquids on board when doing competitive sport. Results in sport are rooted very strongly, and even ontically in the acts of consuming food and drink, but we will not learn how to high-jump over two metres by only studying philosophy. Since everything possible has already been done in the history of philosophy to test the relationship of ontological theses with the subjective circumstances in which reflection takes place and the very courses of consciousness in which simple, daily cognitions (particularly perceptual) take place, I will bear this in mind and follow these insights in my deliberations, thanks to which they will to a reasonable extent be critical. They will be critical, however, not only from the point of view of full awareness of transcendental issues, but in other areas too, which have been partly neglected by philosophical tradition but which are also partly well known to it. The latter include linguistic determinants of metaphysical discourse, and the former – less common in philosophical reflection – include the awareness of the diverse heuristic conditions which I have already mentioned more than once, and one of which I would like to emphasise here. This is the particular influence on the area of philosophical declarations held by the intention that demands that they be *philosophical*, and

affirmation, 'God exists') and of freedom (saying 'I am the perpetrator of my deeds, irrespective of whether they are determined in phenomena or not'.)"

Between these reasonings (Kant insists on the latter, forewarning of the criticism that would come from his successors who would adhere to the former, e.g. Fichte) came a historical and theoretical deadlock which compromised the whole transcendental tradition. It never attained the capacity to look critically at itself as a rhetorical strategy, playing with the idea of "being philosophical" and concepts of trilateral relations between the "ordinary person", "dogmatic philosopher" and "true (i.e. transcendental) philosopher". If it did get this, it would have to reveal to itself its own hypocrisy and its sophistic workings. If we employ the language of Stanisław Lem, (1) and (2) are like a "prosthesis of idealism" and "prosthesis of realism" – the vitality of transcendentalism lay in the fact that it created the categories of "realism" and "idealism", but both from the outset "prosthetic", i.e. false. It hobbled with these two prostheses for a good century and a half, to the great interest and excitement of numerous connoisseurs of sophistry at philosophy faculties throughout continental Europe.

therefore fulfil a certain set of postulates associated with some conception of philosophy, a conception essentially "on a different topic" from the metaphysical deliberations on which it exerts this overwhelming influence. With regard to this point, too, I will maintain far-reaching self-control and criticism. Neither the "problem of immanence" nor "limitations of language" nor the peculiarities of philosophical heuresis will paralyse our deliberations – neither because of our being insufficiently aware, nor because we would have to give them excessive attention. In general, the inadequacies of criticism are far from the greatest weakness of metaphysics, and its potential dogmatism is in any case smaller than in many other forms of cognition that are rather casual in their acceptance of superficially considered ontological categories. As it is not my intention to inflame the in any case bad relations between philosophy and science, I will not wade further into this sensitive area, which is after all not an unpopular topic of discussion. I will leave it with the observation that in following metaphysics, maintaining an appropriate level of criticism, self-control and reflection will not pose the greatest obstacle.

2. Obstacles in the pursuit of metaphysics

The greatest difficulty in pursuing metaphysics (or ontology – for now I am using these words interchangeably) is the theoretical (heuristic) status of the claims of metaphysics. The idea at least (and if anything else is intended then that is disastrous for metaphysics) is that these should not just be claims establishing "how things are", i.e. characterising objects which can be presented and described. Conclusions taking the form of announcements that "there exist objects type *X*, possessing characteristics *a*...*z* and with the relations *x*, *y*, *z* with objects *Y*" are in fact not metaphysical determinations at all, yet the majority of metaphysical systems abound with such phrases, and can even be summarised by using them. However, this is not in accordance with the typical intentions of metaphysicists themselves. For empirical statements, or those deriving from empirical ones, have a descriptive form, but metaphysical statements do not. The aspirations of metaphysics go further than, let's say, determination of a taxonomy of beings (beings of such and such types exist in such and such a way etc.) or their hierarchy and relationships. These are the kinds of taxonomic-descriptive tasks that science possesses, and if ontology desires to give in to this empirical model of heuresis, it exposes itself to futility and alienation resulting from the superficiality and detachment of descriptive statements and taxonomic proposals, which are not connected to any specialised scientific research and are not of direct use for such research. This is the very reason that modern

ontologies (whih unfortunately lean decidedly towards a "description of reality" or "possible worlds") are not particularly interesting to scholars, and the wider public, too, would rather hear what physicists have to say than philosophers, talking about, let's say, mereology or the difference between process and event. Scientific ontology, as a certain compromise between science and metaphysics, does not please anyone. Nobody treats this type of research as anything other than personal, private projects, or at best ones confined to a particular milieu. This is the case because, when science needs a certain formula for concepts of an ontological nature, it can easily make this itself, precisely according to its own needs. Of course, we could not concern ourselves with this at all, yet the very fact that in ontology there is an aspiration to "describe reality" means a desire to form a bond with science, which would like unreservedly to be such a "description of things". Only metaphysics, going beyond establishing "how it is", and therefore beyond attributing certain properties to certain objects, can tell itself that its exclusivity or unpopularity does not concern it in the slightest, since in any case it is obvious from the outset that almost everyone's cognitive aspirations go no further than a desire for descriptive or descriptive-explanatory knowledge.

Since our cognitive lives are organised in such a way that we are almost always interested in identifying and describing objects, it is extremely hard to determine an area of reflection in which description is not the most important thing. And such areas are, or at least should be, the aspirations of metaphysics. But as this is far from clear and widely accepted, at the beginning of metaphysical deliberations we must answer the questions "why not description?" and "if not description, then what?"

The answer to the question "why not description?" is comparatively simple and has already partly been given. Describing anything assumes previous acceptance of the understanding of the "being" in which it is something, something specified, which by studying these relevant specifications becomes all the better known. Yet it is important to go beyond these premises and also ask about the nature of a being in this respect: whether it necessarily constitutes an object (or objects), equipped with properties, and whether this is its deepest essence.[4] The substantiality of a being is therefore something problematic metaphysically. Moreover, metaphysics understood as a "description of being" – even conceived in the broadest terms, that is also as "the characteristics of the

4 At this point we should repeat a remark made earlier: not everything at once. The fact that I use the phrase "the essence of being" at this point by no means indicates that I see it as being clear and not raising doubts. Indeed, doubts are raised by the very concept of being, which is a key to philosophy yet practically non-existent outside of it.

essence of being" or "description of the fundamental structure of being" – seeks statements whose form (attributing characteristics to objects) irresistibly forces the mind to treat them in the same way as empirical statements. Empirical statements, meanwhile, as the scholastics put it, are "accidental", meaning that they state how it is – and this might be with great force, almost as if it simply *could not* be different from how it is – albeit always with the caveat that there is no contradiction in the fact that it could be different. There is therefore in empirical claims (and the metaphysical claims that imitate them) a peculiar dissonance. On the one hand they are *apodictic*, being *statements*, i.e. determinations of the cognitive power of a subject, "factual determinations". On the other hand, however, the apodicticity of statements of a "factual state" is possible only on condition that the "fact" (the existence of something, something's possession of a property or formation of a relationship) which is spoken of is "so, *and not* different", i.e. *essentially* (without succumbing to contradiction) it *could* be different. In an empirical proposition, apodicticity – being a certain (subjective) form of necessity – therefore meets with chance. The traditional solution to this paradox is the distinction between description and explanation.[5] This states that description goes no further than establishing the *fatum* of bare facts, a certain "it must be so, as it is so", while explanation demonstrates why this "must", i.e. the apodicticity of a factual determination, is not a self-contained apodicticity, but one resulting from a different, earlier necessity, the necessity of the influence of the "right" of the fact that it is so and not otherwise. This explanation of "why" is regarded as going beyond purely descriptive and empirical determinations, and as a consequence can even be regarded as metaphysical (indeed going beyond that which is directly factual-

5 Another, ad hoc answer to this paradoxical situation, which is not so popular but is still fairly well known, is the idea of *mathesis universalis*, in whose light empirical propositions are virtually propositions of necessity, i.e. they would turn out to be absolutely apodictic in the light of absolute knowledge. This was the view of Leibniz, for instance. It means more or less saying that "if we knew everything, we would understand that nothing can be different from what it is". Unfortunately, the expression "know everything" means nothing (as the discussion from the first part of this book shows), and if the view of "determinism of omniscience" is to be attractive at all, it is only on the assumption that such a thing as the omniscient absolute mind exists (whatever that may or may not mean), i.e. God conceived one way or another. This view then has the value of sighing "oh, if I was God everything would be clear to me". If there is anything else in this view worthy of note, it is rather from an epistemological point of view. Indeed it is the case that in an assertion the apodictic moment is contained, and this is absolute. Behind the assertoric "is" there is always a certain "it must be so", or, to put it informally, "must be yes". This "must", however, refers not to being, but to claiming.

empirical). However, since an "explanation why" always "points to the cause", while the explanatory factor is most convincing when it is itself empirical (since "being convinced" and convincing others mean essentially using empirical data with the aid of sentences and the rules of concluding), the place of metaphysics as an investigation of ultimate reasons is taken by science, giving empirical arguments, and thus *real* ones. This is why we are doomed to failure if we look upon metaphysics as an investigation of the "ultimate rights" and "original causes" of being, as this eventually leans towards some supposedly empirical, naïve idea of The Maker, responsible for the act of creation of the world. Only seemingly does this go beyond the sphere of factual determinations and their explanations, i.e. ordering into certain sequences of motive (causal or other).[6] Metaphysics to date, therefore, in spite of the awareness of the non-descriptive nature of metaphysical thought penetrating it, appears to be a hostage to descriptive statement, i.e. affirming things in such a way that a factual-descriptive pronouncement is made and the reasons indicated. Sentences of metaphysics therefore look like futile descriptive sentences; that is, parodies of sentences expressing cognition – empirical-descriptive and empirical-explanatory sentences. As a result, their content is inexorably *trivial*, and their cognitive pretensions inexorably ignored. Sentences like "there is one being" or "there are many beings", as descriptive sentences, are essentially quasi-empirical, although lacking in any non-trivial empirical content. This is why they are ignored by science, and were of significance only when empirical sciences were not sufficiently developed to absorb our entire cognitive interest.

Apart from the impossible competition with the empirical sciences in terms of "describing the world", as well as – more importantly – metaphysics' radical impoverishment and the betrayal of its deepest aspirations when it devotes itself to descriptions of substances and their properties, there is one more reason as to why metaphysics should not have a descriptive (or descriptive-explanatory) – that is, quasi-empirical – character. All types of descriptions not only entrust substances to metaphysics (the metaphysics of the properties of the subject endowed with these properties), and not only succumb to the paradox of the simultaneous apodictic and accidental (contingent) character of that which is

6 This was understood by Aristotle, for example, who measured the value of his "first philosophy" by its usefulness for physics, with which it was most closely integrated; this fact was rather costly for him, though, as he had to adopt a rather grotesque, quasi-empirical or quasi-physical idea of God as the "Prime Mover". Only medieval Aristotelianism fully developed the idea of "metaphysics" as a distinct fundamental question, doing likewise with logic. Of course, these scholastic demarcations, or in fact the division of science following the model of the feudal system, did not do science much good.

empirical, but, moreover, exclusively satisfy curiosity or are a tool for realisation of a practical task. And apart from "curiosity" and "usefulness", descriptive-explanatory data contains nothing to justify its collection – nothing to suggest that in and of itself it is *relevant*. Its value and relevance has a subjective basis – its importance is only for us. Even the most theoretical part of physics refers at least indirectly to observational data, and therefore also to empirically cognisable properties (and in extreme circumstances: the properties of producing observable effects on computer monitors linked to measuring equipment). Furthermore, as empiricists rightly claim, every property, even those that are very far from sensed contents (such as the "bending of space-time" or "electron spin"), is empirical, meaning that it can be presented and possesses a specific content only inasmuch as it can be connected with an experience or at least an idea. This is why, when "describing reality in its properties", we succumb to something which could be called a "confusion of importance". This means that on the one hand all detected properties of a thing, being in the widest sense "empirical properties", concern that which might provoke specific impressions in us; they are therefore contingent, i.e. dependent on the entirely chance circumstances of our being capable of these very impressions and not others. Therefore even the most sophisticated messages about the world are in essence no different from information about the colours of some observable surfaces, and thus the abilities of these surfaces to provoke optical impressions in us. And much as we may feel that the colour of a given thing is something significant "from the point of view of that thing", we will be hard pressed to argue that certain other concealed properties are also *significant* (in anything other than a functional or psychological sense). What importance does it have, for example, if something is spherical or has a circumference of 40,000 km? On the other hand, though, since the only properties are those that are "empirical" (that is, revealing themselves, to varying degrees of directness), to our mental cognitive powers which are organised the way they are purely by chance, the "significant properties–contingent properties" distinction remain in the domain of those properties that, taken *in toto*, are generally assessed as the area of contingency. It would therefore appear that saying "we cognise the properties of things connected with the organisation of our cognitive powers, which as an entirely chance factor directing our cognition means that the empirical is contingent – insignificant" loses sense and is empty rhetoric. This, after all, is not the case – the intuition that we should cognise things in that which is significant for them "for themselves", and not "for us" still remains absolutely clear.[7]

7 I am intentionally leaving aside the problem of the possibly relational character of a

As usual, the transcendental argument (here: "the condition for the possibility of distinguishing significant from contingent cognition is recognising the essential possibility that cognising the properties of things is at least sometimes essential") works, but without being convincing. As a result, we are left with the sense that it is "all the same" to the electron what kind of spin it has, and that space has no idea of its bending, while we are entirely helpless in respect of the unjustified impression of contingency countered by the irresistible postulate that "self-contained" and "objective" properties be seen as something accessible to cognition. This is what I call the confusion of contingency.[8] A response to empirical cognition, and therefore any "describing of the world", including ontology, which sets itself the same objective, can be the sceptical comment "so what?" There are only two possible answers: "it is useful" or "it is interesting" (and therefore only "significant"). But neither of these fits in with the intentions of philosophy, or even science. I am unable at this point to delve any deeper into the question of contingency, which I see as being crucial for metaphysics, I will make do with marking this issue as a serious source of doubt on the matter of whether metaphysics can become involved in describing the world. I suspect that metaphysics wants to be a cognition "from which" nothing more can result, and thus the type which cannot be asked "so what?" – for we know from the outset that the answer is "so nothing". This is why one can in no circumstances expect to be given something absolutely significant by philosophy – it can at best be surprising or fascinating, but if anything useful arises in this, this is only because some scientific topics have appeared.

Yet the trap of the descriptive, quasi-empirical way of formulating metaphysical convictions is not one that cannot be escaped. As I shall try to show, an escape route does exist. However, it is not possible for metaphysics not to contain any descriptive sentences. Setting such a condition would be just as unwise as the idealists' requirement that every sentence of a philosophical

property (meaning a property as a factor in the correlation between a thing and the subject cognising it) as well as the associated problem formed by the opposition "the thing as it is in itself" – "the thing as it is presented". Since Berkeley's classic analysis, directed against the naïve opposition of primary and secondary properties, it has become common to consider almost every metaphysical topic in terms of the paradox contained in the concept of the "thing in itself". This was discussed above, but let us consider this matter once again by looking at the question of substance. The matter of contingency is, however, at least partly separate.

8 The dialectical tension arising here is similar in nature to the one which decided on the co-existence of affirmation and refutation of "the thing in itself" in the transcendental tradition. Except that few are interested in transcendentalism, and the idea of "contingency" of empirical cognition is a certain epistemic anxiety and discomfort of universal scope.

system must be necessary and to respect the demands of transcendental criticism and reflection. The fear of dogmatism cannot paralyse and deform philosophical discourse. The same applies to the fear of the effect of futile quasi-empirical metaphysics. In pursuing (in some sense) metaphysics we will form many quasi-empirical propositions, but not only such propositions, and always in a way that will assure us at least partial control over the heuristic function of these regrettable sentences on our way to the final conclusions of metaphysical theory (assuming that we are even able to form these).

At its inception, metaphysics was faced with the choice between two fundamental categories around which to organise its mental work. One of these is "being" and the other is "the one". As a result, in the history of metaphysics there are such traditions which place "being" before "the one" (Aristotelianism) and those which do the opposite (neo-Platonism). The former have gained a certain advantage, as a result of which the dictionary understanding of metaphysics is strongly attached to the Aristotelian context (from which, incidentally, the very word "metaphysics" derives) and thus to the concept of being. This is why we tend to say that metaphysics is "a science about being per se", and not "a science about oneness per se". These phrases do, of course, have a similar meaning, and neither says a great deal to someone who has not learnt the history of philosophy. Unfortunately, it has turned out that the result of concentrating either on the concept of being or on that of oneness is similar. In both cases we reach a state of paralysis of thinking, which does not go beyond the experience of "inexpressibility" which it then describes, with a greater or lesser (generally greater) degree of exaltation.[9] In the case of "being" this takes

9 A particularly onerous flaw of many philosophical texts is their stubborn determination to remain exact and literal in their phrasing. At time this "clarity" even seems to be the philosopher's main objective. For the philosopher, it usually takes much more space to present and bring to the reader's mind something that a poet or writer would manage to do easily. In the desire to lay out the primary factors, and then the details to the reader, like cards on a table, often the philosopher achieves so much that he bores everyone in the process. But he is then surprised that his extremely discursive, logical musings, when scrutinised and subjected to this same monotonous examination of reason, seem insipid and meaningless to everyone (including, after a few years, the philosopher himself). Since the resultant feeling of defeat is generally accompanied by the strong sense that there was something else that you wanted to say, something important, the *most important*, which somehow got lost and by chance changed into trivial content, philosophers have a tendency to throw themselves hysterically at the part that is unsaid, this elusive *trace* meaning, avoiding the clutches of the discipline of reason. At this point the least skilled demonstrate all the ordinariness of their minds, again calling the thing what it is – inexpressible, a mystery or transcendence. Those with more taste surrender themselves to efforts to pass on to readers this very experience of

place on the basis of the following reasoning. Being is that which exists; the concept of being points beyond the concept – towards that which really exists; existence as such is not the content of any concept, and the *concept* of real existence (as opposed to just presented in the concept) does not express the *fact* of being itself, the fact that being really is; because being is not content, but the foundation of any content; existence *as such* cannot be expressed in the concept of existence. We therefore get to the point at which pursuing metaphysics entails taking care to distinguish the order of concepts (cognition) from the order of being itself, meaning existence as such. I will refrain from giving a detailed account of all the processes serving to maintain this metaphysical consciousness; these are well known. It suffices to mention just a few of them: Thomas Aquinas' transcendental concept of being, together with the conception of the *real difference* between being and existence, Kant's *noumenon*, the object=*x* and the very thing in itself for Kant, Heidegger's ontic-ontological distinction and being, and Sartre's existence and nausea. This is a measurable result and by now very much trivialised, although contemporary logical analyses of existential sentences have given it a refined and attractive form (e.g. Russell). Things are no better, though, with metaphysics as "henology". If the one becomes the central metaphysical category for us, then we assume the point of view which states not so much that "everything that is exists", but "everything becomes one"; that is, constitutes a more or less perfect unity. But we will not enter a Platonic dispute here as to what comes first, "being" or "the one", vividly reminiscent of the chicken and the egg. We are interested in the stalemate in which we find ourselves in radicalising the idea of being and the one. If in thinking about being we will in a moment arrive at Being, that is that which is and cannot fail to be, being as that which exists in its own power, because that is what it is – Existence, *summum esse* – then in thinking about oneness we will in

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metaphysical frustration, which at least brings certain innovative literary results, such as in Kierkegaard or Bataille (see his *Inner Experience*), or, rather than metaphysics, pursue anti-metaphysics, expounding, instead of on being, on difference, absence, nothingness etc. This too is interesting, albeit derivative and perpetually intertwined – as a certain shape of criticism of tradition – with what it is trying to disavow or deconstruct. Meanwhile, this dramatic "explicitness" of philosophy, which Hegel calls understanding (and treats as a nightmare haunting his system), can only be combated at the embryonic stage – if at the beginning of every text we reconcile ourselves with the fact that it will only be accessible for intelligent, sharp people, who will not need to be told "what the author meant" before the au thor even says anything. However, even if we keep to this condition, the words of Emil Cioran hold true: "philosophy is the art of masking inner torments in order to deceive the world about the true roots of philosophising" (Cioran, Emil, *On the Heights of Despair*, trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 27; partly own translation – BK).

a moment arrive at Oneness; that is, that so simple and undivided in itself that not even the subject of the property and the property can be distinguished in it, as a result of which it cannot be described or named in any way (even as Oneness or Being). In any case, we stand at the threshold of that which is incomprehensible, and we extol the sublimity of this state of mind. Both Being and The One are certain concepts of the absolute, which, being absolute, cannot be conceived, as it exceeds every concept. In both cases we are left with "negative theology", i.e. the extolment of the inexpressibility of the inexpressible – inexpressible Existence and inexpressible Oneness. We will certainly not get anywhere in metaphysics if we are to join the chorus of those worshiping the inexpressible Absolute – whether it be defined existentially or henologically.[10] As we did earlier with reference to the tradition of idealism, here too we can say: this has been done before in philosophy; we don't have to go any further with it. If we want to plough on, we need to avoid the path that will lead us to the wall of the Absolute and Inexpressible. For we have been there many times before.

We move now onto the issue addressed in the question "if not description, then what?" Can we afford something more, or are we also condemned to the "illusion of directness" – to that exalted "expression of the inexpressible", to "negative theology", intuitive "leaps into transcendence" or mystical ecstasies? There is no doubt that these fine possibilities are available to us at any point, but, for the reasons given earlier, we refrain from making use of them. The sceptic, accustomed to disavowing the usurpation of knowledge and justifying his conviction about the impossibility of knowledge, sees these cognitive possibilities which we nonetheless all possess all the more sharply. Since we have already left the famous "description of the reality surrounding us"[11] to sciences, in metaphysics we are left above all with testing metaphysical concepts. Only as a result of such an analysis will we be able to form a view of "what we have to say in metaphysical issues" – we express this simply by saying what we have to say on metaphysical matters. This will at the same time be

10 The tradition of this kind of metaphysics is very durable in philosophy. It was not just neo-Platonists, not just medieval mystics, not just Nicholas of Cusa, but also authors who were almost our contemporaries who wrote treatises about the "inconceivable". An excellent example of a modern author of works of this kind is the Russian philosopher Semyon Frank. This is a good school of philosophy, albeit a somewhat futile and recurring one.

11 The popularity of the metaphor of "surrounding" is astounding. Why "surrounding" and not "enclosing" or "appearing"? Perhaps the bourgeois spirit, enamoured of science, likes to see itself in the role of a somewhat alienated yet satisfied *tourist*, who, scaling a viewing point in the Wienerwald, looks around at the "reality surrounding him".

tantamount to answering the question "what, if not description?" Therefore, everything that follows in this book is an extended response to this question. The first part of this answer has just come: if not description (and explanation), then analysis of concepts. And it is to this that we shall now proceed.

3. Paradoxes of a realistic theory of substance

The concept of substance is known above all from the work of Aristotle, although he did not see himself as its inventor, making it clear that it was a natural and common concept. For instance, he criticised Plato for viewing an idea as a substance, thus leading to paradoxes. Yet late Greek philosophy marginalised the concept of substance, along with Aristotle's whole philosophy. The renaissance of the theory of substance is linked with medieval Aristotelianism, and above all with Thomas Aquinas, who complemented substance theory with that of the transcendentals, and particularly the concept of the "act of existence", inspired by Avicenna. In the first centuries of modernity the concept of substance was still a popular one among philosophers, albeit in a reduced and absolutised sense (as that which exists not only intrinsically, but only in itself has the basis of its existence, i.e. it exists absolutely). Substance theory did indeed cease to develop together with the fall of Aristotelianism in the 17th century, yet the famous criticism of the British empiricists, which contributed the most to its ultimate disappearance, was rather superficial.[12] The

12 This by no means suggests that it was not well placed. The empiricists (following in the footsteps of the late-medieval "nominalists", who incidentally had more to say about Aristotelianism than the British empiricists several centuries later) pointed to the arbitrariness of propositions on the essence of things, the futility of the taxonomic debates related to them (does *x* belong to category Y?) and the subjective basis of the unity of the object. Ultimately, the factor that led to the decline in significance of Aristotle's conception was the rejection of the idealistically conceived substantial unity (as unity deriving from the harmony of two things: a portion of formed matter and uniform meaning – essence) in favour of physical unity. The consequence of this was a return to the atomistic view. For the atomists had already argued (to Aristotle's great irritation) that unity is the same as inseparability, and constitutes the primal attribute of particles of matter; therefore plurality in being (as plurality of atoms) implies the existence of a vacuum which is thus something real. This last statement earned the label of *horror vacui* in philosophy. Basically, though, we were left with a rather unattractive choice: either unqualified "primary matter" and invisible, ideal essence "exist", or there "exists" a vacuum and "inseparable" particles of matter. Of the two evils, science opted for the latter, while maintaining the ideal factor in describing phenomena (as "physical laws governing phenomena") and even certain analogies of the ancient Greek concept

great theory has not been given a sufficiently serious treatment in recent times, and in-depth knowledge of it is increasingly rare. I make no claims here to either expounding or criticising it in a comprehensive fashion. I will also not go into the various versions of substance theory, which have not been in short supply in the history of philosophy, especially medieval. I will confine myself to analysing an outline of the concepts in which the science of substance is shrouded, without respect to its variations. All the most important peculiarities and paradoxes of metaphysical thinking will therefore be shown, for the benefit of the further analyses, which result from the question: "if not substance (and its description), then what?"

"Substance" is a term introduced to philosophy (by Aristotle) as essentially "ambiguous", meaning that it opens up a certain network of interdependent meanings and establishes a series of designata at various levels of thinking. Aristotle and various scholastics characterise this ambiguity in various ways. Above all, though, "substance" is the general name of "any one thing" (or a definition of this specific thing as one – indicated in any way – among many), particularly from the point of view of its own subjectivity (the "substratum" – the subject of a property), and then the content of the general concept,[13]

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of matter; that is, in concepts of peculiar, archaic states of matter in which the distinction of energy and particulate matter is not yet possible.

13 The difference between the meaning of the expression "the content of concept *x*" and the meaning of *x* itself is that in the former case the idea is invoked that "being a concept" is a certain general form or manner of existence and content is something planted in these ontological foundations. Of course, this is only a hypostasis, based on substantialising (making into a thing) something that is only a simple, direct content or meaning. Aristotle was very careful in this respect, and would never have used the phrase "the content of a concept". Unfortunately, although he himself criticised Plato for hypostasising essence in the concept of an idea (which is not entirely true, as Plato was no stranger to attempts to treat *eidos* as direct presentation of meaning, beyond any "way of existence" or "place", Aristotle was unable to avoid unwanted substantialisations. The word "substance" always refers either to a concretum taken in general (some or any concrete being) or to a general agent but one made concrete (as a general essence and concept that is common to many things, but really always present in a concrete individual being). This general-concrete factor is the essence. Whether we like it or not, this can only be conceived substantially (Aristotle himself mentions on more than one occasion that sometimes by substance we understand essence, because a thing is identical to its essence: see *Metaphysics* 1031a-1032a and 1017b), i.e. as a certain "something". This "something" is referred to by the concept of the category, and the phrase "content of the concept" is therefore appropriate. The essence is that which is *conceived*, or encompassed, by the concept, and that by which it is filled – this is why it is generally better to speak of the "content of the concept" than of the "object of the concept". See what Aristotle writes in *Metaphysics*, 1036b-1039b. Unfortunately – let's

referring to a set of things, and finally "structure of substance", as the Thomists call it.[14] If we want to understand the heuristic power of the concept of substance (and therefore of this construct), we must always bear in mind these *modi* or "meanings" of substance, or in fact their coming into contact and support for each other in a uniform metaphysical discourse. What form does this discourse take? Essentially it is a narrative that tells us that the world is constituted of distinct objects, which firstly constantly change, yet in spite of this (or in fact precisely because of it) are still the same objects, and secondly comprise "natural classes", meaning sets designated by certain aspects connecting the properties of these things which can be discerned in the general (species) concept. Combined with the belief that we gain the concepts referring to these sets (types and species) thanks to cognition of their main common characteristics, which do actually connect numerous things, substance theory provides us with an attractive programme for scientific research. First we must cognise things in our experience, then describe their concepts (define their types and species), and then determine the connections between these generic-species concepts. Science is therefore more than anything a description of the world as a set of interdependent substances, i.e. an insight into its natural (that is, coming from its essence) differentiation into species and genera of things. Like concepts themselves, sciences too must be more or less general, and – more specifically – *specialised*, just as things themselves are "speci-alised" (divided into *species*). In addition, since all things are marked by a certain dynamic (variability) permitting them to retain their identity and existence as a whole, cognition of what they are cannot be limited to recognising their properties as displayed at

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be honest – the text of *Metaphysics* is rather woolly and terminologically shaky (cf. e.g. 1017b with 1028b-1029a and 1038b), and in addition it is obscured by the overlapping of Aristotle's own disquisition with the polemic in which he attributes to other philosophers supposed other meanings of words (e.g. "substance") than those which he wanted to accept. Perhaps it is the complicated nature of Aristotle's texts, offering an opportunity for interpretative debates, that led to the particular popularity of his philosophy in the late Middle Ages. The combination of painstaking precision with woolliness and the certain nonchalance of the not completely edited texts of Aristotle's books seem to attract analytical minds to their author with magnetic force.

14 In this sense at least, the term "substance" is a theoretical term, because it is rarely used in popular language. There is therefore no "innocent", pre-theoretical use of this word, whose "innocence", i.e. a certain kind of self-evidence, could be inherited by metaphysics. And yet such suggestions, a kind of persuasive procedure, are often used by Aristotle, who says "almost nothing ever" about "substance" with reference to older philosophical conceptions which did not make use of this concept. This is typical behaviour for Aristotle – implying that certain concepts were not proposed by him, but suggested themselves and were always known.

one moment, but must also encompass this variability of theirs based precisely on what they are as such, and thus their "essence". Science therefore goes beyond description and reaches for the reasons explaining why something which is such and not otherwise is indeed such and not otherwise. In each case, though, it refers to the substance itself, for it is the substance that is the first principle, and always within it are the reasons for all properties and relationships. We can therefore say that science as such aims for cognition of diverse substances, dividing into disciplines in the same way that substances themselves diversify.

This has all been widely accepted by the academic world to such a permanent extent that even today few will protest against the thesis that the world is a collection of various types of things which the various sciences should work to cognise according to their characteristics, describing what these things are like and what their causes are. And yet this entire conception depends in every point on the conceptual orders of the considerably more sophisticated and extremely controversial theory of substance, once formed with the aim of correcting the errors of the Platonic conception of the idea and achieving a satisfactory synthesis of the Pythagorean-Eleatic philosophy of identity and the Ionian-Heraclitean philosophy of the general variability of nature. However, few are aware of this today. The absorption of the "Aristotelian vision of the world" is so deep that no superfluous questions are asked of it. We are therefore left with a most peculiar cultural situation; substance theory has been rejected and forgotten, but its crowning in the shape of the general conception of science has been permanently accepted. Matters do not much look better in philosophy itself. Substance theory has been put out to pasture, but the thing that was supposed to replace it, i.e. ontology referring to the concepts of whole and parts, possibilities and realisation of possibilities, or to the concept of the process (to mention just the most popular trends of analyses in ontology), on the whole fails to avoid those difficulties which make substance theory paradoxical. We could even argue that the concept of the object, which is employed so widely in ontology that one could practically define ontology as "the theory of the object" (just as metaphysics is often described as "the theory of being"), inherits a large number of the difficulties associated with the concept of substance. And this is not all. Understanding the issues of metaphysics which were accepted and consolidated in philosophical tradition is very closely connected to the specific theory of Aristotle, and even its most fervent opponent, rejecting the concept of substance, must accept the conditions set, meaning speaking on the subject of metaphysics as if it were already decided definitively that it will be the "theory of being", which is to say the theory of substance. Aristotle's proposal is to accept that it is necessary first to create the most general science about everything – that is, about being in general – and then develop this "primary

science" in the form of a theory concerning *every* being, i.e. every individual thing, in terms of what decides on its being a certain individual being and certain thing. And yet this proposal is laden with difficulties. Without heeding these, though, it has come to be treated as indisputable, at least the part that determines that it is something fundamental to consider such matters as "what does it mean to be a being?" or "what does it mean to exist?" Anyone who calls into doubt this type of questions and discovers its dependence on Aristotelian premises has almost fallen overboard from metaphysics, thus preferring to leave this field voluntarily, declaring themselves to be someone who questions metaphysics itself. In this way, the definitional habit, which causes the metaphysical imagination to be captured by the Aristotelian phrase "science about being as being", has led to a profound degeneration of metaphysical questions, which, rather than developing in the normal discussion on already proposed conceptions and the ideas that constitute them, including the concept of being and substance itself, are shifted to the metaphilosophical level, taking on the form of deliberations on the "problem of metaphysics", an expression which essentially means "the problem of metaphysics concentrated on the concepts of the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions". These deliberations, popular since Kant's day, always lead to the same conclusion: that we have metaphysics in the blood and cannot fail to tackle it, but without making any decisive conclusions.[15] This is itself a rather trivial conclusion for such a subtle disquisition, but no matter. In

15 Let us add that the reason why we cannot form decisive conclusions is that no conclusions, as a result of their quasi-empirical form, can be satisfactory. Kant was close to grasping this in underlining, in the spirit of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, that metaphysics goes beyond the bounds of possible experiences, but he was hampered in achieving a complete picture of the heuristic situation of metaphysics by another Enlightenment cliché, identifying metaphysics with the persistent and vain efforts to conceive that which cannot be cognised by experience, as well as the empiricist view still popular in the 18th century that knowledge is a product of the activity of the mind stimulated by experience. Essentially, though, the question here is not of the "uncognisability" of that which goes beyond the boundaries of "possible experience", nor of the paradox of the "thing-in-itself" and directness, but of the question of contingency: metaphysical cognition, formulated as a quasi-description, is consigned to that paradoxical tangle of contingency with necessity accompanying cognition based on representation and imagination. In this way it takes on the form of a system of apodictic definitions and claims, mixing simple intuitions and random definitions with terminological decisions. This is usually an unbearably pompous and egocentric literary product. However, essentially no system, even one that is most sure of itself, can be satisfactory – for we can contrast it with other systems that are equally apodictic and unsatisfactory, and not just because of their randomness, but simply because they paint before us some imagined "picture of reality".

any case, it is an excellent excuse for not paying any serious attention to the issues of metaphysics. We will not devote our attention to these decadent applications of metaphilosophical reflection here, but do quite the opposite. However, in order to explain to ourselves what metaphysics "outside of its definition" might mean, i.e. detached from its excessively binding and ostensibly neutral definitions of the Aristotelian type ("science about being", "cognition of being in its ultimate causes and structure" etc.), first it is necessary to begin to focus on explaining the heuristic structure, meaning the dynamic of the discourse concentrated around the concept of substance. This discourse – which is brilliant, one might add – can be described (in its "standard form", as a certain "mean" of its variations) as follows.

Let's go back to the start. The word "substance" means either a material thing (this dog) or the content of a generic concept (the dog as a species, or the general essence of a dog), or a metaphysical term whose definition is (for example) the phrase "an intrinsic being that is the subject of its properties and the object of statement of the properties that go with it". With these definitions we accept the premise that everything that is, is that which it is (it possesses "identity", is identical to itself) thanks to *something*, and moreover, that the identity of the being is not direct, but is an identity *through* a certain factor. Therefore, everything is the same as itself thanks to the fact that, as Hegel puts it,[16] it mediates in something general which becomes concrete in it. This something, *the thing through which* a given substance is itself (this and not another substance, e.g. a dog) is called the *essence*. The essence is the synthesis of generality (the species concept "dog", substance as species) and individualities – generality closed in a single being, which through this reference to others (belonging to a species) can exist as an *identified* concretum. The essence is therefore what ensures the *concrete character* of a given thing as such (in terms of category) and not other. Thus substance reveals itself to us as a "thing furnished and defined by its essence". But what is defined here, and what does the defining? The definition of the thing (the concrete substance) concerns that on which its unity is based, in spite of the properties that differentiate it and

16 Of course, citing Hegel does not means that we are rising to a Hegelian level of analysis of being and essence. Hegel treated Aristotelianism very seriously, developing its main concepts, being and essence among them. Yet he did this in a way that is sufficiently difficult and advanced as to almost "at his own request" remove himself from normal philosophical discussion. We will not take up the abandoned topic of metaphysics, however frivolously lost in the 18th century, by moving to Hegel or something among the best modern ontology. We must return to Aristotelianism and check what the real reason for this crisis is, and only then decide on a specific path of analysis. In any case, for various historical and psychological reasons there is no chance for a return to Hegel.

in spite of its variability. Without the essence, the form defining the matter and subjectified in it would be a chaotic collection of characteristics, and at the same time nothing would have its history (enduring a process of changes), dispersing into a chaotic series of states of things. And this is what is *defined* by the essence – unity and duration (remaining itself over the course of changes). Understanding essence therefore means understanding the unity of a given substance. The essence itself, though, is a simple thing that nothing can define. Substance constituted by its essence (according to Thomistic terminology) becomes a *thing* (*res*). The extended array of definitions which make substance *different* in a specific way from other substances, albeit only thanks to the fact that it has it essence, is its *form*. The form, i.e. the entirety of actual properties of things (substances) defines the substance in such a way that it *realises* the potentiality in matter; that is, their capability of some self-realisation or other, realisation of that which is defined (allowed) by the essence of things. Substance is therefore the medium of self-realisation in form. But it is not the essence, being something ideal (general-individual, non-sensory, potential-actual) undergoes self-realisation – it remains as the ideal element of invariable substance; realisation of the substance occurs *through the essence* in a certain concrete form, but we cannot speak of realisation of the essence as such. The essence is therefore real irrespective of whether the actualisation (realisation) of a substance that possesses this essence takes place. This is also why it is impossible to consistently conceive of essence other than as an idea.[17] Saying

17 Of course, realism, starting from Aristotle himself, attempts to avoid this conclusion. Ultimately, we can imagine essence as arising *ex nihilo* and then existing in an unchanged way as long as substance exists. But this would be a peculiar being – a cross between something ideal and something empirical. Aristotle insists that form is eternal (see e.g. *Metaphysics* 1034b, 1039b), because it does not have anything to "come from"; yet it should be different from ideas (which do not exist), since it is not the model of the thing, but a constitutive agent of the substance or the substance itself. Aristotle's convoluted explanations for why there are no ideas, but forms, and what the difference between the two is, are not particularly convincing, and the very concept of the form is in many places dangerously close to the Platonic concept of the idea. There is a similar shakiness in the relationship between the concept of form and that of essence. At times these are more distant from one another in meaning, and at others they are actually seen as identical (cf. 1032b; "by 'form' I mean the essence of each thing, and its primary substance"; trans. Hugh Tredennick). But our task here is not to analyse the texts of Aristotle. In any case, as a result of this problem stoicism changes the ambiguous concept of being into the materialistic concept of "*rationes seminales*", or "germinal principles"; that is, the material factor from which substance so to speak "grows", just as a live organism "grows" from its genome, as we today imagine the constitution of

that the idea of a tree exists regardless of whether any tree exists can be extended to the essence of the tree: the essence of the tree exists regardless of whether any substance has been actualised in the form of a tree (or at least a *mature* tree). Adding that the essence exists only within a concrete substance changes nothing, since this addition can only be understood as a proposal for distinguishing the essence of a real substance from an essence as a certain concept and certain potentiality. There is no way for us to escape the difficulties connected with the concept of the idea, which, as Aristotle rightly noted, cannot be separated from the concept of the concept. Such configurations of meaning as "idea", "general concept of the idea" and "concept of a specific idea" form a certain theoretical constellation in which every element is essential; this is compromising for the theory that maintains that ideas exist, if this existence of ideas requires acknowledgement of the "concept of the idea" and the concept of every single idea. Aristotle knew this, adopting the so-called third man argument (see Plato's *Parmenides* and *Metaphysics* 990b, 1038b-1039b). Unfortunately, there is an analogous heuristic situation in the case of the concept of essence which is supposed to replace that of the idea. One cannot claim that essences exist in things without at the same time claiming that concepts of these essences exist, with a definite content, regardless of whether these things exist, furnished with a given essence. Both conceptions – the theory of ideas and the theory of substance – encounter the same difficulty. Both try to answer the question "what does it mean to be a true (real) being", and both "dualise" reality, attributing to it that which is ideal (the idea for Plato, the essence for Aristotle), and to the derivative of what is formed in accordance with this ideal factor (nature as an embodiment of ideas for Plato, and substance as a manifestation of essence for Aristotle).

The difference between Plato and Aristotle lies in their different understanding not of what is ideal, but of matter. For Plato, matter is "non-being", coeternal with Being, i.e. the logical complement to ideal being. Matter here is in a way "under the threshold of potentiality", meaning that it is less real than the potentiality of becoming something itself; the element of potentiality is found entirely in the side of the idea. For Aristotle it is otherwise – matter here is "real potentiality", *dynamis*, i.e. active potentiality. Yet this difference, sufficient to entirely change Aristotle's image of metaphysics in comparison to Plato, is not particularly significant from the point of view of the way in which the two philosophers dealt with the category of *reality* – or in fact *did not* deal with it.

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living organisms. Religious Aristotelianism, meanwhile, transfers eternal forms (often known as ideas) to the divine mind, announcing that they are the creative ideas of God.

The essence of Aristotelianism is dynamism. The question about what it means to exist truly was met by conflicting answers: to be an unmoved Being, be an eternal Idea, be a pure movement, searching for harmony in the balance of opposites. The response of Aristotle and the scholastics is different: to exist truly means to become according to the order designated by the essence, and therefore: self-realisation. Transition from non-being to being is unthinkable – but transition from potentiality to reality is entirely feasible. And it is this transition that is the crux of reality. It is therefore movement or this very *transition*. Unfortunately, this position is not coherent. Alongside reality as enduring in the process of self-realisation, that is making actual the possibilities resulting from essence, every being is also in fact to some degree actual, i.e. real in the here and now. On the one hand, therefore, reality means "forming" each substance from the act and potentiality (transition from potentiality to reality, movement), and on the other, reality is the very effect of this movement, i.e. that which has already been actualised – the form (the "formal act"). We therefore have two concepts of reality in reference to the same substance. According to the first of them, material substance is real because in it is an internal movement, i.e. a change consisting of transition from the potentiality to the act (reality). Reality here means the same as *incomplete* actualisation (complete actualisation is enjoyed only by God and pure, immaterial intelligences) and incomplete potentiality: everything between them, i.e. pure matter and pure form, is *real*. According to the second concept, meanwhile, reality lies in actuality, i.e. the activation of potentiality that has already been *done*. In this sense substance is real (exists) inasmuch as it is actualised, and therefore inasmuch as it actively "glows" with its characteristics. In this context it is said the form (all the properties that are in fact manifested) is the *act* of the substance, i.e. its *reality*. Putting together the two concepts of reality leads to the following thesis: real is that which becomes real; in other words, the form (reality, the formal act of the substance) is the realisation of the potentiality of realisation (i.e. the matter). This thesis must be acknowledged on the basis of Aristotelianism, yet it is paradoxical and circuitous. Such is the price of a dynamic vision of being as a synthesis of potentiality and actuality. The matter is analogous with the remaining oppositions which Aristotle seeks to bring to dialectical unity; that is. with the oppositions unity-plurality and generality-concreteness. On the basis of substance theory, we must concur that substance is concrete thanks to the materialised general essence, and that it is actual unity thanks to the combination (unification) of matter (potentiality) and form (that which is actualised, which it arrives at through its essence. However, the essence itself is also something concrete, and the form itself is something singular. Saying that as a result the essence is (even if only "in a certain sense") a substance (as Aristotle said) is

only a verbalism concealing the dialectical nature of these concepts, which is something that Aristotelianism is afraid to accept. Yet it is this dialectic (that is, the movement of concepts referring to each other), which is the characteristic content of substance theory. Thus the (general) essence of a given substance is the principle of its unity. We can therefore say that the essence determines the identity of the substance. The generality (essence) and plurality (the combination of the actual substance from matter and form and combination of the whole historical being of the substance from the potentiality and act) are therefore conditions of the concrete, numerical unity of the substance, which cannot be grasped outright in a concept but is experienced by us. This unity, as Aristotle often emphasised, is the same as being: wherever we say "being" we can also say "one". It therefore appears that unity also constitutes one of the meanings of reality. And yet the synthesis of plurality and unity, generality and concreteness, that substance is to be is not convincing if we are in the light of this dialectic to come to a final conclusion: that substance is *simply* a concretum. It would be better to say that concreteness is a certain extreme term (like primary matter or a pure act), and *really* substance is neither concrete nor general. It is something fundamental for Aristotelianism, though, to see the world as a set of concrete, numerically individual things.[18]

Substance theory therefore has the form of a dialectic, but its conclusions are rigid. Although the terms of this theory, like "act" and "potentiality" or "substratum", appear as "ambiguous" (Aristotle) or "analogous" (as Thomas Aquinas would have it), at the same time they are real. In spite of this, the manner in which those components of being mentioned by substance theory exist is something entirely indefinite: they are to be real (in contrast to concepts invented by the mind), but it is not clear what exactly this is supposed to mean. For what are we to understand by the expression "primary matter exists" (or: "the substratum exists") since we establish it as pure potentiality, transferring

18 It was this inconsistency that led radical nominalists, from William of Ockham to Tadeusz Kotarbiński (if we can employ such an exotic combination) to reject the Aristotelian-Thomistic conceptual framework. Classical metaphysics appears as partial, inconsistent nominalism (reism). Of course, concretism was also defended by Leibniz, who thought that the unity and subjectivity of a substance should be imagined like the self, i.e. the subject of experience. Instead of dark and potentialised matter, we therefore have a living subject, which as the immanence of itself is "the unity encompassing the plurality". Unfortunately, the unity of the subject is not the slightest bit less mysterious and problematic than the unity of the object, and the unconscious "self" of the monad, making *petites perceptions* (because a stone, too, being a monad, is a subject), in no way a match for the extravagant metaphysical Aristotelian essence or the Stoic and Augustinian *logoi spermatikoi* (*rationes seminales*).

the whole reality of substance into combining matter and form. One would have to say: primary matter exists only within the combination of being from form and matter. But it is within this that primary matter does not exist, being converted into "secondary matter", i.e. the material from which substance is built. As we said, the same goes for essence, which also supposedly has its reality only within the substance, although it establishes its condition of possibility itself, and thus precedes it;[19] moreover, essence as the basis of the identity of a substance does not itself change, and as a result in a way remains indifferent to what is happening with the substance of which it is the essence. How does it then exist? Only one possibility remains – ideally, meaning as an idea (or thought of God). Yet this is excluded in the very concept of the essence, which is formed as a constitutive factor of the substance itself: the essence as an idea is not *the same* as the essence in the substance.[20] Finally, potentiality – this concept seems to be the most dialectical and the most paradoxical in Aristotelianism. What does it mean that potentiality exists, i.e. is real? What does it mean that the concept of potentiality is *real*, and not just invented? Well, the whole reality of potentiality consists in the fact that *ex post* we can confirm it: if something has existed, then clearly it was possible. Yet then it was solely a past, former potentiality. Actual potentiality, meaning real potentiality, can be imagined only as a combination of non-contradiction (logical possibility) with a certain force or potential that shows that a certain substance can acquire certain properties (e.g. grow, if it is a plant). But this only appears to remove the direct contradiction that appears between potentiality and reality: that which is possible is not yet real, and that which is real is no longer only a possibility, but a reality. However, the concept of potentiality is seen as a synthesis of these two elements: possibility (pure, without contradiction) and reality. Potentiality is therefore in a way now reality, though still as "only potentiality", and this is thanks to the essence, understood as real potential, designating a natural (i.e.

19 Metaphysicists always use erudite terms whose fanciness is supposed to imply that in each case there is no theoretical difficulty, but there is only a need for a certain distinction. What could be simpler than saying that "essence is prior to the substance in the logical order, but in the real order existence is first"? But how do "orders" exist? Who is the order-maker here? With their backs to the wall, metaphysicists will always timorously point upwards. Up, meaning God, explains everything. But why? Because the definition of God includes His being the beginning, end and rule of everything. He is there to explain things. It is small wonder that metaphysics ended so badly, treating people as flippantly as this.

20 Scholastic theory states that universals exist *ante rem*, meaning in God's mind, *in re*, or in a substance, and *post rem*, or in a concept. But how does the very *universale* itself exist? Could it have three manners of existence?

appropriate owing to its essence, the nature of the thing) course of changes; that is, the process of actualisation of a given substance. Yet this idea is not consistent. The essence, as "invisible", i.e. absent in the physical order (and therefore simply ideal or "metaphysical"), does not have its own physical agency, i.e. simply does not work; only the actualised substance works. Therefore it cannot be thought of as a certain reserve of energy – only physical things can be thought of in this way (e.g. a genome, which contains within itself the possibility of phenotypical expression). Between power, i.e. the potential to act, and the essence as a logical indicator of the means of acting and changing, an ontic chasm opens up. If we in any way present potentiality as a certain reality, we will think of it as a certain concrete property (e.g. as a concretely existing gene or electric potential), i.e. an element of form – and therefore not as potentiality, but as actualised being.

Let us return, though, to the theoretically realistic conceptual outline itself of substance theory and the problem of unity that is fundamental for this theory. Apart from essence, the principle of the unity of the substance, and therefore also the basis of its reality, is the *substratum*, i.e. the subject of the property (or form), identified by Aristotle with primary matter. The substratum is so dominant a factor in the substance that in fact the whole substance "meets" in it: Aristotle recognises this to such an extent that he proposes that "substratum" be recognised as one of the "meanings" of the word "substance" (cf. *Metaphysics* 1017b, 1029a). The substance, after all, is being conceived as a subject of itself, and thus grasped from within – as being in itself, with this self-subjectification responsible for its intrinsic nature. From within, the qualifications of the substance, i.e. its whole form, are "properties (*proprietates*), and thus that which a substance "has" in itself, what within it as a subject of itself is united and subjectified. From outside, on the other hand, a substance is a thing which has certain "accidents" (*accidens*), i.e. features which fall to it or clothe it. The conception "from outside", meaning "accidental", is not significant, however, and does not allows us to understand the substance in its belonging to a species, i.e. in its very essence. One has to learn to look at the substance from within, as it were, from "its point of view"; only then will it reveal to us its essential truth, its "being in itself", and thus its essence in terms of species. Therefore, overcoming the vexing opposition "the thing as it really is (in itself)–the thing as it is represented (phenomenon)" was by no means achieved in substance theory. It was simply replaced by the opposition of form–essence and cognition of accident (ephemeral, unimportant characteristics) – relevant cognition, reaching to the internal constitutive and essential factors for the existence of a given being. Form, in part knowable in sensory terms, continues to be just a gate to cognition of essence, even though it is the form that is the "actuality", or the

reality of the substance. The status of sensory cognition has therefore been raised, but not so much that its results are of any more than passing value in combination with the cognition of the essence. It is rather hard, however, to imagine what the diversified form has to do with the uniform essence – they meet in the definition, i.e. the concept, but there is no doubt that our concepts and definitions are just imperfect notions of the essence dominated by chance or "accidental" factors. Since an essence is in fact general, but incarnated in a given substance in quite aconcrete way, it becomes concrete-unknowable. The substratum, as the "in itself" of a given substance, though in theory *logical* (intelligible, knowable as a certain essential core), is at the same time inscrutable in its individuality, in its *haecceitas*; this is why we think of it as the dark, indeterminate kernel of the substance, as primary matter. We can shrug this off by claiming that our cognition, as it is always general, is imperfect, remaining on the threshold of that which is concrete-real, but we must then rely on the absolute, which ultimately knows (as creator) what these concreta might look like "in themselves" – when taken individually, what their "individual essences" are. Unfortunately, this contradiction between the essence conceived as an idea and the essence conceived as an individual (*haecceitas*) cannot be solved – both saying unambiguously that an essence is general and saying that it is individual seem unacceptable, since this means the disavowal of the very theoretical dialectical project that says that the essence is the synthesis of generalities and individualities. Yet this project too cannot be articulated directly (apart from in Hegelism, which departs from the Aristotelian concept of reality), since the components of substance theory are something real. This is why the dialectical nature of substance theory is not fully shown in Aristotle or Thomas' discourse, but emerges as a real philosophers' dispute, a debate of schools, with the example of the Thomists and the Scotists. In the Middle Ages this generated the impression of scientific vigour and conclusiveness of substance theory. But this was just an illusion. The whole history of medieval metaphysics should have been put in one treatise as a uniform dialectical analysis. It would be an expansion, and ultimately a deconstruction, of substance theory.

Thomas Aquinas proposed a certain improvement to substance theory which was meant to guarantee its steadfast realism, threatened by the idealness of essence and the unreality of that which is as yet only possible. This solution is a kind of "break forward", definitively connecting the concept of reality with God. This is a God conceived differently from in Aristotle, i.e. not only as a pure act, a final reality, attracting towards Itself all imperfect, "potentialised" substances, but as a person, who with His will, unhampered by anything, summons the things of this world into existence. Substance is therefore real not only because a certain potentiality has been actualised in it, not because it actually possesses a

form which is its *act*, and therefore in a way action, but because it is found in the *act of existence*. Being in the act, in the sense of the "act of the form", (i.e. real possession of certain properties), does not explain existence, and does not explain per se why a given substance actually *is*, since after all it does not have to be. The existence of every substance, which does not of itself have to exist, requires a distinct and final *reason*, and that is the creative act of God, who gave this substance concrete existence. Therefore, "being a substance" means "to exist", "to exist" means "to be in the act of existence", and "to be in the act of existence" means "to be created in the will of God". In this theological perspective, the whole structure of substance, including the real-unreal "potentiality" and real-ideal, concrete-general "essence", takes on a new, theological-metaphysical meaning. Everything that happens becomes the fulfilment of God's intentions, and it is from this irrevocable decision of God that it gains its reality. There is no need to explain that the price for a new "act of existence" to solve the aporias of Aristotelianism is the acceptance of the idea of the personal God, and thus dishonouring the philosophy of theology. For Thomas this was an excellent transaction, but for now we will refrain from investing in this venture.

The error of classical metaphysics is not only its entanglement in dialectic oppositions such as general–concrete, unity–multiplicity, potentiality–reality, the thing as it is in itself–the thing as it is for the subject cognising it; it also lies in adoption of an incoherent and essentially superfluous concept of *reality*. A dialectic is nothing shocking – one is hampered by it when one begins to ask it for definitive abandonment of "word games" in favour of strictly real definitions referring to that which really exists. A mind that has little faith in its strength (and is perhaps a little lazy) does not distrust the value of its concepts, ready at any point to cut the Gordian knot of dialectics with a strong indication of "the thing in itself". Yet the call *rem tene!* has purely rhetorical value, since it means no more than "let's tell the truth!"; that is something that in any case everyone is ready to take on.

If there was no need to insist on the "realism" of substance theory, and thus also its individual components (i.e. "the reality of potentiality", "concreteness of that which is general" etc.), it could be defended as a set of reasonable observations of the type "every object is distinct from others and has certain lasting characteristics, which decide on its being what it is, and not another object". Admittedly, with sentences of this kind (and we encounter many of them in metaphysical treatises, starting from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*) we cannot build an ontology that would make us wiser (there has been no shortage of such attempts), but at least they show where the boundaries lie beyond which we are forced to struggle with the semantic stipulations of our language. The race to the

rostrum, from which first of all we must call "let's get to the point!", usurping leadership among the friends of truth and "realists", has a long history in philosophy. One just has to mention that the whole transcendental tradition would be nothing if we removed from it the exclamations of assurances that every critical and transcendental philosopher is a true realist, treating with the greatest respect the natural, "objectivist" manner of statement, if it only affects the ordinary person, and not the half-critical, half-dogmatic philosopher of the "pre-transcendental era". We have to hand it to Hegel for carefully avoiding this kind of easy braggadocio. His system was not based on assurances and proclamations, but solely on forming concepts and definitions which are meant to speak for themselves, always within the boundaries of the conceptual context in which they are spoken. It is from this that Hegel's paraphrase of classical metaphysics conducted in *The Science of Logic* begins – from according concepts with the status of concept and allowing their unhampered dialectical game.

In this book, when Hegel speaks of existence, being and essence, he is fully aware that "existence" is an entirely inefficient concept if not complemented by the most general concept of a certain content, i.e. "essence". Essence is the thing without which being means as good as nothing – it is reduced to empty, direct existence. For it is not only abstraction (the abstract concept of being) that is empty, but also being directly conceived in its concreteness. Therefore, both abstraction and immediacy are certain extreme terms between which all real descriptions – that is, those *that say something* – are found. Concepts such as "being", "reality" and "existence" serve in various configurations, and above all in a certain specific dynamic ("the movement of the concept") to signal differences and moments that we know well such as "being some (specific) – being real", or "a being as it is in itself – a being as it is shown to us as an object" etc. For Hegel, what allows us to move freely among these terms and prevents us getting hopelessly bogged down in the obsessively returning trivial intuition that "existence" must mean "existing really" and not be simply a certain concept (the concept of existence) and that existence does not refer to any content, but to the *reality* of a certain content, is the concept of appearance. The difference between being and its essence is appearance, and thus the appearance of difference. This is because being meets in its essence, which is *everything that it is*: but this being itself is the appearance of being as content, which is apparently not the same, but is *its* content. Being acquires its reality by means of appearance (that it is a *content*) and by sublating the appearance that decides that it *is* a content. In this way, with the aid of the concept of appearance, Hegel dealt with the contradiction on which realism is based; that is, the contradiction that emerges between *communing with being*, which attempts

(but is unable) to find an adequate *verbal* expression in metaphysics, and the *creation* and use of *concepts* that every metaphysics must inevitably be. The stubborn assurance of oneself and others that more is being done than talking, i.e. that in talking one is *referring* to how things *really* are, which is therefore not exclusively a hypothetical "designatum of the concept", never goes beyond futile and declarative self-repetition, beyond stubborn verbalism. Let's say it again: the aspect of his ontology that Hegel uses to take power, or exercise control over the game of direct and factual references to being, alternating with manifestations of reflection on the activity of the mind, which only creates and applies concepts, is above all the concept of appearance developed in *The Science of Logic*. Without doubt, Hegel was able to overcome the difficulties of classical metaphysics and show how metaphysics is accomplished, i.e. the kind that according to his intention was even possible. Unfortunately, this science provides a negative result. Metaphysics, brought to the limits of criticism, subtlety and conceptual virtuosity and leaving nothing unsaid in terms of what can be *done* with the concept of being and reality, proves to be an essentially superfluous accumulation of connected epithets. These are *only* epithets or descriptions, and therefore form a certain *story* which is (literally) a story about *nothing*. This is because it grows out of the "thirst for knowledge", which, as we already know, is in itself illusory, and as a result – as the quenching of an ostensible thirst – it turns out to be an illusion, a mirage of knowledge. Metaphysics, and especially its crowning glory – the metaphysics of Hegel – is the realisation of a plan that nobody had and a gift that nobody wants. This is why the library cards attached to copies of *The Science of Logic* have a tendency to remain untouched.

Mindful of the lesson given to us by the fortunes of metaphysics, let's again touch the place which is the most neuralgic in it, in which its sickness lies and which we have to learn to cure – that is the idea of *reality*. We have already mentioned the ambiguity of the concept of reality, which can mean subjectification in oneself (self-existence, substantiality), and the actuality of the form (in opposition to passive possession of features), and finding oneself in the process of transition from potentiality to an act, and materiality, and possessing one's own act of existence. Yet all these variations of the concept of reality are merely shadows (or perhaps rather rays) cast on individual metaphysical instances by one, and the main, concept of reality, which is contained in the term "true being" or simply in the word "really". Classical metaphysics almost trips itself up by asking questions whose heuristic meaning it is unable to seriously consider, getting straight down to forming answers. These are the questions "what really exists really?" and "what does it really mean to really exist?" I have doubled the word "really" in these questions in order to immediately

demonstrate the redundancy they contain. The second "really" can be deleted without any semantic damage. Can the first one be deleted too?

I have already mentioned metaphysics' many attempts to tackle the wearying venture of distinguishing "true existence" from that which is only contained in concepts. I also promised not to get caught up in this kind of deliberations. For what more could we want than to accept that such a difference and such an intuition exist? Every possible discourse on "true, real existence" or "that which is actual, and not only possible", or finally on "the very being of being" only leads to the preservation of this simple, entirely unremarkable intuition. It is much more important to understand the connection between truth-related claims communicated by such words as "true", "it is true that…", "is true", and thus "truth-related accent" applied to some expressions in the discourse of metaphysics: "really (and not just in the concept) exists" or "true being". The word "true" is interchangeable here with the word "real", and it is this observation that is the key to understanding of the heuristic "deadlock" known as "the problem of metaphysics".

4. Metaphysics free from redundancy

In the part focusing on epistemological questions, we analysed the complex, multifaceted *redundancy* of the concept of knowledge and the associated notion of truth. We are now discovering the same factor in metaphysics, where the role of the vehicle of redundancy is played by the word "real". In the field of metaphysics, the equivalent of "true knowledge" – the troublesome phrase which suggests itself and yet is illogical –is the expression "real being". The very concept of being contains this "really", just as the concept of knowledge contains the ideas of its trueness. And just as the phrase "true knowledge" is redundant and illogical, so too is "true being", which means something similar to "being being". Failure to discern this results in the production of illusory *distinctions* within the concept of existence, which is simple, i.e. does not encompass any differences. These ostensible distinctions involve the postulation of supposed "types of existence" or "existential modes", and this is based on the intuition that certain characteristics of some objects or others are so special that they are counted in "different worlds", with their own strange "types" or "ways" of existing. Since ideas, then, are outside of time and space, it is said that their way of existing is "ideal existence". Similarly, yesterday's dinner, as it belongs to the past, is accorded "past existence" etc. This is verbose rubbish, which in addition deems certain characteristics to be "existential". Yet there would not be anything bad in this if it were not for the fact that the ultimate conclusion

reached is the absurd one that there are various types of existence, and among them, standing, as it were, in one line with the others, can be found "real existence". Of course, real existence, i.e. simply existence with the accentuating, redundant attribute "real" (true), is by no means "one of the ways of existence", but rather existence as such. If we understand this, we acquire a certain resistance to the verbosity of reinforcing terms which do not add anything to the concept of existence, such as "true", "real" or "actual".

Alongside the misunderstanding leading to pseudo-scientific "ontologies", holding forth about "ways of existence" and including as one such case "real existence", the other common affliction of modern philosophy is the habit of combining the appeal to true cognition (cognition of that which exists) with a reference to the subjective side of being, and therefore to the "thing itself" or "thing in itself" of the object of cognition. The cluster "true cognition = cognition of reality = cognition of how things are in themselves", in spite of the half-hearted critical philosophy, is doing rather well. Its durability should be put down on the one hand to the fact that the distinction of the thing in itself and the phenomenon at one point was seen as the first degree of initiation into critical philosophy, and on the other to the stubborn lingering of fragments of substance theory, which as a result of an ancient, 18th-century critique has been allowed to be forgotten to the extent that what has also been lost is the sensitivity to the theoretical dangers brought by various debris of "substance" left to drift in space. One of these is the substratum, that "inner side" of being, its "in itself". In this way, the innocent "really", which is meant to mean that we desire to cognise, and not succumb to appearances, and that what we want to cognise exists, changes into the dogmatic "Really", in the form of a claim to "true knowledge" cognising "what being is really like in itself".

The radical rejection of metaphysics constructed on classical grounds, that is the metaphysics of substance as "true being", aiming for "true knowledge" of how it is "in itself", led in the second half of the 20th century to the innovative philosophy of difference, i.e. ultra-abstract structuralism. The message of this philosophy is as follows. Each concept is an indication of difference, and only in a living context of diversification does it take on a meaning, one that is never definitive, but living, variable and always problematic. Any attempt at defining a certain concept, and even any application of the concept plays a part in its constitution, and is always temporary. In speaking or writing about a concept, we invoke different words and notions, creating from them a net of contextual, mutually self-referential meanings, and that which is audible (or visible, understood), i.e. the threads and knots of the net, is just as important for the effect of this semiotic work as that which is invisible (unrealised, concealed, unnamed), i.e. the mesh of the net. We have no other concept than concepts of

"difference", and those that feign being concepts establishing some forms of identicalness (e.g. substances) are merely hoaxes, easy to uncover and debunk by pointing to the supplementary concepts that constitute their conditions of possibility and occupy a position of negation towards them (e.g. substance – life; meaning of word – usage of a word; subject – unconsciousness etc.). Yet this is not just about dialectical relations, but something considerably more radical: general difference pushed so far that in this work of language (text) not even any specific "differences" as certain (negative) metaphysical instances are constituted. Expressing this ontologically, we would have to say that no differences even exist – for even differences "differ", and move away from each other. Anywhere where nothing is definitively defined, differences (being the differences of definitions) are not defined by anything either. Therefore, nothing is defined, and at the same time everything is constantly *defined* – it is constituted and disappears in its definitions. The pursuit of philosophy comes down to tracing and recording this general work of differentiation, and perhaps making the process more fluid wherever there are the barriers of appearances of lasting and authoritative meanings. This revolutionary philosophy of deconstruction (which is such an example of making concepts more fluid), raising philosophical discourse to a level of abstraction not seen in philosophy since Hegel's times, is usually associated with the moralist element. A certain criterion allowing us to judge the various strategies of formulation of definitions (that is, building castles on the sands of difference), is the intentions of the speaker. If he wishes to take over the minds and feelings of other people, he deserves condemnation; but if he uses words to build a fair community based on fraternity, he is deserving of praise. In this way, metaphysics, ground to dust along with the world of which it spoke, became moralising and the theory of politics (in some peculiar repetition of the Kantian proposition to give metaphysical questions the power of practical reason, i.e. morality). For even if we are entitled to take issue with "substance" or "the Absolute", we are not likely to fight "fraternity" or "social justice", even though these concepts, as I had the opportunity to mention above, are not the slightest bit less "metaphysical" and susceptible to deconstruction than others.

And yet, both the Hegelian theory of appearance[21] and Derrida's theory of difference represent lessons in philosophy of no small importance which we could not fail to make use of now. In metaphysics today, we are given two key

21 I mention it here in extremely few words, as I have written about it before; cf. my *Techniki metafilozofii* [Techniques of metaphilosophy], Kraków: Aureus 2001, pp. 257-262. The same goes for the philosophy of difference, which I analyse inter alia in the same publication as well as the earlier book *Heurystyka filozoficzna* [Philosophical heuristics], Wrocław: Monografie FNP 1997.

proposals (not counting the countless hybrids of classical metaphysics with the natural sciences or logic, or those "ontologies", uncritically giving themselves over to a *description* of worlds, i.e. their authors' own orders made in their heads). These are Hegel's remarkably abstract and verbal system and Derrida's remarkably abstract and verbal anti-system. There are, of course, many more things worthy of attention, but I will venture the claim that it is these two works – the philosophy of the Notion and the philosophy of difference (or in fact diferrence) – that are the two extremes, complementary to each other and coinciding in one experience of the *redundancy of metaphysics*.

The simplest solution to the problem of metaphysics is to ignore or deride it. In the 20th century, the erstwhile destroyers of metaphysics turned into the destroyers of philosophy *tout court*, and made a very good job of this task, collecting prizes in the manner of anyone who tells the public what they want to hear. Silence is not the worst choice, rather like sleep or other diversions distracting us from tiring and inefficient work. Yet scorn is not appropriate. I will opt for the third way – from scorn taking a little irony, which I offer to the reader, and from silence staying *quiet about the redundancy*. I will attempt to tackle being, fully aware of the heuristic peculiarities and traps left by the history of philosophy and fully aware of the fact that repeating mantras about the "realliness" of cognition and reality is the quintessence of philosophical futility. Neither shall I plunge into abstractions, apart from perhaps to gain greater control over the applied concepts, and thus to return to them the appropriate context designated to them by language and mental habit. For we cannot fight against language and mental habits – yet we can modify them somewhat, for the good of our intelligence. Incidentally, in my opinion such modifications are philosophy's most valuable contribution to culture.

Of course, it is nothing new in philosophy to search for parity between loquacity and silence. We know many examples of this type: looking for the right limit in the discourse of negative theology, or, more broadly, in the discourse subordinated to the heuresis of "expressing the inexpressible", looking for the limit in developing the next stages of dialectical relations between concepts, and finally any leaps from "thinking" to "acting", the intuitions immersing us in the immediacy[22] of "that which occurs", in "life" etc. From

22 Crucial here is this concept of immediacy, which means "the nothingness of the concept", lack of mediation. Take "that which presents itself as it presents itself" – in this imperative is summarised the dream of immediacy. Unfortunately, it is impossible to be in one's experience and at the same time talk about it, almost in a trance. Watching someone else's trance in no way supports the intellectual value of the message possibly meant to accompany it. And incidentally, the manifestations of immediate experience are rather cries, and not articulated speech. Husserl's "principle

Plotinus to Wittgenstein, climbing ladders and throwing them away, and other enchantments with the sounds of being, constantly have their proponents. It is easiest, perhaps, to be a wise spiritual and silent person (free of the effort of explaining oneself for anything). After all, silence is golden! Hegel was not short of "leaps into silence" excuses, yet this did not do much good. I warn that I do not intend to jump anywhere – either into the wilderness of immanence or into the wilderness of transcendence. We will stay on earth. Quite simply, to quote the Polish writer and artist Witkacy, "we won't say unnecessary things", and this is because we have already found out what is unnecessary. It is time to find out what is necessary!

5. Beyond materialism and idealism

Let us begin with a comment on a distinction that occupies a place in the background of the questions of substance and realism discussed above, but to which I have not so far referred. This is the distinction of the material–immaterial and, in parallel, cognisable to the senses–uncognisable to the senses. The popularity of these concepts is particularly astonishing in light of the ease with which one can imagine an entirely different sensuality from the human type and the entirely marginal nature for this kind of *other sensuality* of such indicators of a solid "material" character, such as stretching over space and providing resistance. If we lived among smells, and, say, sensual impressions revealing certain "fluids" to us and, perhaps, an electrical field connected with the activity of our brains and those of other animals, we would not make much from the intuition telling us that something's reality has a particularly strong relationship with that intrinsic nature of things that was manifested in their providing resistance to our movements, putting pressure on our bodies or stretching in visual

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of all principles", proclaiming that reliable cognition is always ultimately validated in some immediate experiences, is basically nonsense. Cognition as such is mediation, and "immediacy" is the futile idea of "the thing in itself", transferred, as it were, onto epistemological terrain. What can essentially not be done is "cognising immediately". The notion of immediacy is constructed in this way – immediacy is "for itself" and not "for me" (and all the more "for another"), just as the "thing in itself" is "for itself", and for me it is an "object" or "phenomenon". Admittedly, cognition is indeed filling, or overfilling, with a certain content (especially evidence), but thinking, whose product is text (including a lecture of the phenomenological theory of cognition) is the opposite of this immediacy of a certain state of the subject. It is precisely mediation, or consideration, reproduction of prepositions etc. Husserl clearly did not read Hegel – after all, he had his own "phenomenology", a priori better than the Hegelian one. In any case, apriorism is a huge waste of time.

space like a homogeneous patch cut off from the background. We would be more likely to consider as true the olfactory compositions or others' mental states that we would sense as a kind of field of tension.

The fact that we see what we happen to see does not result in anything essentially metaphysical. Thanks to the fact that we have eyes we can say that a tulip is red and has a place in space as well as enduring in time. Without the sense of time and spatial evidence connected with sight, we would doubtless be able to somewhat abstractly (e.g. based on some invented science) discover these truths too, but we would be more interested in the smells we could sense than something's substantiality, colour and duration. Metaphysicists would doubtless suggest an idea like "since there is a smell, there is something that gives this smell", but that "something smelling, taken in and of itself, as a source of its own smell" would concern us about as much as we are today concerned by the Aristotelians' "prime matter" or the "processes" about which processism speaks.

Presenting the results of sensual cognition is apodictic, and takes the form of apodictic statements about the world. These are descriptive, and, in the way discussed earlier, join together contingency and necessitynecessity, as an irrevocable, concrete actuality that *must* be so and not otherwise, since it *could* be otherwise (and is not). They are, however, open to corrections and "negotiations" or comparison, yet there is almost always agreement in this respect, i.e. a publically binding definition of *how things are*. Description of the world, whether colloquial or scientific, goes about its business without any cause for philosophy to interfere. "Described being" has as many dimensions as our senses and our imagination will allow, making it possible at least in some way to dimly connect certain ideas and abstract content. And so we can imagine atoms, force fields, space bending, hot plasma and black holes, despite their rather untypical characteristics. Some kind of path to the human imagination must be found, however, if words are to have any kind of significance, and any agreement is to be reached. Empiricism is right in this respect. We cognise being in its visibility, to an extent in its audibility, as well, to a lesser degree, as in its capacity to be felt and smelled. We would doubtless be able to perceive some more sensations and evidence if other senses had developed in us further or were to be artificially added to us. Equipped, for example, with the ability to sense heat at distance, let's say not according to a Boolean metric, but another one, the world would go from being a scrap heap of rigid things "enduring in time" in a Euclidean space to somewhere that would "heat" and "radiate" for us. Normal people would no longer say that "what exists is what they can see and touch" – that is, visible and rigid things enduring in time – but rather that "what exists is what has heat and permeates us". The most stubborn, with the help of the "ontologists" and "proponents of scientism" of this new world, would perhaps

even say that *reality* per se is based on heating and radiating, seeing those who think that there are such "metaphysical creations" as rigid material objects, enduring in time, and that it is they that are the "true reality", as mere dreamers.

Between the various types of sensual experiences in which the factor of solidity, tangibility is present, and those in which this factor disappears, entering a certain ethereality or transience, there is a smooth transition, depending on the sharpness of our various senses and the meaning we can attribute to the appropriate forms of observation in the process of forming notions. It is in this alone that the distinction of that which is material and that which is immaterial has its source. The heaviness of a stone is more "material" than a smell, and a smell more so than, for example, a "person", whose presence is given to us in a complex configuration of perceptions without any unambiguously distinguished indicator. Less "material" still are our own thoughts, which we barely perceive in our observation, as echoes of speech or only becoming evident when they break the threshold of consciousness (for example, when we have almost remembered something that we were desperate to remember). Therefore, in a way everything is material and in a way nothing is material.[23]

23 Let us remember that in philosophy two concepts of matter have emerged which in a strange way overlap. The first is the Platonic-Aristotelian *hyle*, that non-actualised substratum (subject) of formal reality, coeternal with Being, as its logical-ontic complement, standing at the border of being, which is (is *that which* is) and non-being, which is not (is not a certain "*something* that is not there"). Matter here, then, is an Eleatic synthesis of being and non-being: one can say that "it is (we are after all talking about it!) something that there is not (it does not currently exist!") I don't think it will be too brutal of me to call this notion a metaphysical sophism, little different from the "vacuum" that the Aristotelians so hate. The second concept of matter, meanwhile, is partly empirical, and again has two versions. One, the atomistic one, suggests the intuition of "quantum of space", in relation to the idea of rigidity, and the second, Cartesian one, makes us think of "filled space". Ignoring the question of the continuity and non-continuity of matter, in essence both of these basic concepts of matter coincide with the Aristotelian differentiation of prime and secondary matter. The latter (in Aristotle: filled space, subject to division by form) is in relation to the former structurally its earliest actualisation, i.e. realisation (incidentally in accordance with the spirit of the Pythagorean cosmogony of Plato's *Timaeus*). In this way everything physical, that is tangible, filled space, grows to the rank of that which in its essence is substantial, because it is a pure subject of nature, that which is primal. And this common tangibility (of secondary matter) combined excellently with learned substantiality (prime matter as the unactualised substratum of nature), leading to the idea that reality (true being) is based on materiality, the idea of the already familiar materialism. Reality was cut off here from rationality (the Eleatics) and connected with pure, irrevocable actuality (because this concerns precisely that which is tangible; that is, "secondary matter"). This is the state of ideas and notions in which we found ourselves in Greece, and to all intents and purposes little has changed since then, in

It is quite another matter, though, with the differentiation of what is empirical and what is unempirical. If differentiating matter and that which is immaterial (the spirit, essence, idea etc.) solely involves forming hypostases in the form "a certain variant of being" of something earlier recognised as "a certain type of content of a certain type of experience" (an experience of sensual observation or experience of thought), the same differentiation of observation from thought has some grounds. For example, to claim "time is immaterial" makes no sense, since nobody calls time a tangible thing, and therefore time is not something about which one could sensibly ask "is it material?" For the same reason, sentences like "time is not objective" or "time is something ideal" etc. have no cognitive value – they are all superfluous paraphrases of the superfluous (lacking in any reason to be stated) sentence "time is not material". Yet this does not pertain to the sentence "thinking about the concept of time, I do not observe anything". There are certain reasons to suspect that the concepts we think, or the acts of thinking themselves, are distinguished in the stream of consciousness blended by memory, and self-knowledge and channelled by the indicator of attention. It may seem that, alongside the impressions, feelings, moods, ideas, memories and anticipation there will be something in addition – pure, inevident, "abstract contents", "meanings", or "ideas" or "concepts". And this suspicion has nothing in common with the theory that these "unempirical contents" must "respond" as such to "immaterial beings". We can remove the naïve "material-immaterial" distinction entirely, and continue to express the sense that, in our stream of experience labelled as the feelings and contents of what is evident to us, there are "foreign bodies" of abstract concepts which are not accompanied by any experience, and especially idea. For now this is just a certain feeling. We will see later if it is not a little misleading.

This is a much more profound issue than the so-called debate of rationalism vs. empiricism on the sources of cognition. It assumes that impressions and

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spite of the critiques recurring since late-medieval times, via Berkeley to Russell and others, of the contradictions and contingency of the terms used. The concept cluster "the thing in itself", with the invisible material "gulf" that is the "true inside", the material substratum of the thing, the unification of the concept of the subject of the substance (substratum) with the concept of its substantiality, material, heavy and unclear for the eye, entirely dominated our ontological imagination. This is truly worthy of regret, given the primitive empirical grounds of such a position. It just means that for our primate's motor system, the objects that we manipulate usually have their superficial "surface" and their much more important "interior" which we have to get to. I suspect that it is these atavisms that result in this "banana metaphysics" focused on the "outer" "peel" (phenomenal, formal) and the "inside" (substantial, essential, albeit concealed). Classical metaphysics is entirely "banana-like", and this is why it is essentially materialism.

concepts already represent being, as they are credible (or not) vehicles of knowledge. This "representationism-vehicularism" is closely related to the theory of substance and materialism, which constitute the already utterly weathered core of classical metaphysics. Unfortunately, both Berkeley and Condillac and contemporary authors treat the question of the nature of concepts as one that is *prima facie* epistemological, i.e. in the context of the rationalism–empiricism debate, or that of the apriorism–aposterioism, with the "problem of metaphysics" in the background; that is, the paradoxes of the theory of substance on the one hand and the paradoxes of immanentism on the other. Yet the question of concepts must be addressed directly, in a manner free from the historical *knots* from which we have, after all, *untied* ourselves. We no longer have to worry about where matter leaves the spirit, or the concept "represent ideal being" or "are derived from the experience of real being". The victory of materialism (or idealism) and the fictitious opposition of body (matter) – soul (ego, psyche, consciousness and something "immaterial") that results from it clears the path for an unashamed approach of superstitious dualism to understand the *conceptual life* that is philosophy as well, perhaps, as to pursue the "metaphysics of concepts". Concepts seem to be the only form of being with which our internal dealing is close enough for us to muster something more than imagination and description. I would say that on the basis of the deliberations made so far I am entitled to bind any hopes for describing the world with empirical sciences (or literature – when it is a matter of describing experiences), and label any attempts made by a philosopher to do likewise as naïve and leading straight to hopeless metaphysics performed with the motto "we're investigating how things *really are*", condemned to endless chasing of bunnies called "truly", "real", "in itself", "true knowledge" or just "truth". I would say that the whole accumulated self-knowledge of philosophy, organised around several paradoxes signalled by the concept of "substance", "the thing in itself", "the uncognisable absolute", "the transcendental a priori", is just an insignificant sortie from the conditions of typical language usage, just to return immediately to its element with the arrogant sense of superiority of an amphibian strutting for a moment onto the bank of the pond over the fishes constantly immersed in it. The most important result of the long and painful experience of efforts by philosophical reason to break through to autonomy in relation to the prose of everyday language usage is the understanding of two mutually dependent truths (truths of experience, not some "true truths"): that in the philosophy of "cognising the world" nothing new can happen, and that in language nothing more can happen than previously, i.e. nothing except the latest handy and engrossing stories speaking to the imagination, and making sense until one starts to ask foolish questions about the meaning of the words they use or their

"metaphysical premises". I therefore think that the only metaphysics that will be capable of going no further than *describing* the worlds it invents or constructing variations on the scientific or literary narratives about the world is metaphysics devoted to *invoke* conceptual experience; that is, creating a thinking being, creating itself. Metaphysics as *creation*, and not *description*, i.e. speculative metaphysics is not knowledge, let alone "true knowledge", and therefore it is a pursuit worthy of the sceptical mind (contrary to appearances!) However, it makes sense only under one condition: that over the course of the experiences filling up our days and nights we also exist not *in experiencing*, and not in the sense of some "internal thing in itself" – a "spirit" or other "unconscious" (because these are merely already buried metaphysical instances) – but in the sense of me-myself-as-thought. The key question is therefore: am I a thought (Idea), or just an experience? Not: "thinking being", "experiencing being", since we already know too much about the metaphysical hypostases of the grammatical subject. I am asking about another dimension of one's own existence than anything that could ultimately be conceived as one more experience or one more hypostasis, called "the subject". Can I prolong (or intensify) my existence just through the continuation of experiences and comprehending them in memory or anticipation, or am I also able to think on top of this. In living, do I transcend life?

6. Experiencing and thinking: the Idea

Modern cognitive science, continuing the tradition of psychologism in philosophy, appears to persuade us that the being of the human can be described exhaustively in terms of sensitivity to stimuli and capabilities of reaction, development and repetition of learned (or inherited) behavioural patterns and electrochemical-computational brain activity. This cognitive science therefore appears to be something akin to a self-anaesthetising reaction of the brain to the stimulus of asking about human nature, effectively lowering our sensitivity to this kind of superfluous stimuli. If cognitive science is right, and with it naturalism in the philosophy of the mind, this means that the seventh seal has been broken – this is the end of philosophy. As one of the forms of life, it could only be a game of putting concepts together and choosing fitting words. No more than some fancy word game.

It is extremely rare for a philosopher not to know something. He is almost always sure of himself, and just looks for the means for emphatically manifesting the convictions dear to him. Yet the question "who am I?" is too important to be left to the mercy of vanity and sophistry. For it is not just a

question of any old "how it is" or "how it really is", or "the nature of the human subject" ("how are things really with this human subject?") etc. There is no question of making do with the nebulous legends about the soul, self or unconscious, with which I can possibly "identify" solely because they are clearly not what I am. This is the heuristic situation in which we have found ourselves today. It is not a sceptical situation, so irony is not required. We do not desire knowledge as it truly is, we do not search for the being in itself, we do not close ourselves in pure immanence or make any transcendental proclamations. We are not interested in certainty, ultimate validity or the truth about anything. We are not attracted by objectivity or any of the values motivating the "description of how things are." The metaphysics of dark substances, pregnant with their actuality and weighed down by their prime and secondary matters, emerging wonderfully onto the surface of the "real now" from the land of the past and the land of possibility, connected by the transcendental knot of time and space with the seeing "I" – all of this is now behind us, or rather in us, preserved thanks to our knowledge of philosophy or only of its history. We are occupied now only with the *truth of experience*: does it mean living or experiencing something, and thus a sense and sensitivity, associated with how one is feeling and underpinned with what is evident, or does it still sometimes happen to us to *be in a thinking way* or in the way of the thought itself? Does experience point beyond itself, beyond the whole cosmos of the subject and the objects of experience that go with it, together with their supposed substantial sources? Or does perhaps the only Other of experience, its simple logical negativity, remain solely the idea of that "transcendent source of representations"? And does perhaps the experience in which my life takes place have its metaphysical, and not only abstract Other, an Other extending beyond the conditions of possible experience, beyond "substances" and "noumena"? As long as the answer to this question is positive, philosophising is still worth it. We must therefore, however reluctantly, repeat after Heidegger the question "What does it mean to think?" And it would not be a bad idea to quote the words that initiate his deliberations in this key matter: "it may be that man wants to think, but can't. Perhaps he wants too much when he wants to think, and so can do too little".[24] Scepticism suggests just such a possibility; we desire to think, but cannot, since we are unable to detach the will to think from the will to know the truth of being.

Perhaps scepticism is always laced with the disappointment and indolence that results from the sense of being powerless to live up to the dreams of wisdom. If so, all the same it is necessary to go to the trouble of thinking, in

24 Heidegger, Martin, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 3.

order to be a sceptic sated with thinking, and not just a malcontent disappointed with his own mediocrity. Only in thinking is a philosopher, including a sceptical one, truly at home. Yet he must decide on whether this being "at home" has solely a moral sense, as a high and perhaps happy (or maybe painful) form of life, or thought, or if by thinking one *is* in another way than life, beyond experiencing.

We can begin, though, only from what one is unquestionably – from living as experiencing. As Dilthey would say, "life conceives life". He and other philosophers christened by historians "philosophers of life" believed to an extent in "another life" – in the world of symbols that are formed and inhabited by the human being. It seemed so great and beautiful to them that it was practically worthy of replacing the dying mirages of God and the Idea. The beauty and good created by man were to be replaced by the truth of metaphysics with its own truth. Instead of the redemptive power of the supernatural Truth and Good, we were offered enthusiasm for values – those metaphysical instances divided for human measure and entrusted to human power. Scepticism, rebuilt after the decline of classical metaphysics, turned into euphoria – the cult of life and creation, the cult of work and progress, the cult of the person. The philosopher was to be the priest of this cult: the worshipper of science, poetry, music, literary-religious fantasy, all heroic and outstanding human achievements – in a word, culture. This is a subject to which we will return. But let us just note that the question about being *outside of living* in thinking is, contrary to expectations, given a negative response. Thinking here is after all only a form of life, and nothing more. To Schopenhauer this conclusion would still appear a sad one, but Dilthey and James saw it as altogether happy. Nietzsche even called it "happy knowledge", but even he did not know whether this was supposed to be irony or not. Regardless, there is nothing strange in compensating for the depressing tones of scepticism with the rhetoric of a hundred flowers. After all, we all know that "life is beautiful!" This kind of approach is right for a poet. But for a philosopher?

If thinking is something different from experience, it must be the Idea.[25] But what is the sense in asking "does the Idea exist"? What are the possible forms of

25 Earlier I spoke of the "metaphysics of concepts" and "thinking being", i.e. concepts and thoughts. I now use the phrase "the Idea". It is necessary to make appropriate distinctions, and, as always in such a case, we must make use of a supply of several available words. I will, however, be cautious in these conceptual orders, as I have no illusions about what the reader will make of them if too many of them are used. For now I will say just that the word "concept" renders well the act of consciousness which conceives or grasps it. "The Idea" has more logical overtones, and in English is not directly associated with the activity of the subject, and thus with experience.

response? Is this not another metaphysical question, the question "does the Idea *really* exist"? The similarity is purely an apparent, grammatical one. Of course, a normal question about existence makes sense only in the light of some complicated decision process; for example, empirical or deductive (when it is a question of formal sciences and their objects). There is no such procedure with reference to the absolute (God), so one can only weigh up the losses borne in philosophy by rejecting the concept of God, in which the necessity of existence is by definition contained, and the sentence "There is no God" is by definition excluded from the range of correctly formed sentences containing this concept.[26] However, the question of the existence of the Idea does not appeal to any experience, and appeals even less to respect for rationality, which would supposedly be damaged if the Idea were to be rejected (just as supposedly the rejection of God leads to the decline of reason and loss of a sense of experience, in all its dimensions – from the empirical to the axiological).[27] The Idea is not an

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Furthermore, characteristic of this word is the use of the singular, as well as a capital letter – with the aim, of course, of distinguishing it from the logical plurality marked by the word "ideas". As I said before, an excess of definitions does not do philosophy any good, and in addition is often an indication of the conceit and helplessness of an untrained philosopher. I will therefore count more on the reader's intuition than on his readiness to follow caustic, protracted distinctions which in any case no one will remember afterwards, and whose author (fortunately) will be the quickest to break them and forget them (I will refrain from giving examples).

26 Let us add that this loss is not all that severe. If we are to be satisfied by the vicious circle contained in the supposed syllogism "There exists a certain C, being the thing that ultimately explains everything – Everything demands an ultimate explanation – Based on the definition of God, everything finds its ultimate explanation in God – There exists God, who is this X that explains everything" etc., then it is better to revert to a reasoning free from circularity: "Nothing exists that ultimately explains everything – Nothing demands ultimate explanation – Nothing possesses ultimate explanation".

27 Philosophers' remarkable obstinacy when it comes to the belief that thinking is losing its footing and the world is disintegrating with the rejection of infinite and unconditioned being, which is the final argument of all finite being and its cognition, is a phenomenon that is related and usually associated with the "substance" obsession, i.e. that of "true being". As I mentioned, the logic of the speculative half-measures taking place here is such that the concept of "true (real) material being" leads to the concept of "the true (real at the source, archetypal) Being". This is solely a paralogism based on the unrecognised redundancy of the term "true" ("real") which is expressed in such an iteration: true, because derivative of "truly true". The concept of God does not explain anything, but just assures that any explanations are closed in God's inconceivable mind. Yet the "final argument" is no argument, but rather its direct opposite. It is expressed in the sentence "It was God's will", and will is precisely that, and only that, that takes place without reason or argument and is not explained as a logical argument for

ontological object which can be encountered in experience or deduced, like an atom or a substance; it is also not a "sense-maker", since it by no means promises salvation, and incidentally in the thinking-feeling existence of a person there is no shortage of solaces, including those which philosophers make a living from providing. The Idea is also not a postulated being to be accepted, and therefore intellectually affirmed in the sentence "The Idea exists", just as the absolute is affirmed with the proclamation that it is, and is being as such. The Idea is not, after all, a *certain type of being* (with its own manner of existence etc.), and the quest for the Idea-object (substance) is nothing more than a search for a supposed element of the "picture of the world", and therefore chasing pipe dreams (if we go beyond experience). No, the Idea is not an object, and thus it is not a component of any "world" (first, second or even third); it is not "somewhere" or "some idea" (bearing properties, like some object). The Idea simply isn't being at all, and in talking about its existence, we do not speak of an existential proposition, but rather of a quasi-existential one. The meaning of the sentence "the Idea exists" is explained as follows: "without experiencing I express a thought", or more simply (though imprecisely), "beyond experiencing I think", or finally "without experiencing I exist-in-thought". Unfortunately, what can imperfectly be called existing-in-thought is rendered best in English by the word "express", which is why the phrase "beyond experiencing I express thought" seems paradoxical. Yet it remains comprehensible. Also comprehensible is the question "does the Idea exist?", although it is indeed paradoxical. It can be justified as an expression of the doubt of whether we are not introducing the latest false metaphysical instance using the phrase "the Idea". Certainly, after rejecting "substance", "matter, "idea", "phenomenon", "God" and other inventions of classical metaphysics, it would be a great disappointment. No, we cannot ask the question about the existence of the Idea in literal terms (that is, as a question about the "existence really" of being defined in a certain way), but only as a *question about the Idea* that is in fact a question about ourselves, about the importance of our thoughts, perhaps going beyond the trivial occurrence of certain, but not other, experiences.

The Idea is not a being (object, substance), but it is also not a representation or concept. Both a representation and a concept refer to something, and are therefore marked by a derivative nature. Both these concepts gain meaning only

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anything except itself, being a simple "because I want to!" An argument as such is always local and contextual, appropriately for the fact that every thought means concentration on something, and not on "everything". However, substantialism-materialism-theism have dominated metaphysics, and it is truly hard to find a place for oneself in the religious republic of philosophy if one does not pay homage to all these opportunistic and overblown fallacies.

in the light of the metaphysical idea of the "dark well" of the subject, in which is reflected ("the representation") the external appearance (phenomenon) of the "dark well" (substratum) of the object. The whole context of the theory of substance and the paradoxical reasoning connected with it of the theory of cognition as a game of "who can demonstrate the barrier between the subject and the object most convincingly" is now behind us. We know everything about this, and know all the transcendental tricks. We have already devoted enough attention to this matter. The question about the Idea does not concern "whether there is such a thing as the Idea" or "whether apart from representation and concepts in the mind there is *something else* that is their source and to which they refer". It does not concern "ideal being", "God's thoughts" or even the "proto-thoughts" called transcendentals (although the effort of thinking about the absolute onto-logical conditions of possibilities of notions and categories can be seen as the greatest speculative achievement carried out by philosophy in the Middle Ages).

How to understand the Idea is explained exactly by Hegel. But I will put it in my own words. We already know that the Idea is not an object or being. It is not "somewhere" or "some". It is not an "ideal being". It cannot be described, then, which offers us a certain hope that as philosophers we might still be of some use (since we already know that we are not needed at all for the "world of describing"). There remains the pure immediacy in which being is equated with non-being, in which the "question of actuality", the distinction between existence and non-existence disappears.[28] As immediacy, the Idea is precisely

28 Earlier we mentioned how the concept of being has come to dominate metaphysics, marginalising the competing concept of unity (less assimilated into popular language). If the redundant development of the concept of being is the phrase "being exists" (which leads to the aforementioned *horror actualitatis*), then such a development of the concept of unity is "the One is one-ified". Although such a construction, however understandable, cannot be maintained in language (and therefore in philosophy too), all that is left to say is that "the One exists", which ultimately leads to the narratives known from Neoplatonism on the inexpressible non-being (supra-being) that *is Hen*. It is a similar story with the concept of "immediate". Saying "immediacy *is*" or "immediate existence" is misleading, just as it is misleading to say "the One exists". But expressions like "Being. Simple Being" or "Nothing. Pure Nothing", or finally "Immediacy" itself are no better. Only introducing these into the dialectical traffic in which every term demonstrates its weaknesses and leads to the next one makes it possible to resist the potential of appropriation that the concept of being brings. If we do not practise this reasoning, we will fall prey to the overpowering charm of defining immediacy through the concept of being, and specifically in the form "that which actually is" or "true being", and finally "pure, absolute being" and "being as being". These are all metaphors of immediacy, just as the very word "immediacy" is. Hegel alone took the trouble to

and exclusively that which it is, constituting a self-presentation as a meaning without mediation – whether it be in some form (the form of an idea as a certain kind of being – a vehicle of "ideal meaning" or "content of the idea"), or in the subject (as the conception of the meaning *subjectified* in it, i.e. the *concept*). We can also say that the Idea is mediated in itself, i.e. it does not go beyond itself – it is not referred to anything, and is not the idea of something. We therefore face the following problem. Either our *immediate being* is a sense of ourselves, i.e. life, or it is immediate thinking of the Idea, specifically existing-in-the-Idea. Since the Idea, as immediacy, essentially cannot be *given* in any experience, I can only negatively authenticate my existence-in-the-Idea; that is, my truly *thinking* (and not only *living*) being. If I am sure that experiences, representations and concepts do not explain me as a rational being, that I am "wiser" than the observations, conceptual ideas, intuitions, judgements and other acts of consciousness I experience, whether they can be communicated or not, that there is "more" of me than my experiences; this will mean precisely that "the Idea exists", i.e. that in thinking I express thought without experiencing, beyond the bounds of the possibilities of experiences. This Kantian conclusion can restore the sense of philosophy, although not metaphysics, assuming that with it we will understand the description of anything.[29]

Let us repeat. The Idea is not a concept, nor can it be conceived. As pure immediacy it does not exist, but *presents itself*, i.e. reveals itself for and in itself. Therefore, we cannot ask literally "does the Idea exist?" (is there such an *object*), because the response would have to be "yes and no". Yes, because the phrase "presents itself" is translated in philosophical language as "exists in itself

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work on the dialectical tissue of terms entwining immediacy, thanks to which his metaphysics (the science of logic) no longer must be "the theory of being", but is a theory of many other, so to speak, things *equally important to being*. Unfortunately, the philosophical rabble ridiculed Hegel's lengthy, and for them too difficult deliberations, having encountered the aforementioned phrase "Being and Nothing are the same". Plato was, though, partly to blame for his own alienation. He had a revulsion for "understanding", and as a result also had a habit of not revealing "what he really meant". Mindful of the negative consequences of this flaw, I am trying to say very clearly what I mean, even if I wallow up to my ears in unphilosophical reason. I prefer to be reasonable than not understood or ignored.

29 I will repeat a request in the characteristic words of Kant: "I beseech those who have the interests of philosophy at heart […] that, if they find themselves convinced by these and the following considerations, they be careful to preserve the expression 'idea' in its original meaning, that it may not become one of those expressions which are commonly used to indicate any and every species of representation, in a happy-go-lucky confusion, to the consequent detriment of science." Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, *1929*, 1965), p. 314.

and for itself", although this phrase is unfortunate and imprecise, only referring to a certain being. No, because the Idea does not exist as an object, i.e. as a "being for me", externalising itself towards the subject. We can therefore say that the question of existence does not concern the Idea. The question concerns me – do I, beyond the existing-in-life, also "present myself", and therefore "be" in the Idea?

This is not a question of establishing facts, because there can be no facts or state of affairs here. Therefore we also do not have to be impartial or objective – after all we are not communing with any object; we do not have to and cannot know "how it is". We can only *fight* for the human's "second being", apart from experiencing, i.e. try to demonstrate that thinking is not only experiencing, retaining or expressing experiences, representing and communicating, but *is* in and of itself and directly, and is therefore the Idea. Since in this case we do not have to be afraid to use the word substance (after all, this is about us, for *we are* ourselves the thing in itself, being directly), we can present it in this way: we will try to demonstrate that thinking has its own substantiality, that it is the Idea. Of course, not a "metaphysical idea, detached and soaring in the clouds, in a vehicle of a certain "form of an idea as an idea", but a pure self-definition, beyond any "way of existence" and any form. If thought is substantially the Idea, then philosophy is the "other life" beyond life, and is itself substantial and *important*. It is not "true knowledge", it is not "knowledge of how it is", it is not a "description of reality", but a manifestation of the Idea in the experiences of the thinking I. Let's consider, though, whether the thinking I, the experiencing mind, can be capable of thinking at all. Is it substantially the Idea, or simply a series of experiences of a feeling body and pain in the brain?

7. The concept as resonance of experience

In the whole spectrum of perceptions, feelings, sensations and inklings, and therefore experiences of the feeling body (or feeling soul – since this differentiation refers only to the type of qualities filling the experience), distinctive are those in which the contents of experience that are sensed resonate inwardly, forming a several-layered structure. The direct sensory content (feeling)[30] leaves the trace of its appearance in a weakened and only semi-

30 I do not use the word "impression" because of its intrusive etymology behind which there is a vision of something that "impresses" from the outside onto the mind and makes an indentation in it like a small explosion that makes the "impression", leaving the evidence of a certain quality. This is an entirely satisfactory metaphor when we are talking about the brain, but lets us down if we need to refer to the mind or subject. Our

conscious form, i.e. in the form of a concept: yet this undergoes petrification and consolidation through the word of the language, which has its own distinct phantom of perception in the form of the sound of the word or the appearance of its transcription.

Let us take a simple concept, such as the German *abscheulich*. Then let's assume that I don't know German very well and have to remember what "abscheulich" means. I think, I search through my memory, and finally a certain, at first unclear, sense of the meaning of the word appears. I don't know the meaning yet, but I do remember that it is not something good; it is something unpleasant. Perhaps it is something that I feel when I am physically threatened? Or maybe something ugly? Difficult? Yes, it means an experience of aversion, something that I cannot accept and that I push away. Such things are "abscheulich". The word is associated with emotion, and expresses a concept negating the relationship of the subject with the thing which it encounters. Furthermore, in this experience of disgust I feel an objective element. The thing that is disgusting is recognised as such irrespective of me and my feelings. The concept of disgust or revulsion qualifies it as having an intrinsically negative

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ability to think of ourselves as bodies, and particularly of our mind as the brain, is very weakly developed, and weakened further by the dualistic metaphysics of soul and body fixed tight in our imagination since late Antiquity, and also in the era of the decline of classical metaphysics. In spite of the best efforts of Spinoza and others, Cartesian dualism has dominated our ideas – the brain is for us a thing, and a thing is precisely "something that doesn't think". It is therefore better, instead of "impression", to say "feeling" – we do not have to wrangle over my "feeling something" when I see something or think something, as to do so would be useless. In philosophy one must always look for the least pretentious phrases, even if they are different expressions from those already accepted in philosophy. The majority of the keywords in a dictionary of philosophy are neologisms of varying degrees of appositeness, which furthermore over the course of centuries have not acquired any uniform meaning, since they are used by too few people for usage to manage to set their meaning and split the correct from eccentric application of the words. Even worse, the continual repetition in philosophical texts of the same, partial "analyses" of these and other concepts only works to consolidate the muddle in the understanding of the relevant words – it is no longer at all clear to which level of critical thought the standard understanding of a philosophical term refers, and therefore in which place it is necessary to make the reservations to guarantee the critical standard of its usage. Sometimes I have the sense that the whole dictionary of philosophy should be thrown away, together with libraries of books that deal with words, fantasising on their meanings, instead of undertaking something more significant than words. The collapse in philosophical terminology has not stopped us, incidentally, from strengthening our "linguistic intelligence". Philosophy has made remarkable progress here – a history of philosophy textbook presents the ancient philosophers' ideas far more efficiently than they were able to themselves.

value, whether in an aesthetic sense or a moral one. Yet still, what I directly reject is the very experience of the disgusting thing – that is what alienates me and disturbs my inner harmony of experience. I cannot possess a concept of disgust in any way other than by feeling aversion to all its supposed designata. In the concept of disgust I am alive. And likewise, in any other concept that refers to experiences. Whatever is disgusting for me, arouses revulsion in me, including the word "abscheulich", although this appears for me in a different combination with the aural phantom, since as a Polish-speaker I will tend to use a sound (word) like "wstrętny" or "ohyda", or in English "disgusting" or "revulsion". From seeing the revolting thing, via the feeling of revulsion and the concept of disgust, I ultimately arrive at an entirely different experience – an experience connected with saying in my thoughts or out loud the word "disgusting" (or "abscheulich"). In this new experience I now feel considerably better, as although it brings with it a vague memory of something revolting, this secondary experience is very weak and does not disturb my peace. In this way, incidentally, I move every moment from simple experience to "living-in-language", which as a certain kind of "doing nothing" is perhaps more pleasant than any kind of work or concern.

We might, of course, dismiss the case of a concept of a certain feeling as a trivial matter. What does this have to do with the perception of intellectual contents, abstract contents, separated from concrete experiences? Take the concept of a set, for example. This is a synthesis of two moments – unity and plurality.[31] A set is the unity of a certain plurality, a conception of a certain multitude as *one* multitude and the conception of a certain unity as a unity of *many*. What does *possession* of the concept of a set involve? With reference to specific applications, so just as a concept most frequently occurs in intellectual experience, a set is in each case giving attention to a certain diversified idea, i.e. making something uniform experientially. Nothing extrapsychic (beyond experience) takes the floor when we say "look, there's a group of people" or "imagine a collection of all dogs and cats". It is this "imaging", i.e. an experience of a certain kind, that is decisive here, and it is to this that we appeal when we say "set" or "group".

31 In mathematics, remember, one speaks of an empty set. But this certainly does not mean that there exists some more general concept of a set under which the concept of a set as a unity of a specific plurality falls alongside this empty set. The concept of an empty set is a simple negation of the element of plurality in the concept of a set, just like the concept of a set without boundaries, and "fuzzy". It is similarly easy to form a concept of the "irrational human" or "dead human". Anything inconceivable to the mind can always still be conceived by language, especially when we make use of our golden freedom of definition.

Is it possible, though, to conceive a set in purely abstract terms, outside of any idea? In the mathematical sentence "in sets one can carry out multiplication, addition and subtraction" or in the philosophical (false) sentence "a set is an original, undefinable concept" we are dealing with more than just the concept of a certain specific set. A highly theoretical abstract is at play. Who knows if expressing such an abstract concept cannot be carried out in certain minds without any idea or even the most transient "feeling"? Personally, I have never experienced anything of the sort. However many times I think even the most abstract concept, I have a certain *impression* that something *is there* in my head. I suspect that this is the case for the vast majority of people, with philosophers being no exception, particularly as they usually admit it. Incidentally, this concerns not just a concept, but also whole statements, including purely formal and apodictic ones. Moreover, I do not think that this "sensory nature" of abstract thoughts threatens the trueness and apodicticity of such, for example, mathematical theorems. This crowning argument of anti-psychologists, and in particular Husserl, assumes that only eternal and unchanging ideal being can satisfy and explain our ever-so-strong conviction that mathematical propositions are necessary and independent of experience. Yet this very conviction is something extremely psychical, being even a clearly experienced feeling. It is on the basis of this feeling that we create the concept of ideal being, and not vice versa. The claim that perception of the tautologies of logic or other essential propositions, though associated with certain occurrences in the bounds of the psychological subject, is itself a relationship of a certain non-experiencing I to a certain *eidos*, which cannot be represented (experienced); it has the value of an apodictic postulate appealing neither less nor more, but only to a certain experience – an experience of the apodicticity of perceiving essential truths ("analytical" truths", tautologies). This recalls the claim that the formula "2x2=4" written on a computer screen, being the result of the work of a processor programmed with some kind of calculation software, is not a lighting effect triggered by a certain algorithmically designed series of occurrences in the machine, but "something more", which can in no way be reduced to physical processes. The formula, though, only states that which it states, even if the computer itself did not know what it was saying (and we are inclined to have such unkind thoughts about it) and by no means ceases to be something "electronic" just because the sentence (and formula) "2x2=4" is true. Moreover, no modification is made either to the content or to the apodictic character of this sentence if we turn it into the sentence "it is true that two times two is four" or "two times two is always four, irrespective of whether someone is aware of this at this moment" or "two times two is four not because someone happens to think that way, but because it is" or "two times two is four not because the

unconscious activity of the computer gives such a result, but because it is". All these embellishments, no matter how they are eruditely and phenomenologically perfected, are unnecessary precisely because of the reason that gives us a certain temptation to say them. The answer to the potential question of why two times two is four refers exclusively to arithmetic theory, but not to the theory of ideal being (of numbers and actions).

The "ideal sphere" inhabited by ideas, *eide*, mathematical objects or even abstracts, has a postulating and confirming character, expressing in a redundant manner, styled as a metaphysical thesis ("ideas exist" etc.) a simple and direct certainty. The path to the Idea, then, does not pass through "ideas", which, though perhaps solid, are in any case just an invention of the mind, a certain "being", which "is not here because it is There". However, we have these mysterious concepts like the mathematical concept of a set or even – particularly interesting for us here – the concept of the Idea, which it might be possible to express without any evidence or feeling (I doubt this, but will not rule it out for others). Is it the case that in this aspect of life, conscious life, in which concepts are expressed, abstract contents are grasped and whole propositions or other connections of concepts are expressed, there is also some other "transcending" than transcending towards the "ideal sphere"? Is it in this that the Idea is expressed?

Since concepts do not refer to ideas, then do they refer to anything at all? It is easiest to say that they refer to the "objects of experience" or "things". Unfortunately, "objects of experience" cannot be conceived in any other way than as paradoxical mirage-noemata, which do as much to obscure as reveal "the thing in itself", or are also precisely expressed in the immanence of the I (as "evident content"), passing themselves off as something different ("representation"). The "object of experience" is a concept most closely related to the context of the theory of substance, just like the concept of the thing, which cannot be understood in any other way than as an "object" (a being presented to the subject) or "substance" (a being in itself). But we have already managed to leave these sticky, hopeless terrains behind. Can we then speak of yet another area of reference of concepts? After all, also present within the concept of the concept itself is grasping; that is, *conceiving* something. I do think, however, that the sense of grasping refers simply to the very element of the consciousness. What is doing the grasping in the concept is just myself. Expressing concepts is conscious and reflexive (accompanied by consciousness of oneself) and this is what its referential or intentional moment involves. It has the structure of an iteration, since such is the structure of a conscious act as such. The consciousness of something is consciousness of this consciousness, and even sounds an echo of "consciousness of consciousness of consciousness". If this repetition, or iteration, were real, then the act of consciousness could not take place – the reflexive

superconsciousness of an infinite degree would not allow any specific content to be constituted: the idea is therefore paradoxical and not one that can be conceived efficiently. The essence of the consciousness is by no means the tension built between the subject and an object intended by the act it carries out, and thus not *intentionality*, but a kind of structure of waves, or vibrations, expressing itself in the iteration of experience in the concept and concept in the word. The emergence from the numb unconscious of a certain sense of self, and so also the first glimmer of consciousness, defines something *in me*, dividing *me* from *what* has just appeared in me. The I and not-I, whose mutual self-defining and identification initiates consciousness, occur in one field, which changes from the wilderness of unconsciousness to an indistinct, reflection-free sense (of "self" and "*something* I feel") and then, with resonating repetition, turns into a full "becoming aware of something", incidentally only to soon vanish in the shadow of fading attention and oblivion. It is in this short inner resonance of feeling, which is the first to appear in the field of awaking consciousness, a feeling connected to one of the overwhelming senses – or the opposite, lacking in the clarity and obvious evidence of colours and sounds – that the constitution of its "aftersight" take place, i.e. in internal trace that is a concept.[32] And yet this disappears together with the whole stimulation of consciousness in the depths of the un-consciousness, but appears again when the next awakening takes place – internal or external; for example, the sound of the appropriate word. Evoking a concept from the memory, meanwhile, often habitually and compulsively anticipates and regulates a succession of further repeated consciousness events. This almost always takes place with the participation of specific vehicles and repeatable echoes of speech; that is, with the participation of "inner speech".

Concepts, and the words of "inner speech" that often go with them, owe their ephemeral character to the effect of the iteration taking place in the mind, whose feelings do not disappear together with their appearance, but pulsate with

32 I am fully aware as I write these words of how meagre they are in relation to the "history of the subject" left to us by Hegel in the first chapters of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. My ambitions and needs here are, however, incomparably more modest. Incidentally, it is notable that if we had given our generous attention and kindness to the British empiricists and ignored the naïve terminology referring to "imprinting of impressions upon the mind" etc., they may have proven to be more important and worthy of attention than we learned to believe as a result of the disregarding and condescending rhetoric of the "critical philosophers". Yet now that we know all too well the worth and applications of "transcendentalism", the old naïve "naturalists" again have the floor. History described a circle here, and a triumphant one – contemporary cognitive psychology, cognitive science and "brain science" are much closer to Locke than they are to Fichte.

ever weaker repetitions, disappearing only after a moment, when the tension of attention, that inner focusing of the mind in itself, is relaxed. The concept and word continue to sustain the given feeling for a moment, making it possible to commence new activity, specifically correct usage of speech. Say, for example, I see an apple. The impression and sense of seeing something well known rises into a fleeting act of consciousness, in which the concept of the apple is renewed in me and I remember the word "apple". When the impression disappears from my field of attention (or rather: disappears together with the attention paid to it), its place is taken by the consciousness of the concept and the consciousness of knowing the word "apple". There is no longer an apple in my experience, but before the secondary phantom of the concept of the apple disappears, I still manage to eject the word "apple", a moment later no longer remembering anything – neither the apple, nor the concept, nor the fact that I said the word "apple". And it is this separation or unsticking of the concept as a certain secondary and consequent feeling, from a certain initial experience (the perception of the apple), a feeling in which this experience has been reborn in a limited form from the depths of my intellectual resources of behavioural habits (including my memory), that we feel as "abstraction", "generality" or even "idealness". Similarly too, we explain to ourselves the relative autonomy of a verbal expression which resonates and preserves a concept for a brief moment by saying the words have "meaning".

8. The psychology of abstraction and metaphysics

The iterative (echoic) nature of concepts means that using them is permanently accompanied by redundancy. This is expressed in the illusion of the referential character of concepts and words, the illusion of higher levels of statement (and "higher levels" of existence itself – ideas), to which we supposedly ascend on the rungs of "abstraction", when it is only the words and concepts themselves that stimulate our consciousness, leading to "more general" concepts,[33] and

33 From the point of view of experience (which we can choose to call either psychological or phenomenological), the most general concepts are "abstract" in the popular meaning of the word, i.e. linked weakly toclear evidence, and independently, without any particular help from this, invoking a specific impression or feeling called understanding. But worth noting is the curiosity that is the concept of generality in philosophy. Owing to the legacy of substance theory, generality is understood in categories of "common" characteristics", a "set of designata", "collectiveness", and also "unspecificity" or "idealness". Yet these are all only particularistic moments connected with negation of a concept of a specific thing in the concept of that which is general. However, when the thought that being does not have to be a thing ceases to be so exciting and mysterious

finally in the strengthening of the constructions formed from concepts with the aid of special acts of affirmation communicated using such words as "true", "really", "indeed", and at a higher level making use of a metaphysical arsenal: "true being", "lone being", "substance" and finally "absolute". All these words serve to deconstruct the weakened bonds of other words and concepts with more accessible, self-evident feelings. A feeling that is iterated and renewed in a concept, if it is too weak, faces the danger of dying out. The concept and the word that accompany it are therefore in danger of losing their significance. In order to preserve them we produce further concepts and words that with time surround the initial experience as a supposed "intuition" that is "conveyed" by the abstract concepts. Unfortunately, all this work is essentially futile. The experiences connected with perceiving these "abstract contents" are completely different from the experiences that these theoretical concepts were supposed to conserve. Particularly the most abstract concepts, metaphysical ones, live their own lives, and the poverty of incentives accompanying philosophy means that the experiences of the mind that is pursuing metaphysics or philosophy in general are unremarkable, lacking in diversity and irritatingly repetitive. Yet on this weak fodder a new, artificial language grows; that of philosophers and intellectuals. Learning this language, using it and jointly creating it, is perhaps the philosopher's only satisfaction. Of course, though, it has no chance against the true masters of words and the imagination. Anyone who is deeply concerned with the nature of good and evil is far more likely to read Dostoevsky than Kant. And this, on my word, is the right choice.

Acts of consciousness and the uses of words that follow them (rather than taking place during them) are only able to take place because the concentration that triggers them immediately relaxes and disappears. It is in the course of this relaxation, on the border between attention and inattention, that the mirage of concepts and mirage of words that exist in almost complete "unfeelingness" appear. When we use concepts and utter words, the mechanical nature of this action is removed and replaced by a fleeting moment of consciousness – we almost never know what we say; do not accompany ourselves as speakers,

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for us, and we stop associating numerical individuality with material bodies, other aspects of generality move to centre stage, such as "commonality of appliance" or "directness of existence as a specific content". As a matter of fact, it is rather individuality that is hard to conceive, not generality, since uniqueness is in no way perceivable in a concept, unlike with the aid of the *general* concept of uniqueness (or individuality, personality, concreteness). However, absolute concreteness or uniqueness are nothing more than a certain postulating quasi-concept, a metaphysical *x*, a mirage that owes its corner in the philosophical mind purely to the fact that such terms as "the only" and "unique" have a meaning in popular language.

simply waiting for our thoughts to finish emerging and words to come from our mouths. It is because the element of concepts and words is fading attention, the area of aftersight following the ignition of consciousness, that there is no need to go out of our way for precision in building philosophical discourse. This is not just because nobody, including the author, will digest this, but because correct applications of concepts and words are precisely cursory and superficial. One cannot harness a cow to a plough; and one cannot build a wall with clods of mud, no matter how meticulously they are shaped into bricks. It would be a waste of effort. Philosophical conceptions are and always will be sketches, stuck together from words that are used for something else, underpinned with ad hoc definitions, speaking to the imagination, yet not very critical or theoretical. The price of concentrating on one idea and revealing a high intensity of critical reflection in one place is an utter neglect in this respect of many other places. The words of our language cannot cope with the pressure of deformations to which we subject their meaning and usage, in essence spontaneous and unreflexive, making analyses of them and applying them in other sophisticated contexts. In our quest for either the astonishing results of analysis or profound intuitions, we are stranded with rather ephemeral logical and semantic effects, which we endeavour to ossify in an extremely flawed way in recorded sentences, as well as to defend their applicability by way of assertion and various kinds of affirmations of truthfulness. Unfortunately, everything is immediately forgotten, and anything remembered recalls a shrivelled shaving, a paltry trace of thoughts that once lived. The desire for necessity, driven by the metaphysical mind, is realised in philosophy solely through the apodictic conceptual construction guided by the sense of necessity and the feeling confirming it. Yet we experience necessity incomparably more strongly when we commune with *actuality* in the field of what is empirically given, as well as with the structure of the language which we cannot change, and which we can partly describe with the aid of theses that do not belong to grammar and are therefore suggested as "ontological".[34]

34 This is the element of so-called analytical philosophy. Codification of correct (paradigmatic or just comprehensible) applications of various words and phrases is a boring and futile task. But if instead of saying "the word *whole* is used correctly in connection with the words *part* and *greater*, stating the sentence that says that the whole is greater than each one of its parts", we simply said "the whole is greater than each of its parts", we would find an excellent opportunity to form an essential ontological rule. Rather, then, than saying simply "the whole is greater than each of its parts", we might say for example "it is an ontological law that the whole is greater than each of its parts". This is a redundancy no better or worse than the redundancy contained in the sentence given above referring to the correctness of use of words. The attractiveness of a whole

Speech, including that of a philosopher, says only what it says, and certainly does not "say silently" what it doesn't say. It does not point to what it doesn't say, but simply endures a certain defeat. The speech of a philosopher does not have any next part or hidden, deeper contents. What we did not manage to say is what we did not say. Anyone who supposedly speaks "for us", "developing" or "interpreting" our words, simply says his own. And we ourselves, adding the latest philosophical sentences, are forever at the beginning, opening a new statement, when those that have been previously made are already forgotten. Philosophy may here and there go further than speech, but then, a moment later, it gets bogged down in trivial emptiness, i.e. the speculative *freedom* that affects every discourse, even the most captivating one of the "self-knowledge of pure reason". Yet speech is "inattentive" – it retains a sense of meaning thanks to jumping from one ice floe of the unspecified "meaning" of a word to the next, and then the next floe of the latest unclear and unconsidered meanings. Speech, including philosophical speech, holds on and *means*, thanks to this dynamic of jumping and the partial, transitory attention which we devote to the understanding of words and their links. Anybody wishing, like more than one philosopher, to stay floating on the ice of a word or term is sure to float into open waters, where there is no longer anyone to talk to. This is why we have to think and philosophise swiftly, using language dynamically and with respect for the inattentiveness that characterises it, without counting on any lasting effects.[35]

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philosophy based on the multiplication of redundant phrases is to do with the game of two complementary experiences: essentiality and freedom, the synthesis of which is *apodicticity*, that philosophers' narcotic. For example, then, in the analytical philosophy incriminated here, it is we who decide on which sentences we will leave in their natural form and which we will subject to "linguistic critique", i.e. treating them as statements to be analysed from the point of view of the rules of language usage. The boundaries between "essential" ("analytical", "ontological") and "contingent" ("relative", "conventional", "linguistic") can therefore be made in various places according to our discretion, and it is possible to wrangle over it endlessly, like over the nature of angels. Bruno Schulz wrote a story about how easily we go from metaphysical raptures to mundane matters. This contains a characteristic sentence whose penetrating power shames the philosopher: "Our metaphysical hunger is limited and can be satisfied quickly" ("The Comet", *The Fictions of Bruno Schulz: The Street of Crocodiles & Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, trans. Celina Wieniewska (New York: Picador, 1988), p. 106. I would add: "It can be satisfied quickly, but comes back the next day, giving sloppy Miss Philosophy another job to do".

35 The certain amount of experience I have in writing philosophical books and lecturing in philosophy has convinced me that a philosophical life, outside of discussion in seminars, takes place only during times of writing (or lecturing) and reading (or listening), and all this is nothing more than learning or practising – practising oneself by

We have arrived, then, at a very dangerous point in these deliberations. Scepticism is sensing and celebrating victory. Let's see what we can count on in these circumstances, and whether there is anything left from our hopes of a "second life" in the Idea. So far, we have learned that there is no "knowledge", there is no "truth", there is no "reality", "being" or "God". Or more precisely: applying "there is" or "there is no" to these and other metaphysical mirages does not change anything, since we have already observed how concepts of this kind are formed in our minds by the power of desires, imaginations and reasoning, interrupted at that very moment to constitute some clear metaphysical instance, such as "really" or "substance". There are thus only concepts and words to which we can attach importance, as they give us certainty and allow us effectively to anticipate the next (repeated) experiences, but nothing more. The formulation of a series of concepts and propositions connected together logically, in a practical cluster with experiences – those still remembered and those being anticipated – is to some degree successful in daily life, and even more so in the laboratorial conditions of scientific process. To a certain extent, it also succeeds in the field of concepts that are actually useless, but are linked with an intellectual experience which is nonetheless important for certain people. Such are metaphysical concepts. They do not hold up to criticism, but before they are forgotten and abandoned as irrelevant because of their weaknesses and weak because of their contingency, they still manage to provide us with opportunities for speculation in which they undergo promising developments and transformations, rarely displaying the same irrefutable evocativeness which we experience with mathematics. The great philosophical systems, in particular the Aristotelian-Thomasine and Hegelian systems, have delivered evidence to show that carefully conducted conceptual constructions can temporarily take on the features of irrefutable validity and play an important role in the intellectual lives of a certain number of people. Yet much more success in this respect comes to modern scientific theories, which impress perhaps not so much with their permanence, but with their astonishing feat of anticipating experience, and on a scale allowing

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writing books (or lecturing), permanent philosophical self-education, as well as giving readers (or students) practice, training them, or teaching them philosophy. In this sense, every philosophical book is a philosophy textbook – first for the author himself, and then for the reader. However, as mature people are usually reluctant to be subjected to the influence of others, and therefore to learn as well, a good recommendation would be for philosophers to write books only for students, and an age limit to be imposed on the readers of philosophical books, of, say, thirty. Older people will always be dissatisfied, since in the end it is always they who are called upon to express opinions and teach those who are younger, and therefore they do not like to be taught themselves. Yet the only use of a philosophy book that is not instructive is to fuel a fire.

investment in machines and technologies, the success of which is entrusted to these suppositions. We have undoubtedly learned to expand immeasurably the sphere of our lasting and relevant experiences, in which that "necessity of actuality" already discussed twice appears. Sentences like "in this room there are ten people" or "Krakow is not the capital of Poland" are joined by sentences such as "The Earth revolves around the Sun" or "anti-red anti-quarks connect with anti-green and anti-blue anti-quarks". Scientific sentences continue to arrive, and the terms contained within them are more and more coined from the dark matter of abstraction, where the light of the imagination can only just flicker. We already know perfectly well what to do to continue to have the latest scientific discoveries and more and more amazing theories. Moreover, we have learned to construct them so that they are no longer good only for magic tricks, but also for building machines and curing illnesses. Fortunately for us, for science to work there is no need for any of the philosophical dreams about metaphysical knowledge to come true: we do not need either knowledge of the essence of things, or eternal truths, or ideas, or God's plans, or even, a trifle, "the structure of being as being". We do not even have to worry whether we do not happen to be brains in jars, since the "real (and not fictional) reality" is the concern of incorrect dialecticians, but not scientists or normal people, who "know what they know", and use words in a normal way and attach importance to what seems significant for them, but not what others dictate as "true reality".

We therefore enjoy science, and at least no longer have any claims to teaching science in metaphysical issues and other "fundamental questions". A painful lesson in this respect was learnt by theologians, but philosophers have been met with a favourable indifference to their frivolous claims of reinforcing science, which were still made in quite large numbers up to a century ago. A great service to philosophers was provided by the formation of general studies about science, thanks to which we are now quite familiar with the way in which scientists approach their results and the way in which they find recognition or are questioned. It is important to remember, however, that, calling these sciences philosophical is only a certain habit, by no means practised by all theoreticians of science.

9. Between life and the Idea

It is not sciences that we are dealing with here, though; we are leaving them to their own devices, since they need almost nothing from us, and the theory of science is something with which one must be familiar in order to discourse about it. We are dealing with metaphysics. So far, the result has been

emphatically negative. All we know is that all our hopes lie in the idea that in living, and within this in living intelligently – or even, to express it more ceremonially, living spiritually – we are at the same time outside of life, and thus outside of our being, filled with cursory experiences vibrating with redundancy – in the Idea, silent and free from the consciousness of immediacy. Since there is nothing in particular to say about the Idea (as it is pure immediacy and not any type of object), we are in any case consigned to metaphors, which in some way refer our experience to the Idea. Such a metaphor might be "expressing" – "thinking expresses the Idea". However, in the word "express" the moment of representation, presentation or reflection is marked (albeit weakly), which is extremely regrettable in this context. One could rather say that our intellectual life is a *reaction* to the Idea, although this would suggest, again regrettably, some real effect of the Idea, which would mean that it is being, and active being at that. One more possibility is to postulate thinking and life as such being rooted in the Idea. But here the moment of substantiality of the Idea suggests itself too literally. Can one in some other way "be in the Idea"? Does the Idea, presenting itself inside itself, leave an imprint on our lives? These terms are so unclear that they beg further metaphors. Yet we will not force these. Metaphors are only useful when one already has a grasp of what they are supposed to express.

If we are to salvage the "substantiality" of the Idea and demonstrate that we are not a mere stream of experiences, we need to find in the experiencing itself, and therefore among the experiences and concepts we go through, in iterative, echoic acts of consciousness, that substantiality and directness of the Idea that is not explained by experience of life alone. We already know that we will not find it in the trueness of cognition theses and the seriousness of the knowledge gained by the human, since all true propositions are conveyed in experiences, while philosophical concepts and theses, expressing claims to "transcendent" importance, only express paralogisms and persuasions, owing their power to convince either to the ideas standing behind them or to the moment of redundancy reflecting the element of reflection (repetition) constitutive for all abstraction, capable of holding on in the structure of language thanks to the waning attention of the mind, busy grasping its own concepts, forming in it the impression of apodicticity. The *experiencing* alone (life in mediation in self-referential conscious acts) therefore remains a strictly metaphysical concept, together with its negativity, for now supposed empty, which, out of sentiment to old German philosophy, I call the Idea. Without doubt our transcendent aspirations refer to existence. We would like to tell ourselves that beyond life we also *exist* in the Idea, in its noumenal immediacy. Unfortunately, there is no "being" for the Idea, which is as much as it is not. It is not our being that we

save from these negative and entirely fuzzy ideas of non-experienced "participation" in the Idea, but rather ourselves, from this absolute surrender to existence which determines the obstinacy with which we live. Our immediacy, our "noumenal substantiality", does not belong to the area of *being*, which is after all except for fading experience only a vehicle of redundant use of concepts such as "real" and "true" ("real being", "true being"). Yet the experience itself, in the very nucleus of our experiencing it, is also directness and not subject to any description, unless we mean that which a description can only refer to; that is, concrete forming of experiences and the objects appearing in the experience. In an abstract sense, experiencing (which we can in this metaphysical context simply call life) and the Idea are two mirroring instances of immediacy, like being and non-being. The theory of life would therefore be just as arbitrary a metaphysical construction, potentially encrusted with certain evocative descriptions of what we experience and feel, as the theory of the Idea.

A metaphysics of being (and non-being) is, as we know, entirely out of the question. It will always be the same as it has been to date – a tangle of persuasions, dreams, paralogisms and antinomies, entirely taking the form of just apparent descriptions. But our thoughts do not necessarily think being. In speculation they of course think their own *thinking* substantiality, although, for reasons explained earlier, the apodictic system of pure concepts which is assured to the greatest degree by the logic of Hegel constitutes an abortive and lonely endeavour. In any case, alongside the metaphysics of being, immersed in paralogisms, we also have that other metaphysics, the metaphysics of concepts, which Hegel calls logic in order to distinguish it. Admittedly, it does not try to describe anything, yet it may be for this reason that it leaves us indifferent. We have to surrender to experiencing concepts in order for them to take on immediate meaning for us, and therefore reference to ourselves. Reconstructed in the element of pure abstraction, and considered in their internal references (mediations), they become something entirely different from how they are in their appropriate element of experience. They become a *work* of the art of speculation, an accomplishment. Re-construction in the total system of pure concepts turns into construction. The system thus appears on the stage of our intellectual experience as a product, but not as truth. This is the root of the tragedy of Hegel, and together with him the tragedy of the whole of philosophy. The fundamental claim of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, that the history of the spirit (life) is the basis for the absolute Idea, which can be developed in the form of a system of the self-knowledge of reason, proved to be nothing more than a mere wish. There is no force capable of ensuring that the spirit is for the reader of a work on the phenomenology of the spirit or philosophy of the spirit anything other than a certain being, and therefore the latest metaphysical

instance. The history of the reception of Hegel is a bitter confirmation of this fact.

It therefore seems that in a certain sense we are condemned to return to Kant. Hegel's defeat, to view the matter in a Kantian way, was about the fact that he wanted to speak as an *intellectus archetypus*, but ended up speaking in a human voice. Kant's error lay in acknowledging the legitimacy of metaphysical sentences for moral reasons. He saw the legitimacy of the thesis on the existence of God and the immortal soul as an argument of a *correct postulate*. Yet in metaphysics (and religion) the point is of course not only to demonstrate that it is good to believe in God and eternal happiness, especially as this is known from the start. In the metaphysics of God and the soul the point is only to affirm what is real, and not to make pious wishes. Such metaphysics is impossible, though, because the very concept of reality, i.e. of true being, is redundant and paradoxical, just like the concept of true knowledge.

It therefore remains for us to turn away from the illusion of reality, true being and truth itself and search, in the place of metaphysics of being, for this self-understanding in which we experience ourselves as *important* beyond being, in the opening between two immediacies, life and the Idea. There, in entire non-reality, outside of life, outside of human existence, the human being's own internal work takes place or does not. This work is, as Immanuel Kant himself showed, morality. Since the metaphysics of being is impossible, we are left with just once possibility for conducting philosophy with dignity; that is, metaphysically: we are left only with the metaphysics of morality. If we present ourselves not only in experiencing, but also in the Idea, if we can express our ideas without experiencing them, this is only as a shaping of the will, and therefore as good and bad intentions. If these words, "good" and "bad", have any meaning beyond their simple association with satisfaction or unpleasantness, if ethics has its own substantiality and is able to defend it from being reduced to the "wisdom of life", then we are saved. If not, we can surrender to life (and to flattering it in pertinent aphorisms on life) to the full, once and for all forgetting about any metaphysics. This is why it is with hope that I now proceed to ethical considerations, because, as Seneca said, man would be ugly if he did not rise above humanity. And what he meant was the fact that it is not life itself that is important, and he who only lives – or lives life to the full – lives in a bad and ugly way.

Part III
THE HUMAN BEING.
TOWARDS A MORAL METAPHYSICS

1. A lesson from Kant and Schopenhauer

We will start by telling ourselves something that Ludwig Wittgenstein expressed in these words: "if a man could write a book on Ethics which really was a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world. Our words used as we use them in science, are vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, natural meaning and sense. Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water [even] if I were to pour out a gallon over it."[1] Wittgenstein is right, along with many others who in spite of everything have devoted themselves seriously to the pursuit of ethics; this is an undertaking on a par with metaphysics, and metaphysics, if it were to succeed, would ipso facto have to take a principal place in the realm of the important statements of mankind. Ethics, when treated seriously, must be a metaphysics of morality, an explanation to humanity of what it is and what it can become. A metaphysics that is different from the human and different from the internal, and so a metaphysics of the world and substance, is not possible, as has been demonstrated more than once, and demonstrated once again on the pages of this book. Yet few and far between are the philosophers who have dared to follow metaphysics as a certain kind of ethics – not theology, nor psychology – even the most profound kind – but ethics, meaning meditation on good and evil, on the greatness and insignificance of humankind, on the nobility and wickedness of its acts, on freedom and enslavement, love and hate, hope and despair, commonness and genius, solitude and community, death and happiness. The first to do so, or at least try to, was Immanuel Kant. His work was taken up, in his own way and perhaps considerably more consistently, by Arthur Schopenhauer. In my view, both of them met with failure, but they marked out the path which was trodden by moral thought, reaching the state of the paralysing crisis of self-knowledge in which it finds itself today.

Kant presented, in a systematic way not lacking in apodicticity, a view that in the time of the Enlightenment had already become widespread. This was that cognitive issues belong exclusively to science, yet moral matters can speak for certain metaphysical convictions, while what confirms society in its moral condition is religion and theology. This is one of several of Kant's views which in the subsequent centuries acquired almost universal recognition, and which even today underpin the intellectual order of the West. For two hundred years, Kant and the recommendations he made regarding the competences of

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics", delivered in November 1929 to the Heretics Society, Cambridge University.

individual areas of life and thought – science, religion, theology, philosophy, law, political authority – have been practically official dogma. This is helped by the huge self-assurance with which Kant presented first his metaethics (*The Critique of Practical Reason*, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, and then his ethics (*Metaphysics of Morals*) and theory of religion (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone)*. Although in *Metaphysics of Morals* there are for Kant here and there, occasionally, certain doubts and penumbrae; their presence seems to be almost an additional safeguard for the certainty of the Kantian doctrine, which, as this shows, is after all no stranger to the spirit of self-criticism.[2] Kant's main ambition was where possible to define moral law, at least in the form of the formal rules which can be absolute and without exception. In spite of the formalism that is indispensable for the reason of ambition, Kant was not afraid to formulate moral norms and judgements of an outstandingly moral, if not to say detailed character, which he also wished a priori to prove. Kant went as far as to show, in his casuistic vigour, that the greatest and most monstrous sin (worse than suicide) is "abuse of the sexual organs", immediately after which was placed suicide.[3] As a result, the great arsenal of analytical means put forward by Kant served to justify, sometimes in detail, a raw puritanical morality, along with its prejudices, peculiarities and moral blindness in many areas, such as the rights of women and children. This

2 This delicate creature usually sits hidden deep in its hole, while on the surface prowls its gallant cousin – the spirit of critical philosophy. It most often appears to philosophers in the meticulous correction of typesetters' errors for which they have been famous for centuries. However, the phrase "if I'm not wrong" is so alien to them that it is hardly appropriate to call oneself a philosopher if one has the habit of using it. Luckily, I, too, am not in this habit.

3 Cf. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 218-221 (422-425 in the international pagination) and also p. 166 (359-360), where we read: "Apart from this condition [i.e. extramarital] carnal enjoyment is cannibalistic in principle (even if not always in its effect). Whether something is *consumed* by mouth and teeth, or whether the woman is consumed by pregnancy and the perhaps fatal delivery resulting from it, or the man by exhaustion of his sexual capacity from the woman's frequent demands upon it, the difference is merely in the manner of enjoyment. In this sort of use by each of the sexual organs of the other, each is actually a *consumable* thing […]". The harm endured by the "offspring" condemned to death as a result of its parents debauchery (and particularly the woman pestering the man) is somehow not mentioned by Kant. Incidentally, the exotic view that extramarital sex means using the other person as a thing comes back obsessively among people whose idea of sex is shaped mainly on the basis of their own imagined ideas. A number of prejudices about sex, although they came about in the distant past, acquired popularity, also among the enlightened strata, in the very era which declared war on darkness.

conservatism is particularly striking in Kant's book *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Well, self-assuredness and conservatism do often go hand in hand. Kant therefore did not fail to throw down a proud challenge to his successors: "if […] the readers of [*Critique of Practical Reason*] think they can show the nullity of these thoughts themselves […] they would […] deserve well of philosophy".[4] Few would take up this challenge. Probably because Kantian ethics follows the hidden dream, albeit not entirely moral, but fairly widespread, to once and for all explain what is good and what is bad and how one should act. Indeed, rarely did Kant have his doubts, and when he did, he left them in the form of questions of "casuism", to which the answer, instructed by the philosopher's works, we are supposed to be able to find without difficulty; for example, by making use of the categorical imperative test: would you like the rule according to which you are supposed to proceed to be a general rule? Like every ethic associated with religion (because ultimately Kant's, in spite of the sharply marked demarcation between the spheres, is such an ethic), Kant's critique of practical reason, together with the metaphysics of morals, departs from the dramatic dilemmas and the whole tragedy of moral life, expressing itself in the inevitability of moral guilt and the making of imperfect moral choices. It is astonishing how late – how much later than religious and literary writers! – ethicists treated moral life seriously, accepting that moral perfection is unattainable, and that even someone who is always satisfied with his conduct as obeying obligation and conscience, or manifesting virtue, would still not become a moral being. This may seem obvious, yet the dream of finding a reliable method of morally right conduct for a long time pushed the moral drama of human fate and human choices onto the sidelines. Only in the 19th century did philosophy discover this. Paradoxically, it would have been hard to achieve this without Kant.

For Kant, a decisive factor in crossing the boundary between the pre-moral and moral state in humankind is whether the person is capable of consciousness of moral law, and thus the moral obligations he has towards others and towards himself. Kant sees in the human being "practical reason", i.e. the power of rational determination of his own will, in accordance with the imperative of obligation. Anyone who possesses practical reason is a human, and moral principles apply to him. If one tries to abide by them, within the bounds of what is possible (yes, Kant sometimes allows for this limitation[5]), by doing, often

4 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 9.

5 "For a man cannot see into the depths of his own heart so as to be quite certain, in even a *single* action, of the purity of his moral intention" – *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 196 (392). And further, ibid.: moral law "[prescribes] only the maxim of the action, to

against one's inclinations, that which obligation and moral law requires, then one is a decent human being. If one does not do this, then one is a beast,

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strive with all one's might that the thought of duty for its own sake is the sufficient incentive of every action conforming to duty". The septuagenarian Kant speaking in *The Metaphysics of Morals* has a different tone from a decade earlier, as the author of apodictic metaethical sermons, whose hallmark is the famous "categorical imperative". This term loses some significance in Kant's later works. Might he finally have noticed that morality dies in the same place that the conclusion as to what I should do is clear and unambiguous, and in addition easy to determine, but is reborn out of quandaries and dilemmas? Or perhaps he noticed that the same does not have to be good for everyone, or that each act can be attributed to many different maxims, or rules, which can be exemplifications, and that it is far from clear which of these should be chosen in a given case, especially as they can come into conflict with each other? Or maybe even, the thought dawned on him that the universality of a moral rule (that "maxim which I might want to become a general law") and its identical application to me and to everyone else is in fact not the most important thing that makes this rule right and moral in the first place? Never mind how this was for Kant. The most important thing is that for so long philosophers were transfixed by the cold light reflecting off harsh ideas, absolute moral rules as the essence of morality. Philosophers were very slow to shake off their love affair with the "imperativeness" and absoluteness of moral duty, the illusion that the "it must be so!" that silenced any discussion and indeed simplified everything; this constituted the most profound essence of morality. For centuries, obedience and pride at this obedience (even if I am obedient to myself, since I interpret my duties myself, which I call freedom) served as the final explanation of all orders and prohibitions, as they accounted for the lack of need for any explanations (something akin to the transcendental argument in social practice!) It was Kant who – how very perversely – called obedience, if it was to be sufficiently internalised and accepted of good will (with the support of virtue, conscience, and what he called "moral integrity", which means decency), freedom. In this respect he had many predecessors, but he was the first to make this idea into the foundation of a theory of freedom. For him, we are free in the choice of means of action, free in doing elective deeds and committing sins. Even the whole system of common law gained its legality from the fact that it defended the freedom of the person, and thus his or her autonomy in obedience of moral law. For above all, we are supposedly free precisely in the fact that we voluntarily yield to moral law. Perhaps the liberal costume for an old-fashioned ethics based on the idea of obedience of orders made it so dissimilar to its religious and dogmatic – indeed literal in their dogmatism – predecessors, that it was able to seduce philosophers. Regardless, throughout the 19th century in ethical thought, those considerations that Kant had wanted to evict from ethics again had to break through: these were feelings, temperament, attitude, conflicts of conscience, and thus all those circumstances which exclude the possibility of any abstract system of ethical concepts being able to fit into life and have a significant meaning for living morality. Luckily, Kant himself at times stepped out of the golden frame of his own formalism and timidly touched life. But this was not enough to be a good ethicist.

deserving of contempt. This is because the starting point for the whole of moral life and all virtue is respect for the law: "to hold the Right of men sacred".[6] The objective, meanwhile, is "*one's own* [moral] *perfection* and the *happiness of others*".[7] The path to this goal, to building one's own humanity to the greatest available extent, and contributing to the common good, is self-improvement, i.e. culture. Thanks to this, humans strengthen the virtue inside themselves, which makes it easier for them to fulfil their moral duties. Yet anyone who has learned to incline his will towards that which binds him by law, especially contrary to his inclinations, experiences the hope of being rewarded for this in the next life. Yet it is not for this that he carries out his moral obligations, but only out of duty. Essentially, Kantian moralising does not differ markedly from the traditional discourse of Christian moral philosophy, including Catholic Aristotelianism.

Kantian ethics is stern and conservative, and as a result not very original. What is original are the "bureaucratic", juridical grounds for it, its formalism and apriorism. Above all, though, is its status in the system of philosophy and place on the throne of metaphysics. Nobody contributes as much as Kant to the formation in modern philosophy of that mysterious sense that morality is an autonomous sphere that cannot be reduced to anything that can be cognised and defined from a neutral and purely descriptive position detached from moral judgement, i.e. to agreement, benefit or psychological inclination. Perhaps nobody else, too, has missed so much living matter of moral life in ethics, entrusting all important questions to "moral anthropology" or at best "casuism". The whole of contemporary ethics is lost somewhere in this schizophrenic situation, torn between the abstract autonomy, or perhaps even idealness, of the moral sphere, and the profoundly psychological and existential nature of good and evil, as we experience them. We will have to consider this problem further.

The fact that I devoted the first pages of deliberations on the metaphysics of morality to Kant is firstly because it was he who was chiefly responsible for the state of contemporary moral reflection, a father who left his offspring with a legacy practically condemning it to its demise. Yet he did give it an invaluable treasure: the sense that the moral sphere and ethics itself are something special which cannot be reduced to law or to psychology. However, the verbosity and apodicticity with which Kant pursues ethics constitute something unbearable. Yet we are afraid of committing philosophical patricide on Kant. After all, it is on the doctrines of Immanuel Kant that the order of the modern Western world is based.

6 Ibid., p. 198 (394).

7 Ibid., p. 190 (385).

Despite all this, somebody had to finally take the bull by the horns and accept the aforementioned challenge set by Kant in the foreword to *Critique of Practical Reason*. In fact, there is no lack of critics of Kant's ethics, although their voices are usually drowned out by the din of praise. It is not my aim to fight for this matter, however. So the second reason for which I wanted to start the last part of this book from Kant was not the desire to take up the gauntlet thrown by Kant, but the fundamental claim of Kantian metaethics, which states that the proper form of ethics is the *metaphysics of morality*. And this claim is accompanied by the next, even more important one: "such a metaphysics […] every man also has it within himself, though as a rule only in an obscure way".[8] Although Kant, speaking of the metaphysics of morality, ultimately has in mind his own system of moral concepts: freedom, obligation, action etc., simply proclaiming that the shape not just of ethics itself but of the inner moral life as such is *metaphysics*, constitutes a philosophical discovery which must be appreciated and honoured. Admittedly, prior to Kant religious thinkers had often pursued ethics as metaphysics, and even metaphysics as ethics, but nobody had justified this conduct in such a consciously and consistently theoretical way as did Kant. Furthermore, nobody before him had dared to accord ethics real autonomy in relation to religion, although the very principle – providing a pretext for this chapter – that an action is not truly good if it is done out of fear of punishment or the hope of a reward in the next life, had been known since Antiquity. It seems, however, that in building a metaphysics of morality there is still a great deal to be done, especially when we put aside the umbrella of faith, which Kant was never really able to do. If I attempt to offer a small contribution to this mysterious and intriguing venture, it is because of the results which we attained in the early parts of this book. These leave us under no illusions that metaphysics could be something different from ethical reflection. Since the science of the Idea (being immediacy, but not an object of any type) is impossible, then our intelligent being, if it proceeds in any way other than through experience (life), if it is "presented" in the Idea, then it is perhaps accessible to us only in terms of giving a metaphysical (moral?) significance to our will, which is perhaps something more than blind, fatal energy and instinct.

Understood (because "determined" is an attribute that practically contradicts the essence of will – how could I "have to want to"?) as possessing meaning, the will goes beyond simple wanting that we experience, but at the same time is not any reality that we could cognise as an object. Intelligibility not based on experience, free from reality, unmoved by the differences between a phenomenon and a substance, reality and appearance, is the will of a rational being reconciled

8 Ibid., p. 44 (216).

with itself, understandable for itself. This is a will permitting the content of depiction, which as a result becomes a dream, permitting the content of imperative which as a result becomes a duty, and permitting the content of an action, which becomes good or bad. At the same time, it is not the kind of immediacy to which we could only refer negatively, like the Idea. The will, as it is unreal, does not demand and does not allow "reference to it"; that is, cognition – however, it does permit one to *reveal how it is defined*, and thus understand it. And this is the meaning of the metaphysics of morality: to conceive consent, dreaming, planning, deciding and any form of affirmation in their becoming. It is not a science about anything, even on experiencing and not experiencing oneself, i.e. on existence or life conceiving itself. It is something different from cognition, since it possesses no real object. It is rather meditation, in which experience gives way to the Idea, while the desire for truth or the desire for knowledge give way to the pure manifestation of a particular will, the will to define *what is good and evil*.

One might say that the metaphysics of morality is a phenomenological *meditation on good and evil*. This path was not trodden by Kant. Yet his inspiration led Arthur Schopenhauer to embark on it.

Of course, Schopenhauer's position with regard to the nature of the will is different from that expressed by the sentences written above. And yet he formulates an important view at which we too have arrived in the course of our deliberations. This is the view of the primacy of the will as an unconditioned, unreal basis of all being and experience.[9] Schopenhauer writes that "the concept of *will* is of all possible concepts the only one that has its origin *not* in the phenomenon, *not* in the mere representation of perception, but which comes from within, and proceeds from the most immediate consciousness of everyone".[10] The objective sphere, the phenomenal world, extending from the limbs of my body to the ends of space,[11] is subject to scientific cognition,

9 In order to express the fundamental metaphysical status that the will has, Schopenhauer calls it the "thing in itself", although he points out that this is done simply out of respect for linguistic custom and to emphasise that the world and all objects with regard to the status of the will have the status of a representation and phenomenon, and this a manifestation and self-presentation of the will.

10 Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), p. 112.

11 "The body is nothing but the will itself become object" (ibid., p. 363). Schopenhauer sketches a conception of the body which anticipates a certain theoretical standard that became widespread in this field in the 20th century. He made pertinent observations on the particular, opalescing subjective-objective status used to characterise the human body, so fascinating for phenomenology, existentialism and pragmatism in the 20th century. And this was not all. As Schopenhauer writes, the centre of the will in the

whereas the task of philosophy is to conceive the fate of humankind, and especially the question of good and evil, albeit not empirically (psychologically), but as the ultimate metaphysical question. According to Schopenhauer, between the will, being the direct substance of all life, including human life, and the world (the thing) "the Idea still stands as the only direct objectivity of the will".[12] While to an extent I share this view,[13] I should consider the consequences that this had for Schopenhauer, while not forgetting that these stem from several more assumptions, including at the forefront the extremely controversial conception of the human character, which is supposedly

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human being is his genitals, and the centre of cognition his brain. The genitals unconsciously *want*, and the brain rises to presenting to itself and knowing the objectified will; that is, the things of this world – as we understand it, including the thing that the genitals want (cf. ibid., p. 330). This sounds somewhat eccentric and frivolous, but it is worth noting that it was one of the earliest attempts at this type of bipolar anthropology that would at some point in the future accept the mature form of psychoanalysis.

12 Ibid., p. 175. Schopenhauer believes that, speaking of the Idea, he is only taking up Plato's conception. However, his leaning on Plato does appear rather unconvincing.

13 "To an extent" because in terms of the question of the Idea, Schopenhauer, doubtless influenced by reading Plato, saw it as a mediating factor, making *self-presentation* possible to the will in an objective phenomenon. However, if we conceive the Idea as "immediate, and therefore, adequate, objectivity" (cf. ibid., p. 1740), then we only pretend to ourselves that we are not making a substance and object out of it. There is no "immediate objectivity" (except in the empty concept if being as immediacy), just as there is no wooden iron, to use Schopenhauer's favourite allusion. His aversion to Hegel prevented the young and tempestuous Schopenhauer from becoming acquainted with *The Science of Logic*, which had a very bad effect on his own philosophy. Luckily, the author does not stick too rigidly to his own conception of the Idea, since ultimately, like other philosophers of his time, he strove to occupy a position "outside of the subject and object", and as a result had to forget that the Idea was to be this "immediate objectivity". If we are to take the trinity of terms – the will, life and the Idea – then the one that mediates will be life, not the Idea. If it were to be the Idea, then we would have to agree that the will draws the Idea from itself, like projects and dreams, and then realises them in life. Yet this is entirely in contradiction with the very experience of life, which involves adapting to the conditions one encounters, and not fantasising them. We should rather say that the will defines itself in life, changing into the Idea, i.e. from irrational to rational unreality. It is in and through life, then, that we learn what we want. Knowledge of what we want, which is essentially not knowledge, but moral self-knowledge, is the metaphysics of morals – the one we "have inside ourselves" and which, to some degree, we can consider theoretically. The metaphysics of morals basically then speaks simply of the rationality of life. As for the first form of objectivity, though, Schopenhauer quite rightly points to the body: "The body is nothing but the will itself become object" (ibid., p. 363).

immutable and like a metaphysical *fatum* determines our conduct. We can conquer our character only by relinquishing our will, and with it ourselves, entering the quietive, i.e. a state of peaceful nothingness, in which there is no longer the suffering resulting from the frustrations and conflicts of our own selfishness with the selfishness of other people, but neither is there us as individual personalities.

As a result of the young Schopenhauer's adoption of the Kantian critique which designated for metaphysics a place outside of the sphere of cognition in the strict sense of the word, the whole of his philosophy is concentrated on ethics. Just how important the Kantian inspiration was for him (albeit in fact that of *The Critique of Practical Reason* rather than *The Metaphysics of Morals*) is demonstrated by the fact that the annex to the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation* is "A Critique of Kant's Philosophy". Among the subjects of Schopenhauer's critique is the categorical imperative, which he treated (rightly) as a version of the golden rule "do not unto others what you would not have them do to you", which is essentially a selfish principle. The Kantian postulate to acknowledge as good only such an action which results from duty is seen by Schopenhauer (and not only) as an eccentric and openly condescending consideration of the moral value of love of one's neighbour as the grounds for morally noble actions. These are, incidentally, well-known arguments which do not need to be presented more fully. But the crux of Schopenhauer's critique is something different. In a brilliant way, he perceives at the very source of Kant's whole ethics his claim, stated almost in passing, that the human ability to define duty (the categorical imperative) is the consequence of the ability to imagine future states of affairs as worthy or unworthy of desire.[14] Indeed, it sometimes appears that in Kant's view moral obligation was formed in the sphere of discernment of facts and their anticipations, and was thus some a priori power to choose that which is materially good, albeit according to a purely formal rule. It is neither here nor there if the Kantian "kingdom of ends" does indeed contain the ideas of desired and undesired states of affairs. Schopenhauer was only interested in pointing out the contradiction in the concept of duty as "absolute necessity", according to which one should act in a certain way and not another, although the conditions in which this imperative appears are empirical, and therefore not entirely clear and unpredictable. Duty is always duty with respect to something, and therefore relative – if Kant wishes to entrust it to some "practical reason" that defines duty a priori and without regard for anything else than itself, then he makes the idea something unimaginable (that "wooden

14 See ibid., p. 523. The author included an appropriate quotation from *Critique of Pure Reason* here.

iron"). This is why he lapses into inconsistencies. Kant's insistence on the idealness of morality meaning its strict formalism and a priori unconditionality, while the real content of deeds and their consequences belong to the amoral, visible world of phenomena, entirely paralyses his ethics, and even Kant is not able to maintain the radical division of the formal (ethical) sphere and the material (anthropological) one. This, incidentally, is a subject that is well known and much discussed, e.g. by Max Scheler and Martin Heidegger. We will not come back to this. But in any case that is the way things are: when shown the door, the material and emotional side of ethical life return via the window. According to Schopenhauer, the very idea of "practical reason" as a priori power is an empty invention, together of course with its "categorical imperative". And yet, says Schopenhauer, Kant performed extremely important services for ethics. This was in "the fact that he freed ethics from all principles of the world of experience, particularly from all direct or indirect eudaemonism, and showed quite properly that the kingdom of virtue is not of this world."[15] We can doubtless find "indirect eudaemonism" in Kant (particularly in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*), yet as a whole Schopenhauer is right – it was Kant who discovered the metaphysical essence of moral life, its fundamental lack of empiricism. But this entails something quite different from what was imagined by Kant. This is not a question of our being able to determine a priori what we should do in a given case ("determine our will through practical reason"), guided by a priori principles, but of the fact that the norms of behaviour, as they inevitably contain a material (empirical) factor, by their very nature cannot be unconditional and perfect. Only purely formal or conditional determinations, such as "be guided by good will" or "make efforts to fulfil promises", can have the value of absoluteness, yet their normative form is only an appearance of some regulating power, since essentially they are empty generalities which only explain the content of the norm of all forms: do good, avoid evil! Yet such reprimands will not make us much wiser. As long as we remain in the range of duty, effective separation of ethics from the empirical sphere is impossible, since any definition of duty, even the most abstract, assumes that it will concern a certain real, and therefore empirical, action. The thing is that the science of good by no means has to concentrate on the obligations associated with doing good, but on good as the Idea that is expressed by a subject and which it determines for itself independently of experience. This in fact means that ethics beyond the bounds of experience shifts to the metaphysics of ideals of good, in which the will defines itself as the will of good. We will not learn what we should do in abstract deliberations. Perhaps, though, we will be able to find out

15 Ibid., pp. 523-524.

what kind of life is good. And ethics does indeed return, in Schopenhauer's work, to its traditional, natural course. However, if the question of a good life has previously been seen as empirical or theological, it now becomes a metaphysical issue.

Schopenhauer is also right to point to the weakness of ethics as a means supporting a virtuous life. Virtue is indeed something that cannot be taught to anyone, and this is particularly impossible through a lecture on ethics. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer does accord ethics a certain practical role. He believes, at least, that reading his ethical treatises might help in making the salutary leap into the quietive, and thus in renouncing one's individuality and egocentric will. It seems that Schopenhauer never followed his own advice, and doubtless neither did others. Perhaps this is a good thing, as he preserved personal ambition and desire to have an influence on others, without which he would have no doubt lacked a certain motivation to write his extremely interesting book. But let us return to Schopenhauer's conception of the will.

As we know, the will is one and universal. Yet there are many individuals, including those conscious ones incarnated in individual bodies. Each one lives for itself, as a representation of the will, as a phenomenon for itself, thanks to the *principium individuationis*, which the necessary and a priori forms of plurality and order in the sphere of phenomena represent, with time and space at the forefront. In appearing to myself as a being distinct from others, embodying in myself the will as such, I essentially present myself in the centre of the universe, as an ego, becoming its slave and a slave to the appearance that the "I", which speaks in reference to myself, is more me than anyone else who says "I". Fighting for the fulfilment of the will in a way dictated to me by my innate disposition, I become a hostage to desires and passions, the continually regenerating products of the general will, which are, however, for my consciousness apparently "mine", just as only apparently am I something distinct and placed in the centre of the world. Stimulated by my innate egoism, I fight for my desires, against others, going as far as harming my neighbours, and even finding a liking and pleasure in their harm. The culmination of the evil which is born from my selfishness and individuality, and also my frustrations and rivalries, is taking others' property, murder, and finally cannibalism. Yes, the world is evil. And it will always be so, as the will, divided into a multiplicity of phenomena, incarnated in numerous bodies and a complex world that is the entirety of representation, i.e. the self-subjectification of the will, has no end, and its powers are inexhaustible. There will always be enough will, and therefore also enough conflict and pain. Will is infinite and insatiable, so every fulfilment, in any field, is only an appearance. Will can only be rejected. But this is achieved only by those who are cable of renouncing egoism and passion, love

their neighbours, and experience a community with them. Solace is also brought by the contemplation of beauty, which is after all disinterested and pure. Yet full salvation is not accessible without the help of grace. The ultimate renouncement of my will and myself, the dimming of the phenomenal world, being the plaything of unending acts of evil, is finding grace, the sudden revelation of the nothingness and futility of the world, the acceptance of this truth with my free will. Like almost every 19th-century treatise, here, too, everything comes down to God and praise of the Christian doctrine, and in this case particularly the Lutheran teaching on grace and justification. At the end of his major work, Schopenhauer states that his ethics "fully agrees with the Christian dogmas proper, and, according to its essentials, was contained and present even in these very dogmas. It is also just as much in agreement with the doctrines and ethical precepts of the sacred books of India".[16]

In spite of his zeal, Schopenhauer again surpasses his era. The ethics of community and concern for one's neighbours, romantic in spirit, praising compassion and renouncement of violence, became one of the main themes of the moral culture and moral philosophy of the 20th century. Schopenhauer was not the first moralist of this type, but he was the first among the great ones. However, it was for another reason that he became a true pioneer. For it was he who introduced to the ethical spirit of community, glorified in German philosophy throughout almost the whole course of its history, a nihilistic tone and a sense of tragedy. The pessimism and melancholy evident in his works from now on found a permanent place in literature and philosophy, even till today. The feature-like style of his writing, associated with the ambition of creating a great and definitive philosophical treatise, belongs to the 19th century. Yet the content of his works held a taste of the next century, beginning with the philosophy – slightly ahead of time – of the works of Nietzsche. Schopenhauer's role was analogous to the one played at the same time by Kierkegaard.

Unfortunately, Schopenhauer's ethics falls into the "literary trap". Instead of being authentic metaphysics, it changes imperceptibly into a narrative about life and human characters, succumbing to one-sidedness and psychological fantasy, which invariably brings much satisfaction to lovers of literature, but of course cannot compete with true psychology. The writer's temperament and rules of narration take precedence over analytical discipline. We should admit, however, that when the metaphysics ends and must be replaced by ethics, and this is based on elusive directness, the temptation arises to continue to repeat one and the same, pointing to the name of this immediacy (of which "the will" is the least

16 Ibid, p. 408. I doubt that I need add that theologians had a different opinion on the question of this agreement.

confusing). This is also what Schopenhauer does, and ultimately the thing that we will remember most from his work is the mantra that the world is only a representation of an unfinished, but blind, and in its blindness innocent, *will*. The roar of a lion in the desert and the prayer of a person are in their nature the same – a great wanting. And yet, when to everything that happens in human life and that a human does in his life we add a footnote of just one kind: "because he wanted", "because the primacy of nature or disposition worked", "because that is how will had to be manifested", it ceases to mean anything significant. Many philosophers have faced up to the desire for a statement of profound intuition, preceding objective cognition. Among them was Schopenhauer, but so too was the next great philosopher of the will, Nietzsche, and then Bergson, Heidegger and many more. All of them were in their efforts ultimately boring, and all earned the opinion of "philosophers of one thought". We cannot follow this path. Let Schopenhauer suffice as an example. The metaphysics of morals cannot be "eternally returning to the same thing"; that is, an obsession with one idea or one mood. The inestimable Polish philosopher Edward Abramowski gives us a quotation for this occasion that to the modern ear sounds charming. "We come up against the noumenal being in primary, agnostic experiences, i.e. where there is zero intellect (agnosis and pure forgetting)".[17] Precisely, if it means zero intellect and pure forgetting, then it is better to say nothing.

2. The defeat of moral discourse

The road to a metaphysics of morals does not lead through speculation on the subject of the will or the Idea. Words, despite their best efforts, can never catch up with pure immediacy, while following Traces, as Jacques Derrida did, ends up with us going round in circles tracing one's own footprints. Of course, there is no need to entirely abandon analysis of metaphysical concepts, in which the extent to which humans are capable of understanding themselves *in abstracto* is expressed. Yet such analysis and speculation cannot be an objective in themselves, since excessive concentration on the order of concepts alone does not lead to wisdom, but to a system, concentrated on its own construction, and raised, like it or not, on the pillars of the grammar and semantics of popular language from which its phrasing grows. Neither, though, can we be entirely satisfied with a metaphysics of morals as a philosophy of life or philosophy of existence. More than anything else, we already have such a philosophy, and this is thanks to Schopenhauer, among others. For reasons given earlier, this cannot

17 Abramowski, Edward, *Metafizyka doświadczalna* (Warszawa: PWN, 1980), p. 549.

be consistent – life is a hybrid metaphysical concept, establishing, but not enduring, the opposition of the substantiality of the subject and the substantiality of the object, and problematising, but not enduring, the opposition of plurality and unity. In short, "life" is the keyword. However, it became an excellent stimulating means for accumulating observations on natural, psychological and cultural subjects *avant la lettre*, before appropriate humanities fully developed. The same can be said for existence, a concept which emerges from that of life and joins together with it as an opposition to the traditional "soul".[18] All existential descriptions of the human condition and of the abundance of important experiences of humanity are ultimately purely subjective phenomenology, i.e. verbalisation of experiences and moods. This is without doubt of great value, but only on the surface is this metaphysics. There is no abstraction in it, but an appeal to feelings; and the very nature of existential deliberations ensures that these are thoroughly empirical. That said, the subject of the experience speaks for itself here, based on various experiences, interested less in the world (which, incidentally, has always led to accusations being levelled at existentialists).

Our philosophy, then, will not be the philosophy of life or existence. But it seems to me that there is one more path leading to certain anthropological reflections, and thus to a certain moral metaphysics.[19] This leads from

18 Of course, the concept of existence is no simple application of the concept of life, but rather a dialectical correlate of it. The human being, alienated by life through its redundant, superfluous consciousness as well as through the consciousness of human existence's own ontic redundancy, experiences manifold spiritual ordeals, but the small beacon of reason and feelings illuminates the dark around him. But it is therefore all the easier to see what an immense black universe this is being stretching beyond himself and his own actions. But perhaps he might see in the distance a guiding star and desire to connect with it? And so on. In our moods, sentiments, exalted, sometimes tragic and desperate, sometimes inspired and religious, the philosophical literature of existentialism is woven. From an intellectual point of view, though, this is only a handful of metaphors useful for describing hypodepressive or hypomaniacal states.

19 So far, I have been using the phrase "metaphysics of morals" in reference to Kant. But now that we have partly explained that this is not about what Kant was trying to do using this name, but something that he *should have* done, and which later philosophers did, there is no longer any sense in remaining faithful to this name. This is especially the case as this is far from about there being such a sphere of being as "morals" that would demand its own metaphysics. It is more that the meaning of inner metaphysics, referring to human fate and the sense we are able to give to our lives is *moral*, and not cognitive. The "morals" or "morality", then, of which we need metaphysics, cannot be understood in narrow terms, as the sphere of obligation, duty and responsibilities, but broadly – as the sphere of *gravity*, and what is ultimately *important* for humans. Therefore, we can at least as well speak of the "metaphysics of morals", to differentiate

conclusions concerning the actual state of our moral consciousness and the way in which we imagine our fate, our lives and our ultimate objectives, towards the reasons according to which the historically and culturally variable ideas of this type come into conflict with one another. It leads, then, towards a certain critical and differentiating consciousness, because without doubt there is no way of finding transcendental factors of a positive character; that is, universal and invariable components of each ethical system and each system of ideas which the members of societies would out of necessity use to conceive themselves and provide meaning to their fate. At best these could be elementary concepts like good and evil, although the general description of this is only a certain abstraction that does not tell us much.

It would appear that similar "grammatical" work has already been done, and with great success, by researchers of myths and other components of tradition, in the field of cultural anthropology, and, in terms of differentiating factors, anthropology pursued in the current of structuralism. This is indeed to a certain degree the case. From this science, whose competences should in no case be usurped by a philosopher or layperson, remarkable conclusions ensue on the subject of the similarities and differences which divide societies that are distant from each other in time and space. Ethnology teaches that the level on which the community of humanity is constituted is hidden deeply below a layer of cultural distinctions. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the experience of someone who has met people from various parts of the world, it is surprisingly easy to communicate with just about anyone on many subjects, including those of a moral nature. The basis for this communication is a widespread awareness of some of the norms and customs which are today dominant in the countries of the West. They are also well known to those who have not adopted them as their own. For example, a member of a tribe living from plunder, and even today not ashamed of stealing from foreigners, knows very well that the majority of people see any violation and seizure of property, including that of foreigners, as wrong. Perhaps this was not known by Homer's protagonists, because in Antiquity the concept of theft, too, was something that only philosophers were just about able to give an abstract and universal meaning too. But today basically everyone knows. It is hard to say to what extent awareness of moral

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it from the quasi-empirical metaphysics of substance and the thing in itself, and of theological eschatology, connected with metaphysics through the concept of absolute being. The whole metaphysical tradition does not withstand criticism. We shall see whether a certain "metaphysics of morals", not one looking for the truth about "how it is" but meditating on the definition of good in the will of a rational being, on its power to be itself outside of the simple experience of life and outside of the forces of nature, in the unreal Idea, is at all possible.

concepts affects people's conduct. In any case, this is an empirical question, and not a philosophical one. Of significance, though, is the very fact that concepts in which moral consciousness is defined evolve. In parallel to this evolution, the evolution of philosophical moral reflection, i.e. ethics, takes place, which develops partly under the influence of social ethical changes, and partly somehow influences public morality. In any case, in every era there is a certain Socratic gap between the moral concepts which a philosopher possesses and those prevailing in the society in which he happens to live. From the point of view of the philosopher, desiring to maintain the criticism and control over his participation in common culture, this is a characteristic fact which requires special attention. Perhaps, among the principles which the metaphysics of morals seeks to discover, one of this kind also features: ethical discourse essentially does not express how a human acting *silently* conceives his acts and the sense of his life. For now, this is only a hypothesis. If it were to be true, that would mean that the metaphysics of morals is not and cannot be ethics. Without doubt, metaphysics is more about what in silence is present (or absent) as opposed to that which is only a certain concept.

The problem which I set in relation to this hypothesis can be expressed as follows. In each case there are certain convictions, certain feelings, customary explanations and one's own moral reflections, which accompany the acting individual and have the task of explaining the meaning and moral significance or moral value of his actions. They usually serve to justify the actions taken, and sometimes contain critical elements. There are considerably more of the latter in a case of the application of common ideas and concepts to someone else's, not one's own conduct. The hypothesis goes that all these moral discourses accompanying one's own or somebody else's conduct by their nature distort its meaning, since they can be expressed in the language of abstraction and treated in a condescending fashion – as a poor, particularistic application of a certain *ethical thought*. The popular ethical judgement of matters is therefore unsatisfactory and by its very nature remains in conflict with a truly critical and mature ethical theory, whose application to day-to-day situations looks ridiculous, incompetent and inappropriate. Incidentally, academic ethics itself cannot pander to common ethical ideas if it is to go beyond their bounds at all. And yet, on the other hand, ethics does not have any concepts available other than those which can be delivered by the prevailing morality and available popular moral ideas. If, then, the latter are from the outset contaminated with falsehood (as something akin to critical parodies and competent potential ethical reasonings), then this will apply all the more to abstract ethical theory itself, which is after all unable to entirely break the bonds with popular discourse and as a result becomes something like a parody of itself; that is, a falsified and

effusive discourse. In other words, in our discourse on morality we are faced with an alternative: either we only ineptly feign being wise, or we say perhaps wise things, but in constant reference to something which is only feigned wisdom. After all, it is hard to imagine that an ethical theory should be so profound and complicated as to not create chances for someone who is not a trained philosopher to use it to better conceive what he is doing, because it would simply be intellectually inaccessible for such a person. However, if ethics is to be cut to the measure of popular moralism, or at least have such an application in mind, its philosophical and ethical status would seem extremely suspicious.

Before we again examine this look at the state of affairs in moral life, let us consider the question of its consequences. If moral concepts are basically distorted or at least inappropriate, and together with them all ethics, then the whole of moral life – acts and their explanations and judgements – proves to be a domain of moral and intellectual *evil*. This evil would not necessarily be bad will (one might not be aware of the deficiencies of one's own ideas and ethical statements), but it would be the paralysis of self-knowledge, silent self-non-understanding, unstated unspecificity of this will, which would decide on our actions. And it would be quite wrong to see in the possibility that this is the way things are a reason and justification for profound naturalism, reducing our motives for actions to biological factors and overwhelming forces of instinct, on whose manifestations we do not have any influence, or only an apparent one.

This is the case because in naturalism there lies a heuristic error. Even if one states with an inscrutable expression how moral laws are explained by reasons of the conduct of a species, one makes a judgement of a moral nature, as it has consequences for the understanding of morality and respect for it. For some this will mean a provocative disavowal of moral law, and for others raising the laws of nature to the level of ethical significance. And even if we never had anything of the kind in mind, denying that we are only interested in the description, and not the judgement of human actions, naturalism in ethics quite naturally enters the space of moral ideas, being a destructive and dangerous factor for the defenders of the pure ideals of morality. There can be no success for an attempt to speak about morals outside a moralist context, separated from involvement in the judgement, but above all making an effort to ignore the confusion into which we are led by the question "does ethics that doesn't make us better make any sense, and if not, then in what way should ethics have a morally constructive influence?" It always leads to the irresponsibly eccentric "descriptivism", which is about matters that are sometimes dramatic, and even cynicism. Therefore, anyone who insists that he is only "describing morality" will in any case receive a moral judgement regarding his approach, and at least in this respect will taste

defeat in his attempts to find a safe and neutral way of talking about morality. In our hypothesis, therefore, we are not talking about the question of naturalism or the possibility that moral discourses and ethical theories are inventions and sublimations of primal and natural needs and urges of individuals and societies. They certainly are that, but by no means does this mean that that is all they are.

It is a similar matter with the tempting possibility of shrugging off the complexity and incomprehensibility of all morally significant situations, in terms of the motivations for action, objectives, risk, foreseeable consequences etc., with a relativistic or situationistic observation. Both these positions are linked by the inclination to evade the apodictic and binding moral judgements for which responsibility would be taken, and as a consequence giving an example to others also not to refrain from such judgements – in relation to neighbours, and, what is worse, in relation to oneself. In this case, too, far-reaching restraint does not provide justification for the inconclusiveness of ethical discourse, and neither does it make it more valuable. It is a similar matter with all principalism, especially that which develops into moral absolutism. Nothing appears more amoral than a supercilious self-confidence in terms of what is morally right and what is not. For morality is in fact an area of quandaries and uncertainties, of guilty conscience and anxiety of conscience. Anyone who would like to eradicate all this through obedience to a legal code or the authority of a person (or God) would in fact like to throw off the weight of moral concern or hide behind the shield of legal correctness, decorousness and humility.

Every well-known moral discourse, from the more abstract to the more casuistic, and even popular, risks moral objections.[20] Each is one-sided and burdened by some ethical error which can easily be perceived from the perspective of another ethical concept that is in no way any better. Eudaemonia is guilty of aristocratism and educational moralism, hedonism is compromised in the face of drastic and tragic situations, utilitarianism leads to moral accounting, while principialism suggests that it is always obvious how to conduct oneself, and belittles the moral significance of kindness of heart in comparison to apodictic practical reason and the good will that is obedient to it. Anybody who knows ethics is aware of these and many more moral doubts related to the positions listed here and to more besides. The heuristic situation of ethics is no

20 It would make sense to offer broader grounds for this thesis here. I will abandon this, however, in order to avoid repeating something about which I have written elsewhere: see "Tożsamość etyka, czyli uprawianie etyki jako problem moralny" [The identity of an ethicist, or the pursuit of ethics as a moral problem], *Ruch Filozoficzny* LXVI 2009/1, pp. 23–50 (also available online, including on the website of the journal *Diametros*).

different from the situation of other areas of philosophy, but in this case it becomes something unbearable, as it leads to moral crisis. The ethicist's claim to teaching morality is extremely doubtful, even if only for the reason of the moral deficiency of his theories, although any shirking from the role of mentor seems to be even more reprehensible. And the paradoxes do not end here. For the moral and intellectual position of the ethicist do not differ at all from the position of a normal person who would like to provide some justification for his actions or moral judgements. Such a justification will naturally always be based on some moral argument or idea of well-known ethics being invoked. A "moral situation" is therefore a situation without a way out – for ethicists as well as non-ethicists.

The impossibility of satisfactory ethics and impossibility of a sensible, respectable popular moral discourse to justify or discredit certain types of behaviour results in a moral scandal, and even more – a *scandal with morality*. A scepticism encompassing the moral sphere would strip us of the idea that we can truly choose between good and evil as well as do good. And this is not even about the fact that we constantly *do not know* what is good and what is evil. Neither is it even only about the fact that the meaning of these concepts – good and bad or good and evil – is a muddy one, and therefore they are themselves suspicious, as no explanation seems to be complete and morally pure. It is about the *powerlessness*, i.e. the lack of potentiality to *do* good, whose meaning becomes doubtful. Moral scepticism would perhaps liberate us from the ethical illusion, would perhaps make us more noble inasmuch as we become acquainted with the deceptions and sophistry of various moral arguments, but at the same time it would have to paralyse our good will, taking away from it all, even false, self-knowledge, and therefore denying it its means of action. Does it have to be this way? Is it the case that honest moral science is impossible, scepticism also encompasses the area of morality, and good fades, shorn of its reliable definition?

One more peculiarity of ethics should be noted. Ethical concepts such as good will, dignity, virtue, moral duty and many others possess transcendental guarantees. This is because they are defined in a way that anyone who wants to disavow them in any way, doubting their autonomous application, putting them in other, natural-descriptive categories or placing against them suspicions of a moral nature, is guilty of a semantic abuse similar to the kind which we commit in saying "There is no God". The word "God" has a different meaning in this sentence from the one we give it in forming the sentence "God exists", i.e. a meaning that respects the condition set in advance that "God" should be an ultimate being which cannot not exist, and exists by the power of its own essence etc. We will come across duty or moral value, analogously, with the

contradiction of "naturalistic" sentences which, let's say, will reduce duty to a relation of means and objectives, moral value to predilections, and for example moral good to certain psychical facts which can be described (such as pleasure or sense of grandeur). The autonomy and idealness of the moral sphere, on which actuality has no effect as it is entirely external to it and only phenomenal, is an apodictic institution of reason, a certain "it must be so!" Anybody who does not perceive that moral duty does not depend on the desire to take it up, that moral goodness of actions is not exhausted in the empirical circumstances of its psychological motives, course and effects, and the word "good" in its moral sense does not describe any category of the state of affairs, fails to perceive the essence of morality. Since Kant's times, this insistence on the impassibility and idealness of morality, mirroring the feature of the severity and prescriptiveness of the principles of decorous conduct internalised by the well-brought-up person, has become the nucleus of the identity of ethics as such.[21] For two centuries, a debate has been raging over the right to belong to the field of ethics of those discourses which refuse to respect autonomous ethics founded in the transcendental normative and metanormative (formal) appointments whose model was given by Kant. It is the course of this debate that decides on the identity of ethics, although it is a debate with the only clear discourse establishing this discourse and permitting ethics to be distinguished from psychology and theology. The identity of ethics is therefore metatheoretical, and bearing in mind the fact that the majority of ethical debates are formed at a metaethical level, the true level of self-knowledge and self-definition of ethics is meta-metaethical. This is also why the distance that divides the popular moral discourse that goes with actions – or comments on them, justifying or criticising them – from ethical theory, has become as large as is imaginable. The Socratesian gap today is incomparably wider than in Socrates' day, though even he was perhaps told that in acting, man is somehow wiser and knows better what he is doing than when he has to account for his actions.

Fortunately, anyone who remains silent does not yet talk nonsense. Yet the acts of humans are often accompanied by an ethical comment. If it comes from an ethicist, it is burdened by those flaws that burden ethics itself and its position as the supposed centre of moral guidance. If it comes from a person who is ethically uneducated, the flaws of the ethical arguments which he in any case uses, contribute only to the essential inopportuneness (from the point of view of

21 Of course, this does not just mean Kant and his followers. We can also find the same moment in Edward Moore's conception of "the naturalistic fallacy" in the phenomenological ethics of values (axiology) or personalism.

ethical theory) of day-to-day moral discourse. It is this that makes the impression that *we do not know what we are doing* so overwhelming.

A look at the state of contemporary ethics appears to confirm our hypothesis on the silent lack of moral self-knowledge of humans and their inability to make a credible and honest explanation to themselves of what they are actually doing. Let us not expect too much from ourselves – a moral subject characterised in any way, if there is still anything substantial in him, any "thing in itself", must act in theoretical contemplation in the form of the mysterious "black box" whose internal processes by their nature remain impenetrable to other people, only seeing what is external – the conduct of the given person, its circumstances and effects. The metaphysics of morals is not and cannot be a narrative on the moral subject "in itself" – simply because every question as that something is "in itself" is wrongly posed (and as we have seen, it was never possible for metaphysical tradition to be freed from posing such a question). However, the discovery of an acting personality in the darkness of the unconsciousness of that which happens in and with it does not have any significance for moral self-knowledge, and thus for the question "what am I doing?" This question does not seek to cover the "hidden mechanisms" of motivations, instincts or other behavioural routines, but is simply a question of good, and the relationship of our own conduct to good. Metaphysical fatalism and naturalistic determinism do not weigh down on this innocent and noble question, since these spectres are threatening solely when distortion or error in thinking are falsely determined by motives of action. The question of the meaning of good and significance of our own actions need not have any fear of naturalistic or fatalistic discreditation.

Detailed reconstruction of the popular moral ideas in a given society is the task of the sociology of morality, which proves up to the challenge.[22] For us, though, examples will suffice. A great number of them can be found in the works of Nietzsche, whose inclination was to track the pettiness and mean-spiritedness of popular moral convictions, perhaps not imagining that the people from whom he heard them said these things and not others as they were unable to accord significant sense to their conduct in any other way.

In Nietzsche's time, a new, egalitarian and sentimental public morality developed, the mature form of which is well known to us. Its most striking feature is mixing together elements of the old ethe that underpinned traditional hierarchical society with modern egalitarian and democratic ideas. Together, they by no means form a cohesive whole, but create a chaotic motley of ethical

22 Notable on the Polish scene is the unprecedented collection of articles by sociologists Mariański, Janusz (ed.), *Kondycja moralna społeczeństwa polskiego* (Kraków: WAM i PAN, 2005).

ideas and clichés which shape the landscape of private and public life in modern society, just as signs and advertisements give a big-city street its appearance.

The foundations of day-to-day ethical discourses in the democratic world are still the ideals of honour, fidelity and pride whose common factor is *justified partiality*. This partiality concerns one's own family and own religion and nationality. Yet it has been generalised, in the egalitarian spirit, in such a way that the right to pride and standing by one's family, almost regardless of the circumstances and even at the cost of deceit and open injustice, once in normal conditions the privilege of those of noble birth, is today the entitlement of all. The moral category which combines the factor of pride with common equality is *dignity*, which after all marks the individual and is inalienable irrespective of the circumstances (such as noble birth) and is something to which all are entitled, to a strictly equal degree. The result of this chivalrous-democratic hybrid morality is the unanimous and universal condemnation of any manifestations of aristocratic pride which might hint at self-exaltation above others within the same society. The consent that is today widespread in many societies to countless weaknesses and misdeeds (viewed from the point of view of traditional morals) does not encompass superiority, which is not tolerated in any form. Modesty has therefore advanced to the ranks of the highest of virtues. This permissiveness, meanwhile, which takes the form of mildness in punishment and tolerance for the most diverse types of behaviour which would previously have been seen as licentious, is streaked with a readiness for decisive and aggressive actions against individuals contesting the egalitarian order, based on "generalised honour", the order prohibiting the discrediting of anyone who respects the right to equality. Something very characteristic of this aspect of public morality is the moral exclamation "what right do you have to judge me?!" The meaning of this is by no means about questioning the moral condition of the person pretending to make moral judgements (although restricting anyone's rights to moral judgements based on their own sins would be hard to justify on the basis of any of the ethical theories), since this moral condition is treated as a personal matter. The thing is: moral judgements per se are something immoral, since they infringe the sphere of the private and intimate affairs of the people who are judged. This sphere, meanwhile, is subject to fundamental moral protection, which is served by the peculiarly transformed ethical concept of conscience: bad or good conduct thus becomes a personal matter, a question of one's own conscience which nobody should interfere in. Paradoxically, the sphere of conscience constitutes a refuge in which the contemporary person feels free from moral supervision, but treats this freedom as his entitlement of moral nature. Anyone who makes moral judgements not only elevates himself above others, but infringes a certain fundamental social contract proclaiming

that no one should judge other people or interfere in others' private matters, as otherwise everybody would begin to interfere in everyone else's affairs, with great harm done to the general comfort and peace. Questioning the "right to judge others" is therefore by no means the most important thing, and is essentially about the famous admonition "judge not, that you be not judged". Yet this threat is effective on the condition that anyone who might be scared by it would be guided by the instinct of the egoist and coward. There is no moral factor in it, but rather only an amoral one. This at least is the way things look from the point of view of all of the major systems of ethics, including utilitarianism, which, although it falls into the well-known difficulties when it wants to explain why egoism is an evil, still cannot recommend a universal abstention of people from moral judgements as being something of use.

The amorality of the contemporary moral clichés of public life is striking. With all the innocence of the morally unaware being, the citizen of the modern world openly refers to egoistic reasons, if only they are accompanied by the idea of equality and mutuality. And so, for example, the value of providing help to others affected by a collective disaster, today hugely valued, is explained, making a mockery of ethics, by the reason of expected gains: "today I help you, because tomorrow it might be me who needs your help". It is a similar matter with showing compassion and anger. When a crime takes place, outraged people protest in the name of the principle "it could happen to each of us tomorrow!" Anger itself, and even compassion, are morally suspect enough for us to avoid talking about them out loud. Egoistic arguments, on the other hand, are proclaimed openly, and their inappropriateness and ethical deficiencies are almost invisible for society. Well, it looks like solidarity-based egoism really is regarded as a morally noble position, and is not just an appearance based on an inept manner of expressing oneself.

The moral culture of "solidarity in egoism" is shrouded in a particular emotional aura dominated by mawkishness and sentimentalism. It seems that the emotion that goes with a collective act of good dominates the good itself which has been achieved by private or social mobilisation. Major charity events take place in a mood of mass self-adoration or adoration shown to their leaders, while charity itself barely figures in public discourse. In the way stands egalitarianism, which excludes the possibility of someone doing someone a favour and somebody else showing gratitude for this. Gratitude today is a humiliating state, almost a violation of equality and dignity. This is because in an egalitarian society, the reason for gaining kindnesses is not the law of love, but entitlement. The place of gifts and gratitude has been taken by the "support" and satisfaction of the benefactor. The severity of the legal relationship that is giving and taking, if treated as a requirement of justice, a relationship which in modern society has

been replaced by willing acts or those carried out in the hope of a posthumous reward, requires a certain emotional compensation. And this is assured by the public mawkishness, often bordering on infantilism. This mood of the people's self-adoration that is connected to it partly frees the public sphere from aggression and the remnants of the strictness of the religious moralising of duties, punishment and rewards that liberal changes have not quite managed to eradicate.

Mawkishness is linked with another characteristic – incidentally a very favourable one – of contemporary public morality, which is the radical condemnation of violence. This results from the considerable reduction of modern man's resistance to physical suffering, which he experiences to an incomparably lesser degree than his forebears. In any case, violence has become anathema, and there is a lack of consent to it, even as a punishment. Corporal inviolability has become a moral sanctity in the Western world, and a side effect of this is the reduction in the rank of moral considerations as a whole. There is no longer any real sanction in their way. Punishment is the preserve of the state leviathan, which barely knows any moral considerations, reducing them to the law, while private revenge is regarded as barbarism. Ultimately, for immoral or indecent behaviour, or even causing violence, all that we can be faced with is monetary punishments, a light prison sentence or simply criticism. Hell, corporal punishments, curses, and even condemnation (seen as unlawful judgement of others) are things with which we no longer need to concern ourselves, while tormented consciences have somehow let up, since "no one has the right to judge us". As a result, moral life has yielded to a considerable sublimation, and has therefore decreased in importance in its broad, public dimension. The ever more flawless legislation takes the place left vacant by the shrinking public morality, and acting in accordance with the law or an ever larger number of people means acting correctly per se. The belief that only actions that are against the law are reprehensible, shocking from the point of view of moral sensitivity as well as any ethical theory, is becoming a real conviction of a growing number of the members of Western societies. And since from a legal point of view the question of guilt is decided on by the verdict of a court, many people see themselves as innocent in an absolute sense as long as they are not sentenced by a "legally binding court verdict". Doubtless similar were the attitudes of citizens of the pre-modern world, where guilt meant simply sin, i.e. breaking God's law, rather than any "moral law" per se. To be truthful, this strictly ethical concept of culpability is quite esoteric, if we take into account the temporal and spatial coordinates of its effects. Guilt understood as contravening the law, breaking taboos or sullying them is a much more culturally consolidated concept than "guilt in a moral sense".

The modern disappearance of moral evaluations (or at least religious-moral ones – religion is today after all a private matter) and severe punishments is accompanied by a characteristic regression of moral language, which was in any case never particularly rich. Not only the word "virtue" and even "morality" have become anachronisms. The meaning of the word "morality" in various languages has undergone interesting changes both helping and hindering the finding of a common idiom by ethicists and ordinary people, i.e. untypical and typical users of the word. The dominant feature of these changes, though, is the progressing sexualisation of its connotations. The popular notion of "morality" mostly concerns whom one has sexual relations with, how and in what circumstances. However, since the restrictions in this matter have practically all been eliminated (at least in comparison with the times when morality was understood as the sphere of customs and mores explained by the requirements of religion), there are also fewer opportunities for contemplating the moral decency or indecency of our (mis)deeds. For when it comes to this, we are more likely to use vocabulary suitable for private statements and inappropriate in public. We talk, for example, about "doing filthy things".

Ultimately, modern society proves to be infantile and to an extent stupefied in terms of its moral awareness. The terror permeating public morality at the time of the domination of the religious imagination (and these times are not distant ones) – that is, the fear of God and dread of Hell – has vanished entirely, giving way to a mood of comfort and freedom. The modern personal moral ideal is also free from an ascetic element. This ideal is a person of cheer and full of life, but at the same time modest and ready to do favours or help friends. It is these traits that are today emphasised in eulogies honouring the dead.

As in the past, today, too, common moral ideas do not fit in with the dominant ethical doctrines. Once, the most important divergence was due to the fact that the right reason to behave decorously was seen as obedience to God and fear of divine retribution. These are, of course, opportunistic and egoistic considerations, yet formal ethical doctrines provided such an interpretation of them that they could be regarded as noble. In any case, such efforts were made. Ultimately, the fear of divine punishment is not the same as an ordinary compulsion, connected with the threat of sanction, imposed by human legislation. These endeavours were to the benefit of academic ethics, since they brought about the illusion that public morality is more or less in accordance with the letter of ethical theory – yet this was just an illusion. The tangent point between the correct discourse of ethical theory, considering egoistic factors and acting out of compulsion as not belonging to the sphere of authentically moral motivation, and public morality, was always one and the same: the readiness of the majority of people to acknowledge that certain norms apply without the need

for further explanations: “that’s how to behave”, “that’s the way to do things”, “there are certain rules” etc. The arbitrary nature of custom which is part of the very essence of dos and don’ts, which are of course part of the order of the will, and not reasoning and giving reasons, is shrugged off by principialist ethics as a moral duty or law (or natural law). It is around these key categories that the self-knowledge of ethics is organised as an autonomous discipline providing apodictic terms like the strict discipline of knowledge. In our contemporary times, the significance of unquestioned norms has decreased markedly, and with it the sense that the essence of ethics as a philosophical discipline is the expression of the apodictic character of moral obligation. The identity of ethics has suffered greatly as a result, and at the same time a need has appeared to find some new link to provide the grounds for a common language of ethics and popular moral discussion. This link is made by feelings. They are much more “democratic” than virtues and indomitable rules, since they are much more easily accessible. Modern ethics is retreating from the traditional system of concepts focused around questions of moral judgement of conduct (the motivation and consequences of an action, virtue, conscience, norms), striving to appreciate attitudes and feelings (care, goodness, sacrifice, concern for the fate of others, tolerance, disgust at manifestations of discrimination) following the course of changes in public morality. Sentimentalism, however, leads to a complete loss from ethical discourse of the substantiality associated with the phenomenon of apodicticity of moral duty. Without the apodictic element and clear conclusions, ethical contemplations turn into chatter, usually orbiting around common moral ideas (like the solidarity-based egoism mentioned above) and pandering to them (for any criticism lacking in certain, apodictic foundations would be a venture condemned to failure from the outset).

The fortunes of moral discourse – the popular and the academic varieties – are intertwined, and the defeats and deviations on one side bring consequences to the other. However, both morality and ethics itself without doubt develop, although the development of the latter bears clear marks of maturity. The theoretical awareness of contemporary ethics, operating almost entirely on a metatheoretical level, is incomparably wider than it was in the times when ethics was formed exclusively from systems of categories and definitions developed independently of each other, underpinning certain moral recommendations and judgements. In fact, commending a certain system of norms or virtues, or a certain wisdom on the “art of life”, could today not be regarded as a purely academic action. It would rather be seen as literature or, in other cases, theology. But this sublimated theoretical awareness does not so much favour the strengthening of any particular theory as accompany the demise of ethics as a distinct philosophical discipline. This decline is taking place before our eyes,

and we discussed its causes above. The refuge for theoretical moral discourse today is on the one hand the extension of the art of moral argumentation (in analytical philosophy) – although this is not the same as formulating a theory, but only its application – and on the other contemplation on politics, i.e. the philosophy of politics. However, this is something that also finds itself today in deep crisis as a result of the spread of the view that in the very concept of politics ("politicity") is contained a certain mystification or ambiguous rhetoric, and also as a result of the blurring of the boundaries between the public-institutional sphere and the sphere of private activity.

There is no need to concern ourselves with the fate of ethics, however. We can say that it is dying a natural death, having essentially performed its task. Raising the theoretical awareness of ethicists themselves further seems unimportant and unnecessary. What we have achieved is more than enough. It is a different matter with public morality. After all, we cannot fail to be interested in perfecting it (whatever that means, although we have not attained a clear and universal concept of moral perfection). And although moral language and discourse are in a parlous state (and perhaps, from the ethicist's point of view, it was always thus), this state lingers on in society, which nonetheless has made remarkable moral progress. I say this with no hesitation, as every acknowledged system of ethical terms and statements leads to just this appraisal (if common reason is not enough). Over the course of a few centuries, we have discovered that slavery, discrimination, authoritative government and gaining benefits or pleasure through the use of violence are evil. We have discovered new areas of freedom and discerned the moral importance of equality of rights and the indecency of privileges resulting from birth. Today, though, a whole new sphere of moral responsibility is opening up before us – the animal world and the whole of nature. It is hard to conceive why for thousands of years moral reflection was unable to free itself from the dogmas that suited the privileged classes and admit that violence, war, slavery, arbitrary compulsion or religious persecution are evil. In any case, reading Aristotle, Thomas or Kant, it is difficult to maintain good faith in the relevance of abstract analysis of moral categories since this was insufficient for them to perceive their own prejudices. Incidentally, to some degree we without doubt also have philosophers to thank for moral progress, even the prejudiced and conservative ones. A good example of this is Kant, who, being an incurable conservative, articulated the conception of the rule of law that still applies today. Yet an even better one is Nietzsche, whose revolutionary anti-moralistic was accompanied by an effusive attachment to old-fashioned views and mores.

The question of the relationship between ethics and public morality and the interdependent evolution of both is essentially of a historical and empirical

nature. What is significant from a philosophical point of view is the fact that ethical convictions and ideas cannot be either deduced or justified. The difference between saying "everyone wants to live" and the norm "do not kill!" is not about conducting reasoning (which is obvious) or any "leap" of intuition. The content of the two statements is basically the same, and it is just the circumstances that change. We say "everyone wants to live" when commenting on somebody fighting for their life. We say "don't kill me" when someone wants to kill us. We say "do not kill!" to express the conviction that everybody would demand not to be killed, if faced with such a danger. Even if we see in a more sublimated way that "life is a value to be defended", we have not departed far enough from the colloquial phrase "everyone wants to live" to understand this taught phrase without the involvement of its colloquial content. Moral intangibles have a base that is as universal as it is trivial. It would be naïve to think that great philosophy can be done from this. Quite simply, everybody wants to feel safe, everybody fears violence, bearing losses or losing the regard of others. And nobody wants someone else to get things at their cost. Abstract moral maxims and categories such as virtue, responsibility or duty are completely powerless and lacking in meaning outside of such trivial contexts, and are connected with them by an inseparable tie. One may indeed extract from them certain intangibles and define them as "values", "norms" or virtues, but these will still only be sublimated terms referring to universal and typical states of will, i.e. wishes. This is the way things are with our example: the phrase "everyone wants to live" can be translated into the phrase "life is a great value to be defended" or "saving someone else's life is a great moral service", or "do not kill", yet in the background will always be more natural convictions: "no one would like to be killed", "someone whose life is threatened would like somebody else to help him to cope with the threat", "I would be grateful to someone who saved my life", etc.

Yet we can do something else. Instead of dressing our wishes in the language of intangibles, then defending them with great words from the designs of the "naturalists" and "relativists", whose fight for dignity of ethical discourse is not understood by anyone other than ethicists themselves, we can simply ask what these wishes are. Their object is by definition always good. This good is defined as the object of will and the goals of actions. Although it is an empty, purely formal term, invoking it means a certain metaphysical declaration, i.e. that the being of a human is teleological, meaning ordered by goals. Moral metaphysics, if it is at all possible, must contend with this hypothesis. Undermining it would mean that human beings exist solely in experiencing life and are guided by immediate stimuli or reasons, in an entirely empirical and natural order which can be cognised by the appropriate sciences. Yet if the

human is capable of establishing his being outside of experience, in the unreality of the Idea, he must also be capable of some supernatural teleological self-expression. Otherwise, his moral self-unknowledge, expressed in the incoherence of moral discourse, both popular and ethical, would be a symptom of the poverty of the condition of the human species, consumed by chimeras and illusions about itself. However, this supernatural self-definition should not be confused with any idea, such as that of eternal success, since such an idea will only constitute a trivial extrapolation of the idea of a certain experience, and especially experienced pleasure. It is a similar story with simple negation of an experience, i.e. the quietive or nirvana. If transcending life were only to mean self-denial and renouncing of being, then nothing more would be said by this than that moral metaphysics is impossible, and a human being is enclosed in the very experiencing of life. As a result, if we want to give a last chance to metaphysics, we need to ask the question of the ultimate *telos* of mankind and form a positive, and not a negative answer to it. The stake of this intellectual venture is the settlement of whether human culture, expressing itself in metaphysics, art, religion, and morality, also some transcendent claims, is a fundamental good, an unreal work, for which for its own reality its own value suffices, or a fundamental evil, whose reality is the overwhelming self-deceit and self-unknowledge of humanity.

3. What do human beings desire?

When we ask about the ultimate objective, we must of course be talking neither about a description of the human "system of needs" nor simply about setting decent goals for life. Although both of these are still worth revisiting, in light of the changing conditions of life, the *ultimate objective* cannot be any state of affairs within the range of experience-based, phenomenal reality. As we know, our ability to use language, and even just concepts alone, is dramatically limited. The best evidence of this is the hopelessness of metaphysics, searching for the absolute, the thing in itself or another pure existence. It is also demonstrated by the monotony of all attempts at a moral metaphysics, which usually take the form of fuzzy and effusive moralising or religious-theological fantasy. We do also have a kind of substitute reflection available, whose subject we make metaphysical symbols of culture. But this is in no way metaphysics, but rather a kind of aesthetic and humanistic consolation after its loss. It is not easy, though, to lean even a little outside of this range. In order to do so, it is worth being aware of what moral metaphysics definitely *cannot be*. As to what in spite of everything it *can be*; on the other hand, we know very little. But at least we

know that it will be some kind of meditation. And this is why we should pose this most unpretentious, yet at the same time most metaphysical of questions – what do human beings desire? – and, if possible, outline the first horizon of answers beyond which in some sense metaphysical terms can appear. This is solely the horizon of our moral self-unknowledge, the horizon of our *bad consciousness*, which is revealed in the permanent regrettability of moral discourse. And yet it is through our falsified, incapable self-knowledge that the path to potential metaphysics leads – for there is simply no other path.

In terms of the ultimate objective, it is the concepts in particular that serve to define it more closely, and thus the concepts of happiness and salvation (eternal happiness) that suggest themselves. This is, of course, because both these concepts, although one of them refers to the context of experience ("of this world") and the other refers, at least allusively, to extra-experiential being in unreal transcendence, are paradoxical. Neither happiness, nor salvation can be *good experiences*, since such experiences are neither lasting nor free from traces of unpleasantness, and meanwhile without this promise of experiencing pleasure both concepts lose their whole power of attraction.[23] Contemporary philosophy and psychology have devoted much attention (no less than ascetic medieval writers) to the question of the illusoriness of desire and pleasure. Desire is a dynamic and painful process in which pleasure figures in the form of an idea intertwined with frustration, even when it seems that is a current experience already. This whole perverse dynamism has of course been studied best in the erotic sphere (Freud and especially Lacan), but it concerns all experiences in which the element of desire is contained. From the time of the Stoics, via Catholic and Protestant ascetics and Schopenhauer, up to psychoanalysis, an awareness evolved in Europe that a good life is not just about good experiences, good experiences are not only pleasures, while pleasures are not just sensations of earlier desired pleasure. We know that this is all much more complicated, and that furthermore every form of life is marked by a certain suffering. But this is where our wisdom ends. We have the sense that our existence is formed from good and evil, but we do not understand either of them; we do not know what we are actually doing and why, with the vague idea that others might know this for us. The best evidence of this is the instinctive appreciation of mutual help and peaceful community as a basis for moral philosophy. In a group, with some bearing the burden of others, we succumb to the illusion that the sum of

23 Moreover, as the world's religions, including Judaism and Christianity, teach us, there is no way of seeing God and still living. As we read in Exodus (33: 20, King James Bible, Cambridge ed.), "And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live".

powerless and helpless individuals is a power and mainstay, and the unattainable happiness of the individual can be compensated by the happiness of the loyal and just community. Working for this, expressed in doing good to others, is supposed to provide meaning and value to the lives of every person. Yet an unspoken doubt hangs over this fundamental and universal moral idea: if neither I nor any of us can be individually happy, and if I don't deserve to care for myself instead of others, then why should I actually care for those others and the whole community, when every member of it is in the same situation as me, deserving almost nothing? Why should "another" be more important than me? This doubt, a very awkward one in ethics, is solved in the doctrine of socialised egoism, which proclaims that in a well-ordered society work for others is at the same time work for oneself, and vice versa. Yet this is only an apparent solution, because it is based on a compromise with egoism. The importance of "living for others" is still emphasised for the very reason that "you can't live *just* for yourself". The argument of socialised egoism refers to egoism in any case. Since one cannot be a happy egoist, but only a conditionally happy partial altruist, and since my happiness is at best a part measure and dependent on whether I bring a little good to other people, the ultimate effect is in any case that we are a community of egoists capable at best of acknowledging the nihilistic conviction that, since one cannot be an entirely happy egoist, it is perhaps sometimes better to do something for others and enjoy one's act of love. However, if everyone thought this way, we would end up with a picture of widespread unhappy consciousness; unsure of ourselves, looking at others in the hope that they will hold the key to our happiness, although they will use it on the condition that we show readiness to certain sacrifice for them; at the same time, though, we realise that the remaining members of society are characterised by exactly the same weakness and dependence on others. So who might be strong? Who can we depend on, since each of us is weak and restricts his egoism on account of himself? The solution to the contradiction of this unhappy consciousness can only be according the power of disinterested giving of happiness to some being standing above the community of egoistic solidarity or the mythologised and personified community as such. This is a false solution, as best shown by the commonplace hypocrisy and self-righteousness in adoration of the symbols and hypostases of one's own community as well as the sometimes shameless egoism and partiality in relation to it. The final word in the spirit of cooperation, solidarity and altruism is therefore pride. This is accompanied by contempt for people weaker and worse than oneself and hatred towards those seen deep down in the soul as being better. A step that can still be taken in order to escape the fate of egoism, self-adoration and hatred, is to embrace the community of the whole of humanity. For humanity as a whole does not have a partner towards

which it can show its true, egoistic nature. Yet this moral project is fallible, and anger will easily find a route to the surface of social life – it suffices to find a suitable "enemy of humanity" or "enemy of progress".

The pleasure which we desire is not the final word in our will. We know all too well the illusions and traps into which the lust for pleasure can drag us, and it is no different with the lust for power, riches and fame. Everybody must decide individually how much these goods are worth and how one should pay for them, yet without doubt the experience of humanity in this respect is unambiguous enough that we can state that people really want something different from all those things which they chase out of passion. However, we can say the same, equally categorically, about any visions of salvation. The most noble of these depict this salvation as a state of mind consisting of an eternal pleasing vision of the absolute, yet surely no one could possibly ask for such an immeasurable and infinite effort at intensive experience. The very idea of immortality is just as vast and terrifying as the idea of absolute death. As a result, in every culture, the ideas of the ultimate fate of humans are fuzzy and mysterious. If this is a positive vision (because nirvana is only a proposal of liberation from the torment of life, but not a real good, as is the case with acceptance of total mortality), it must contain something of the idea of the things and states that we love, and at the same time extend beyond any experience, from which we would desire to *rest* as something inseparable from effort and suffering. Ultimately, then, religions try to convince us that although we do not have much knowledge about what our stay in paradise will be like, there will, nonetheless, be one, and it will be good.

No, moral metaphysics cannot lower itself to a tale of how a person desiring good attains it in the form of eternal bliss. Eternal happiness, whatever that may mean, is not a good at all. One cannot desire it and strive for it without succumbing to contradiction; after all, the path to happiness cannot be selfishness and love of oneself, not to mention the fact that a noble and virtuous person deserving happiness cannot consider himself as worthy of the highest reward. If, then, it were to prove true that humans really desire salvation (although, fortunately, it seems that they are not so unwise), this would mean that they are amoral beings, who perceive a fundamental link between their laudable and wise lives and the degree of their own bliss.[24] On the other hand,

24 As we remember, Kant, as a good Christian, accorded everyone the right to the hope that their laudable lives would be rewarded with eternal happiness, on the condition that it was not the prospect of this that would be the reason for fulfilling one's duties and that people would not treat grace as a due payment for good deeds. Unfortunately, it is all too clear to see that on the basis of Kant's ethics it is impossible to justify any mixture of ethical considerations with the hope of receiving grace. The order of hope

since individual moral discourses are morally controversial from the point of view of other ethical conceptions, then perhaps ethics as a whole is marked by contradiction and constitutes a sphere of appearances. The lack of possibility of ethical justification for human aspirations to eternal happiness could be a confirmation of such an axiological catastrophe. After all, they certainly cannot be justified by ethics (without the participation of faith and theology), but it also cannot openly condemn them, since, having acknowledged the idea of salvation as immoral, it would deal a blow to its own identity and tradition. However, I do not think that the ethical sphere can be discredited that easily. It is very much imperfect in conceptual and verbal terms, but it would be premature to suggest that striving for one's own absolute happiness, although morally repellent, cannot be subjected to criticism on the basis of any ethical theory. Perhaps there is some compromise solution, some explanation, that the idea that man's ultimate objective is salvation is something like an "ad hoc hypothesis", a naïve formulation beyond which we must discern something more profound and noble. Perhaps somewhere on the border of ethics, in the moral metaphysics which we are searching for, it will turn out that humans in fact desire something other than eternal happiness, and this authentic desire is not thoroughly unethical, as the desire for salvation appears to be. We would then reach agreement with the popular experience that categorically denies the idea that people en masse imagine their ultimate objective in a form of salvation – even if this is constantly suggested of them. Why it is that most of us do not even think about eternal happiness, although it is the simplest definition, and the one that comes most readily to mind, of the ultimate human objective, is something that we will have to explain. In truth, experience teaches us that the ultimate objective actually very seldom appears in human minds, and when it does, we are satisfied with shallow and incidental responses and quickly stop bothering ourselves with metaphysics.

Let us then assume that what human beings ultimately desire is not an eternal salutary state based on any kind of experiencing of happiness. Human desire is transcendent and by no means trivial, although many people try to give it the trivial form of heavenly delights. Although ideas of the objective and

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and grace is not strictly speaking an ethical order. Although hope is a fundamental manifestation of will and cannot be forgotten when speaking of the human condition, it would be all too easy to say that human hope is the hope for salvation. Yet we can say that something very characteristic of hope is its lack of an object – we have hope, but we do not actually know of what. Kant rightly demanded from philosophy an answer to the question about the object of our ultimate hopes, but he himself did not give any serious answer beyond the traditional "wishful thinking" that formed religious discourse.

meaning of life are only ideas, meaning that they refer to certain states and experiences, it is worth looking in depth at these sometimes naïve names which in inattentiveness, in rare moments of reflection, humans give to their *telos*. They do this on the basis of their life experience, but more or less consciously referring to unreality beyond the bounds of experience; these are terms which so to speak replace the metaphysical terms sought in philosophy. These sometimes speak of salvation, but also of love, community, joy, and experiencing beauty, and it is worth remembering that just a few centuries ago they included reputation, i.e. renown and respect amongst one's neighbours. These terms usually refer to certain experiences, and for this reason can be treated at best as metaphors of the human *telos*. One might ask, however, what the *idea* of these metaphors is. Each of them refers with varying degrees of directness to the idea of nobility. All imagined final states are imbued with noble peace, glory, beauty and the triumph of good. They all carry inside themselves the idea of perfection, which goes beyond the usual human measure that is called nobility or sanctity. For the language of values (that is, of the ideals of life), is situated above the language of ideas. It occupies the border between the daily language of experience and the impossible or almost impossible language of metaphysics. Thanks to the efforts of philosophers, we know that the metaphysical intuitions and words of the "language of values" are characterised by a certain hidden semantics that can be discovered in phenomenological concentration. Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Heinrich Rickert, and in Poland Henryk Elzenberg created semantic "tables of values" proving that intuition achieves an astonishing discipline and apodicticity here. Yet its significance is limited by the very status of the "value", whose concept constitutes a hybrid of experience (the element of experience) and the Idea represented as substance (a certain "something that is "a value"). In addition, the concept of values is a postulate, and only from the apodictic gesture of establishment ("values speak for themselves and authenticate their validity for themselves") do they draw their reality as metaphysical categories. However, we can strip values of this substantialist and rhetorical costume and leave them wholesale in the sphere of immediate self-application, i.e. in the unreality of the Idea. Moral metaphysics could then take on the form of an axiology, although this would not talk about the "world of values" like about some fairy-tale kingdom and its court hierarchy, but demonstrate that in human action good is *diversified*. Yet a fundamental axiological phenomenon is *plurality of values*, meaning the multiformity and variability of good in the still changing context of the practices and ways in which the will is defined (made clear) in us.

The starting point of such an axiology would present us with a situation which can be described as follows: what do human beings want? They want

good. What is this good? It is a variable and moving constellation of values rising above experienced life. What is a value? It is an ideal of life, defined ad hoc in an experience but intended outside of experience, in rational unreality; that is, in the Idea. Can humans attain such an ideal? No, because an ideal is not a practical objective, and life is not a planned game of imitation of ideals; yet humans can live well while creating (intending) values outside of themselves, outside of their experience. How can one "create values"? By acting for good. How am I to know how to act for good? One cannot *know* this – for good can only be *wanted*, and in wanting – imagined; it is the whole of this process that is the intending of values. I suspect that it is this *intention* that we have in mind when we respond to the question about the ultimate objective with the popular answer which is most courageously removed from the stream of life – that "we would like to leave something behind". Yet the thing that is to remain after us is not a memorial to remember us by, but rather a useful product of our work *helping* our descendants not only with its usefulness, but above all as a *blessing* – a good wish. However, this expresses only a hope, and not a concept of the human *telos*.

We will come back to the idea of moral metaphysics as axiology in the next chapter. For now, though, let's summarise our discussion on the grounds of human teleology. This has not brought us too much data for moral metaphysics. It has, however, shown us the path that needs to be followed. We already know that moral metaphysics cannot be ethics, but possibly axiology, albeit not the type about which we are talking when referring to the so-called "world of values", so not an "ontology". We know that the ultimate human objective is usually defined in either a false or a haphazard way using concepts referring to the act of experiencing, although surely what we want to do is to find it outside of the domain of experience, beyond life itself. The characteristic inattentiveness with which humans treat the ultimate, metaphysical perspectives of their being seems to be a phenomenon related to the permanent lack of success of popular moral discourse and the academic discourse of ethics joined with this in an unhappy marriage. The source of confusion is the understandable lack of an appropriate language to provide transcendent, metaphysical terms, but also the fact that good appears in the most diverse forms. For human practices are various, as are the historical and cultural contexts which give value to these practices, and finally various too are the ideals of life as values. This diversity demands an explanation. But on its own it serves as a sufficient justification for the fact that humans notoriously *do not know what they want*. They are not interested in defining *what* it is they might possess. Whether this is called salvation or, like Plato in his famous *Symposium*, beauty itself – it is not about substance or possession. It is *not* exclusively themselves that humans are

interested in, since even personal perfection is the good of our own living I, while the *telos* goes beyond life, and therefore also beyond the living subject. Moreover, the egological organisation of experiencing and acting is felt ambivalently by the human – as ego, but also as a compulsion from which he wants to be liberated, deprecating egoism as morally ugly. Human beings, let us repeat, do not know what they want, and are sunk day-to-day in a thoughtless self-unknowledge manifested as the whole ineptitude and inconsistency of moral discourse. But the evil, the false ethical consciousness linked to this does not have to have the last word. The silent victory of good is demonstrated by the undoubted moral progress with which ethical self-knowledge did not keep up, not only in the past, but also today. Human will works in secret, far from the hubbub of naïve and false moralising. This secret work of the will of good, good will, is something which we must examine.

4. The will of good

"The will of good" and "good will" mean practically the same thing. The reasons for using the former term, although the latter is the one that tends to be used, will be explained later. In any case, when examining good will (the will of good) we should begin from Kant's lofty words, which are widely known to philosophers:

> A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes, because of its fitness to attain some proposed end, but only because of its volition, that is, it is good in itself and, regarded for itself, is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it in favour of some inclination and indeed, if you will, of the sum of all inclinations. Even if, by a special disfavour of fortune […] this will should wholly lack the capacity to carry out its purpose […] then, like a jewel, it would still shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself.[25]

And a little further on:

> the true vocation of reason must be to produce a will that is good, not perhaps *as a means* to other purposes, but *good in itself* for which reason was absolutely necessary. This will need not, because of this, be the sole and complete good, but it must still be the highest good and the condition of every other, even of all demands for happiness.[26]

Good will is the only thing that is absolutely good in man, claims Kant. Only the will is something unlimited, and therefore absolute in man, adds Schopenhauer.

25 Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 4: 394.

26 Ibid., p. 4: 396.

In what way does the will become good? In what way, subject to specification, and therefore a certain limitation, through the precise intention which it undertakes, can the will still be good? Perhaps it is this limitation that allows it to gain a moral value? Or, conversely, are its dimension of absoluteness and perhaps the kindness joined to it not obliterated when the *general* good becomes the concrete will of something specific at the cost of something else, and thus the *choice*? These questions demand answers, if the metaphysical concepts of will, good will and good itself are to maintain their credibility. For now, all that speaks for them is their neatness as "pure concepts of reason", and thus their idealness and apodicticity. We therefore need to expand these concepts in order to check whether their arrangement, as long as it is supported in language and is not solely a speculative creation, makes it possible to understand something more than the concepts themselves in their mutual self-definition. It is thus necessary to examine good will critically as a concept, together with the whole array of concepts in which it is established.

Let's begin with the concept of the *will* itself. It is this that in some way acquires the attribute of goodness, but it is impossible to explain how this happens without first understanding the concept. The basic, and perhaps insurmountable difficulty associated with the concept of the will is its fundamental, constitutive simplicity. *Analysis* of the concept of the will therefore seems to be essentially impossible. And yet it is this *simplicity* that constitutes the certain so-called moment which belongs to the concept of the will and can be *distinguished* in it. The word "moment" means the most general content, capable of being distinguished in any way and at any level. This is the way that it is used by Hegel. The moment can be a property attributed to an object, a component of a concept, an element of a definition, a constitutive factor, through which anything – a thing or its concept – attains its unity and a kind of specificity – and finally that which in centuries past was known as the *modus*; that is, a sign or way in which something is manifested or operates. The "moment" is such a broad category, so indifferent to distinction of subjective and objective and general and detailed factors that they can be listed, with perhaps no great benefit, but also without significant risk of error. Such is the nature of conceptual speculation that it is as apodictic as it is bland; that is, leading to essentially trivial results, especially when translated into day-to-day language. Nonetheless, a purely conceptual analysis encompassing logical and semantic connections and all connections of meaning in general in the field of the vocabulary and intuitions that are considered important for a given subject must be made, even if only, having taken up a certain position or view following a philosophical study, to avoid accidentally becoming attached to some trivial

and particularistic moment or connection of meaning, and giving it as a solution to some question or key to understanding it.

In what way, though, can the concept of something absolutely simple, such as God, Unity or even will, encompass the plurality of any "moments"? Firstly, these can be purely negative moments. We then say that the One is uncomplicated: it is "uncomplicatedness" that is a certain "moment" here. Secondly, plurality can refer to relationships, such as when we specify the concept of God, saying that it is Good; this expression means that for other beings it is an objective or model. Thirdly, plurality can occur in the unity of the subject – as plurality experienced by the subject in the form of a plurality of representations or perceived by it in a phenomenon. It is essentially unity itself (or the related moments: uncomplicatedness, simplicity) that is a certain "moment", showing that a given concept (e.g. the concept of the self or God etc.) is assumed (this Hegelian term means "thought", "established", as a concept of a certain simple substance and thing in itself. As such, in this conception of it as a substance ("substantiality" too is a certain moment) it should be something simple. If, however, we consider that being "something in itself" belongs to the concept of substance, outside of all possible imagination and experience, in this sense we can ascribe this unity to every substance. Substance, taken from the side of its substratum ("matter" or "subject of properties"), is something which we think out of necessity with no content (in an empty, formal and negative supposition), and therefore something "simple", in which we do not recognise any differences. The reflection meeting this paradoxical moment of simplicity in the concept of the will should therefore not delude us. Everything subjected to reflection in the way that it is assumed in advance as something metaphysical is recognised as simple (and also: in a certain sense absolute and perfect). For simplicity (together with perfection) is one of several moments intended in the metaphysical approach, alongside the topic of "truly-ness" (reality) that we have already examined at length, intrinsic nature, relevance, generalness, extrasensory nature, non-naturalness, and invariability. In short, what is metaphysical is essentially thought of first as elementary and uncomplicated, since in the assumption there is "less reality" than in an eternal, indivisible and simple element. For this reason too, when speaking of will as a metaphysical category, we should start from its simple indivisibility, and then uncover its differentiation or mediation in the phenomenal or relational sphere. Such conditions are imposed by the logic of metaphysical discourse.

However, one might raise a certain objection, in keeping with the spirit of the critique of metaphysics carried out in Part II. This is that conceptual predilections guided by metaphysical fantasy and leading to innumerable

"claims", like the claim mentioned above of the perfection of that which is simple, in fact do not have to interest us, since they are only a certain folklore of intellectual life whose cognitive pretentions have been entirely disavowed. Yet the fundamental deficiencies of metaphysics do not mean that it is completely lacking in the desired factor of necessity. We will find it there without any difficulty in forming apodictic conceptual links, in the producing concepts per se, and finally in assessing the existing grammatical and semantic conditions of the language. In addition, just as in traditional concoctions, of no interest to the modern pharmacist who will neither produce nor sell them, there may nonetheless be healing elements, grammatical-logical games with various linguistic intuitions and concepts guided by the quest for unity and grandeur within a certain systematised conceptual construction may also lead to valuable perceptions or provide interesting arguments in this or another matter. Furthermore, many philosophical concepts, including that of the will, although taken from the contexts of popular language, have been effectively galvanised by the long tradition of their scholastic use, and as a result their metaphysical scope is something which we cannot simply ignore. This, incidentally, is the reason why we still have some chance in subjective terms, i.e. referring to human beings' axiological and unreal production and their spiritual powers, to expect descriptions that are truly metaphysical; that is, general, relevant, and intrinsically *important* – regardless of the conditions of experience. We should therefore be glad that the tradition of metaphysics prepared *metaphysical concepts* for us that fundamentally transcend empirical use. We are now testing whether it is possible to make use of them without ridding them of the whole metaphysical semantic load invested in them.

Following these heuristic remarks, we can attempt to detail the moments of the will. As we said, the will is *simple*. Specifically, this means that it is not a phenomenon, a series of psychophysical circumstances, a structure of elements, and it therefore cannot be *reduced* to a set of factors. As demonstrated emphatically by Schopenhauer, such concepts as incentive, imagining a goal, feeling desire or lust, and the strength to make an action possible assume the concept of the will, but do not underpin it. The will is expressed directly, and in mediation it can only be *conceived* or *experienced* as desire, need, resolution, satisfaction at attaining a goal etc. Of course, recognition of all these numerous manifestations of the will has a fundamental importance for understanding it. First, though, one has to be aware that we think of the will as a simple immediacy which is only defined in these empirical moments such as a real need, a desire, dream, project, the pain of unsatisfied urges, resistance, hesitation and many more.

As simple and immediate, the will occurs for us as we experience it as being *autonomous* and *apodictic*; that is, guiding us and directing our executive powers. The will *imposes* itself on us, and only when embracing us can it be affirmed and internalised, and thus *assimilated* by us. It then occurs in the general modus of *my will*, which as our actions progress is fulfilled by ever more detailed empirical content, becoming a concrete, egoistic *will of my person*, my own desire, intention and resolution or just a dream, estimation, sentiment belonging to my biography. As something to be assimilated, the will embracing us at source is *unconditioned*, and thus *overwhelming*. We can overcome or deny certain desires we have, change decisions we have made, but all acts of this kind occur in the presence of a previous will from which they draw their meaning and effectiveness, incidentally constituting the expression of some other will defining itself in us anew. I must therefore desire something in order to refuse it out of my own *free will*, but I cannot desire without will, which enters me in the form of imagination of the object of desire or of some even loftier state of affairs. We are unable to think of a good that is so perfect and noble that the desire of it is unnecessary for it to present itself to us as good. Even passive, viewing admiration is an active, volitional affirmation, while melancholic submissiveness means the death of all our being and all its abilities to act and affirm anything.

As autonomous (unconditioned) will is *free*. The moment of freedom complements the unconditioning and immediacy as their negative side. Freedom of the will means that it does not come up against any obstacles and restrictions as such. Obstacles are met only by the realisation of concrete resolutions, and even the making of them. The will itself, though, has the power to embrace all being and any state of affairs. Empirically, psychologically it is manifested in the form of the phenomenon of wanting, which does not encounter any resistance: anything can be wanted, even unification with God… no, even *being* God.

The freedom of the will is a paradoxical moment. As free, apodictic and overwhelming, the will *imposes itself* on us, or enslaves us. This enslavement, however, is the immediate negation of freedom of will. The will which forces us to want loses its freedom in us. Becoming empirical, specific, connected to a specific defined idea, it contradicts itself. This is why the will needs to be freed in the sphere of experience, i.e. in humans' empirical action. We must answer the question as to what this freedom means. In any case, for free will, denied in us, for example, as overwhelming, enforcing passion, to achieve freedom, it must deny this very denial. Our task with regard to the manifestations of the will that we experience is therefore not just about "identifying" with them, and accepting the will as our own wanting (the will of my person), but about

experiencing its freedom as the overwhelmingness which we are trying, unsuccessfully, to resist. Only when we know that we want to, must and cannot do otherwise do we act as free beings.[27] Free, which means being forced by our will and surrendering to it not directly, as passion, but prudently, in a mediated way, and in particular having experienced an unsuccessful attempt at conquering it. For it is only then that we say that we are acting out of free, unforced will, when we are guided by an inner compulsion in which it is we who are the enforcers, not some abstract general "will" and its abstract, general object "good". But if we manage to reject some empirical wanting (which is commonly seen as a particularly emphatic expression of freedom), that means that we have been overtaken by will in another form, perhaps even the will of renouncement; for this, too, is something that we must affirm as internal necessity. In any case, the freedom of will obtained in us is manifested as a *free*, *autonomous compulsion*.[28]

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27 An analogy to cognition occurs here. We only see as our own and true such a judgement that suggests itself to us irrefutably even though we tried to subject it to a test.

28 Philosophical tradition going back to Socrates and the Stoics interprets this "oxymoron" of free will by conceiving freedom as a free decision about myself by the rational I, an internal agreement with what is rational. Free is he who is reconciled with that which is necessary on the power of reason. It is not hard to detect a false note, and even hypocrisy in such an approach. Tradition makes a mistake here that has already been demonstrated so many times by existentialist philosophy, Nietzsche and others. The idea of freedom as obedience (to God, reason, values) sounds like a joke. The only true thing is the fact that freedom assumes necessity and is in itself necessary. But this is not about any calculation of reason (there is never such a thing as "the most reasonable action in a given situation") or even "self-determination", but about entering the role of the subject of necessity – that necessity whose ultimate exponent is the action itself: since I did something *thus*, it clearly had to be *thus*. This process is a struggle, an attempt to pose impossible resistance to the will. This struggle can be called "a struggle for self-acknowledgement". In classical metaphysical tradition the will is indeed understood as a process, but this is the process of subordination of the soul to the highest Truth and the highest Good; yet it is not about self-acknowledgement, but about recognising God as the source of all good. Thomas Aquinas writes: "Happiness cannot be without a right will. […] Every act of the will is preceded by an act of the intellect: but a certain act of the will precedes a certain act of the intellect. For the will tends to the final act of the intellect which is happiness. And consequently right inclination of the will is required antecedently for happiness, just as the arrow must take a right course in order to strike the target." (*Summa Theologica*, part 1/2, question 4, article 4, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province).

In cognising and affirming an act of will of any being, we show a natural love to its Creator, and in every fulfilment of such a cognitive-affirmative act lies a glimpse of eternal happiness. How simple everything is when we assume that all our dreams can be

Colloquial language – in Polish and other languages too – gives an important hint here. An action that is not forced but taken by the power of the will of one's own person may be called an action taken voluntarily or *will*ingly (Polish: *dobrowolnie*, from *dobra wola* = "good will). From a purely formal point of view in Polish, the word "good" is a simple, abstract description of the object of the will. "Will is the will of good" – this is a description connecting both concepts together and establishing their mutual, founding reference. This has a tautological meaning, but in the empirical context it is transformed into a concrete experience which can be grasped in the simple words "if I want something, then it seems to me that it is good for me". This is why we speak of an action taken out of one's own "free (or good) will"; that is, one in which an intrinsic, autonomous will has spoken in me, since in me has been revealed the freedom to affirm it as *mine* – in other words, is serving *my good*. To distinguish it from *good will* (to which we are slowly coming), we can call this moment, belonging to the phenomenal side of the will, "goodwill".

As an immediate compulsion and a mediated goodwill, the will is a certain axiologically indifferent positivity, a chance actuality, which from the point of view of *judged* will – that which is recognised as good or bad – continues to be entirely innocent. Let's say that my will has ordered me to desire food. I therefore feel my hunger as my own, personal willingness to eat something. I affirm this willingness and see it as my own, and therefore reach for food, doing so willingly, in the conviction that food is good for me – I therefore take it *willingly*. There would be no such willingness if not for the compulsion to eat and the overwhelming will behind it. Yet all this as yet has no moral significance. I can also willingly reject food, wanting something else; for example, willingly choosing health or fasting if I see in this a value for myself. The *choice of my good* is a still indifferent manifestation of free will as goodwill, a phenomenon of life. As an intelligent being, I confirm internally and subjectify the compulsion of the will, transferring the freedom of the will to its own psychological centre of feeling and acting. I then operate in a free and

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fulfilled, that everything is aiming for a common, triumphant end, that everything is watched over by a good Spirit. Like moths around a fire, all systems circle around a spiral, nearing the Absolute, to finally have something that is always one and the same to say, the same bland and boring truth: that at the beginning and end of time is one unchanging God, conditioned by nothing, unspeakable and inconceivable, from which everything is derived and to which everything will return, to His very glory. Indeed, somebody who, when asked about anything, is only capable of pointing upwards and declaring "let Heaven's will be – for with it we must agree". There is truly nothing simpler. Real thinking begins where the lazy mind tries to move beyond these pleasant theological decorations.

willing way, making a choice where other beings act in immediacy. Nobody except for me and on my behalf does this – I am the enforcer myself; freedom is indeed my self-determination, although in terms of content what I choose can be strictly defined.[29]

Choosing willingly, however, I affirm not only a certain state of affairs which I consider to be at least comparatively favourable for me. Incidentally, this state of affairs appears to me generally in quite a hazy and fragmentary manner – its specificity is imperfect. In choosing, I also affirm in my good, in my choice, the will itself as such, attaching to it the meaning of something that

29 And this is why the word "self-determination" is misleading and paradoxical. Misunderstandings based on it still come up. In the teaching of philosophy the alleged moment of hidden compulsion is emphasised, and thus the appearance that appears in human freedom. It is said: Fichte and Marx thought that choice was an illusion, that we must "choose" in a defined way, and that freedom means that we *ourselves* genuinely give consent to that which is otherwise necessary. But this is not the main idea of this classical conception of freedom. It is only about the fact that essential for freedom is autonomy and not experiencing compulsion. As for the concept of choice, though, and whether it is a concept of a certain phenomenon (since it is really "undecided" in advance how I will choose), or only a concept of a certain appearance (it only "seems to me" that I "choose" because my choice is decided "in advance"), it is not the choice that is apparent, but the thought of the "apparent choice". If choosing were always only an appearance, then the sentence "choosing is always an appearance" would make no sense (since the very word "choice" would lose sense). The sentence in quotation marks contains a contradiction, but this can be seen only when we climb one level higher than this trivial transcendental reflection that accepted necessity is a sign of freedom. For there is no "in advance" or "decided" with regard to choice. We are dealing with the same chaos of concepts which we have already discussed with reference to the question of possibility, since the question of choice is only an aspect of this. Such concepts as choice, probability or possibility do not refer to any unreal potential content which we might "choose", which is a "possibility" or "probable". Such thinking is governed by the metaphysical illusion of "truly" and "really" which we have already discussed, an illusion leading to the metaphysical opposition undetermined – determined. There is no "unspecified (that which is to be chosen, that which is for now only possible), which *somehow* is", just as there is no "non-being which somehow is". Phenomena take place outside of determination and non-determination. Specific nature belongs to the content of experience and their correlates, and we can therefore speak of "possibility" or "probability", as well as "choosing", only in an epistemological context. In this sense, though, i.e. empirically, I choose when I simply decide and point to something that to me seems better. Whether I call this a choice or a discovery of my own good, or self-determination, is just a question of words. Yet I cannot confirm that it only seems to me that I am choosing (unless there really are some particular, misleading circumstances, but which can always be explained – for example if I choose from a menu in a restaurant and then find that my chosen dishes are not available).

is "good-bearing", that precedes and conditions my ability to perceive my own good. The will therefore wants itself through me, and in me defines itself as free and good-giving. For now, though, these are still purely egological, immoral definitions. In freedom I discover the sphere of my own good, becoming a free person, i.e. doing willing acts. I am, though, still "outside of good and evil", as Nietzsche says, in spontaneous innocence. A primitive human, still unfamiliar with any moral ideas, can also act in a free and willing way.

The value of one's own freedom and the willingness of one's own actions is considerably dominant over goods which are subject to an ad hoc choice. We can therefore say that the will wants itself. The next moment of the will is therefore its self-affirmation, directing towards itself or autotelism. Dispersed in the multitude of ad hoc wants, intentions and choices, the will again focuses on itself – giving a good-for-me value to its temporary objects, setting itself as the *source good*, i.e. the one that transcendentally conditions the goodness of anything that can be wanted. "There is no good without a will" – in this brief and simple way we can distil this speculative circumstance; we might incidentally have already mentioned this.

The autotelism, if not simply the narcissism of the will, which before any differentiation wants itself, has always fascinated philosophers, leading some to the conclusion that the purpose of the will is in fact separated from the effectiveness of the efforts made for this reason since they cannot bring any result. This possible lack of result and wanting in any case, this combination of chance empirical conditions with the metaphysical rank of the will as an overwhelming, extrasensory reality, proves only that the purpose lying within the will illuminates for us "another world" in which the will by necessity, *within itself*, achieves its goals. In this other world the will is at home, and it is therefore absolutely effective. Does it therefore occur there as absolute law? Should the human being experience it as an obligation to obey the law? Are we free when we surrender to the spiritual agency of the will and fervently – and with the sense that it is in this fervency that our freedom lies – surrender ourselves to the "slavery" of the law? "My true final aim – obedience to the law […] I must will to promote it because I must obey", writes Fichte.[30] Ideas of this

30 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *The Vocation of Man* (*Johann Gottlieb Fichte's Popular Works*), trans. William Smith (London: Trübner & Co., 1873), p. 374. It is worth reading the whole of this extraordinarily effusive text that delights in its own grandeur. It tells how it is through the absolute obedience of one will that is defined as pure reason that a just social order is formed in which bad will, egoism and individualism vanish, replaced by eternal community, living in rational harmony in two worlds at the same time: the mundane and the heavenly. When all inequalities, exploitation, self-interest and disobedience of the law are abolished, humanity will be left with just one common

sort are based on that fascination with pure apodicticity which orders, without giving any reason, fascination in the absolute moment of the pure, royal "I want!", which does not have to explain itself for anything. So absolute obedience to the will as law may happen to sheep and to Fichte, but for other people the will breaks up in the prism of practice and disintegrates into a multitude of acts of very different types, in keeping with such or another law (or not) of desires, choices, intentions, decisions, and even judgements – which the acting person takes more or less consistently, fighting for them to be able to be acts of will of his person; that is, willing acts. It is in this struggle for the voluntariness of one's own acts, rather than obedience, that their volitional nature expresses itself, since the will can essentially not be conveyed in any way other than as free. The will therefore seeks in the human being an outlet and a realisation as it is, i.e. as free will. Stating that we discover the freedom of our own will in the idea of law and consolidate it through conscious obedience is a distortion of the very nature of the will and freedom which we could call grotesque if it were not so threatening.[31]

To sum up, then, the will, in its abstract sense which we are examining here, still has no subject. It is more a stream of immediate intensiveness with no differentiation. It is, as has been said, simple and unconditioned. As it permeates the experience of the rational being, the will experiences differences and definitions, and in this process affirms itself by way of the changing goals of wanting. This process is a struggle for the maintenance of the will in the experience of the rational being in its conscious form. This becoming aware requires an even more dramatic struggle to be fought for the freedom of one's own actions against the feeling of external compulsion – let's add that this means both the compulsion which we feel as an overwhelming passion and the

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enemy: indomitable nature. Fichte's text is pervaded by a Kantian juridical, legalistic moralism, and as a result its totalistic rapture becomes even more alarming. Dozens of such authors, writing books like Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* and of course *The Vocation of Man*, have managed to wield a malevolent influence on reality.

31 If my words carry little meaning in relation to the authority of Fichte, let those of Hegel speak instead: "the good is the universal of will – a universal determined in itself, and thus including in it particularity, still so far as this particularity is in the first instance still abstract, there is no principle at hand to determine it." (*Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*... trans. William Wallace (1894) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2009), p. 116. And yet the matter is much more complicated. As Hegel writes, in the same place, the will is defined dialectically, because "there are *diverse* kinds of good and multiple duties", but a human being as a concrete person has the duty to guide himself by his own interest and favour. Apart from this, though, he is also bound by the general good. Everybody can strive to harmonise both sides of good – personal (detailed) and general. Having this possibility, however, they also have the possibility of becoming bad.

one that we feel as an overwhelming law about which we may not ask "why?" The compulsion of wanting itself and the compulsion developed in the idea of the irresistibly desired state of affairs or the object in itself is the opposite of freedom. Only when the moment of compulsion turns into subjective necessity – that is, when it is I who take the role of the enforcer – does my will regain the freedom that belongs to it and I become free. As free from the compulsion alienated from me, I affirm my goals, intentions and judgements through calm consent.

The struggle for the freedom of one's own actions is not therefore about a perverse affirmation of their obligatory nature, as certain dogmatic and effusive philosophers with limited analytical talents would imagine, but about an independent choice based on the internal acknowledgement that one action or state of affairs is better for me than another. In this way, in the light of *my will* becoming conscious and mustering freedom, the concept of *I* and its benefits appear. On the basis of this new consciousness of myself as a person with an affirmative compulsion, by the power of the free subjective necessity choosing my own benefit and favour, the first good is constituted – *my good.* In developing an intentional action, initially in the narrow range of still partially instinctive behaviour, humans become ever more conscious of the difference between their benefit and harm. On this basis, the aspiration slowly grows in them to take their own actions as *willing* actions.

We now face the question of the constitution of good will. Is it possible on the basis of egotistically good will, meaning personal *goodwill*, to return to the abstraction (generality) that marks the will as such, a return that will make my will not only willing but good *as a whole*? If this generalisation of my good is possible, this is only because in the concept of I, the concept of *my* will and *my* benefit is contained in the reflexive moment of generality that allows these concepts to be referred to others – other "I"s, other beneficiaries, other subjects of free will. First, however, it is necessary to actually produce this generalised concept of the individual free will of any and every individually viewed person; that is, allow this moment of generality to really come to the fore. Originally, we have only a very weak sense of our own identity and the benefits which we desire.

Uncovering an alter ego and basing the consciousness of oneself on the experience of another I constitutes an exceptional and extremely difficult area of philosophical self-knowledge. I suspect that it is not a question in which speculations and conceptual analysis could be of very much use. From the point of view of the teleology of the human in general and the problem of good will in particular, though, it is important to distinguish those moments which will decide on the primary moral definitions constituting the first basis for moral

judgements and evaluation of human life in general. The dialectic relation in which encountering another I and yet another I allows oppositions of I-you, I-(s)he, I-you plural, we-you plural, I-they, I-you-they etc., assumes the simultaneous recognition of the similarity and difference of each of the constituent subjects. The process of generalisation of the concept of good, (that is, separating it from the context of the immediate sense that this or that is my willing goal as my own benefit), must overcome a number of contradictions. The most obvious of these is connected with the competition for goods that are in short supply and cannot fall to everyone: "that's mine", coming from my mouth and yours, sounds the same and at the same time different. Antagonism and competition reveal a contradiction that is extremely fundamental in interpersonal relations, yet one that can be overcome, together with the competition itself. As the concept of my own benefit is already defined for myself, and thus a specific choice of a certain good-for-me has been made, the other faces me as a competitor, to whom on the one hand I ascribe my own will, meaning that I suppose that he desires the same as I do, but on the other hand – conscious of my own identity – I do not apportion necessity to this principle. I go as far as to see it as essential that as another person he should want *something different*. This is also why, in the light of a primitive social relationship, good-for me becomes "good due to me", essentially separate from "good-for-you" and further "good due to you", "due to him" etc. In this primitive idea of justice, out of the question is the idea that someone could want my good; that is, that which is due to me, because it was wanted by me. The principle here is "this is mine, because *I* want this thing, and that is yours, because *you* want that thing". But if this is one and the same thing, the necessity arises that the two selves be separated from each other "to a safe distance", two manifestations of will, and, phenomenally, also the two desired things, so that each can still be good: one for me, the other for you. This is how the first generalisation of the good-for-me arises: "what's mine is mine, and what's yours is yours". From this moment there exists the foundation for distinguishing the egological nature of teleology, according to which a good is a good-for-me, from *egoism*, which does not permit a division to be made of people and their goods and aspires to encompass everything around in a self-recognition that conceals other subjects.

Together with "distinguishing egology from egoism", as we might put it, begins the next great struggle – onto- and phylogenetic – of human life. The first was the struggle for the ownership of our will – that is, the freedom of willing wanting – the second was the struggle for recognition of our own identity within the structure of the group, and the third is the struggle for justice – that is, for preserving the separation of selves, their free acts and their goods – and then for creating a whole system of norms and guarantees safeguarding the reality of just

relations. The drama of this struggle lies in the fact that two moments belonging to each other impose their rhythm on it: the moment of identification with another I, allowing its will and needs to be understood as an analogy of my will and my needs, and the moment of negation of this identity, allowing the autonomy of the will of the other I to be understood, and together with it its real identity and the ominous possibility that it will become a competitor to me.[32]

It is in this area of the struggle for justice that the decisive step can be reached in which primitive goodwill exceeds the boundaries of the *imagined* egoism of others, going beyond a simple recognition of this egoism according to the principle: this is "my good-for-me" and that is your "good-for-me", i.e. "good-for-you". This step is the negation of immediate, positive goodwill, or freely reaching for some available good-for-me, and consequently willing *renouncement* of something, i.e. a *cession*. In abandoning a good-for-me without any clear practical reason, prospects for reciprocity or another benefit in future, I lose that primary basis of my own identity that is the certainty that I will act on behalf of my own good, i.e. want that which I want. This cession in my attitude also produces a break which I cannot explain to myself: I don't know *what I want* as it is not clear why I renounced my own good!

The Hegelian analysis of the primitive encounter of two selves, which lies at the heart of the whole of social philosophy, is played out in the concepts belonging to the juridical perspective of the Enlightenment philosophy of law, with Kantianism at the top, as well as the dialectic of identity and difference of

32 It is remarkable how late the *otherness* of the other was perceived in philosophy. To all intents and purposes this discovery was only made by Kierkegaard, and the category of otherness itself acquired a special meaning only among 20th-century Jewish thinkers, from there permeating the entirely secular discourse of the modern left. The enchantment of philosophers of the past with the abstraction of concepts and the idea of unity of reason led to the fact that even in ethics people were unable to notice a circumstance fundamental for moral life: that that which is good for me does not have to be so for someone else, and vice versa: that which is good or bad for him does not have to be the same for me. The biblical golden rule "do not unto others what you would not have them do to you" is so effective in building empathy and brings so much good in practice that even the sharpest philosophers did not notice that it is not an unconditional moral imperative. Kant waded in deepest here, without hesitation deeming as good those deeds which can be subjected to some universal rule of conduct, and thus also the principle of reciprocity. Since there are no such rules, as Kant himself would ultimately recognise, his whole ethics ran aground on the verbosity called formalism. It is worth reminding ourselves that "rules" like "do good and avoid bad" or "do not use others", along with many other generalities of this kind, do not have the capacity to make people better or philosophers wiser: they do, though, sound so good that whoever puts them nicely enough can count on many imitators and commentators.

selves that was developed by Fichte. The main concept here is the *recognition*; that is, confirmation of the status of thinking and free subjectivity in another person as a condition for one's own humanity. One of the most fruitful lines of development of contemporary philosophy led this discourse into metaphysical territories (Levinas, Derrida, and earlier Rosenzweig and to an extent Heidegger), where the juridical, contractual spirit that still dominates in Hegel gives way to metaphysics and the phenomenology of *unconditionality*, which is expressed in the experience of the meeting of two people as *devotion* and *giving*. In this attempt at moral metaphysics going far beyond the disciplinary ethics of judgements, punishments and rewards from which the Kantian "deontology" is directly derived, good is a metaphysical *event* caused by human behaviour, which is symbolised by acts of saying "please", "thank you" and "sorry". Let us bear this somewhat affected ethics of giving in mind, as we will also come across it in our search for man's ultimate prospects. In the meantime, though, we find ourselves in the juridical, frosty context of a *cession* – unconditioned and inexplicable renouncement of a possible good-for-me, weakening of natural goodwill.

In giving up to someone a good that is available to me, I lose the certainty of my own action and its predictability for others. When I yield the good-for-me to someone else, I also undermine its value. It becomes problematic for me. But if I manage to experience the act of cession and survive without the thing that I have renounced yet which could be a good-for-me, my endurance proves to be stronger than I may have thought, accustomed as I am to the free obedience of my own goodwill. In the moral experience entering the socialisation of the subject a new general moment therefore appears: *unwilling endurance*. In spite of my own will, which calls on me to affirm it as a free wanting of the good-for-me rejected without reason, I am still able to live. "Why aren't you eating?" ask my fellow tribespeople as they devour their prey. "I don't know, I don't feel like it," reply my eyes. The momentary act of denying my own will (which should not be confused with a decision taken after consideration, and thus free), in which I lose my freedom and self-determination, can in terms of its empirical content be something entirely insignificant – a small disturbance of emotions, common "submissiveness" or some kind if indisposition. Yet its moral significance is fundamental. For the cession introduces me to passive and unwitting existence, establishing for me that in the order of experience to which I myself belong as a corporeal being along with all goods-for-me that I know, I transcend the ideal world of necessity, in which there is after all no room for exceptions. If *inexplicability* is one of the attributes of metaphysicality, the unpredictable and inexplicable cession, giving up to another the possible good-for-me, raises the experienced world, my empirical being to the significance of

metaphysical importance. From this moment metaphysics directly invades my experiential existence, which I therefore no longer have to leave in order to *be non-experientially*; metaphysics has entered the course of my life!

Renouncing the good-for-me, although it constitutes a profound foundation of morality, is not yet in itself a strictly moral act. It is close rather to the state of indifference expressed in saying "I'm not bothered". For the first time, though, I obtain moral subjectivity – for as the act of cession is made, my subjectivity receives a two-pronged support. I become convinced that I am capable of surviving without a certain good, without the thing which I usually take, and at the same time, seeing that this time, with my consent, somebody else is taking it, I become *empirically* convinced that the good-for-you and good-for-him is something different from the good-for-me, because other people are different from me, and might desire something different in their own desire, impenetrable to me. The "good-for-you" is no longer your "good-for-me", something that you *should* desire, since I want *my* good-for-me. In the subtle step of my "internal moral metaphysics", to invoke that Kantian phrase, the good-for-you becomes for me a *good-for-another*, something unsuitable for my good-for-me. This good-for-another is no longer desired by me, but I still believe that it is a good. It is a good-beyond-experience, an *other* of experience. It is unknown to me, just like the very figure of "the other", but this is the very reason why I can refer to it in an immediate and affirmative way. This unreal affirmation, free from envy and entirely abstract, is the beginning of my "being outside of experience" – in an affirmative but not cognitive reference to the Idea, which I simply see as a good.

The experience of ceding convinces me that "do not unto others what you would not have them do to you" or "do to others as you would have them do to you" are rules that are purely pragmatic and therefore fallible. Not by everyone, and not everywhere will my adherence to these principles be liked. The order of peace, comprising the separation of people and things (material "goods"), the rules of amicable settlement of conflict and limitation of violence, essential for the survival of free selves reaching independently for their goods, cannot be permanently and effectively based on the assumption that scarce goods should be divided among the members of a community in order to partially satisfy everyone, the result being the avoidance of danger. This is just the latest fallible pragmatic rule whose effectiveness only stretches as far the correctness of the conviction that the *other* wants the same as I do. This is indeed often the case, although only in the sense that a thing that is empirically the same becomes the centre of the constitution of the subjective object of the will (the good-for-me), essentially separate for every wanting I. However, moral relations are based not on recognition of similarity between people, not on counteracting the results of

competition of similar beings for "the same" goods, but on recognition of the otherness of other people and their free will. In the act of cession I discover that I may not want what others want and what they have come to possess in their own will. And it is this ability not to desire things whose external features might indicate that they would be good for me that constitutes the beginning of ethicality, this internal metaphysics of morals, this being outside of experiencing. Not desiring that of others is possible thanks to immediately looking at things in the context of their assignment to that will and that person who has already assimilated them or desires to. It is this ability of looking that is the beginning of greed and possessiveness, as well as the ability to cede, to at least momentary indifference, to things that I do not absolutely need.

In this way, an encounter has taken place between two conditions of primitive justice, expressed in the conclusion-cum-postulate "this is mine, because I want this thing, and that is yours, because you want that thing". To put the matter succinctly, in a psychological projection of its metaphysical meaning, the first condition is assigning good to me myself and to my free will: how could someone want *my will*; that is, want the thing that is good-for-me? The second is the ability to cede: why should I want something that someone else wanted and which is a good-for-another? Indeed, both conditions occur in combination and the attitude to the thing, immediately appropriating it for oneself, intertwines in day-to-day conduct with the naturally and continually occurring cession. It is on this wide platform of the day-to-day attitudes of free subjects that both our internal moral metaphysics and the false moral consciousness and false ethicality whose verbal inconsistencies we experience daily are constituted.

Separating people and things ("goods") opens a space for the construction of a system of justice and formation of the ideals of life that would manage to consolidate this system. However, owing to the capriciousness and chance nature of these inexplicable acts of cession, immersed in empiricism, no system of justice, even one based on some monumental and noble public axiology, can be entirely reliable.[33] This is because there is no way of determining what is

33 Axiological narratives, not to say "value systems", owe their authority to the lasting gap that divides them from the realities of life. Since the great majority of people have no other ethical reflection than an imperfect imitation of the rhetoric of moral construction (that is, moralising narratives), they can always be accused of hypocrisy – after all they say one thing and do another. Unmasking the hypocrisies of this world is an excellent strategy for moralists, since it is based on effective provocation of embarrassment. In fact, though, it is moralising that is hypocritical, as moralists themselves know very well that their discourses have nothing to do with practice, and it is here that the cause of the aforementioned gap lies. The best evidence of this hypocrisy is the far-reaching moderation in moralising when it comes to taking the floor in the typical circumstances

desired by people, and therefore also what is needed, due and essential to them, but which they can do without. It is because the good-for-me and good-for-another are not and cannot be the same that there is no sense in postulating "giving everyone what they are due"; there is no abstract "thing" that is a priori a "good in general" or "objective good" before becoming wanted by something. This postulate can indeed be made on the basis of a justice system that has been adopted *symbolically*, but not in an absolute sense. For the will is not affected by what is *due* to me, but itself defines something as a good due to me, as a good-for-me. And it is this will, and not the judgement of justice, that is the measure here. And it is for this reason, owing to its arbitrariness, that every *system of justice*, as something based on convention, is notoriously and fundamentally unjust, while its appearance of justice results from the very (usually illusory) form of the convention as well as the egalitarian factors that always occur in such an abstract system. We say "there is no justice in this world". And rightly so. For it is the will itself that is capable of dividing people and the goods due to them, but this is never done by any rule of division or law regulating ownership and claims to it. Of course, it does sometimes happen that the acts of will of two people match, and this is accompanied by the sense that justice has been served, yet more frequently in the face of competition over the same good the "rule of justice" must come into effect, which does not satisfy anyone and leaves everyone with the almost inarticulable sense that justice has not been done at all.[34]

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of moral conflict. Using ethical platitudes in day-to-day conversation and dazzling one's interlocutors with them is inappropriate and indecent behaviour. Why? Because everybody knows that moralising is streaked with falsehood. Falsehood is based on the fact that the apodictic axiology, which can incidentally in many cases be appropriate, concerns concepts and values, and not interpersonal conduct and relations. Real practices can by all means be juxtaposed with ideals, just as the roads we travel can be juxtaposed with the ideal curves described and studied by geometry. And just as we can accept the general directive of walking – "try to go straight to your goal" – we can also accept general moral suggestions like "respect other people's property" or "keep your word". But this is all. When it comes to details, ethical or geometric generalities are no more than an advisory voice coming from afar.

34 This is illustrated extremely well by the famous rule of division of berries. This rule states that when two people want to divide berries between themselves fairly but have no scales or dish for splitting them equally and as a result are left to their own judgement, they should proceed by one person dividing the berries into two piles and the other choosing one of them. But the whole "justice" of this procedure is based on false assumptions, although these are hard to challenge during the course of the suggested procedure and afterwards. The first of these states that it would be fair to divide the fruit equally. This rule is purely negative, and only establishes the fact that

Let us remind ourselves of what happens on the threshold of morality, when from not wanting we are affected by the authentically negative freedom of *not wanting*. The ability to acknowledge the division of people and goods that emerges in wanting and not wanting (cession) will soon become the beginning of a system of justice which essentially cannot itself be fair. Although the discourse of justice is the most fundamental form of ethical speech and a constantly gushing source of public morality, it is a poisoned source, and the public morality based on it is unerringly false. One cannot determine "what is due to whom", and this is not only because of lack of knowledge, but simply because it is impossible to be the subject of *someone else's* will and state *what kind* of good a given thing is. It becomes a good in the light of the inscrutable will of a specific person who is unconditioned and is not subject to objectivising expectation or standardisation. As a result of the fundamental subjectivity of the

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we are lacking an efficiently enforced rule allowing us to differentiate our claims to the divided good. Such a rule could be the will itself (the strength of the desire), merit, need etc. – but in any case there would be the difficulty of judging the significance and size of the individual factors. The second false premise is the suggestion that the concern that I might lose out, or the sense of justice, will compel me to make efforts to ensure the two piles I make are equal. Yet this is by no means necessarily the case, as I might not want us to share the berries equally or consider this to be fair. According to the third premise, the one who is choosing should not have any complaints. Perhaps that person "should not", and is in an awkward position if he or she wants to argue that the final result is unfair. Yet neither choosing the pile of berries which seemed bigger to the person making the choice is something fair, nor is necessarily choosing one that seemed equal to the other one but in fact was not. The intuition that the rule of division of berries is fair is based solely on familiarity with hypocrisy. We pretend that justice is simply a question of applying a rule – that is, reliability – and not something objective. We pretend that if we are in a situation in which we cannot protest, the very object of this protest disappears. And finally, we pretend that we are convinced that each of us is ready to accept greater benefits than others and will not deem such an inequality as unfair. The multi-layered falsehood accompanying this famous procedure with the berries illustrates the paradox of justice which as a certain ideal cannot be fulfilled, although it is an idea of something that should be fulfilled (and not remain "just an ideal"), and cannot even exist as an ideal (since it proves to be precisely a *false ideal*). Justice therefore contains a certain fundamental contradiction. Yet this does not stop it developing into a system as a certain false consciousness. The synthesis of subjective will with the objective rule that is demanded by justice cannot be realised. But this is the reason why justice is something that can still be *demanded*. Moreover, one can be sure that it will remain, like some true ideal, reliable and inviolable in the fact that it will always appear as a postulate, and not a "factual state". And incidentally, anyone who has read John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* will know that this is nothing more than an expanded "berry theory"…

will and its freedom in setting itself an object, the good cannot consistently act as an *object with a value*. All the procedures that objectivise the value of a thing for some standardised or statistical will are blatant abstractions that do not match the subjective reality of the will. Pre-moral will cannot make itself into something ethical by introducing the definitions ("significances") of good (good things) to a universal system of legal norms and rules of redistribution. In this essential in-justice lies an important cause of the permanent lack of success of moral discourse and ethics itself which were discussed above. Another cause is the brutality of moralising, trading in axiological concepts and seeking to "bring them down to earth"; that is, apply them to the phenomena of moral life.

However, the system of justice is not the only result of the human ability to give up something that might for someone else turn out to be a desired good. Remember: the self-contained nature of a human subject, which endures in spite of renouncement of a thing capable of becoming a good for him or her and for another person, in spite of the weakening of the will, opens up his or her *metaphysical being*. For it is here, outside of the experience of the will, outside of activity, that the person is filled with the *positive passivity* in which reflection and *endurance* turned towards oneself are possible. This is glorified by ethical discourse as the ideal of modesty, making do with little or liberation from one's needs, although in fact cession is not the same as limiting of needs. Limiting one's needs is a certain decision in the personal economy of the will, but not the weakening or stifling of it that go with the cession. The language of our cultural axiology obscures these rather indistinct states of our lives, which are passive and inexplicable and thus too difficult to articulate. Cession is included in the system of ideals supporting our system of justice as a value and virtue. It is ultimately supposed to be about renouncing egoism and greed and about generosity expressed in giving. In this way, though, a simple and selfless cession is interpreted as a particular act of freedom, in which a person rises above his natural impulses and above his egoism, leaving or giving to others that which he could claim or leave to himself. From the point of view of public morality, any manifestations of good and bad are included in the great system of exchange of goods, and thus in the system of justice. Lightening the load of the system by withdrawing one's own claims for a share in the goods means relief and more room for manoeuvre in this economy of justice. It therefore gives rise to gratitude and is rewarded as magnanimousness. Yet these plaudits are just a symptom of the inefficiency of the system of justice itself and the whole discourse of public ethics focused on it. In praising somebody for withdrawing their claims or increasing the pool of goods to share, we express the sense that moral life is all about satisfying the claims of people who were essentially unable to rise above their own egoism and to willingly abandon their claims.

Anyone who does abandon them is therefore held up as a paragon. So what was supposed to be ethicality itself – the system of justice – proves to be a system of self-defence from the fundamental immorality of the members of the supposed moral community, just as can be seen in the example of the rule of division of berries.[35] In fact, this is how the self-knowledge of civil law as a certain sanctioned sub-system of the justice system looks – civil law is necessary for morally imperfect people and is in fact fitting, or even authorises morally impure motivations and self-interest, if only the contracts whose execution becomes the object of the dispute are fair and willing. Yet it is a different matter with public morality and ethics. The functionality and applicability of moral and ethical sciences assumes that although everyone is morally imperfect, they should make efforts to be better and closer to perfection. However, in the logic of formation of fair relations there is no impulse for moral perfection; on the contrary, fair relations consolidate self-interest, egoism and suspicion in relation to all claims to privileged treatment, including moral claims. Egalitarianism is simply a use of social systems of justice, while "equally" almost never means "fairly", not to mention it meaning "nobly" or "virtuously".

A cession is a common and primal phenomenon. It is not the same as a gift or sacrifice, which constitute the prototypical object of moral praise. Ceding is, though, an introduction to a gift and the condition of its possibility. A gift and a sacrifice can have different statuses. They are not always noble and are not always acts of love. If they are not, they become close to cession. If they are, they take on their own, distinct and higher moral significance. In every case, however, a gift contains the same unconditionality as a cession and contains a cession in itself – even if it is connected with a heroic renouncement and dedication.

35 The system of justice is therefore ethically incoherent, and therefore, in spite of rhetorical efforts, it ultimately becomes a legal-political area. Incorporated in it is praise for the ability to stifle one's egoism, and at the same time the principle of universalisation which states that conduct or an attitude meriting praise should be a model for everyone. Yet the generosity or magnanimousness associated with restricting the rule of acting for one's own benefit can come to the fore only when somebody agrees to accept a gift, in this way acting for their own benefit. The moral commonness of one (poor) person becomes a condition of the moral perfection and source of the splendour of another (rich) one. Alongside the repulsion of gratitude which recipients do not wish to experience (as something that belittles them) this is the second main reason for which the system of justice soon loses its (false) moral features and degenerates into a social contract defining the entitlements of some (impoverished or members of the once underprivileged classes) and the related duties of others (richer or members of the once privileged classes). The essence of this contract is eschewing repossession on the condition of peaceful transferral of goods in the name of justice. And awkward virtues – generosity and capability of gratitude – are put out to pasture once and for all.

A gift does not care for its own virtue and the praise coming from withdrawal of claims in the system of apparently objectivised and arbitrarily valued goods that is the system of justice, the basis of our common false ethicality. A gift is not incorporated in any series of transactions and is not subject to valuation. Something given cannot be returned in the currency of ethical praise, added in the deficit economy of justice as a reserve or an unexpected income. And gifts are therefore anathematised from it as an alien incursion coming from another, non-contractual, un-just order. Gratitude, which does not pay back for a gift, but emerges from it, sounds like an ethical scandal. But this is why it is such an important manifestation of internal moral metaphysics. A gift is an event in which a passive cession, becoming part of the false economy of justice without any resistance, turns into a *partiality* that transcends and ignores this economy and is fundamentally un-just. In the act of giving the good-for-me transforms into a good-for-you: I give something, something in which I myself find a liking, expecting that now you will enjoy this thing. But this is not a transformation of my "good-for-me" into your "good-for-me", since, in accordance with the subjective nature of the will, that which is wanted by me cannot be *the same* as that which is wanted by you. It is rather me, possessing the thing as a good-for-me, who changes it into a good-for-you, albeit still keeping it by myself, but keeping it from now on "for you". Storing a thing designated for someone else, I no longer enjoy it in itself, but the fact that the person chosen by me will receive it. What really happens in an act of giving is the definition of the will not in my desire, but in the *desire of another person*. In the expectation of the act of giving, *I expect* that the thing given will please the recipient, that he or she will want it. In this anticipation I therefore move into the recipient person and find myself in that person as a subject of will: may my will be in you! I, on the other hand, turn into the object, which this transferred will should want. In the act of giving I therefore give myself as a good-for-you – I declare the readiness to be constituted as the object of your will, to an extent given to you by me, together with the offered thing; with the gift I say "in taking this thing, want me". Offering myself, I guarantee that my free will, transferred to you by means of the given thing, here and now becomes the will not of my good, but of yours; after all, I am giving the best thing I have: my own wanting-good-for me self.

And this is how my goodwill is liberated from its own subjectivity, achieving generality in the exchange of subjects: instead of me, it is you, desiring the given thing, that become the subject of the will, finding a liking in the gift, from beyond which I shine through as the giver and as the good-for-you, as your new "good-for-me": at the same time, through the act of giving, you too become a good-for-me which I win. As a result, the given object disappears from between us, and the will of the giver and the recipient turn

towards each other in a common, composite act. Towards each other as the response to the gift, breaking the goodwill of the giver and changing it into the will of good, is the readiness of the recipient of the gift to do the same; essentially, the acceptance of the gift is itself a gift, the gift of acceptance of a gift, an act which is all the more difficult as it is to an extent enforced by the circumstances. The giver and the recipient of the gift choose each other as goods-for-themselves, encompassed by one common will, in which they can entrust themselves to each other and rest in each other. The essence of this mutual and complete act of giving (which by definition is an act of love, although it can be an entirely trivial incident in the course of day-to-day experiences) is a momentary triumph of two people over the will, which at this instant cannot be wholly and solely about their everyday and ordinary greed. For a moment these people ("lovers") are occupied with each other, not seeing any concrete goods around themselves. The world ceases to exist for them, and they disappear for the world, disconnected from ethicality based on the rules of justice. And it is through this disconnection that gifts and the love that goes with giving are an ethical scandal.[36]

As we see, moral metaphysics comes true outside of morality and its inept, contradictory discourses. It is something spontaneous for itself, yet from the point of view of an ethically constituted society aspiring to justice it seems morally *consequential* and at the same time *problematic*. At times it appears as the multiplied and generalised egoism of the lovers excluding themselves from the society, and at others as a noble existence in which self-interest turns into selflessness, greed into generosity, competition into harmony, and concern for oneself into a heavenly accord of beings ready to forget about themselves. These contradictory judgements correspond to the ambivalence of the loving relationship, initiated by a gift, which in its natural dynamic after all does not lack the appropriation of the other I, self-humiliation, jealousy and other painful factors thanks to which the subject of the will with time regains its normal egological efficiency, its individual goodwill. And yet once expanded to the other subject, my personal teleology will never return to the animal state in which the immediacy of

36 Yet the public ethos cannot deprecate the gift, which remains for it an unattainable moral horizon, a prick to the conscience, and also, simply, a good example, seeming to consolidate the general capability of cession, whose acts increase the capital found in the disposition of fair stewards. This is why public morality cannot afford to condemn gifts, as a result of which, in a deceitful inversion, it devotes itself to affirming them as a sign of generosity. It even happens that in public life parodies or imitations of acts of giving are arranged which are accompanied by a "discourse of justice", namely in the form of an appeal for solidarity with the needy in the name of caution that comes from being mindful of the possibility that we might in future need help ourselves.

the will becomes the immediacy of action and fulfilment. It is now placed on the side of generality, going beyond my own subject and beyond experience, in the sphere of moral approach, where the material content of the object of wanting, and with it considerations of justice, lose meaning entirely.

In the giving love, in the "ethicality of the heart", which reaches far beyond the ethicality of obligations of justice and even enters into conflict with it, the will of the good-for-me is generalised in a double abstraction: from my person as the one and only subject of the will for me and from the specific character of what is good, that is the desired thing. The will, which ultimately wants itself, is objectified in love, i.e. defined in the other subject, although this cannot be objectified since it by no means loses its independence, but strengthens it in the loving mutual recognition of the giver and the recipient. This modus of the will, which first comes to the fore through a cession, and then changes into a gift of love, is called *good will*. But essentially it is not the will that is good here, since it is as it is, as we said before, simple and *innocent*, invariably "outside of good and bad". It would be better to say that the will, wanting good-for-me, thanks to my *inexplicable acts* detached from this simple subjectivity, becomes an abstract *will of good*. We should therefore rather use the term "the will of good" or "the will of the good", and not "good will".

The will of good does not possess a specific plan or design. There is no interest or foresight in it. It also does not mean groping for the Highest Good. For its essence and incentive are not unfulfilment, as Plato puts it in his *Symposium*, and after him countless Christian writers, but it is the incentive itself.[37] From a speculative point of view (which plays solely an auxiliary role in

37 The error of tradition is indeed dramatic here. Plato and the scholastics imagined that the general "erotic" orientation of the soul towards good matures through the next, ever more perfect ideas of what is worthy of love. The next goods are therefore taken into account by the loving subject and then abandoned for the more perfect good. Ultimately, of course, what remains is that which is by definition the Highest Good; that is, God. The greedy Eros abandons all his lovers for the ultimate Lover. If Christianity somehow adopted this vulgar conception of love as appropriation in the search for fulfilment (Plato still speaks of "possession" and "giving birth in beauty"), this is probably as a result of the paralogism which states that since some finite and imperfect goods exist, then they cannot be so intrinsically, but solely through their participation in or similarity to the Highest Good. Only the fervour of sated desire can justify such a way of thinking. For in eternal unfulfilment emerges the idea of something which is ultimately able to satisfy us. Yet there is no logic in this. The deficiencies of individual goods do not prove the existence of a perfect good, and the qualification of some good through the subject of the thing does not result from its ontological connection to the Good Itself, but from the will of the one who desires it and has voluntarily made this thing the object of his desire. I don't desire a Mercedes instead of a Trabant because the

meditating philosophy!) the will, becoming a general will of good, regains itself, i.e. returns to its essence. It is the will, simple and immediate, essentially general, and therefore also without subject. Therefore, as long as it is still manifested in the individual subject, which experiences it as a free will of good-for-me – that is, goodwill – it yields to a restriction that constitutes its negation. The freedom of the existential individual appropriates and takes over the general freedom of the will as such. This is why it appears individually in the form of a contradiction: for me to be free, my freedom must give me orders or I must give orders to my freedom; individualised freedom appears in the form of an oxymoron. I must fight for the freedom of my individual will by myself ordering it. But I cannot avoid the ordering itself as such. This restriction is a consequence of the individualisation of the will; that is, its being closed in the space of individual experience. Only with its liberation from the ego is the will returned to its appropriate essence which is generality. The impulse of love in which I negate myself by giving myself with the thing that is offered means that individual goodwill turns into the real and general *will of good.*

Since in the act of giving the thing that is offered becomes entirely insignificant, the will of good turns straight to the person of the human being as subject and object; that is, the whole whose being enclosed in itself as a certain subject and whose being enclosed in itself as a certain object is now overcome. This whole is "you and I", because only together can we overcome the false metaphysics of one-sided substances enclosed in their immanences. Liberation from the falsehood of the "thing in itself", which finally ceases to be as a result of the act of giving oneself and accepting a gift, means moving to the unreality of being not-for-oneself-in-oneself, being together-in-good. Moral metaphysics is therefore opened precisely at the place where the metaphysics of substance is negated, and with it the greedy teleology of salvation and the absolute and the self-interested ethicality of justice. It is found, outside of itself, in the domain of in-justice, self-less-ness, where I am no longer governed by the economy of lust, competition and seeking the ultimate goal. In the wasteful co-being in the other, my own will and the objects chosen by my desire are blurred and lose their last semblances of reality. For they no longer represent the rungs of a hypothetical ladder leading to the goal and ultimate fulfilment. The newly subjectless will, restored to generality, in which I coexist with my fellow human, does not appear to me as a pyramid of objectives with absolute pleasure or absolute solace. I am

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Mercedes bears a closer resemblance to God, but because I like it more, and I like it more because it is better. As for Plato and his *Symposium*, of course climbing up the rungs of maturing and growing more serious, from sex to religious rapture, does not mean that when we reach the highest rungs we neglect the lower ones. It is not "this and only this" that is good, but always "this, that and that too"…

free from the desire for the immortality that is necessary for absolute consumption of the infinite good-for-me, since I am free from the desire for good-for-me. I am free from the desire for disappearance, nirvana, as I no longer fear the infinite suffering of my forever insatiable will. My will, after all, though invariably active and insatiable, is no longer wholly mine, and does not fully appropriate me, since I have learnt to survive outside of it, watching as it flows past me – first in the primitive act of cession, and then in the sublimated act of giving and the sophisticated relationship of love. The freedom for which I had to fight to the end and unconditionally, desiring that which I desired, and thus established as the real subject of my will, is now outside of me. It is I who am in-the-freedom, and not it in me; I have dispelled the false and contradictory idea of freedom as my own most profound essence which compels me to affirm it as "free necessity". In my metaphysical being, in being outside of experiencing the impulses of the will and its fulfilments or lack thereof, I free myself from the dialectic of freedom and bondage which governed me when I was fighting for self-recognition and the recognition of others, when I was fighting for the good-for-me (and thus ultimately for salvation), justice, and above all for freedom under the pillory of the compulsion of wanting. In metaphysical ethicality, I lose the desire for salvation and desire for liberation from the oppression of the will and the resultant tortures of the soul. I remain *with the other* with whom I have become linked through a gift, and perhaps by a promise. My concept of what is good for me has become blurred. My teleology is fragmented and disorientated. I don't know what I want, but I don't need to know exactly. This is because the will or good is general, and concerns me and you, but not the things that I can possess and experience, which can affect me.

The will of good is not governed by the logic of increasing reserves and the arduous advance to the heights of happiness up to ultimate solace, liberation and ecstasy, contrary to the impossibilities understood as the unity of the salutary state. The will of good is not linear and unidirectional. It is not determined by the location of the stars on the horizon of values. For its fulfilment and satisfaction lies in itself and together with it. The will of good does not exult, but rejoices in what is close and what we can reach together by giving to each other. As such it is a *happy will*, whereas the primitive goodwill was still a *will for happiness*.

The freedom of the will comes to the fore in the will of good directly and in a much more complete way that in the goodwill enclosed in its own substantiality and in the egoism of the subject. The will of good is free for itself – in choosing first this, then that, like Adam and Eve in the Paradise imagined by Milton. The will of good is a capricious will, and it is in this flightiness that it manifests its freedom. It does not enter the supposed reality of intrinsic goods waiting for me to appropriate them, but effortlessly occupies the vast expanse of

nothingness which it fills *ex nihilo* with unreal value, in its strange certainty that it possesses such power – the power of *kindness*. The will of good is thus creative – but creating not according to a plan, but to hope.

Hope is the emergence of my existence beyond its experiential substance, beyond its egological teleology, towards that empty generality which I want (hope) to fill with the good-in-general, another, better content. I draw it from myself, because it is in myself, enduring beyond experience and unwillingly, capable of cession and giving, that I find the metaphysical base of my values. Hope is not the expectation of a specific good or state, just as betterness is not an ideal defined in such a way, larger than any other ideal with which it is objectively compared. Hope is in itself a hope-for-betterness – a general constitutive intentionality guiding me towards good, beyond my own freedom, beyond my goodwill, beyond my egoistic plans and dreams of good-for-me. In hope I go beyond my own will, which orders specific desires for me. In hope I am no longer a being struggling for my own freedom and the recognition by others of my independent personality, but I renounce myself, certain of my survival despite this renouncement. Forgetting myself in a gift returns to me my immediate being in which I *freely* express myself, freely present myself towards the external and negative side of the experienced world, as something that is *from me* and in which I have my have my own creative role.[38] In willingly becoming a good-for-you, I free myself towards generality, which is fundamentally *better* than the shallow experiential, empirical will and its objective definitions. In this *betterness* my being takes place with the hope and faith, bordering on certainty, that I am not on this unreal and high plane only once, that I will not have to once and for all and wholly fall back into the egological teleology, with its logic of greed, reaching right to the imagined absolute. The good that appears in the light of hope is no longer a specific object or state of affairs, and it is also not a shadow of the Highest Good, but just *remaining* in the freedom and unconditioning of the Idea. It is in this state of remaining that my will, now facing generality, finds fulfilment. The shape of this fulfilment is not the idea and taking possession of the desired object (even of Good itself), but reconciliation with oneself and others on the basis of common ethicality, beyond the false, economic ethicality of justice. When I go beyond my goodwill, beyond the good-for-me, any "thing that is good

38 Kant understood this creative role in the spiritual sphere as the "legislativeness" of practical reason, working for the reason of good will. We already know that this is not about the discipline of obligations and legal compulsion. However, since the time when Kant ascribed legislative power to good will, philosophy has never again lost sight of the axiological agency of human beings. It has, though, been conceived in a generally quasi-empirical way, as a type of life – namely as a "spiritual life" (e.g. Dilthey), whereas life here is an entirely misleading metaphor.

in itself" disappears. The will of good, taking on the shape of hope-for-better, is not defined as an object or state. It does not designate a plan of action, grades and hierarchies, intrinsic and indirect objectives, a system of justice or anything at all that can be viewed as an array of empirical and metaphysical instances wielding an individual teleology experiencing its life and free in the I wanting good-for-myself. In the light of this moral metaphysics, expressed in moving away from experienced life, with hope, towards that which is better – in a word, expressed in the will of good – the "experienced world" falsely perceived as something fundamentally *non-metaphysical*, together with its whole false metaphysics and false ethics, sinks into nothingness. The suffering existence of the free I, fighting with myself and others for self-recognition and social recognition, overwhelmed by the incoherent desire for salvation and freedom from the compulsion of wanting, proves to be a mere projection of false metaphysical and moral consciousness, a spectre which has been suggested to me as reality. Liberated towards unreal generality, I no longer have to worry about "reality" or any other metaphysical instances. At the same time I can live freely in the bed of experience, certain that in it I now present my being non-experientially, that in it my being is metaphysical, able to easily and safely plunge into the *oblivion* of that which is outside life, in the Idea itself. Hope brings me to the kingdom of unconsciousness and lack of knowledge which is mine, although in it I experience nothing, do not feel, do not remember. Just as in my experienced life I do not fear falling asleep, in my metaphysical, moral being I have no fear that the good that I affirm will not be embodied as Being and will not fill my soul with its salutary presence.

A calm will of good gives my incidental and often ineffective acts the mark of this *betterness* in which I commune with others through hope, giving and love. In this way my actions take on a symbolic importance, beyond the economy of justice and purpose, beyond the teleology and theology of the Highest Good. The will of good itself manifests me in a good, permitting me to endure beyond any wanting objectified in a desire object. Through the simple absence of bad that my mundane fight for recognition is, together with all its metaphysical and ethical arsenal of lies and delusions, I exist in good.

Enduring in good is not governed by any practical reason, and the Idea is not "the kingdom of purposes". Hope is not the hope of salvation, and freedom is not a free imposition of compulsion on oneself. The Idea is im-practical, and my non-experiential being in hope does not strive for anything specific. Its empirical side therefore seems to be an inconsistency, impracticality, lack of ambition. Enduring in good is open-handed and alogical. It is filled by generous affection and a surplus of hopes needing no authentication. The will of good knows one imperative: "may it be better!" Not for me, not for you, not for us – just that

things may be better *in general*! This means: although we continue to be flooded by the waves of daily empirical existence and the false ethical and metaphysical consciousness that goes with it, after every surge of egological experiences and discourses comes an ebb that reveals the unreal nothingness, and with this the possibility of giving and love re-emerges, without resistance, again and again filling this nothingness with acts of value. The teleology of the free man liberated from freedom released from the illusory metaphysical orders of "reality", "salvation" and justice", is not concentrated on any project, but relies on chance, on a "throw of the dice". It is scattered and wasteful, ready to affirm its own specific and finite nature, which is after all a certain form of manifestation of that which remains infinite through its lack of specificity. A free self, living with love and hope, is not too concerned for its own fortunes in the visible world, yet is pleased when able to use finite forms of things that can be possessed to make them into symbols and bearers of betterness. The good-for-me of a free person turns into a "generous good", i.e. a potential gift. The generous good is for-me, for-you, for-everyone. It is its very generosity, and not participation in the Highest Good, that makes it so good and authentic. Hope and the will of good do not need the promise of a reward, the support of grace or validation by similarity to the absolute. Hierarchical orders, dispositions of rule and dependence, advances and humiliations belong to the world of experienced existences, isolated and waging a painful battle for recognition, overwhelmed by lust reaching even to the invented beyond. The will of good silences this lamenting and uproarious pandemonium. It does not seek emotions or calm, does not seek company or seclusion, does not desire to live as long as it can and does not await death, does not tremble in fear of God or swoon in the hope of eternal happiness – it is happy with anything to which it is able to give the shape of good; that is, change into a gift, transform into an unreal value.

We should not think that the will of good is contemptuous of life. Quite the opposite, in fact. It is through it that the human being is at home, also in this empirical, or perhaps rather oneiric order of the experiences flowing through him, in his kingdom of finiteness. In concrete experiencing, good is defined and materialises, taking on a certain sensual or even aesthetic content. In the scheme of empirical objectivisation, good therefore obtains its *measure*. And this is crucial for preserving the difference between good and better, in order for maintaining hope. It is in this constant comparing and contrasting that the moral sense of human practices is expressed. The starting point of every action is a certain evil which we hope to lessen. And this is why the victorious good is a *betterness*, or fulfilment of the hope that things will be better. Since the triumph of good in the world is always temporary and illusory, as noble acts force good into the finite and transitory shapes of experiences and states of affairs, hope is

always current, and a good itself in fact does not triumph here, but invariably there – in the Idea. A good act, symbolically mediating the Idea in the experienced life, is the kind that is manifested as better than another, i.e. the kind in which one can interpret a stronger, more certain determination for a better, stronger and more generous hope. This has little in common with motivation or sense of obligation, with the entire order designated by the intentions, means and consequences of the act. These abstract instances only allow us to form judgements on the basis of the system of justice. But there is no truth in them about human conduct, which except for the certainty of the will of good does not know itself, let alone the significance of its effects – there is no such truth in them because no such truth exists. Our actions are not ethical because we know what we are doing and do what we ought to, but because we choose something better than we have so far known. Not because we remain obedient towards moral law, but because through giving, love and hope we go beyond our own goodwill towards a common and general *better*, despite the obviousness of the bad. The notable and objectively conceived contents of the acts, and even (if it were possible), also the specific content of their motivations and results, does not give any certain insight into their relationship with good and bad. At best it gives deceptive and unreliable circumstantial evidence. It is a similar matter with obligation – what we are obliged or ought to do because of duty or custom by no means must be a choice of what is best. The faith of some philosophers that this is the case, and therefore the idea that normativity has a certain fundamental layer which can be viewed as ethical, and thus that it is a certain "you should definitely and absolutely, out of pure, original obligation", is essentially a dangerous and superstitious claim. Sooner or later it always leads to one thing – to the usurpation that this or that author or one or another religion knows the intrinsic core and model of all obligation, some "moral law" or "natural law". And it is at these peaks of hubris that ethical discourse experiences perhaps its greatest embarrassments. Any normativity – from "pure obligation" to the rule of a tyrant – is apodictic, and thus questionable. For to every "that is how it is" one can – and often should – respond with the question "but why?" Invariably the riposte is "because I want it this way or "because it's good like that". And to this the answer is often "but I want differently, and I think another way is good". So this path leads from irreproachable and absolute morality to a straightforward confrontation of forces. Even if it is not violence that ultimately decides this conflict, in any case the threat of it does, along with interest and considerations of security and the public order. The transcendental rules of all normativity legitimise a normative order not as a positive good, but as the least evil – safeguarding against anarchy and violence. Do we need any better proof that in the domain of life "good" is always "better", and this better is always the removal of a certain evil?

Anyone who in imposing laws says otherwise about their nature is only consolidating that unhappy false metaphysical and ethical consciousness which I am trying to debunk in this treatise.

Good is never positively achieved or realised. It is invariably *intended*, invoked or summoned in life, but in the name of what is outside of life – in the name of the Idea. Good is unreal, i.e. independent of the whim of "realisation" or "non-realisation". This is why it cannot be seen or otherwise experienced – we only commune with its *measurable traces*. Metaphysical good itself, meanwhile, moves away and disperses in the face of every experiential or, all the more, empirical specificity, marked unconsciously and negatively in the scheme of measurable experiences – as betterness, as improvement, shifting evil towards its nothingness.[39] Good makes itself known when the evil of our

39 The classic question of whether evil is something positive, (that is, whether it possesses its own reality, or whether it is solely a certain appearance connected with the limitations of our ability to conceive and experience, or perhaps simply the lack of good), is misplaced. For it is posed metaphysically, boiling down to the question if evil "really" is (is "real") or not. And such a question is simply absurd. Anyone who has ever had a toothache knows that the pain was real, and not pretend. The nothingness (negativity) of evil is about the fact that it is not a "substance" or "reality", because nothing is it – truly, nothing more trivial. The problem of evil is just as good an opportunity as any other (e.g. the question of the final validation of knowledge or that of the "thing in itself") to become convinced that metaphysics is a mishmash of paralogisms and abuses. Evil and good intrude on us, i.e. they interfere with the only "reality", which is simply the lives we experience, from "that side", which is "nothingness" to life, i.e. the mute non-experiential domain, ideal or – as we call it here – "unreal". Defined as an experience or state of affairs, therefore being realised, both evil and good take on the form of a sign or trace that inclines us to imagine the Highest Good or Evil (Satan) as "transcendent reality" and a source of good and evil, as they are experienced by us. The fragility and fleetingness of all experiences of life that fill up our time also strengthens in us a, so to speak, Platonic-Manichean vision. Yet in the fear of giving too threatening a shape to evil (indeed, better than calling the wolf out of the woods), we search feverously for a unipolar metaphysics where in the role of Being there is only Good, while evil is pushed into the dark void of the ontic lowlands or "lack of good". In this way, false metaphysics changes into a naïve theodicia; that is, "cursing evil". In short, experiencing good or evil is "real" to greater or lesser extents, but good and evil themselves are unreal. Experiencing good and evil is done as an awareness that things are "worse" or "better", so comparatively and relatively. We say "it's worse" or "it's better" when we are suffering or when we stop suffering. As an aspect of life, evil and good are in motion. They are a real reality of our experience, like a pain, and unreal in the sense of our experiences themselves – variable and fleeting. Only moral metaphysics discovers in this movement from the worse to the better (and vice versa) a meaning going beyond just experiencing, not excluding salutary experiences. And the features of this meaning or what we have just been looking at.

falsified existence, defined by the mirages of false and amoral metaphysics, disperses into nothingness. The destruction of evil comes from the side that is absent for us, barely flickering in the experience of good. In silence and without witness the unfelt good overcomes the felt evil.

Ethics, immersed in the domain of the visible, hanging on tightly to the order of experiences, feelings, desired and undesired states of affairs, empirical effects and circumstances of acts, itself blocks off the path to understanding good. Good, being an act and accomplishment of the will of good, is neither visible nor even defined. Emerging from the will, it is itself like this – unconditioned and free. This is why human teleology does not have any necessity or any hidden structure. Good is just done, rhapsodically and incidentally. Its traces always *appear* here and now, leaving an imprint in the will itself as the will of good. They appear unexpectedly and independently, as an epiphany shrouded in hope. One cannot count here on any perfection or endurance of the result – the will of good, going from the heights of abstraction to the detail of concrete wanting, is narrowed and spoiled: but preserved within it, nonetheless, is an absolute moment – this is hope, leaning towards betterness and towards the Idea itself, felt in the experience of sublimity.

Good is not governed by the norms or other laws of consistency, but by a continually regenerating independent hope for *betterness* in ourselves and between us. Those among us who are able to waste themselves generously in the will of good, who do not fear emptiness but attain it for themselves and others, filling it with noble things which they elevate above life in life itself – these people are truly free and happy. They do not fear nothingness or death, nor misfortune and distress. They live in the hope that they fulfil in themselves, through the will of good and a beautiful character. Do not expect any other Messiahs.

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> Good is to be found neither in the sermons of religious teachers and prophets […], nor in the ethical systems of philosophers… And yet ordinary people bear love in their hearts, are naturally full of love and pity for any living thing. […] Even at the most terrible times […] this senseless, pathetic kindness remained scattered throughout life like atoms of radium. […] The powerlessness of kindness, of senseless kindness, is the secret of its immortality. It can never be conquered. The more stupid, the more senseless, the more helpless it may seem [...] This dumb, blind love is man's meaning. Human history is not the battle of good struggling to overcome evil. It is a battle fought by a great evil struggling to crush a small kernel of human kindness. But if what is human in human beings has not been destroyed even now, then evil will never conquer.[40]

40 Grossman, Vasily, *Life and Fate*, trans. Robert Chandler (London: Vintage, 2006), pp. 391-392, 394 "Ikonnikov's scribble".

Index

The index contains entries referring to subjects and people. Subject entries refer to terms that play an important role in the treatise, a significance that is not reflected in the table of contents or made obvious by the themes of the book. Therefore, the index does not included entries such as “being”, “substance”, “metaphysics” or “scepticism”. An exception has been made for the terms “knowledge” and “truth”, in light of their importance for the whole book and the fact that the analyses connected to these concepts are dispersed throughout.

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