The Schism in Philosophy is an introduction to a mode of philosophizing rather than simply a history of philosophical questions and the responses proposed to them. Historically there have been two contrasting modes of philosophizing: the communal mode of the Hellenic world and the individualistic mode of the post-Roman West. What the Greeks sought was the “criterion of truth”: a thing was true when it did not change or decay. Whereas existents themselves are ephemeral and subject to decay, the mode of their coexistence is the rationality of harmony and beauty, and this mode of being renders the universe a cosmos, a thing of ordered beauty. Consequently, the Greeks found their criterion of truth—that upon which they founded philosophy—not only in changelessness but also in the communal verification of knowledge: a thing was true if it could be defined as the result of shared experience. In contrast, in the Western tradition truth was a product of the individual’s intellectual capacity—sufficient on its own to guarantee the possession of knowledge—rather than a product of communal verification; for Western philosophers truth was defined as “the coincidence of the perceived object with its intellectual conception” (adaequatio rei et intellectus). This book’s purpose is to trace the divergent paths along which philosophy developed in the Hellenic and the Western traditions as a result of this fundamental schism.

“Christos Yannaras . . . is perhaps one of the most significant Christian philosophers in Europe.”

Rowan Williams, Former Archbishop of Canterbury

“Yannaras’s role has been extraordinarily important in Greece, where he has radically renewed the cultural perception of religious discourse with the power and freshness of his thinking. One might think that the value and importance of his work is of a theological rather than a philosophical nature. That is not in fact the case. Yannaras’s reflections on philosophical questions have always been central to his endeavor, not only because he refuses to separate philosophical from theological discourse, but because in its Christian form salvation has an ontological content and structure.”

Basilio Petrà
Professor of Moral Theology, Faculty of Theology of Central Italy (Florence)

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Against Religion
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CHRISTOS YANNARAS

THE SCHISM IN PHILOSOPHY
THE HELLENIC PERSPECTIVE AND ITS WESTERN REVERSAL

Translated by
Norman Russell

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Preface

This book has no ambition to be a general introduction to philosophy as a whole, or to all the philosophical debates that have been conducted in the course of human history. Its primary character is not historical, nor does it deal exhaustively with all the philosophical approaches relating to the topics touched upon in its pages. Its methodology is abstractive and synthetic rather than comparative and analytical, which means that much is abstracted from the vast amount of material provided by the history of philosophy (forgoing a full discussion of the variety of approaches) in order to realize a synthesis that adequately introduces the reader to the fundamental questions of philosophy and to the more important methods (with regard to their historical consequences) of confronting these questions.

This book, then, is an outline introduction to a mode of philosophizing, not primarily to the history of philosophical questions and the responses proposed to them. References to the history of philosophy are such as may function as an introduction to the modes of thinking that determine philosophical inquiry. And historically the modes are two: the communal mode of the Greeks and the individualistic mode of the post-Roman West.

On the opposite shores of the Aegean and on the archipelago of islands lying between them, there arose, for the first time in human history, the question of the validity of knowledge, of how you decided when knowledge was true and when it was false.
thinking—philosophy—was born. The Greeks sought the *criterion of truth*: a thing was true when it did not change, did not decay, did not die. And for the Greeks the only empirically accessible reality that was *immortal*, and therefore *true*, was the *mode by which the universe was governed*.

The *mode* of immortality/truth was located in the *rational relations* (relations in accordance with reason: *kata logon*) that governed the coexistence of existents. Existents in themselves are ephemeral, mortal, and subject to decay. The *mode* of their coexistence (the relations between them) is the rationality of harmony, beauty, and decorum—a *common logos* or mode that rendered the universe a cosmos (*a kosmēma*, a thing of beauty).

Consequently, what was true for the Greeks was what could be participated in *kata logon*: in accordance with reason. It was necessary for particular individual experiences to be shared and harmonized, for them to be coordinated with a *common logos*, for their coordination to result in ordered beauty. A thing was true when for defining its knowledge (for setting the boundaries of its knowledge), the shared experiences of all converged—"when all share the same opinion and each bears the same witness." The Greeks founded philosophy on a "criterion of truth," which was the *communal verification of knowledge*.

At the opposite pole to the Greek *mode* (of truth as a communal achievement, as the fruit of relations of shared experience) was the *mode* of the post-Roman West. There truth was a product of the intellectual capacity of the individual (the *facultas rationis*). It was defined as the *coincidence (adaequatio) of the perceived object with its intellectual conception (rei et intellectus)*. The intellectual apprehension of the individual was sufficient on its own to guarantee the possession of knowledge: the capacity of the intellect (*cogito*) confirms the reality of existence (*esse*).

The historical appearance of this unshared subjectivity was not surprising. It went with the individualism of natural, instinctive urges, with the priority of satisfying the needs of nature, which are marks characteristic of human communities at a low level of cultural development. This was precisely the state of the barbarian tribes that overwhelmed the territories of the Western Roman Empire from the fourth to the sixth centuries AD—invasions that plunged the West into the so-called Dark Ages. Western Europe's reliance on individualism (and the utilitarianism that is cognate to it) was not overcome or even diminished by its impressive achievements much later in the fields of art, science, and technology.

In particular, an epistemic individualism continued, in the historical development of the West, to accompany a simultaneous demand for the "objectivity" of knowledge—an objectivity that shored up the individual and was the kind of verification of truth that rendered epistemic correctness obligatory for all, "necessary in every respect." And it was with such "objectivity" that *authority or convention safeguarded knowledge*. Thus philosophy slipped into a way of *a priori* thinking that made intellectualist "proof" independent of human experience, or else into a relativism that led directly to nihilism.

The Greek *mode* was embodied historically in the *common struggle for truth* that is *political* life, the art and science of politics, the realization of the *polis* and of *democracy* as an existential (not utilitarian) goal. The Western *mode* was embodied in the safeguarding of the individual with *rights* guaranteed by institutions and conventions, as well as in amazingly advanced technological means of satisfying the human urges for self-preservation, domination, and pleasure. The purpose of this book is not to pass historical judgment or to evaluate two incommensurate *modes* axiologically. The book is designed more as an introduction to guide the reader, by an analysis and comparison of two modes, toward an engagement with philosophy either in sympathy with, or parallel to, or in opposition to, the book's own perspective.

If after studying these pages, the reader is able to approach the problems presented here through another perspective, a different theory, or a personal hermeneutic, that would be the book's real achievement. It would have fulfilled its introductory purpose.

*Christos Yannaras*

*Kythera, July 2013*
Part One

THE PRIMORDIAL "LOVE OF WISDOM"
Chapter 1.1

The Sensible and the Intelligible

§ 1. The “Initial” Distinction

Human beings “by nature have an appetite to know.” For that reason philosophy too has its origin in human nature itself—in that which humanity is universally before any individual differentiation. But how is it possible for us to work our way back to the natural and chronologically indeterminable origin of philosophy as it is in itself, in a search for the first roots of philosophy’s fundamental questions?

The traces of human presence that have survived from the depths of prehistory are traces of a collective life, of the cohabitation of a group. By nature human beings are “social animals.” And the primary fact that differentiates the social cohabitation of human beings from the herd coexistence of animals is that of oikismos, of settlement: the organization of space, the relationship with physical space—that is what constitutes a human settlement.

For a human settlement to exist, a sacred sign needs to be established within the space, an axis or center of settlement. Cohabitation is a result of a common reference to this sacred sign that unifies life. The center of settlement is the axis of life in its universality; it is the “navel of the earth” and the center of the world—even if it changes location with the movements of a nomadic society—
because wherever life is realized, it is there that its universal dimensions are recapitulated.1

The expression and confirmation of life is the form \((\text{morphē})\) by which every existent becomes manifest, makes itself manifest. And the realization of life in its universal dimensions is also a formation \((\text{dia-morphōsis})\) of the totality of existents, the order and harmony of the relations that bring existents together into an ordered world \((\text{a kosmos/kosmēma})\). Life is form, order, and harmony; the opposite of life is formlessness and chaos, the dissolution of death. The determination of the sacred center in the human settlement is the starting point for the order of life to exist and to be differentiated from disorder and confusion. On the basis of the sacred center, four stable points are determined within space: east, west, north, south.2 Thus space is shaped in a cruciform fashion around the initial axis, takes on a form, and is organized—it banishes the threat of formlessness and chaos.

With the determination of the one center and of the four cosmic signs that arrange the circumscribed space of the settlement in a cruciform fashion, we have also the first awareness of numbers and their "sacred" function: numbers constitute and make manifest the form and decorum that constitute life. Together with the monad and the tetrad, the awareness of the sacredness of the number three also seems to be primeval.3 The "sacred arithmetic" of all the great spiritual traditions has evolved on the basis of the productive combi-


3. "The universe and all that is fall into three divisions; for the end, the middle, and the beginning contains the number of all things, these being the number of the triad" (Pythagoras: see Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, 6th ed. [Berlin: Wiedmannsche, 1952], 1:455, lines 19–20).


5. "Only the intelligibles are real... the sensibles are always in a state of becoming, they never are"; "To pass from the intelligibles to the sensibles is to pass from truth to opinion"; "Those men assumed a twofold hypostasis, on the one hand the intelligible hypostasis of the really real, on the other the sensible hypostasis of the world of becoming" (Diels and Kranz, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, 2:99, lines 15–18; 1:234, lines 20–21; 1:228, lines 13–14).

6. "Pythagoras was the first to call the universe the ‘cosmos’ on account of the order to be found in it" (Diels and Kranz, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, 1:105, lines 24–25).
attribute the formation of the cosmos to its shaping, to the banishment of formlessness and chaos.

The *mode* or the **how** of the world's order (the *kosmiotēs* of the cosmos) is the result of the intervention of the intelligible in sensible reality: the world exists because there exist the sacred order of numbers, the laws of harmony, the measures and the boundaries of every individual entity and the relations between them—measures and boundaries that cannot be overstepped without dissolving the cosmic order. Intelligible realities constitute the *reason or rational principle* (*logos*) of the cosmos, the *mode* by which that which is becomes manifest, or manifests itself. Reason is the form (*morphē*), but it is also the potentiality for form, just as it is also the correlation of forms, the functional referentiality of existing things. Reason endows sensible things with form; it gives them their *eidōs* (their kind or species) and also their "otherness" (their specific difference). Consequently, it establishes relations between them of referential differentiation and similarity. This rational shaping (*dia-morphōsis*) and correlation of sensible things is life—reason is the life-endowing element of the cosmos.

In Greek we refer to the vitalizing element of the cosmos by the word *logos* ("reason" or "rational principle"). The gender of the word is masculine because the endowing of sensible things with life by the intelligible finds its fullest analogy in the fertilization of the female by the male. The *nature* of sensible things possesses a "female" readiness to give flesh to the event of life. It needs the seed of reason, however, for this enfleshment to be realized. Without a rational otherness matter is nonexistent—it is an abstract concept. Reason gives it hypostasis; it makes it an event of life.

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7. "They hold that the principles of the universe are two: the active and the passive. The passive principle is substance without quality, which is matter; the active principle is the reason (*logos*) in it, which is god" (Hans von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1905], 1:24, lines 5–8). "Phercecydes used to say that Zeus had changed into Eros when about to create, for the reason that, having composed the world from the opposites, he led it into agreement and peace and sowed sameness in all things, and unity that interpenetrates the universe" (Diels and Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 1:48, lines 13–16, trans. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven of *The Presocratic Philosophers* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], 62).


9. "We say the philosopher is one who desires wisdom" (Plato, *Republic* 5.475b8; all translations of Plato in the present work are from Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963], sometimes lightly modified).


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In the traditions of the Near East, the word used for this vitalizing element of the cosmos was *hakmā*, which has more the sense of *wisdom* (*sophia*). The meaning, at any rate, of reason as wisdom was also preserved in Greek by the name given to those who dedicated their lives to the study and knowledge of intelligible realities. They are the friends of wisdom, the *philosophers*. In the Egyptian tradition they were called "friends of the bridegroom." Wisdom or reason is the "bridegroom" of matter, leading the bride to the fruitfulness and vitalization of sensible things.

Regardless of the name we give to the intelligible vitalizing element of the cosmos, investigating intelligible principles, approaching them and knowing them, always remains an attempt to decipher the mystery of life, and it is this that is the beginning of philosophy. The primordial "love of wisdom," in any event, has nothing to do with any utilitarian intentionality (without this implying that it is also unrelated to a practical view of life), nor has it anything to do with any aspiration for a knowledge that had been rendered independent of life. "Love of wisdom" is the study of the mode by which intelligible realities intervene in the sensible world, realizing life as order and beauty. The only ambition I have for this study is that it should assure subjection to the rational principle of the decorum and order of life, that it should serve the proper functioning of life, the realization of life "in accordance with reason."

§ 3. The Dynamic Mediation of Humankind: Thinking (*Noein*) and Being (*Eiai*)

Humans are the only sensible beings that have the power to approach the world of intelligibles, the rational harmony and order of life. And this means that only humans possess reason, that only they
are by nature "rational animals." Human reason is not only the ability to discern, to come to know, and to express the form/formation/mode of cosmic harmony and order. It is also the power to create a kosmos, to give form to what is formless, to endow irrationality with reason.

By their sensible nature and their rational capacity, humans "mediate" between the intelligible and the sensible. Human existence is a "mediating" nature, sensible and at the same time rational: it is "embodied" reason, an event of the encounter of life's reason with the nature of sensible things.

And because reason constitutes being, the unvarying, incorruptible, and timeless character of existence, humans participate in being, in the power of an active realization of being, through their rational capacity—which we also call mind (nous), the human intellect (noēsis). The operation of the intellect gives humans the power of existing on the level of incorruptible intelligible realities, of realizing being by their existence as reason corresponding to the reason that forms life in the dimensions of cosmic harmony and order. Parmenides's famous phrase "For it is the same thing both to think and to be," which remained the foundation of philosophical thinking right up to the age of Neoplatonism, does not imply the beginnings of "rationalism" and intellectualism in human history, as is often assumed. What it does is to preserve the archaic understanding of the realization of being through the rational capacity of humans to decipher and actualize the intervention of intelligibles in the sensible world.

Humans are intellectual beings (ennous). They possess mind; they are endowed with the power of thinking, the power of participating in that mode of existence that is not bound by the limitations of space, time, decay, and death. And the beginning of philosophy is to be found in the intellectual capacity of humans. For us to rec-

11. "Reason (logos) that pervades the substance of the universe... all things are from reason and by necessity... reason that is common and divine... by drawing this in with our breath we become intellectual (noērs) with reason always present" (Diels and Kranz, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, 1:145, line 38; 2:81, line 5; 1:148, line 10; 1:150, lines 3–4).
12. Ibid., 1:231, line 22.

ognize the beginning of philosophy, we must detach ourselves from the much later understanding of intellecction (noēsis)—the understanding that exhausts the power of intellecction in the human capacity to substitute the reality of existing things by "significatory" thoughts (noēmata), to create by the use of language a conventional code of comprehension (syn-enkoēsis), and to link together the given thoughts of the code to create "valid" syllogisms. Philosophy in its beginnings is "love of wisdom" and "a passionate desire for wisdom," a real/experiential relationship of humans with intelligibles (the reason or wisdom that vitalizes the sensibles)—a relationship more universal than the simple exercise of thought.13

Before anything else the noetic function makes possible the apprehension (kata-noēsis) of beings, the approach to beings according to their noetic (kata-tēn-noētēn) reality. We must repeat that for early philosophy the noetic reality does not represent subjective conceptions of the human mind—an external projection (toward the world) of the exclusively human capacity for signifying the existence of beings. Before it can be "significatory" of intellectual realities, philosophy is an erotic desire for, and love of, the reason or wisdom that constitutes the reality of beings. It presupposes an approach to beings that transcends mere information about their sensible—corruptible and ephemeral—character and raises humans to the incorruptible and timeless "form" (eidos) of beings, to the harmony of the relations of being within space and time, to the laws that assure order, beauty, and the continuation of life.

This means that for philosophy, at its natural beginning, intellectual realities are not inventions of the human mind. They are not the mode in which the mind approaches sensible objects but the mode that constitutes life and cosmic harmony. The mind is coordinated with this mode of life and of cosmic harmony in the degree in which it becomes a lover of the reason and wisdom of the intelligible realities. Thus philosophy is not only a desire for knowledge but also a passion (erōs) for life, an expression of humanity's deepest thirst for life, its aversion to transitoriness, to decay, and to the disintegration of death.

13. "The philosophers are lovers of reality and truth" (Plato, Republic 6.501d2).
Chapter 1.2

The Relative and the Absolute

§ 4. The Primordial Ascent

The distinction between sensible and intelligible realities necessarily implies a comparison between two possibilities or modes of existence. Every sensible object is locally circumscribed and temporally fleeting: it is subject to decay or even to death. Yet the principle (in Greek, the logos) of its form, the qualities that determine the species (eidos) of the object (shape, size, dimensions, color, weight, density, etc.), the analogical correlations of its presence, which are the measures/boundaries and the arithmetical determinations of its position within the harmony of space and the succession of time, as well as the laws that govern the evolutionary trajectory or “becoming” of its transient existence—all these are intellectual givens unrelated to the corruptibility and temporary character of the object’s matter.¹

The intellectual/rational qualities define (set boundaries to, and consequently determine form [eidos] and shape [morphē]), that is to say, they shape the matter of sensible things and thus specify their existence, or make their existence manifest. Without shape (schema), size, dimensions, color, weight, density, analogical correlations, and so forth, nothing material is anything. The intellectual/rational qualities give every existing thing an otherness

¹ “Sensible qualities come into being from things without qualities contemplated by reason” (Diels and Kranz, Fragmenta der Vorsokratiker, 2:112, line 27).
(a “specific difference” differentiating it from all other beings) and consequently make it be that which it is (and not something other than itself): they constitute the identity, the existence, of every being. The origins of this assertion are lost in the depths of prehistory: in all primitive traditions of cosmogony, amorphous matter is equivalent to nonexistence.

For a sensible being to exist, then, a combination of rational qualities is presupposed; the existence of a sensible being depends on a combination of rational qualities. Every sensible being is only in relation to (in dependence upon) shape, color, size, dimensions, weight, density, analogical correlations, and so forth: its existence is relative to rational qualities—to what it relates to (to prôs ti esti).

In contrast to sensible beings, rational qualities are not in themselves relative: they do not depend on some other realities to which they therefore owe their existence. They do not even depend on the limitations to which the reality of sensible things is subject: rational qualities are not bound by the relative dimensions of space and time; they have no knowledge of decay and death. The nature of intelligibles (that which an intelligible quality is before any partial differentiation) is not subject to relativity; it is free, “released,” absolute.

This primary and basic ascent from the relative to the absolute is found in the first stirrings of early philosophical inquiry, because the distinction between sensible and intelligible realities (which leads to the investigation and study of the reason or wisdom of the cosmos) cannot be exhausted in a simple classification of experiences derived by us from the cosmos. For the distinction to be philosophical (“loving of wisdom”), it must also lead up analogically to the existential powers that represent sensibles and intelligibles—it must investigate two modes of existence: the relative mode of sensibles and the absolute mode of intelligibles. From its earliest mythological steps, philosophy has presented itself, dimly to begin with, as an attempt to search out and study the absolute (even if the term absolute, at least in the Greek language, only appears in the Hellenistic period): it is a love and passionate desire for that mode of existence that knows nothing of dependence and limitation.

We could say that this purely philosophical awareness of the absolute has priority even in relation to religious beliefs, seeing that in most mythological traditions “supernatural” beings—gods and demons—are subordinate to the absolute character of intelligible realities: they cannot abolish or transcend the laws of cosmic harmony and order. In a similar way much later, in Plato’s highly developed theology, the world’s demiurge in the Timaeus “looked to the eternal,” or contemplated the given and absolute ideas/forms of beings, when he was about to give shape to all that constitutes the cosmos.2

Of course, philosophical inquiry was gradually to broaden the primordial inference from the relative to the absolute beyond the contradistinction between sensible and intelligible realities. It was to inquire into the derivation or cause of rational qualities, to deny the autonomy of rational manifestation, to refer the rational qualities to analogical correlations, to what is connected with movement and change. That is, it was also to relativize the intelligibles, arranging the powers of the absolute on an ascending scale and resorting finally to a single and absolute First Principle—the source and cause of the existence of both sensibles and intelligibles. Or it was to investigate the character of the absolute apart from the problem of the definition or constitution of existing things: it was to identify the absolute with the given reality of matter and the “innate” dynamics of its various forms, with the “becoming” of the world and of life.

But this progressive investigation and differentiation of the primordial inference did not cease to affirm, in every stage of its development, the distinction between the relative and the absolute as always the starting point of philosophy. This was because it did not belong to the character of philosophy at any stage or in any circumstances simply to describe phenomena and affirm their existence. Philosophy was not exhausted in the observation or the utilitarian exploitation of existents. The character of philosophy is always and indisputably analogical; it presupposes going beyond the mere noting of the givens of sensory experience, as well as a movement toward the universality of the rational principle (logos) or mode (tropos) that constitutes the event of life—or at least to the universality of the mode that constitutes the potentiality of knowledge. And inferring the universality of life or of knowledge (a universality that is

2. Timaeus 29a3.
always modal/dynamic and never quantitative/static) presupposes going beyond the relative character of the given sens of sensory experience. It presupposes the awareness of the unlimited and inexhaustible, that is, of the absolute character that the mode of life and of knowledge possesses.

§ 5. The Experiential Appropriation of the Absolute: Freedom and Otherness

Philosophy owes its genesis to the originating experience and confirmation of humanity’s power to transcend the relative character of its sensible existence and infer a realm of absolute realities. This power is a fundamental approach by beings in keeping with their intellectual reality; it is the apprehension of the existence of beings—a work of the human mind or soul.  

The power of the mind or soul to approach the realm of the absolute signifies a “kinship” of the mind or soul with the absolute realities. In fact, like the existence of intelligibles, so too the operation of their apprehension does not recognize the boundaries of dimensional space and measurable time; it is not bound by the different dependencies to which sensible objects are subject. Consequently, we are also able to say that the intellectual capacity is a function of the realization of the absolute within the bounds of humanity’s corruptible and mortal atomic existence. Humans exist on two levels or modes of existence: they share in both the relative and the absolute character of existence. They realize the absolute in a transient fashion—the experience of the absolute is subject in the end to the relativity of their sensible nature.

This “coincidence of opposites,” the collocation of the relative and the absolute within the bounds of a single existence, is the existential privilege of humans but also their existential drama. The search for a solution to the drama becomes the matrix of philosophy. The love of wisdom (philosophy) is love and erotic desire for the absolute with full awareness of the relative; it is the struggle of humans to taste existential fullness as intensely as possible within the suffocating boundaries of their survival as individuals.

The realm of the absolute is a mode of existence “released” from or not tied to any relativity/dependence or limitation; it is the event of freedom, or rather, the existential event of freedom, because freedom presupposes an existential bearer; it is not an abstract idea or a nonsubsistent “happening”—the erotic desire for the absolute is not exhausted in the charm of a grandiose idea that is simply a concept, an “empty belief.” What humans desire and seek through philosophy is their own existential freedom, their own existence as an event of freedom: to be that which they are, not tied to any relativity/dependence or limitation. If philosophy is not simply an exercise in thinking, but is an erotic desire for life, then for the philosophical person freedom too is only one of the two aspects of the absolute: the other aspect is the identity of existence, its unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable character. The two aspects are, in any event, complementary: the identity of existence, that which makes it be that which it is, signifies an otherness from everything that is not itself, that is, freedom from any general predetermination, common attributes, dependent subordination, mutation, and change. And the freedom of existence, that which makes it not tied to any relativity/dependence or limitation, is its identification with its otherness, that is, an existential identity that is unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable.

The philosophical clarification and formulation of these definitions of freedom and otherness appeared quite late in the history of philosophy—this is an achievement of Greek thought of the fifth century AD. We could, however, say that these definitions belong to the “nature” of the philosophical enterprise; they constitute and define it indirectly or directly, explicitly or implicitly, positively or negatively. From the primitive mythological stages of the philosophical search up to its most precise systematic definitions, the attempt to appropriate the absolute experientially is clearly apparent in every aspect of the philosophical enterprise. Even in the most intellectualist schools and tendencies, the problem of philosophy remains the knowledge that goes beyond the useful aspect of things,

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3. “The soul and the mind are both the same”; “For the soul is the same as the mind” (Diels and Kranz, Fragmenta der Vorsokratiker, 1:218, line 4; 1:226, line 2; 2:84, line 17; 2:109, line 15).

4. “Mortal nature seeks so far as possible to exist for ever and to be immortal” (Plato, Symposium 207d1–2, trans. Hamilton and Cairns).
the exercise of the mind’s freedom in clarifying even the definition of phenomena, that is, in approaching the event of otherness. And of course the attempt to appropriate freedom and otherness experientially is all the more discernible the more evident is philosophy’s persistence in refusing to be a partial and fragmentary (merely intellectual) pursuit, and is all the more discernible the more immediately it preserves both the universality of the erotic love of wisdom and the proximity to its original sources, because the love of wisdom and the erotic desire for wisdom are fundamentally a mode of life, an experiential discipline of coordinating and participating in freedom from relativity, in the principle of the uniqueness of the things that really exist.

§ 6. The Collective/Communal Appropriation of the Absolute: History and Civilization

It is evident from the preceding pages that the search for philosophy’s primordial origins cannot have any relationship with what today we call “historical research.” It is not about a fundamentally chronological tracing back but about a fundamentally systematic (methodically organized with logical consequences) inferring of the earliest possible and most elementary starting points of philosophical questions.

Nevertheless, even the rudimentary and sparse information that has come down to us from the depths of prehistory (traces of human settlements, how they were laid out, basic numbers, elements of worship of supernatural powers, primitive tools—and later the myths) does not cease to be a starting point and challenge for our systematic search—without abolishing its nonhistorical character. Thus the information we have about the way human settlements were first laid out allows us to infer the possible experiential roots of the distinction between intelligible and sensible realities and to seek this distinction’s earliest philosophical consequences. These

same traces lead us also to discern the initial collectivity of human life (humanity’s primordially social nature) and to form systematic conclusions—always introductory to philosophy.

The confirmation of this initial collectivity can be immediately referred to the contrasting distinction between the totality and the individual, to the comparison between the possibilities of the totality and the possibilities of the individual. The totality possesses duration and permanence; the individual is ephemeral and transient. Individuals come and go; the totality continues and endures. This is because the existence of the totality (in the case of the social phenomenon of human life) is not the conglomeration of specific individualities within limited temporal contexts. It is a universal dynamic “becoming,” or operation of relations into which the temporally finite individualities are always inserted. The same individualities produce the relations that constitute the totality. Neither the totality nor the individual represents realities that have been formed in a definitive and complete manner; they both constitute events—a dynamic “becoming.” But a temporally finite individuality cannot exhaust the infinite relational possibilities that it itself constitutes.

We have seen that a first cycle of philosophical inferences is formed by the contrast between the human individual’s spatial and temporal finitude compared to the dynamic and unlimited character of the individual’s intellectual capacity. The operation of apprehension (of kata-noesis, the approach to existence according to its intelligible—kata-tê-noêtê—reality) is a capacity for approaching the absolute—in a mode of existence free from any restriction. Now, the fact of collectivity (the social phenomenon of human life) allows us to infer a second possibility of approaching the absolute. This is individuality’s power to form relations of communal life that are not exhausted within the limits of its own ephemeral survival.

If birth, growth, decay, and death are the given “invariables” of the evolutionary development, or “becoming,” of humanity’s sensible individuality, the power of communal life is a diachronic event, that is, it is chronologically indeterminate. The life of the individual has fixed limits and invariable factors governing its trajectory as it evolves. Collective life is realized as an operation of relations without predetermined limits and invariables. It is the experience of an
event of freedom from predeterminations, that is, an event of "release," of the absolute.

But like the operation of apprehending (kata-noësis) as an experience of intelligible realities' absolute character, so the realization of the relations that constitute communal life is a definitive event of the individual existential otherness of every human person. Individual human existence is inevitably embedded in a "becoming" of relations that already exist: of the family, language, the economy, politics, the character of the social whole within which it is born. Nevertheless, this embeddedness in the preexisting dynamic of relations is differentiated from one individual to another; it is a participation in the communal event that reveals and marks out the otherness of every individual existence. Thus the experience of the absolute within the bounds of communal life is not exhausted simply in the comparative understanding of individual social relations' transient character and of the diachronic and unlimited character of these very relations in their collective universality. The experience of the absolute is chiefly an experience of the unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable mode by which every individual existence realizes the given relations within which it is embedded. The diachronic relations that constitute communal life are absolute as unlimited potentialities of the formation and duration of the collectivity, whereas the realization of these given potentialities by each individual is free/"released" from any predetermination—an experiential taste of the absolute.

This means that humans are necessarily embedded in the given relations of communal life but also dynamically mold these relations in the measure in which their human existence is realized as an event of otherness of relations and consequently of freedom from any predetermination. Social relations are fixed conventionally in more or less stable institutional forms because the collectivity must be given a shape, must constitute a "cosmos"—must overcome the threat of confusion and chaos. But the atomic insertion into insti-

tutionalized relations cannot be assimilated totally without abolishing the existential "specific difference" of the individual, that is, the individual's very hypostasis.

That is why the diachronic event of communal life too, despite the institutional forms it takes, is not a predetermined and uniform succession and repetition of the same phenomena but an unbroken evolution of new forms. This dynamic of the evolving forms of collective life we call history.

Within the framework now of the dynamics of the social molding that constitute history, human individuality is not only implanted in given networks of relations in a unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable manner but actually founds relations that are ceaselessly formative and renovative of the social "becoming." The foundation of relations that are unforeseen points of departure becomes evident chiefly in the realm of artistic creation, political action, the practice of a profession, and the language of daily life. And the cumulative effect of these creative moldings lends a character of collective otherness to the communal life of a group of people or of an epoch. It is precisely this collective otherness of a people's and an epoch's history that we call a civilization.

History and civilization, then, are the collective expressions and manifestations of the modes or potentialities by which the existential otherness of humanity can be realized within the context of communal life. Approaching the mode of existence that is "released"/free from every predetermination, and even from every limitation of transient individuality, is not a merely subjective "intellectual" event: it is also a specific experiential participation in the diachronic universality and collective dynamics of communal life; it is an appropriation of the absolute within the event of communion and relation.

6. "So that there should be order in our cities and uniting bonds of friendship... which could not have come about unless all had shared in respect for others and justice" (Protagoras, in Diels and Kranz, Fragmenta der Vorsokratiker, 2:270, lines 13–14, 18–20). "L'organisation sociale n'est qu'une tentative de faire par l'homme de s'adapter à l'harmonie du monde telle qu'il la conçoit" (Jean Servier, L'homme et l'invisible [Paris: Robert Laffont, 1964], 260). "Any kind of order is better than chaos; even an ordering on the level of sensible properties is a step toward a rational order" (Lévi-Strauss, Agré Skepsé, 113).
Chapter 1.3

Myth and Symbol

§ 7. The “Mystical” Function of Myth

The “love of wisdom” and the “passionate desire for wisdom” are the dynamic starting point for the ascent from sensibles to intelligibles, from the relative to the absolute—the starting point for an approach to the logos, or rational principle, of natural order and beauty, to the specific otherness that constitutes the existence of every being. Both the starting point and the accomplishment of this ascent and approach are an experiential event, an immediate and universal human experience.

The experience of intelligibles or the absolute could be described as an encounter and relationship of the human logos with the logos of the otherness of beings, the logos of the cosmos. And the experience of this “dia-logical” relation is manifested and made known by a similarly “logical” function: by the ability of the human logos to shape and manifest the “logical” experience of life by a specific significant formulation. The capacity of the human logos makes the experiential appropriation of the “logical” otherness of beings possible; it also makes possible the imparting and communication of this experience—the oral, written, and visual representation of the “logical” experience.

What need do the expression and formulation of the experience of intelligibles or of the absolute serve? Why, the very functioning of life, its social realization: the possibility that life should be unified
with the common experiential reference to the fixed and immutable axis of intelligibles. What concerns us is not recording for posterity, not the neutral description of experience, but its communication. And the most immediate possibility of communication is that "semantics" of the *logos* that provokes the reliving of the formulated experience—in the first place the semantics of *myth*.

Myth is always the narrative and telling of an event. This event is not an accomplished fact; it does not refer to actions and relations that were realized in the past and must be preserved from oblivion by some meaningful formulation of it. In myth reason does not function simply in order to describe sensory experience or the intellectual approach to reality; it seeks to interpret reality, to communicate the awareness of the *mode* by which life is realized, and in this case we say that reason functions as *judgment* and *imagination*.

Thus myth is the story of an imaginary event: it reproduces actions and relations from the realm of the senses, but in the way in which the mind imagines them by judging them, that is, by distinguishing the essential from the inessential for the realization of life—by combining forms and modes that suggest and reveal the functioning of intelligible realities. The expression of myth is not limited by the need to be faithful to phenomena, to the bounds of the possible as they are known in sensible reality. Although it narrates actions and relations with sensory clarity, it transcends and dissolves the boundaries of the possibilities of sensory life in order to depict and signify the *mode* by which intelligibles intervene in the sensible world: the possibility for awareness/appropriation of the absolute.

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1. "The myth-lover is in a sense a philosopher, since myths are composed of wonders; therefore if it was to escape ignorance that men studied philosophy, it is obvious that they pursued science for the sake of knowledge" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.982b18–21; all translations of Aristotle in the present work are from *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. [Princeton, N.: Princeton University Press, 1984], sometimes lightly modified). "It is characteristic of mythical thought that it is expressed with the help of a repertoire the composition of which is of a mixed nature. . . . It thus manifests itself as a kind of intellectual craftsmanship. . . . Like a skilled product on the technical level, mythical thought can attain, on the intellectual level, brilliant and unforeseen results" (Lévi-Strauss, *Agric Skepsé*, 114).

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Usually mythical expression personifies intelligible or absolute realities, because the experience of life and the relative or absolute possibility of existence are depicted more directly when they are embodied in an actual bearer. The relations that constitute life and its existential possibilities are in myth relations between persons. The "cycle" of life, for example—sowing, sprouting, bearing fruit, dying—can be in myth an androgynous fertilizing relationship or an eponymous maternal relationship that moves in an endless cycle. The manifestation of wisdom can be a strange birth from the head, the center of the mind. Both the head that gives birth and the wisdom that is born are in myth eponymous persons. But the relation is intellectual; it "signifies" the immutable and incorruptible reality of the *mode* of life. For that reason the persons that embody it are also existences that are absolute, free from time and death.

Myth is the most immediate approach to cosmic wisdom. It is an empirical approach, a presupposition of experiential coordination, an adaptation of the human mind to the intelligible (rational) reality of life—that is, it is the correct *apprehension* (*katanóesis*) of life. This is because the *logos* and wisdom of life do not admit of being observed in an experientially neutral fashion. The neutral observation of life could only be hypothetically a dead object—a mirror or motionless water in which sensible objects are reflected. But the human mind does not simply reflect existing things and events. It apprehends life; it is the very fact of humanity's participation in life, and only by the mode of participation is life apprehended. The "semantics" of this experiential apprehension is fundamentally myth.

That is why the semantics of myth is also a "mystical" expression: a word (*logos*) that "initiates" us into the rational ("logical") reality of life, that transposes and detaches the mind from the limitations and dimensional determinations of sensory experience, in order to lead it to the apprehension of the *mode* in which life functions.

§ 8. The Symbolic Expression of the Ineffable

The *imaginative* and *critical* function of reason (*logos*) within the boundaries of myth is realized fundamentally through the use of *symbols*. A symbol is an image (a form or representation) of sensory
experience that does not exhaust its meaning in its own self: it presupposes the transcendence of the simple marking of the depicted object or form and the leading up of the mind to a meaning or event of universal experience. The symbol puts together (sym-ballei in Greek) or coordinates particular individual experiences in a common experience that is revelatory and interpretative of meanings and events constituting an immediacy of knowledge.2

In any case, the very use of language, even in everyday communication, is a symbolic function of reason that presupposes imagination and judgment: inference from the particular to the general and from individual experience to universal experience. For me to name a specific object, I must judge that beyond the characteristics of its particular individual form it has marks in common with other objects of the same kind, marks that correspond to the universal concept ("phantasm" or "image") that has by abstraction been impressed on my mind by the everyday experience (or relation) of the same kind of objects. Every other person who has the same linguistic experience as I have—that is, who has learned to name the mental representations of universal concepts with the same words/symbols—exercises the same judgment as I do when referring the object's naming to the mental image of the universal concept of the same kind of objects. Thus we manage to communicate on the everyday level, and when we say "a stone," "a river," "a child," all of us who speak the same language apprehend the same realities.

Yet the achievement of everyday understanding does not mean that because symbols are held in common, the mental representations of universal concepts that have been formulated out of experience and critical abstraction in each of our minds are also the same. This "formulation" of mental representations and universal concepts in the mind is the unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable mode of each person's relation with the world. In the end it is an ineffable principle (logos) of exclusive otherness that constitutes the approach of every human mind (or logos) to the intelligible (logike) reality of life. We say "a stone," "a river," "a child," and we all apprehend the same realities, but each of us apprehends them in our own unique and unutterable way from within our own experiences and mental powers. The words only play the role of symbols, conventional "points of departure" for referring to the inexpressible experience of universal concepts, with a view to making everyday common understanding possible.

Yet although the words of our common language are symbols, the reality of the symbols is not exhausted in the meaning of the words. What we chiefly call symbols within the context of ancient cultural traditions are sensible starting points for the analogical reference not only to simple uniform mental representations of universal concepts but also to more composite experiences of approaching the logos or meaning of life. Within the context of myth, symbols preserve humanity's "philosophical" search, the age-old passion for wisdom, for understanding the mystery of life. Mythical symbols evoke and coordinate in all of us, without actually formulating it, the inexpressible word of the unique and dissimilar relationship each of us has with an event or meaning of life, and finally with the search for the ultimate meaning or possibilities of existence.3

By shaping persons and events in a manner that draws on fantasy but is symbolic of the possibilities of life, myths express the unutterable word of the extreme experiences of life (joy, pain, love, and death) and propose solutions and responses to humanity's ultimate questions: the ancient mythological traditions of different peoples preserve humanity's first philosophical speculations.4 They

2. See Pierre Chantraine, Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968), 162. "We use names as symbols instead of the things themselves" (Aristotle, Sophistical Refutations 165a7–8, trans. Barnes). "No name is one by nature, but only when it has become a symbol" (Aristotle, On Interpretation 16a27–28, trans. Barnes). A symbol is recognized "to be the best possible formula by which allusion may be made to a relatively unknown 'thing' which referent, however, is never the less recognised or postulated as 'existing'" (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, The Transformation of Nature in Art [New York: Dover Publications, 1956], 126).


pose the first questions about the meaning, cause, and purpose of life; the problem of evil; and the need for law and the possibilities of freedom, and they venture to give the first answers to them. They also pose questions about the reality of matter and of the world, the origin of beings, and the distinction between the relative and the absolute and how the two are linked, and they suggest answers to these questions.

In comparison with the symbolism of the code of linguistic communication, the philosophical speculation embodied in the myths is an "unorthodox" symbolic system, a paradoxical statement. It personifies lifeless objects, creates "phantasms" of nonexistent beings, or attributes nonexistent powers to existing things. And it does this because the conventional symbolism of the words in our everyday speech (which is conventional because it is primarily utilitarian) is not adequate—or at least was not adequate in some period of human history—for the expression and formulation of philosophical questions, which must be able to convey the experience of the questions. The experientially neutral description and noting of philosophical problems are unrelated to humanity's first philosophical speculations. Philosophy's primordial expression is mythological, because only myth can evoke and coordinate the unutterable experiences of the ultimate questions of existence, the immediacy of the relationship with the possibilities of life.

§ 9. The Desired Objective: The Clarification of the Existential Event

In its rudimentary mythological beginnings, philosophical inquiry did not aim at a knowledge that was independent of experience. On the contrary, experience offered the only possibility of approaching knowledge, whether this concerned sensible and relative realities or those that are intelligible and absolute.

When we speak of experience, we wish chiefly to indicate the human possibility of arriving at a dialogue with reality, of encountering through our rational (logike) capacity the principle (logos) that makes every existent what it is and the principle of the relationship of existents, that is, of cosmic harmony—-the human possibility of receiving this principle by a universal coordination of our own rational powers (of sense perception, thought, imagination, judgment, emotion), of confirming the rational correspondence of beings to our own rational approach to reality.

In the rudimentary mythological beginnings of philosophical inquiry, then, every real and existing thing embodies a rational imprint of human experience, a reflection of the universal mode by which humanity recognizes each existing thing. Thus the mythological approach to the real is, as a rule, its personification, which takes place when anthropomorphic forms embody the rational correspondence of beings to the experiential approach of humans. A mountain, a river, the sky, and the sun are anthropomorphic existences because existence in myth cannot be separated from the power of reason, the power of rational correspondence to the rational approach and experience of reality by humans.

The primordial beginnings of the functioning of myth do not allow us any grounds for supposing that there is an initial human approach to reality that is not rational, that does not identify knowledge with the universal coordination of humanity's rational powers, that is, with existential experience. A human relationship with the sensible world that is exhausted simply in using it to provide a livelihood, and consequently is confined to a purely utilitarian description, is unknown to the symbols of primordial mythological traditions.

We can therefore say that the mythological approach to reality, the universal coordination of our rational powers with the personification of the principal of existing things, reflects and outlines the initial meaning and content of the word theòria ("contemplation").


6. Cf. Aristotle's expressions: "To know by experience" (Topics 2.9.114b11); "To substitute the words" (Topics 5.2.130a39); "And indeed the ancients say that thinking (to phronein) and perceiving (to aisthésai) are the same thing" (On the Soul 3.3.427a21-22); "Perception (aisthèsis) is relation (logos)" (ibid., 3.2.426b7); "The soul is that by which we primarily live, perceive, and think" (ibid., 3.2.414a12-13); "The mind is the things that it actively [thinks]" (ibid., 3.7.431b17).
which gradually came to be identified with the philosophical approach to knowledge. The approach to the rational otherness of existing things coordinates sense perception, thought, imagination, judgment, emotion, all of humanity’s rational powers, and we mark this coordination in our symbolic linguistic system by the word *theòria*. It is an experience of the mind or soul corresponding in its universality to the sensible vision/viewing of beings. And myth has the prerogative of preserving in an accessible embodied form the rational otherness of the object of contemplation.

Because the initial contemplation/viewing of the discrete principle (*logos*) or otherness of existing things is an approach to beings that is wholly rational (*logike*), even from the time of its rudimentary mythological beginnings it is analogical (*analogike*), that is, comparative of principles and inferential (*anagogike*) of the universality of a uniform set of principles. Mythological symbolism already begins to make rudimentary comparative judgments and inferential references distinguishing uniqueness from multiplicity, the particular from the general, the transient from the permanent, from formlessness. Through the experience of these comparisons and inferences, the field is gradually prepared for a “systematic organization” of philosophical theory. At the dawn of history—and not always separately from myth—humanity advanced toward a more “theoretical” distinction between phenomena and mental objects, between what was corruptible and what was incorruptible, between simple survival and real existence or true life.

Out of the analogies, comparisons, and inferences of mythology, there developed gradually the deliberate activation of the mind, the emergence of the philosophical person. The philosophical person is one who is “contemplative.” Such persons desire and train themselves to “contemplate” phenomena and the mode of the rational manifestation, grouping, and harmony of phenomena. And because the rational otherness of forms and relations is not subject to the decay and temporality of matter, and humanity too has the power as an existence of participating through contemplation in the mode by which the principle of life operates, a mode that is not tied to corruption and death, it becomes obvious that philosophy is the power of humans to immortalize their existence, the power of humans, by study and disciplined practice, to participate in the possibility of immortality.

The ancient philosophical “belief” in the *immortality of the soul*—in which the word *soul* summarizes the existential presupposition of contemplation (*theòria*), the existential power of the coordination of rational powers: sense perception, thought, judgment, imagination, emotion, will, memory, intuition—presupposes, but also interprets, the primordial love of reason or of wisdom that constitutes philosophy: it is a passionate love of life and incorruptibility, a disciplined practice of active participation in the powers of an existence free from the limitations of the sensible. That is why the teaching of philosophy, for many centuries, was fundamentally a *mode* of life that gradually initiated the student into the desire for true life, into the experiences that pointed to the questions of philosophy.

In any event, the soul’s power to *immortalize* its existence, to “love” and apprehend (*kata-noen*) the mode of the incorruptible operation of the principle (*logos*) of life, does not exhaust the starting point of the event of philosophy; it merely defines it. By the contemplation (*theòria*) of sensible things and the mode of their rational otherness, grouping, and harmony, philosophical questions simply begin. What relationship does this contemplative/rational power of human existence have with the sensible (corruptible and mortal) bodily hypostasis of humanity? What is the relationship of matter with the rational qualities of life? Are intellectual functions a “higher” manifestation of the biological powers of humanity’s material organism, or are humans “bipartite” and is their existence composed of two realities, of which only one, the more indeterminate of the two, is in the end immortal?

Even with these very few questions the ways are already parting, as philosophical inquiries multiply to form distinct schools and tendencies. But the desired objective that fundamentally constitutes philosophy, before introducing any subdivisions or distinctions in the inquiries, is at the very outset the clarification of the existential event. Whether the principle of cosmic harmony and of the mode of life is a product of the operations themselves of matter, which con-
stitutes existentially an absolute and autonomous mass, or whether it is reason on its own that forms the reality of existence and constitutes matter as a harmony of sensible qualities, in both cases the reply is a response to the one primordial question of philosophy: What is being, what does being consist in, and what is the definition of participation in being, that is, in the possibility of existing?

Chapter 1.4

Image and Language

§ 10. The Dissemination of the Principle of Experiential Immediacy: The Embodied Principle of the Image

The intellect’s “contemplation” and “love of wisdom” understand and interpret the mode by which life is realized, the mode by which that which is is. The power of apprehending is an event of conformation and response of the human logos (“reason”) to the logos/mode that constitutes being: that is, it is an event of relation (approach, proximation, communion of the mind) with the logos (“principle”) of existential manifestation and cosmic harmony.

What we call logos (“reason,” “principle,” “relation,” or “ratio”) is the actual event of reference; it is existence as-toward the person who apprehends it. An existing thing is existent as-toward the receiver of the fact of its existence; it exists only as manifestation and presence, that is, as logos. But even though we distinguish the referentiality of the existing thing intellectually from its hypostasis (that is, from the fact of its existence per se), we must still acknowledge that the constitutive presupposition and hypostasis of the existing thing are rational (logike), that is, an event of relation. They are fundamentally a relation of form and matter when they concerns

sensible beings. The form (*morphê*) makes the matter be something; and this something is *that which it is* (and not something other than itself) thanks to its form. The form gives the being its identity, and consequently its rational existence (which is why we say that the constitutive presupposition of the existent is *rational*). It "hypostasizes" every being (produces its actual existence) and "rationalizes" it (places it proportionately on the scale of existing things). But the form does not cease to be a category of knowledge, an event of common dissemination, of reference of the existent to the recipient of the fact of its existence. Thus we return to the referentiality (that is, to the *logos*) as the defining fact of existence.

Turning now to realities that are not sensible but are only apprehended intellectually or noetically (such as space, time, the whole, the part, the first, the last, the soul, God), it is evident that they are noetic precisely on account of their *rational* character, which makes them accessible to the rational/perceptive capacity of humans. There is no longer any mediation by the *logos* of form to make the mind’s approach possible in the case of these realities. It is their rational "quality" itself that makes them capable of being participated in by human experience. An immediacy of experience operates (that is, a rational relation): a direct approach of the mind to the rational quality of space, time, the part or the whole, the first or the last, a direct approach to the rational otherness of the soul or of God. Thus even in these cases reason remains an event and realization of relation.

Nevertheless, the communication of reason, the expression and manifestation of immediate experience and relation, is not possible within the bounds of what is open to humanity except by the *logos* of form (*morphê*). A *logos* endowed with form is an *image* of a sensible or mental reality, an image that is acoustic or visual. An image is the rational form of the inexpressible *logos* of the unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable experience of every human person through his or her immediate relationship with noetic and sensible realities. A *logos* endowed with form (that is, an image) does not exhaust the experience of immediate relationship by disseminating it and manifesting it but marks the relationship by means of the form and stimulates the coordination of the particular experiences of the im-

mediate relationship, the coordination of the particular noetic approaches to the unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable event of the private experience of sensible and noetic objects.

Within the framework of human life, we recognize two ways in which a *logos* endowed with form or image operates and is disseminated. Both ways are creative ("poetic") possibilities or powers of the human soul, which means powers of manifesting the inexpressible *logos* of the immediate relationship but also powers productive of new relations of immediate access to the manifested experience. The terms by which these two powers of expression operate inevitably interpenetrate each other: art is a language capable of representing the *logos* of experience; language is the art of creating mental images of rational experience.

The mutual interpenetration of the two ways in which a *logos* endowed with image or form operates is preserved above all within the bounds of mythic expression. The language of myth operates not only with acoustic images signifying concepts but also with images of the representative/sensory reproduction of the relations that constitute the experience that is being expressed—images that are not of concepts but of anthropomorphic relations. For example, the obligatory succession of birth and death, the ceaseless swallowing up of life by death, is not in myth simply a universal concept of human experience, the concept of *time*, but is a person, the person of the god Kronos who devours his children—who represents in a sensible fashion the relationship between birth in life and the unavoidable death.

It is in the language of myth, that is, in mythopoeic art, that philosophy found its first expression. It did not abandon the use of myths so long as its goal remained principally the empirical initiation into the truth of the noetic relations that constitute life (rather than the objectified inventory of these relations).

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2. "There exists an intermediary between the image and the concept: the *sign*, which can be defined—in the manner inaugurated by Saussure on the basis of the special category formed by linguistic signs—as a link between the image and the concept, which through the union realized between them in this manner play the corresponding roles of signifier and signified" (Lévi-Strauss, *Agría Skepsê*, 116).
§ 11. Democritean Iconology: "Images Endowed with Speech"

In its Greek historical beginnings, philosophical inquiry makes its appearance already confident about the relationship that exists between the noetic (rational) power of humans and their sense of sight. Sight "records" in the mind the "image" (form) of visible things. And the mind has the critical and imaginative power to abstract the individual and circumstantial marks of these repeated "recordings" and infer the common and singular image/concept of all objects of the same form.

The abstractive clarification of the image/concept of objects of the same form, that is, the critical and imaginative power of the mind, is always ana-logical, comparative of the logos or relations of the various images/concepts that are "recorded" in the mind by the experience of existents. It is the power of syn-eidēsis ("consciousness" or "awareness," with the root meaning of "seeing-together-with") the comparison and synthesis of the totality of items of visual information (eidēseis) that the mind receives from the world and from life. Gradually the word syn-eidēsis acquired a polysemantic content, but its fundamental meaning refers to the capacity of the human mind (or soul) to receive knowledge of the world and of life as a totality of eidēseis, that is, of images, of the products of sight, and to put together these eidēseis ana-logically, comparing and clarifying the logos of the identity of phenomena beyond their individual/circumstantial marks of recognition.

One of the Presocratic Greek philosophers, Democritus, observed that the impression of images in the mind and their critical and abstractive clarification is a process that corresponded to the work of a maker of statues in his own age. The Greek artist of the fifth century BC aimed not at a faithful representation of the natural original, that is, at a technical reproduction of it, but at the kind of imaging that permitted the direct vision of the logos or concept of the imaged entity. Consequently, the artist effected a form of abstraction with a view to successfully reducing the particular to a

consciously rational harmony and coherence. Thus the work of art, the statue, serves as a standard for the beauty of the physical original, not the other way around. The work of art is called an agalma in Greek (a "sculpture" or "statue," but with the root meaning of a "delight" or "honor") because it offers the delight and joy of a true view of the world. It impresses on matter a vision of a being along with its logos, referring sensible things to their rational reality, a reality that is more real than their circumstantial impression. Art offers a mode of vision that interprets the world.

For Democritus, then, language functions in the manner of a sculptor's art. By naming something we impress its image on its name, but this image is not exhausted in the circumstantial/individual marks of recognition of the specific being: it abstracts them and transcends them, drawing the mind to the consciousness (syn-eidēsis) of objects of the same kind, to the universal logos or concept of the named being. The functioning of language is realized "through the names as through images," the names being "images endowed with speech," that is, visible representations of the rational reality of beings: the imaging function of language points out and manifests the "potentialities" of things, the rational powers of beings—powers of reference to and organic insertion within the universal rational harmony of the forms of knowledge/images of the cosmos.

Democritus's iconological interpretation of language allows us no room to doubt the character of knowledge as meditative contemplation. Even with the most abstract ideas, as in the verbs and adjectival definitions we use in our language, we have some initial images and mythical examples that have led us to their understanding. When a small child asks us to explain an abstract idea, we reply with an image representing the relations that define what is indicated by this idea. At the beginning of the formation of our linguistic system of expression and our capacity for understanding it lie such exemplary images and symbolic outlines. And the more "refined" and abstract are the semantic nuances of the word, the greater is our need to invoke the hermeneutic possibilities of myth, that is, of the expe-

3. Cf. Gorgias, frgm. 11 (17): "Thus the faculty of sight has recorded (en-eigrapsen) images of the visible things in the mind."

4. Frgm. 142.
rential reference to the experience of the relations that are signifies by the abstract acoustic image.

The question that arises from Democritus's iconological interpretation of language concerns the relationship between the named being and the universal mental image that gives it rational identity: Should we identify existence with the individual and circumstantial form of the specific being's otherness or with the universal mental image of the conscious conception that manifests the specific being to the mind, that makes it a phenomenon/item of knowledge/existential event? What in the end is the truly existent: that which is perceived by the senses or that which is seen mentally? And which of the two constitutes real knowledge: the immediate perception (aisthēsis) of a specific thing or its mental apprehension (katanoēsis)? With these questions we are already entering into the realm of Platonic iconology.

§ 12. Platonic Iconology: Ideas/Essences of Beings

In the case of Platonic teaching, we have the fullest recapitulation, systematization, and interpretation of the primordial distinction between sensible and intelligible realities. Each specific sensible being exists only because it participates according to its morphic hypostasis in the common and unitary principle (logos) of a single intelligible sameness of form. But this common and unitary principle of beings of the same form is not simply the abstract image (the universal concept [noēma] of morphic sameness of form) that the mind forms when it transcends the individual and circumstantial marks of recognition of particular beings. For Plato the common and unitary principle of beings of the same form is an idea in the primordial etymological sense of the word (from idein, "to see"). It is the result of the spectacle/vision/contemplation of the prototypes of existence.

Platonic philosophy refuses to limit itself to the descriptive investigation of the human person's intellectual powers. It refuses to accept the existence of the mind or of the soul as a given coincidence within the bounds of humanity's corruptible and mortal bodily hypostasis. It seeks to respond to the question about the origin of the soul and the mind that directs it. It takes as its starting point, then, the fundamental assertion that the soul "is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable," whereas the body "is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble, and never self-consistent."6

This differentiation immediately signifies a distinction between two modes of existence, two different worlds. For it is not only human beings who reflect this contradistinction; it is every existing thing. Every object of human experience participates simultaneously in the sensible world and in the intelligible world. What is the relationship between these two separate worlds? One is the world of rational forms, of the eternal models of every sensible phenomenon, the world of incorruptible and immutable intelligible realities and consequently of the things that truly exist. The other is the world of sensible realities that are transitory and condemned to extinction, the reflection of the eternal rational models in ephemeral and corruptible matter.

Human beings have a direct experience of both these worlds. Their body belongs to the world of sensible objects, the world of matter, and the body's senses inform it about the phenomena of this material world. Their soul, however, belongs to the world of intelligible realities, owes its existence and origin to that world, and consequently preexisted in that world before being united with matter. And there where it preexisted, with its own direct organs of perception, the soul saw the incorruptible and immutable forms of what really existed—human beings have imprinted on their souls the ideas of the things that are. Thus in the forms of the ephemeral and corruptible objects of the material world, the human soul (mind) recognizes—by the operation of recalling to memory (anamnēsis)—the reflection of the eternal models, of the principle (logos) of the incorruptible and immutable intelligible forms.

The ideas of beings, then, those that the soul saw (eide) in the world of intelligible realities, are not products of the imaginative

5. Phaedrus 247c8.
and critical faculties of the mind but are the **essences** (*ousiai*) of beings, which means (etymologically and by abstraction) the *logoi* modes of the **participation** of beings (*onta*) in being (*einai*), in real existence, beyond space, time, decay, and death. And every sensible being **exists** (even if only ephemerally and temporarily) because it participates "proportionately" (*ana ton logon*) in its idea/essence (it has "the same *logos*" as its essence).

The analogy of beings and ideas also represents the possibility of the knowledge of beings by humans (the only being that has the possibility of rationally approaching the *logos* of beings). This approach to the analogy of sensible beings and ideas becomes more immediately obvious with every creative act: every creative act manifests (brings to light) the common *logos* of idea and created object. That is, it presupposes the "spectacle" of the idea of the created object, whereas the idea itself remains "beyond" every creative possibility: "And are we not in the habit of saying that the craftsman who produces either of [the utensils] fixes his eyes on the idea or form, and so makes in the one case the couches and in the other the tables that we use, and similarly of other things? For surely no craftsman makes the idea itself. How could he?" So in approaching the *logos* of beings we "contemplate" the truth of the ideas; we participate analogically (proportionately) in the realm of incorruptible and eternal truths.

Thus the *logoi* of sensible beings are **images** of the eternal ideas ("images corresponding to their objects"). Humans recognize the *logoi* of sensible reality by their bodily eyes, and they recognize intelligible reality, real truth, by the eyes of their soul. The faculty that conveys knowledge is sight, that is, the general recapitulation of all the epistemic and empirical powers of humanity in one direct vision that is simultaneously a participation in the things that are known. Plato calls the true philosophers "those for whom the truth is the spectacle of which they are enamored." These do not inquire into the truth relying on their own individual *doxa* ("opinion," "intellectual conception"), which only generates *ignorance* (*amathia*), but seek to see the truth with "the eye of the soul"—"for by it only is reality beheld."
BIBLIOGRAPHY I


RATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Part Two
§ 13. The Reality of the "Common Logos"

If it was in the earliest human settlements that the first signs of the distinction between sensible and intelligible realities, and consequently the first traces of philosophical inquiry, found expression, we should be able to say that in the evolution of the settlement into the polis ("city-state"), we can follow the main lines of the development of philosophy, its becoming independent of myth.

The polis is not only the quantitative enlargement of the primitive settlement. It is also the qualitative development and evolution of the relations that constitute the communal reality of human life. These relations always aspire to the imitation and expression of cosmic harmony and order: their aim is that human symbiosis too should result in a cosmos and should exclude the risk of disharmony, formlessness, and disorder, a risk that destroys the possibilities of life.

The cosmopoetic, or ordering, principle of political symbiosis is not a self-evidently given fact but is an achievement of citizens (politai), of the people who constitute the polis. And it is precisely because political life (the life of the polis) is an achievement that it presupposes the possibility of nonachievement, of the probable inability of everyone who participates in the symbiosis to achieve those relationships that form the polis as a unified and organic reality of life. This is the possibility that the laws of the polis seek to counter.
The first traces of political legislation belong to the realm of myth. The origin of the laws of the polis is mythical; the earliest thinking about such laws presupposes their sacred character, their divine provenance.¹ This means that on their first appearance the laws are not considered products of a common agreement/contract for the "improvement" of the conditions of human symbiosis. On the contrary, they are intrinsic presuppositions for the very realization of life—and the realization of life is a purely social reality, a "cosmos" of harmony and order.²

If the origin of life, then, is "sacred," the origin of the polis and of the laws of the polis is also sacred, seeing that it is only as a social reality that life is realized, that it is preserved from the threat of disorder.³ And the sacred character of the laws does not imply an authority drawn from some unspecified "higher realm" and unposed as a political deontology. The social reality of life—the realization of the relations that are assured by the laws and that form the polis—constitutes a harmony of logos, the coordination of the individual logos (thought, will, the activity of the individual) with the common logos of the citizens, the ordering principle of political symbiosis. The danger for the polis is to live in an autonomous fashion (idiazéin): to set your private logos against the common logos—to have your own individual logos set apart from, and uncoordinated with, the demands of the social reality of life.

And because the polis is not a contractual form of symbiotic life but an undertaking to live the life that is in accordance with truth (a "cosmic," or ordered, realization of life), the common logos is not exhausted in the intentionality of symbiosis but is the only possibility for the expression and manifestation of the truth of life. The common logos is identified with truth, without ceasing to be a dynamically actualized principle of the realization of life, that is, without truth being transformed into an objective given to which the individual logos must be subordinated. Truth is not a given what but an actualized how: it is the ordered character of life. That is why we also recognize truth not as an object of the individual's capacity to understand, not in our own private way by the idios logos, but only through the coordination of the individual logos with the common logos, with the how of the orderliness that constitutes life in accordance with truth.

The relationship and coordination of the individual logos with the common logos does not imply a retreat from the uniqueness and dissimilarity of the individual logos. On the contrary, the relationship and the coordination highlight the otherness of the individual logos, while at the same time constituting the truth of life and the knowledge of truth. To live in a private and autonomous fashion (idiazéin) is to insist on a nonrelational atomic uniqueness and dissimilarity. It is a withdrawal from relating to or approaching the common logos, a withdrawal from coordination with truth. It is a falling away from truth, an embracing of untruth.

Among the written traces of the earliest philosophical inquiries, Heraclitus is the first who connected truth with the common logos. For Heraclitus the common logos meant the logos of communion, and therefore "when we share something in common, we express the truth, and when we hold something in private we deceive ourselves."⁴ And here the communion that ensures the truth does not have the sense of the conformity or subjection of

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1. "All human laws are nourished by one divine law" (Heraclitus 114, in Diels and Kranz, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, 1:176, lines 7–8). "To a god belongs the cause of instituting the laws ... in our case to Zeus, in the case of the Lacedaemonians ... they say to Apollo" (Plato, Laws 1.624a1–5, trans. Hamilton and Cairns).

2. "These indeed we now say are not states, nor are laws that have not been instituted for the common benefit of the whole city true laws" (Plato, Laws 4.715b2–4, trans. Hamilton and Cairns). "A citizen preserves and procures the common ordered government (kosmos) of the city" (Plato, Laws 8.846d5–6, trans. Hamilton and Cairns). "For justice in a political society is the principle of order [taxís]" (Aristotle, Politics 1253a38, trans. Barnes).

3. "For this is the law that the son of Kronos gave to humans. Fish and wild animals and some kinds of birds eat each other, because there is no justice among them. But humans have been given justice, which is by far the best" (Hesiod, Works 274–79). "Zeus therefore showed solicitude for our race. He sent Hermes to bring humans respect and justice, to that there should be order (kosmos) in cities" (Protagoras, in Diels and Kranz, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, 2.270, lines 12–14). See also Erik Wolf, Griechisches Rechtsdenken, vol. 1, Vorsokratiker und frühe Dichtung (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950), 77.

the one to the opinion of the many, the opinion of the majority. It has the sense of the participation that constitutes rationality: we become rational in the degree in which we participate in the common logos (which is divine, because it is the rational principle [logos] of life), and not because we are endowed with the power of this participation, that is, with private intelligence. "Heraclitus says that the criterion of truth is our becoming rational (logikoi) by participation in this common and divine logos. Hence on the one hand what is evident (to phainomenon) is common to all, that is, reliable (for it is received by the common and divine logos), and on the other hand, is experienced as unreliable by some only, for the opposite reason."

The private conception or "phantasm" is "unreliable," persuades nobody, and lacks the empirical persuasiveness of the common logos, of the truth that is participation in the common affirmation and realization of the logos of life. "Therefore we should follow the xynos (that is, what is common to all, for the xynos is the common [koinos] logos)." It is from within this perspective that the path toward the truth emerges with clarity, the path that is the goal of philosophy: philosophy is rational (logikê) knowledge; it is the study and formulation of "what is commonly evident to all," of that which all see/contemplate by participating in the logos, that is, by becoming rational (logikoi) "by participation." Any effort by human beings to become rational individually and on their own, without participation in the common logos, but "as if having a private intelligence," constitutes not "love of wisdom" but only "ignorance" and error.

Participation in the common logos renders the logos of philosophy "reliable," believable, and "seeable" by all. For the logos to be philosophical, it must be a logos of participation in the common logos and therefore a logos capable of participation, that is, evident "to all in common." Philosophical inquiry has these two goals as its aim.

§ 14. The Definition and Semantics of Essence or Substance

The way the laws of the polis operate is actually the first occasion on which it is possible to approach a definition of truth in the distinction between truth and falsehood. The laws distinguish the common logos that constitutes the truth of life (the cosmic/political realization of life) from the private logos, that is, the denial of this truth, the refusal to participate in the common logos (in participatory rationality). And this distinction presupposes a term (a limit/boundary) between partaking in common (to koinônein) and possessing in private (to idiaein), between the rational (logon) and the irrational (para-ton-logon), between truth and falsehood.

The manifestation and formulation of the term/boundary between the rational and the irrational, between truth and falsehood, constitutes the definition. The definition marks the participation of beings in Being, that is, in the social realization of life, in the common logos. And in the Greek language the verbal derivative that renders the sense of participation in einai ("Being") is the word ousia ("essence" or "substance"). The definition, then, signifies the substance of beings, the mode by which beings are within the boundaries of the common logos, boundaries of the presuppositions for the social/ordered realization of life.

Here is an example from Democritus: the substance of sweetness, sourness, etc. is defined by the common logos of the experience of sweetness, sourness, etc., that is, by the mode by which the taste of sweetness, sourness, etc. is within the limits of the social reality of life. If by means of the private logos we define sweetness as sourness, we are outside common experience, beyond the boundary of the common logos of life. Consequently, the substance of sweetness, sourness, etc. is a definition that functions in a manner totally analogous to any other law that assures the social realization of life.

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7. Ibid.
8. "Again, we say that that 'is' (estin) which participates in ousia" (Plato, Cratylus 401c-6-7).
10. Cf. Heraclitus, Frgm. 114, in Diels and Kranz, Fragmenta der Vorsokratiker, 1:176, line 5: "Men should speak with rational awareness and thereby hold on strongly to that which is shared in common—as a city holds on to its..."
possibility of communicating with others when we signify sweetness or sourness, and not possessing it in private, not exiling sweetness and sourness from being, from the social/ordered reality of life.

At this point I should mention in passing that in the Greek language the word ousia ("essence" or "substance") has the same sense from its first appearance as the word physis ("nature"). The most likely explanation of this coincidence of meaning is that for the ancient Greeks participation in Being (which is ousia) does not represent something finished and complete; it represents something in the process of becoming; it is participation in the becoming (the gignesthai/phyesthai) that constitutes life, the unfolding of life as an ordered/communal event. The word physis (from phyomai, "I develop," "I grow") has precisely the meaning of participation in the dynamic becoming of life. To be (einai) is not exhausted in the given and self-evident property of existence in itself; it constitutes participation in the dynamically activated how of the ordered (and political) realization of life.

We may thus suppose that in the way in which it originally functioned, the word ousia (as also the word physis) defined the how of the participation of beings in the common logos of the experience of life. But in the degree in which the definition of substance signifies the coordination of common participation in the experience of what is defined (the unicity of the common logos of experience), it represents the what of common understanding. When the common logos defines beings, it signifies this one event that is the particular being as such, that is, as participation in Being. "The substance (ousia) of each thing is one—and unity (to hen) is nothing other than being (to on)," as Aristotle says.14

Aristotle, who is the first and unsurpassed teacher of the study and formulation of definitions, observed that the unique character of the definition of substance refers to the unity of a being as a universal (katholou) and a whole (synolon): the unity of a being as a universal presupposes the synthesis of particular elements that constitute the being (matter, form, and "the third by a combination of these"—"the combination of both taken universally"). And the unity of a being as a whole presupposes a synthetic totality of properties and attributes—of the predicates of being ("quality or quantity or any such other category"). These particular elements and predicates of the unity of a being allow it "to be spoken of in many ways," but always with reference to one principle: to the initial primordial unity of the being, to the ousia or physis of the being. When we say the tree is woody (quality), the tree is tall (quantity), the tree is in the forest (place), the tree is centuries old (time), the tree is fruit-bearing (activity), and so forth, we use many ways to define that one being which is the tree. Yet we presuppose the single definition of its substance: this is a tree—the abstractive unity of its being.

But this one which is the substance of a being does not exhaust its semantic content in the definition of merely a single individual being: the substance represents the reality of participation in Being, not the establishment of an arithmetical/significative autonomy for existence in itself. The definition, then, of substance signifies all those beings that participate by a common mode in the common logos of social experience—all those beings of which we all have a common experience, that is, a common logos of approach to the mode by which they participate in life: "Things are said to be one, when the account [logos] of their essence is one and the same."20

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12. See Aristotle, Physics 2.192b32–33; Metaphysics 5.1015a14: "Nature in the primary and strict sense is the substance of things which have in themselves, as such, a source of movement" (trans. Barnes).
13. "If one considers things in their first growth and origin... first there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other.... Hence every city-state exists by nature, of indeed the first communities did... and that man is by nature a political animal... man is not only a political but a social animal" (Aristotle, Politics 1.1252a24–1253a8, trans. Barnes).

15. Ibid., 7.1029a2–4, trans. Barnes.
20. Physics 1.2.185b7–8.
Consequently, the singular character of the definition of a substance links the common logos of individual approaches to the particular existent units of the being, to the "things that are said to be one." The definition of a being refers to something (it is "the formula [logos] as related to the thing")22). It is not a logos ("formula") about something; it refers to the initial question "What is the 'what' of a thing,"23 that is, its substance. "Now of all the senses which 'being' has, the primary sense is clearly the 'what,' which denotes the substance."24 The identification of the definition with the power of manifesting the substance of the being immediately shows the character of the defining logos ("formula") to be that of a declaration (apophansis). Not every logos ("formula") is declaratory,25 but the declaration—the precondition for the being to be manifested in its substance, that is, for its participation in the common logos—is always a logos possessing a meaning,26 always a single definition of the being. What is declaratory is the logos ("formula") that refers to the substance and is definitive of the substance, the logos that tells us that something is or is not, that it exists or does not exist, the logos "in which being true or being false exists."27

The activity of being declared or shown forth (apo-phainesthai), that is, the operation of the logos that manifests the substance of a being (that allows it to appear), presupposes the collection and assembly of the particular elements as predicates of the universal and whole unity of a being, but also the exclusion of other elements and predicates that do not belong to this entity. In this way we are led to a clearer understanding of the logos as a definition, that is, as a boundary for the discernment of the presuppositions for the singular character of the substance of each being. The logos that is declaratory of the substance defines, that is, distinguishes and separates the elements that "signify" the unity of the substance from other elements "significatory" of other substances. The definition refers to the singular character of the substance ("the unity of the thing of which we say that the formula [logos] is a definition"),28 presupposing the differences that show up the singular uniqueness of the substance: "It is evident that the definition is the formula [logos] composed of the differentiae."29 And this unity always has a universal character, referring either to the uniqueness of the existent unit of the being ("a particular man or a particular horse"—primary substance), or to all the particular existent units of the being, "those things that are said to be one" (secondary substance).30

In both cases the logos ("formula") of the distinguishing differentiae subsists in the single logos of the universal, the logos that is declaratory of substance. The definition defines the unicity of the substance as a logos "from the differentiae": "The ultimate differentia will be the substance and the definition of the thing."31 Thus the activity of being shown forth, the declaratory logos, reveals not only the unity of the being as a universal but also the mode of this unity: it preserves both the formula of the distinguishing differentiae that define the single universality of the substance and the logos ("formulae") of the particular elements or "parts" (moria) that compose the single universality of the substance: "The formula [logos] of the parts must be contained in the formula [logos] of the whole"32. "The formula [logos] of the essence of some things contains the parts of the things defined."33

Consequently, the logos as a definition corresponds not only to the semantics of the singular universality of substance but also to the manifestation of the mode of the composition of the particular "parts" or distinguishing differentiae that show up the singular

23. Ibid., 7.1028a11-12, trans. Barnes.
25. "For even the definition [logos] of man is not yet a declaratory formula [logos apophantikos] unless 'is' or 'was' or 'will be' or something of this sort is added" (De Interpretatione 5.17αι11-12, trans. Barnes).
26. "The simple declaration [apophansis] is a significant spoken sound about whether something exists or does not exist" (De Interpretatione 5.17αι22-23, trans. Barnes).
33. Ibid., 7.11.1037a22-23, trans. Barnes.
universality of the substance. This means that the definition of a substance is not simply a conventional "sign" that is useful for ensuring mutual understanding, but that it corresponds to a composition and ordering of the specific data of common experience with a view to enabling the unity of the substance to be manifested within the framework of the common logos. Thus in so far as beings are manifested by the logos, they are also manifested in accordance with logos ("reason")—by a mode corresponding to the harmony and order that has been created, which constitutes the common logos. The mode by which beings are manifested/defined constitutes the participation of beings in Being, in the well-ordered/social realization of life: it is a rational (logikos) mode that refers to a harmonious and ordered assembly of distinguishing differentiae and of particular "parts," showing up the universality of the singular substance—that which the being is as common logos: "Order [logos] always means ratio [logos]";34 "That 'for the sake of which' is in the definition [logos]."35 Thus we arrive at the sense of logos as a rational [logikē], organic, and causally explained [commonly accepted] series and order.

§ 15. Abstraction and Abstract Concept

My brief discussion of Aristotle's analysis of the definition of substance in the previous section helps us to study the similarities and differences between the function of logos as "logical" or "rational" and the function of logos within the bounds of myth.

We may say at the outset that the function of logos in the two cases is identical. Both in its mythical and its rational expression logos "signifies" and manifests the event of the relationship (approach, access, communion) of the mind with the mode of the manifestation of beings and well-ordered harmony—the event of the conformation and correspondence of the human logos with the logos/mode that constitutes Being.

In either case the function of logos (the signification of the relationship of the mind with existing things) is not an autonomous individual achievement, but a communal event, a coordination with the common experience of the relationship between mind and existing things. In other words, the mode of the logos (both in myth and in rational thought) is the mode of life; the logos is not exhausted in an ineffectual imaging of the mode of life, but reproduces this mode as an event of communion and relation. Both in myth and in rational thought knowledge is assured only "by participation" in the common logos.

The difference between mythical and rational expression seems to be centered fundamentally on that which we could call a "unit" of participation in the common logos. If a unit of participation in the common logos of myth is chiefly the personified image, a unit of participation in common rationality is chiefly the impersonal concept. But if we are to define this possible difference more precisely (accepting it or rejecting it), we must study what it is precisely that the concept represents, and in what respects it is different from the personified image.

On the basis of Aristotle's analysis discussed in the previous section, we can say that the concept is the minimum unit of the definition—minimum as the result of abstraction, or better: the abstractive condensing of the signification of the definition in a single "notion" (ennoëma), in a single formulation "in the mind" (en nóti) of the semantic content of the definition. This single formulation "in the mind" does not cease to be definitive of the substance of that which is signified, of the mode by which the signified thing participates in the social realization of life. But the "abstractive condensing" leads the defining concept to function more as a marking with a sign and less as a critical clarification of what is signified: in everyday language the defining concept functions chiefly as a "sign"—a mark of reference to the experience of the common logos.

If we are to understand the function of the "sign," we need to refer to the specifying (eidopoios—"endowing with form or species") character of the defining logos, again as Aristotle clarified it. In the degree in which the definition of substance signifies all those beings that participate by a common mode in the common logos of communal experience, it ends up as a single abstractive synthesis,

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as a notion/"phantasm" determining the substance: it "makes the substance a species (poiei eidos);" it is a specifying (eidopoios) logos. This specifying function of the definition is more clear when it concerns the signifying of the substance of sensible things: then the definition of the substance summarizes the particular experiences of the common species (eidos) or form (morphē) of all those beings that participate in the same substance. The universality of the definition refers to the universal species (eidos katholou) of beings of the same substance—it summarizes the universal nature of the substance: "For the definition refers to the universal and the species."36

But for the definition of the universality of the species to be singular, it presupposes the distinguishing differentia of the species from the species of other substances—the differentia with regard to which the uniqueness of the substance is marked out. Consequently, it is not only the abstractive synthesis of the particular experiences of the common species of all those beings that participate in the same substance but also "the logos drawn from the differentiae" that marks out the singular species of the substance. The distinguishing differentia endows with form or species (is eidopoios): "The logos that arises from the differentiae is the species"37; "For every specifying differentia with the genus makes a species."38

And the species can more easily be "signified" than clarified critically. The reference to the species is chiefly indicative of the common experience/contemplation of the species, which is why the definition of the universality of the species is identified with the name/sign of the uniqueness of the substance: "The logos of which the name is a sign, becomes a definition."39 The name itself as a phoenetic expression has no meaning when it is not a sign, that is, a symbol—when it does not bring together the particular experiences of the species that each of us has separately, with a view to "signaling" the being, that is, to defining it: "Nothing is by nature a name but only when it becomes a symbol."40 The signified species names the things: "The species give names to the individuals."41

We may now add that the specifying function of the definition is also wholly analogous when it relates to the signifying of the substance of nonsensible realities: then the definition of the substance summarizes the particular experiences of all those nonsensible realities that participate in the same substance—that constitute a common mode of their realization within the framework of the communal event of life. The definition has once again a singular universality of the substance that is signified by a name/sign/symbol. And the name/sign/symbol of the substance has a specifying (eidopoios) character; it "makes a species" (poiei eidos) of the substance, referring to a common notion (ennoēma/"phantasm"), to a singular formulation "in the mind" (en nōi) of the semantic content of the definition of the substance. Thus when we pronounce the word freedom, the hearing of this word evokes in all of us who commune/communicate with each other through this word (and do not have it as part of a private language) a common "acoustic symbol," a species (eidos) signifying the common experience of the fact of freedom—of the mode by which freedom is realized as comming/participating in life.

Within this perspective (and also theory) of the way concepts function, we may set down some conclusions about the relationship and the difference between the unit of participation in common reason (which is the impersonal concept) and the unit of participation in the common logos of myth (which is the personified image).

In both cases the logos functions in a semantic/symbolic fashion: it presupposes participation in the experience of the common logos, the mode by which life is realized as an ordered/social event. Neither the personified image nor the impersonal concept represents in itself an epistemic potentiality, but both do lead to an epistemic potentiality simply because they function in a semantic/symbolic manner: they unite the experience of the individual with the

common experience, ensuring knowledge "by participation" in the common logos.

Both these units of knowledge constitute an experience of species (eidos): the human mind operates with images (phantasmata), intellection is contemplation (theoria), and this statement was formulated by Aristotle with the bold inference that "the soul never thinks without an image." The rational definition is specifying (eidopoios)—it gives specific form/shape/unique boundaries to the experience that is signified, and therefore operates as an epistemic potentiality in a manner entirely analogous to that of the personified image. And unfolded by abstraction ("as an abstract," we would say today), the definition, as a concept definitive of substance, does not cease to be declaratory of participation in Being, that is, the manifestation/possibility of the mode by which the thing defined participates in the realization of life. "It is from the substance itself that we take the logos of Being," as Plato had concluded before Aristotle.

If there is a difference between the personified image and the impersonal concept, it must be located in the "resistance" of the personified image and in the "susceptibility" of the impersonal concept to becoming autonomous and being objectified as items of knowledge. If the personified image ceases to operate in a semantic/symbolic manner, and as an epistemic category is identified with that which it wishes to signify and symbolize, it constitutes a manifest falsehood. The knowledge that myth wishes to convey—for example, the myth of Phaethon—manifestly becomes a huge falsehood if we identify Phaethon’s chariot with the sun that shines on us every day—if we take the image as definitive of knowledge in itself.

By contrast, the impersonal concept loses its semantic/symbolic character much more easily. It is more easily subjected to private appropriation, to the egocentric inclination of individuals to possess, by their own powers, the certainties of knowledge. Thus the impersonal concept is made autonomous as knowledge, and is detached from the unique potentiality of knowledge that is participation in the common logos of communal experience. It becomes an object of a fundamentally individual understanding that draws universality and validity from the imposition of a homogeneous understanding of it by all the individuals of the social whole. This imposition is dictated by the utilitarian intentionality of everyday communication. But by this means the common understanding of the concepts is separated from the actual realization of life—life is separated from thought and reason, and thought and reason serve only the conventions of everyday speech. Even Being is transformed into a conventional concept, and ceases to signify and symbolize the ordered/social realization of life, to refer to the dynamically activated common logos of life.

As a result of such bestowal of autonomy on concepts, an occupation with the intelligible realities that constitute life, that is, with philosophy, can easily be itself transformed into an individual skill in constructing different methods of correlating concepts, in order to arrive at a very rich variety of contested conceptual "systems." The concepts replace the experience of the existent, and knowledge is identified with a human’s individual ability to "understand" the concepts of the conventional code of communication—to compare them, link them together, and contrast them—always regardless of the reality of life.

It is evident that the mode of understanding and using abstract concepts becomes a criterion for the historical shaping of human life, a criterion for the differentiation of cultures and civilizations.

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42. On the Soul 3.7.431a17, trans. Barnes.
43. Phaedo 78d1.
44. Timaeus 22c: "Phaethon, the son of Helios, having yoked the steeds in his father’s chariot, because he was not able to drive them in the path of his father, burned up all that was upon the earth, and was himself destroyed by a thunderbolt" (trans. Hamilton and Cairns).
Chapter 2.2

The Semantics of Truth

§ 16. Truth as Participation

In the previous chapter we took as our starting point for approaching rational knowledge the identification that Heraclitus makes between sharing in common or being in communion (koinōnein) and being true (alētheuein). By the acceptance of this initial presupposition, we attempted also to interpret Aristotle’s discussions of both “definition” and “concept.” But from Heraclitus’s identification of sharing in common with being true, there arise two questions—introductory, of course, in philosophical terms—that we must address.

If truth is accessible only as rational knowledge, and if knowledge is rational only as a result of participation in the common logos of the ordered/social realization of life, then truth and the possibility of the knowledge of truth must be a common given in every instance of the political/social constitution of life. In that event, however, why are the historical/political manifestations of participation not always accompanied by the same rationality, by the same level of the activation of rational relations with regard both to the interpretation of reality and to the constitution of political life—by the same final understanding of truth? What are the factors that differentiate rational knowledge (with regard to both the content and to the degree of realization) within historical time and geographical space?
To take an image by way of example: What is it that distinguishes the social/political and cultural life in Athens in the fifth century BC from a “semibarbarous” (from the Greek perspective) tribe that nevertheless manages to form a polis with laws and an ordered society? If we accept that the establishment of the polis is the realization of life “in accordance with reason,” the realization of sharing in common or being in communion (koinōnein) and consequently of being true (alētheuein), then fifth-century Athens and the rudimentary city of a semibarbarous tribe ought to constitute a single common rationale (logiκe) of truth, the same understanding and realization of what matters for something to be true. Yet the Athenian tragedies, or the writings of the Sophists and of Plato, or fifth-century Athenian sculpture and architecture, reflect a rationale of truth very different from that reflected by the texts, art, and laws of our rudimentary tribal city.

There is no question that there is a dynamic in the way we exploit “being true”—beyond the fundamental embodiment of participation/verification in every political realization of life—a dynamic that differentiates knowledge, and consequently also rationality, on the level of participation in truth. What are the factors, however, on which this dynamic of knowledge and progress toward truth depends—a dynamic and progress that always seem endless and unbounded? And if knowledge is only by rational participation, by access to the common logos of life, what is it that differentiates the collective approaches toward, or individual participations in, the common logos of life at different times and in different places? What is it that differentiates, for example, the participation in, and access to, the rationale of truth of a great philosopher on the one hand and a minor philosopher on the other? What is the role of the individual logos—the individual capacities of the mind or the soul—for participation in the common logos and for the expression and formulation of the truth of the common logos?

To attempt a reply to these questions, we must rely on the concept of participation in truth—in view of the fact that the semantic content of participation enables us to make a fundamental distinction between the collective approaches and the individual participations in the common logos of life.

Before anything else it should be emphasized that when we identify truth with the orderly event of life (with the realization of life kata kosmon: in an ordered state), we are not referring to a finished objective something that can be exhausted as knowledge with a definitive informative description. The ordered realization of life manifests itself as a dynamically actualized common logos, that is, as an always unified realization of relations, as a coordination of the particular logoi of everything that exists. But the realization of these rational relations that form the common logos of life also constitutes an indeterminate dynamic that is presupposed for the formation and manifestation of the common logos of life. It is only relatively (again only with the aim of realizing relationship) that we can “freeze” this dynamic of life in terms of definitions and concepts, that is, within the semantic structure of the rational relations that form the common logos. The realization of the rational relations that form the common logos of life is dynamic and indeterminate, precisely because the participation itself of beings in Being (in the universal fact of existence) constitutes a logos, that is, a uniqueness and otherness of relations that differentiates the participation of every being in Being and thus gives identity to the being, makes it be that which it is and not something other than itself. The identity of every being presupposes its otherness with regard to other beings, and is consequently a result of its relationship with the other beings (not of an a priori given and abstract “principle”: A = A). It is the logos of the being’s referentiality that constitutes its identity as realization of life.

We can therefore say that the logos is the manifestation of existence as a fact of reference and relation (a manifestation of the referential character of Being, of the mode by which it is what it is). But as manifestation of the referentiality of beings, the logos presupposes the recipient (or the “horizon”) of the manifestation. That is why we say that the logos is existence as-toward the one who apprehends it. And the human person is the only sensory being that has the power of reason (logos) (the power to apprehend beings intellectually), to receive as logos the referentiality of beings—to realize as logos his
or her *relation* with the identity/otherness of beings. Or, formulated in a different way, life for the human person is found to be true as *logos*, because *logos* offers the sole possibility of participation by humans in the referential becoming of reality. With reference to the etymology of the Greek word *a-letheia* ("nonoblivion," i.e., "truth"), we say that the human person is the only sensory being for whom existence is not something that escapes awareness (*lanthanei*). The relationship of the human person to existing things manifests itself as *logos*. *Logos* is the manifestation of existing things to humans; it is their "nonoblivion," their truth.

But for the truth of beings (their manifestation to humans) to be realized as *logos*, it cannot only be a product of relation, it must also constitute relation. This means that the *rationality* of the truth of beings is not exhausted in each human's individual capacity to comprehend the manifestation as the *logos* of beings. Existence is understood by the individual intellect as *logos*, because such an understanding functions as a relation with the totality of human communal life. It is only because the *logos* is a fact of relationship and communion that it can also function as an individual capacity for understanding the referential truth of beings. *Logos* is at all events a fact of relationship that cannot (except merely conventionally or arbitrarily) be "frozen" in the understanding of the individual or be "codified" as a useful instrument of the collective exchange of views.

Naturally, individual apprehension is an experience in itself and a fact of life with an absolute character of otherness—considering that it is a unique and dissimilar relationship of every human with every being and is different from the relationship with every other being. But the otherness of individual apprehension is disclosed and constitutes *logos* only as a fact of relation that differentiates the identity of every human *as-toward* the apprehension/relationship of every other human with existing things. The individual identity of every human is a referential otherness that manifests itself as *logos*—as a unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable how of the common *natural* power of apprehension. Individual existence *proves to be true* only as a fact of existential otherness, that is, only within the context of *sharing* (*koinōnein*). The human person is *that which is as a referential existence*—and the referentiality of human existence manifests itself through the capacity of reason (*logos*).

It is consequently impossible for us to separate the truth from the referentiality of reason, and it is impossible for us to separate reason from the manifestation of an otherness that is realized and functions only as relation. Humans are *rational* (*logikoi*) because the referentiality of their existence proves to be true as a dynamic realization of otherness, that is, as participation in the universal rational realization of life, in the *common logos* of life. It is precisely because otherness constitutes the *mode of existence* of humans (in the state of otherness *being* is identified with *sharing*), that existential otherness also proves to be true as a dynamically actualized participation in the rational realization of life. And for this reason participation in the truth of the common *logos* is always objectively indeterminate, a dynamically actualized *how* that distinguishes the historical and cultural forms of human life.

We are therefore able to reply to our initial questions by saying that that which distinguishes *rational knowledge* within historical time and geographical space (the collective approaches and individual participations in the common *logos* of life) is the very "definition" of Man, that is, the *mode of his existence*—a *mode* that is realized only as otherness of participation in the universal rational realization of life, in the sharing/proving true of life.

This otherness of participation in life that constitutes human existence has, of course, natural, moral, and historical points of departure. It depends on the given (and philosophically unexplainable) differentiation of natural individuals, the differentiation of the rational/intellectual capacity from one human individual to another. It also depends on the differentiation of the "moral" achievement of a transcendence of the *private logos* and a coordination with the common *logos* of life. And it depends similarly on the influences that individuality receives from the historical-cultural environment. Nevertheless, in every case the differentiation serves the existential fact of individual otherness and is always a differentiation with regard to proving true, with regard to the actualization of the relations that constitute truth ("nonoblivion"), the emergence of individual-
ity from nonrelation, the actualization of atomic and collective participation in the universal fact of the relations that assemble life, in the common logos of life.

What, then, distinguishes Athens in the fifth century BC from the rudimentary city of a semibarbarous tribe is a different dynamic (physical, moral, historical, and ultimately existential) in the citizens' demand to actualize the universal potentialities of the relations that form the social reality of their life. And the actualization of the relations signifies an exploitation of the powers of communion and consequently an expansion of the space of truth, an effort to ensure that all the givers of life should prove true, that they should all constitute a logos/event of relation and communion. This effort is an expansion of life, an expansion of all the powers of communion, and consequently an effort to ensure that every relation should be signified, should be offered as a rational power of common relationship.

The semantics of truth is a communal achievement, and this achievement differentiates the historical data of human life and constitutes the variety of cultures and civilizations.

§ 37. Logos or Reason as the "Judge" of Truth

We say that truth is the fact of participation in the common logos of life, a dynamic proving true (aletheuein) that is identical with sharing or being in communion (koinonein). The analysis of the terms proving true and being in communion has led us, up to this point, to the following conclusion: that which is and that which becomes (beings and facts or events) are true as rational knowledge, that is, as the individual apprehension of the logos of beings and of facts or events (of the referential character of existence and of the facts or events of life), with the presupposition that this individual apprehension is realized (verified) as communion within the context of human communal life, that is, as common logos.

But is this theory of truth and knowledge not excessively relational? Is not the reality of beings and of life exhausted in the mode by which that which is and that which becomes is true for humans? Should we not distinguish between the existence of beings in itself and in its referential character (as toward humans)? Do the formulations of the logos of beings in our individual apprehension (that is, our intellectual representations), which are true only as categories of the common logos, not convey the logos of the reality of beings in themselves or function as logos only relative-to-us?

We owe the statement of the problem as summarized by these questions to Kant, although consciously or unconsciously the problem lies behind every phase of the historical development of philosophical inquiries. We could say that philosophy's journey has almost always been a balancing act on a line between two possibilities: that knowledge should become autonomous by its identification with the truth of beings as they are in themselves, or that knowledge should be relativized by making the experience/apprehension of beings autonomous simply as phenomena. This "dualism," as Kant defined it, appears to be fundamentally insuperable—philosophy is bound to the polarity of relative-to-us and in-itself, with immediate consequences for the more general human stance toward the world and life: if the source of truth is intellecution and consequently knowledge is always relative-to-us, then all knowledge and every branch of science have a priori a relative and conventional character, and the only truth is ignorance. If the source of knowledge is reason as a coincidence and substantial correspondence of the concept and the reality conceived, then the knowledge of beings in themselves is exhausted in their rational manifestation, and reason is an objective and universally obligatory given to which the individual's understanding must be subjected. The dualism of the Kantian approach binds us to the dilemma of choosing between agnosticism and dogmatism.

Kant attempted to overcome the dilemma by resorting to the relativity both of agnosticism and of dogmatism—a relativity that is confirmed by the interposition of reality in the process of understanding through immediate pragmatic experience. The philosophical adequacy of this solution (adequacy both in the field of scientific epistemology and in the metaphysics that so absorbed Kant) cannot be judged unless we take into account a further and even more fundamental consequence of Kantian dualism.
Both the identification of reason with the truth of beings in themselves and its identification with the phenomenicity of beings (the truth of beings as-toward-us) presuppose the same individualized autonomy of knowledge, the same version of the knowing subject and the known object as independent ontic atomicities. In both cases Being (the dynamic becoming of life) must be divided up into independent ontic atomicities in order to be accessible to knowledge—either in itself or as a phenomenon. In both cases the logos of the real or the phenomenal (or also of immediate pragmatic experience) becomes independent of the mode of being, that is, of the dynamic of the relations that form life, and is identified with an individual approach to the individual truth (absolute or relative) of beings. When truth is identified with the logos of the atomicity of beings, it is itself an atomic fact of knowledge that is shaped and communicated with the help of the semantics of concepts.

The philosophical adequacy of any attempt to resolve the dilemma between agnosticism and dogmatism cannot be judged if we fail to respond to the question about the relationship between reason and truth. If reason is identified with truth, then truth has a priori given boundaries and the problem of knowledge (real or relative) necessarily presupposes the understanding of the given boundaries of truth, boundaries that differentiate the reason/truth of existing things and consequently lead to the individualized autonomy of knowledge—leaving the problem of the reality or phenomenicity of the rational principle (logos) of existing things unresolved. However, if reason (logos) is not identified with truth, but is the judge of truth, then truth is free of any rational predetermination and can be identified with the universal becoming of the relations that form life and the world. In that event, other avenues of approach to the problem of the reality or phenomenicity of existing things open up. But let us take a more detailed look at which consequences follow from the identification of truth with reason and which follow from its identification with the fact itself of reality, which is manifested and signified as reason (logos).

If we identify truth (alēthia) with reason (logos), then reason constitutes a reality that precedes the world of existing things and brings that which exists into subjection. Then harmony and order are no longer the mode of that which exists but the imposed boundary and given law that are presupposed for life and the world to be realized—that is, that are made autonomous as-toward life and the world, constituting a reality in itself that is ontologically different and axiologically superior. In that event, the questions concerning the differentiation either of the realizations of that which exists or of atomic entities’ participation in the truth of reason remain fundamentally unanswered, because the differentiation cannot arise at being otherness as-toward the given reason without constituting untruth. And untruth cannot represent the realization of life and knowledge without constituting a contradiction—a kind of failure of life and knowledge to conform to the very presupposition for their realization, which is the one common and given rational principle.

If we identify truth (alēthia) with the rational principle (logos) of reality and not with the fact itself of the existing thing, then the differentiation of the existing thing’s realizations or of atomic entities’ participation in the truth of reason only a posteriori—quantitatively and axiologically—can be determined, accounted for, and measured. There is no room for fundamental or qualitative differentiations, that is, for creative surprises or new rational achievements of life and knowledge. In other words, if truth is identified with the given of reason, then truth cannot constitute history. Then history is only a variety of noncompliance with the given truth of reason. And this greater or lesser untruth (noncompliance with the truth of reason) that constitutes history can only be accounted for by the axiological depreciation of phenomenal reality as-toward the ideal rational principle, leading unavoidably to the necessity of an ethics of reason or rational ethics: a body of rules and laws imposed on life compulsorily to ensure conformity to reason.

The quantitative/ethical version of truth/untruth ends up necessarily in the atomic version of Being: no existing thing exhausts its identity by the fact of its relationship with other beings (a relationship that is always determinative of species and rationality); it is not that which it is as a result of participation in the universal reality of
the relations that constitute Being (that is, life). Instead it draws its identity from the reference and quantitative correspondence of its properties to the given rational principle of its existence, the principle that constitutes the substance of the existing thing, the truth of its participation in Being (Plato), or of its participation in the primordial purity of its existence (Augustine), or of its participation in the reality of the being in itself (Ding an sich: Kant). In all three of these historical examples, the Being of each existing thing is exhausted in an atomic/ontic version of existence in itself, and the knowledge of existing things is realized only by the fragmentary objectification of their individuality. The truth of a being is assured by the reference (which is a quantitative comparison of properties) to the given atomic/ontic nature or substance or concept or reality in itself of the being, seeing that it is this that constitutes the rational principle of the being (beings are or are shown in correlation with their atomic nature or substance or concept of reality in itself).

And the consequence of this chopping up and ontic objectification of Being and knowledge is the objectification (the ensnaring in institutionalized forms) of life itself. In order to assemble the event of life, the existing autonomized individualities must be organized in structures of obligatory givens or conventional relations with reference to unbreakable natural, moral, and political laws—seeing that the structures function more effectively the more stable, fixed, and hardened they are. And the “stability” of the structures that organize life is served by definitive and “positive” knowledge, by the unappealable definition of the atomic nature/substance/concept/reality, or phenomenonicity, of beings, and by the definition of the laws that govern the “mechanism” of the universe or of the “values” that preserve political civic life.

If we now accept the second version, that is, if we identify truth with the mode of existence and life, and reason only with the semantics of this mode, then the knowledge of truth is not exhausted in the understanding of the “fixed” (for reasons of semantic intentional-ity) boundaries of beings and facts, but knowledge is realized as participation in the dynamics of the relations that form the world and life, a participation in the universal communion that consti-

tutes the mode of that which exists and manifests itself as common reason (logos).

Knowledge as participation in the dynamics of existence and life is served by the intellectual, empirical, aesthetic, intuitive, imaginative, or whatever other possibility humans have for approaching the dynamic becoming of beings and events. But none of these particular possibilities for approaching how to establish what is true, not even if added up arithmetically, exhausts the dynamics of knowledge as participation in truth. This is because the mode by which knowledge is realized is the mode of existence and of life—and life has no other mode of realization than the universal unity of a dynamics of relations; it has no other mode of being true (to alêtheuein) than being in communion (to koinônein). If knowledge is the study and manifestation of the truth of life, it is not possible for philosophers to arrive at establishing truth (to alêtheuein) in a mode different from that by which they realize being alive (to zên). And philosophers, like all humans, live because they participate organically in the universal dynamic becoming of the world, because they commune directly with the reality that surrounds them: they assume and assimilate the world to their own bodies as food; they use it as clothing, tools, and shelter; they adapt themselves to the conditions of the natural environment, to the weather and the seasons—and all this not “as units,” not individually, but within the framework of the dynamics of the relations of the political/social whole in which they are organically placed.

If nothing is, or lives or exists, isolated and independent of the dynamics of relations of communion that form the physical and political state of becoming, then neither is it possible for reason to be true in an atomic state isolated from the communal realization of life—it is not possible for reason to be true when it arbitrarily makes the Being of beings motionless as an individual objective what subject to individual apprehension, possession, and use. If being true is life as communion, then reason too is true only as the power of participation in life, a power that we signify with a view to participating in truth, in the dynamic communion that constitutes life. Then also untruth is not fundamentally an intellectual error but fundamentally an event of nonparticipation, of standing apart or being absent,
that is, of self-exclusion from the dynamic becoming of life—it is ultimately a falsification of life: an attempt to make the arbitrary autonomization of atomicty, the artificial “freezing” of life in the individual’s apprehension, and the insistence on the private reason appear to be the truth about life.

Consequently, if Being (eiain) is identified with being in communion (koinônein) and reason is true in the definition of Being only as signifying the event of communion, then an understanding of atomicty as existential fact in itself or in accordance with the phenomenon is schematic, artificial, and arbitrary, without any relation to Being. Just as a member of the human body is not in itself, but is only as a realization of the general fact of the life of the body—only as a realization of the communion/function of the members that constitute the human body—so too no existing thing is in itself but only as a realization of the communion of existing things that constitute the unified and general fact of life.1 When we say a being, we signify a fact of participation in Being, a dynamically actualized how of communion.

Of course, the identification of being true (aletheuein) with being in communion (koinônein) does not imply a fundamental irrationality in truth, the possibility of an exclusively intuitive or mystical approach to truth, any more than it implies a version of truth as an impersonal historical “evolution,” truth as a product of mass “praxis,” of the total and automatic self-realization of life as historical/evolutionary becoming. To be in communion is the dynamics of

1. We members of so-called “developed” modern societies—of the industrial overproduction that nourishes our consumerist hysteria—have learned a painful lesson in this matter through our experience of the pollution of the natural environment. The pollution of the atmosphere or of rivers as a result of industrial emissions, or the destruction of even one species of insect that impinges on our agricultural productivity, does not represent an isolated instance of damage to the natural environment but disturbs, or throws out of balance, the entire unified operation of natural “becoming,” the organic whole of the relations that constitute the reality of animate and inanimate beings. For the first time in history, we humans are learning through direct tragic experience a fundamental philosophical truth, namely, that to see beings as existentially autonomous individuals is only an arbitrary choice of the human understanding, a choice that has not the slightest relationship to the truth of life, to the dynamic unity of the universal “becoming” of life.

the realization of relations, which means that for the relation to be an event of communion, it is free of any predetermination, it possesses uniqueness and therefore otherness of reason. But the reason of existential otherness does not precede the relation; it is the relation that constitutes reason—reason discloses Being as an event of communion.

The inference we may draw from the above is decisive for overcoming the agnostic/dogmatic polarity in philosophy. The knowledge to which philosophical inquiry aspires is in any event rational because truth itself is rational, that is, a fact of relation and relation that discloses. It is not reason that constitutes truth, but truth as the social realization of life that constitutes reason. Reason is not identified either with Being or with reality in itself, or with the phenomenicity of being, that is, with reality as relative-to-us. Being is identified with the dynamic realization of life as communion, and the relationship of communion is manifested and signified as reason.

So when we say that reason is existence as-toward whoever apprehends it, this as-toward does not signify the relativity of the knowledge of the existing thing in contradistinction to its existence in itself; it signifies knowledge as a fact of relation, existence as a fact of reference, and reason as a manifestation of existential reference and as indicative of epistemological relation. Existence only is as a fact of reference and relation, and this fact is manifested and signified as reason. And knowledge is not true except only as a manifestation of reason, as nonforgetfulness (a-lētheia) of the otherness and uniqueness of the fact of relation.

Thus reason functions critically—is the judge of truth; it judges the truth or untruth of knowledge—in the degree in which it preserves the truth as a fact of relation and as otherness of relation. It does not allow knowledge to become untruth, to become independent of the dynamic of relation, of the unique power to be true that is life as communion. Reason is judge of truth in the degree in which it preserves knowledge from its subjection to the arbitrariness of atomic apprehension, from its alienation into an objective given that is only possessed and is not shared in common, thus violating the truth of life. The critical function of reason is, of course, also
served by the atomic understanding, as it is by the correspondence of understanding to the presuppositions of the individual's experience. But for it to be rational, intellectual judgment must verify the things thought as indicative of communion. The ultimate criterion of truth is not the fidelity of the individual's understanding to some objective givens of knowledge but the correspondence of intellect (noein) to the reality of universal communion (koinōnein).

By this route truth is freed in a philosophical context from the schematic dilemma of a choice between dogmatism and the relativity of knowledge, and also between “objectively” right and “objectively” wrong knowledge: truth is transposed to a level different from the utilitarian objectification of showing forth as affirmation and denial. Truth is an event of dynamic participation in the rational realization of life, and this participation is judged within the boundaries of philosophy.

§ 18. The Apophatic/Potential Definition of Truth

The fundamental investigation that we are attempting here of the rational character of truth leads us to review again the semantic distinction between relative and absolute that occupied us in the previous section.

If truth is identified with the universal communal event of life, with the dynamics of the relations of communion that constitute life; if truth is not stipulated in terms of realities in themselves or as phenomena; if it is only signified by reason without being imposed as the given and objective certainty of knowledge, then we can say that truth and the knowledge of truth are an absolute dimension: “released”/free from every predetermination, not subject to any defining intellectual formulation, law, convention, or authority.

On the other hand, the semantics of truth and knowledge are without question a relative dimension: they represent only the occasion or the possibility of participation in truth, they are subject to a relationship/dependence on the fact of the social realization of truth and knowledge, they depend on the dynamic indeterminacy of the relations that constitute this realization. Any intellectual formulation, law, convention, or authority can “delimit” the fact of participation in truth and the knowledge of truth, but it is never identified with this fact and never exhausts it—seeing that the objective/signifying character of the “limit” cannot be identified with the dynamic indefiniteness of the relations that constitute the realization of truth and knowledge. And these relations cannot be seen as atomic; they are not limited by the bipolarity of subject/object (truth is not exhausted in the intellectual or sensory approach of the subject to the object), but truth is realized dynamically as the subject’s participation in the totality of the relations that constitute and show forth the otherness of the object. And this subjective participation is true only as an event of communion, that is, as common reason.

But if the signification of truth is inevitably relative, if it cannot represent a certainty of knowledge, then the whole edifice of human science, as a positive semantics of knowledge, is radically questioned. If we deny the defining character of what is signified in the relationship between intellecution and noumenon, between subject and object—if the cognitive marking of the subject's approach to the object is not delimiting of truth but is only realized as a continuously actualized and ultimately indeterminate dynamic of communion—then it looks as if the foundations of scientific knowledge are overturned (at least in the way that this knowledge has functioned in the last few centuries). That is to say, it looks as if the presupposition of the distinction between positive knowledge and doubt or ignorance, between objectively correct and objectively erroneous knowledge, is overturned—the distinction between scientific objectivity and subjective impression or ambiguous expression.

And yet the relativization of what is signified by scientific knowledge is the great contribution that the very epistemology of the so-called positive sciences has made to philosophy in the twentieth century2 (a return of science to the epistemological presuppositions of Greek philosophy of the fifth century BC). Examples that may be mentioned as early cracks in the objective certainty of

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2. As early as 1943 Sartre wrote: "La relativité de la science moderne vise l'être. L'homme et le monde sont des êtres relatifs et le principe de leur être est la relation" (L'Être et le Néant [Paris: Gallimard, 1943], 370).
intellectual and empirical approaches to knowledge, without en-
croaching on alien scientific fields, include Albert Einstein's theory
of relativity (Relativitätstheorie), which showed that scientific ob-
servation is always affected by the position and movement of the
observer; and later, Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (Un-
bestimmtheitsrelation), which ruled out definite prediction in the
field of physical becoming and linked the result of observation or
inference from it not simply to the factor of the "observer" but to the
event of observation itself, to the fact of the relationship between
observer and things observed; or again, Niels Bohr's radical observa-
tions on the electron's property of appearing either as a particle
or as a wave, without its being in itself either one or the other but
something that presupposes both—the acceptance that in the field
of nuclear physics energy is not only kinetic but is identified with
mass and increases with motion, the assertion of the existence of
"antimatter" or the theory about the continuing "genesis" of mat-
ter and astral bodies in the universe as a whole, and a host of other
inferences, both on the microphysical and the macrophysical lev-
eels, which shake the sensible and intellectual certainties that have
dominated science in the last few centuries as regards not only the
ontic/objective and individually autonomous character of existing
things but also the mechanistic operation of laws in the universe as
a whole.3

These inferences ultimately present the distinction between
right and wrong as an impediment to scientific methodology, with
the result that only a gradation between these two poles of knowl-
dge can serve to advance scientific research in any substantial way.
Cosmic harmony and order are revealed more and more to be an

3. See Max Planck, Vorträge und Erinnerungen, 11th ed. (Darmstadt: Wis-
senschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1979); Albert Einstein, Über die spezielle und
die allgemeine Relativitätstheorie, 20th ed. (Brunswick, Germany: Vieweg,
1965); Werner Heisenberg, Physik und Philosophie, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Hir-
zel, 1984); idem, Schritte über Grenzen, 4th ed. (Munich: Piper, 1977); Niels
Bohr, Atomtheorie und Naturbeschreibung (Berlin: Springer, 1931); C. F. von
Weizsäcker, Zum Weltbild der Physik, 12th ed. (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1976); Alfred
Books, 1956); Hermann Bondi, Cosmology (Cambridge: Cambridge Univer-
sity Press, 1951); Erich Jantsch, The Self-Organizing Universe (Oxford: Pergamon

objectively indeterminate dynamic becoming. "The scientific model
of physics has now ceased to be of a purely scientific nature," says
Heisenberg—at least in the sense we understood science in the cen-
turies immediately preceding the twentieth.

The relativity of the semantics through which we participate in truth
and knowledge is the initial presupposition of the apophatic epis-
tology, as we call it, that took shape in the course of the historical
development of Greek philosophy, beginning at the time of Plato
and ending, by way of the Neoplatonic tradition, in the great syn-
theses of Christian thought in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries.

The terms apophasis and apophatic knowledge are set out
with clarity in the so-called Areopagical Writings of the fifth cen-
tury AD—texts that have remained a pivotal point of departure
for the formation of tendencies and currents of thought with vital
consequences for the evolution of philosophy in the medieval and
modern ages in both the Greek East and the European West. The
meaning of the term is immediately apparent: it is in fundamen-
tal semantic antithesis to the cataphatic (affirmative) approach to
knowledge: cataphatic and apophatic represent two different meth-
ods of approaching the object of knowledge. By following the first
we attribute to the thing known positive predicates; we say precisely
what the object that we wish to define is, whereas by following the
second path or method we use predicates negatively; we say what
the defined object is not with a view to clarifying its specific defini-
tion indirectly.

This apophatic/indirect approach to knowledge through the
exclusion of positive predicates (which can easily be objectified as
properties in themselves of the thing known) is only the nucleus of
the much more general epistemological position that constitutes
apophasis. Apophasis is not restricted to a "logic of denials,"
to an epistemological position that is cataphatic in a negative way, not
at all different from positively stated cataphatic knowledge. The use
of the apophasic method aims at transcending both the affirmations
and the denials, in a freedom from any conceptual predetermination
of knowledge. It refuses to exhaust knowledge in the semantics of
knowledge; it refuses to identify knowledge only with the intellectual
approach to the content of knowledge, with the conventional understanding of the concepts of the common linguistic idiom.

Apophatic epistemology does not deny or distort the intellectual content of the concepts of the common linguistic idiom and does not reject the use of syllogisms and their methodological correctness. It uses both positive statements and negative statements, as it also uses the simultaneous synthesis of positive and negative statements, the “union from both” whereby “the inexpressible is interwoven with the expressible.” But it does not restrict the possibility of knowledge to the common and uniform understanding of concepts and syllogisms. The use of concepts and syllogisms, their intellectual and methodological coherence, only signs/signifies the possibility of the human approach to knowledge. Within the framework of this epistemological position, philosophy continues Heraclitus’s reasoned understanding (logos), imitating “the lord whose oracle is at Delphi”; its statements are neither disclosure nor concealment, neither affirmation nor denial, but only indicative of truth: it “neither speaks nor conceals, but gives signs.”

Insistence on the relativity of knowledge, which is represented by the semantics of the concepts and syllogisms, broadens the margins of the possibilities of knowledge beyond the merely intellectual capacity of humans: it allows Plato to call true knowledge “the soul’s vision,” “contemplation of truth’s beauty,” and “participation in the things known,” and Aristotle to speak of an immediate encounter of the soul with knowledge, of “the knowledge of immediate things that is not demonstrable,” and of “contemplation that is most pleasant and best.”

It is very widely assumed that the epistemology of ancient Greek philosophy exhausts the possibility of knowledge in humanity’s intellectual capacity, in the mind’s perceptive function—that is to say, that with ancient Greek philosophy rationalism makes its first appearance in human history. Even when the Platonists and Neoplatonists define knowledge chiefly as “departure (ekdēmeia) from beings” and “participation” in the good—a participation that is attained only “beyond every substance”—even then it is believed that this refers not to an epistemological possibility beyond intellectual perception but to a transcendence of the distractions of the objects of sense perception with a view to arriving at a purity of mind.

And it is a fact that not only Platonic and Neoplatonic but also Aristotelian ontology (the understanding of Being and the relationship of human existence with Being as a whole—as we will see in a later chapter of this book) prevent us from supposing that there is any other possibility for human existence to assert itself as a hypothesis beyond intellectual self-consciousness and the conscious capacity to perceive beings. But it is equally a fact that even if ontological truth is exhausted for the Greeks in rational manifestation and rational harmony, nevertheless the knowledge of this truth is not restricted to the intellect’s capacity to form concepts to verify the concept’s correspondence to the object of thought and to construct syllogisms. Ancient Greek epistemology has only the most tenuous relationship, if any at all, with what we call rationalism in the history of Western European philosophy.

The introductory nature of these pages does not allow us to demonstrate systematically and at length the priority that the universal/experiential vision of truth has in relation to intellection even in Plato and Aristotle. We will confine ourselves simply to noting in summary fashion that for Plato the unit of knowledge is the idea in its original etymological sense (from idein, “to see”) as a product of the dynamic/active vision of things. The inference to the idea, that is, to the dynamic vision of things, presupposes something much more than a collaboration between sensory perception and intellection, a collaboration according to which the former supplies the content and the latter the form, as Kant interpreted it: it presupposes the general experience of the soul and its participation in the beauty of the visible object. And the ascent of knowledge to the vision of beauty is not a detached experience (only sensory or intellectual or emotional), nor is it a simple “synergy” between the epistemic and experiential powers of humans, but it is a dynamic movement of the
soul toward the beauty of the visible object, a general relationship with it, an erotic love for the beauty of what is seen. The “steps" (epanabasmoi) of progress in knowledge are rungs on a ladder of erotic love that is based on the successive stages of the contemplation/vision of the beauty of bodies and of the achievements of laws and branches of learning, and lead ultimately to the supreme erotic surprise, the unexpected vision of beauty in itself, which is of a single form and eternal. Toward this “vast ocean of beauty" the philosopher will remain ever “turned in contemplation."8

And Platonic contemplation, as an epistemological stance, finds in Aristotle its natural extension and continuation. The contrast that Western interpreters have taken for granted (from the time of the medieval Scholastics to the present day) between Platonic contemplation (theōría) and Aristotelian logic (logikē) does not seem to have always been a consistent interpretation of ancient Greek epistemology. Aristotelian logic presupposes correct reasoning (orthos logos) as the correct defining and correct structuring of concepts and syllogisms, but it does not exhaust knowledge in defining and structuring. The ultimate correctness of reason is not simply methodological (or formal); it is confirmed “by virtue," and virtue is “a work of community": “Virtue must be in relation to the state."9 Knowledge refers ultimately to “contemplating rationally" (logikōs theōrein).10 It is the soul that “thinks and understands" actively through the contemplation of the “forms"—and the soul is the whole human person, an indeterminate inclusion of that which exists: “The soul in a sense is everything that is."14 Aristotle rejects the subdivision of the soul into its rational, incensive, and appetitive parts as maintained by a number of thinkers. For him the parts (moría) of the soul appear to be infinite: “In a sense their number is unlimited."15 And these objectively indeterminate or “infinite" powers of the soul can only with great difficulty (“is very difficult to determine") be separated from or even identified with the supremely cognitive power of the soul that Aristotle calls the soul’s imaginative faculty (to phantastikon).16 All the parts (moría) of the soul’s functions converge on the soul’s power to imagine (to contemplate as image) that which it knows, without these parts being identified with the phantastikon or being separated from it. And because “the soul never thinks without a mental image [phantasma],"17 we cannot speak of knowledge apart from vision/contemplation, just as we cannot speak of intellectual learning without prior knowledge: “All teaching and all intellectual learning come about from already existing knowledge"; they “produce their teaching through what we are already aware of."18 And the immediacy of cognitive experience remains always undemonstrable: “Knowledge in the case of the immediate is non-demonstrable."19 Ultimately, contemplation (theōría) is “the most pleasant and excellent" aspect of knowledge,20 but so is its metaphysical end point: the meaning of human life is found in “the contemplation of god”—“the service and contemplation of god."21

In any event, however, the apophatic epistemology of the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition came to philosophical maturity with the radical break that occurred in the history of philosophy through the Christian thinking of the Greek theologians of the so-called

8. See Symposium 210a–211c (Diotima’s speech on beauty).
13. “The soul is that by which we primarily live, perceive and think” (On the Soul 2.2.414a12–13, trans. Barnes).
17. On the Soul 3.7.431a17. See also 431a14–15 and 431a9–10: “To the thinking soul images [phantasmata] are, as it were, contents of perception [aisthēmata] . . . for images are like contents of perception except for the absence of matter"; and perhaps the most “apophatic" passage in Aristotle, 432a10–14: “Imagination [phantasia] is different from assertion and denial; for what is true or false is a combination of thoughts. In what respect will the primary thoughts differ from images? Surely by not being further images even though they are not without images" (trans. Barnes).
"Byzantine" period. The fundamentally new elements that this thinking introduced to the epistemological problem are two: the ek-static character of human existence and the distinction between the substance (ousia) and the activities (energeia) of the substance, that is, the clarification of the dynamic character (not reducible to a "constant") of participation in Being.

The affirmation of the ekstatic character of human existence responds to the question concerning the difference between the dynamics of the relations that form the unity of the cosmic realization of Being, and the dynamics of the epistemic relationship of humans to the cosmic reality of Being. And the distinction between the substance and the activities of the substance (or the essence and the energies, as they are conventionally known in English) responds to the question concerning the correspondence of knowledge to reality in itself or to the phenomenicity of beings. It is impossible for us to interpret the ekstatic character of human existence without the distinction between essence and energies. And it is impossible for us to study this distinction outside the field of its existential realization, which is the human presence.

In order for us to interpret and study these two epistemological presuppositions, we need first to place them in the series of hermeneutic syllogisms we are using here. We take as our starting point the literal meaning of the word essence (ousia): it is the fact of participation in Being. And this participation is realized and manifested as the mode and rational principle (logos) of the relations of every existent within the context of the totality of existents, as an organic insertion into the universal social realization of life. Some of these relations have a character that is unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable: they constitute the otherness of the subject, that is, its single identity. And some of the others are common relations—a common mode and rational principle of participation in Being—that are more subjective: they constitute the uniformity of these subjects, their common substance or essence. We usually call the former relations the individual properties of the subject ("primary substance," according to Aristotle) and the latter, the common relations, substantial or natural properties ("secondary substance"), modes/rational

principles of a common participation in Being, that is, of a common substance or nature.

Consequently, what we call substance or nature only exists as the dynamically activated fact of a realization of unique relations by each subject or of similar relations by more than one subject. The substance or nature corresponds fundamentally not to the what of the hypostasis of beings (to the matter in itself, or to the form in itself, or to "the third from the two": "a combination of both taken universally") but to the how (the mode or rational principle) of the dynamic realization of the relations that constitute the fact of the participation of beings in Being. But in that case what precisely is matter, what is form, and what is represented by the knowledge of the sensible hypostasis of beings, the experience of the senses that inform humans about the existence and specific otherness of beings?

The reply to this question, as it was formulated by the Greek philosophical thinking of the fifth century AD, tends to converge in an astonishing way with the epistemological approach to reality taken by physicists in our own day: the matter of sensible objects is itself also the result of a conjunction of activities or energies (energeia), a conjunction of actualized (energoumenai) relations. These energies/relations appear (manifest themselves to us) as particular principles or rational qualities whose conjunction and union define the hypostasis of sensible objects. "All the things by which matter is constituted," says Gregory of Nyssa, "lightness, heaviness, denseness, tenuousness, softness, resistance, dampness, dryness, coolness, warmth, color, form, outline, dimensions—all of these in themselves are bare concepts . . . for none of these is matter in itself; it is only when they come together with each other that matter comes into being." These "bare concepts" or rational qualities that constitute matter are an early, clear-sighted prefiguring of what in the language of today's physics we would call different forms of energy: elementary systems with a symmetry that is not static/geometrical but dynamic/mathematical; equivalent forces of mass and energy; fields and particles; dynamic units of matter/energy with

kinetic force, transmutation, and transience. The reference, then, to the *rational* constitution of matter "signifies" its energetic hypostasis; when we speak of the concurrence of rational qualities, we are referring to a synthesis of subjective (of our own) concepts that nevertheless discloses the unifying coordination of "units" of activated relationship, modes/principles of a dynamic realization of relations.

But if the constitution of matter is a consequence of the coming together of energies, the possibility is excluded that we should identify the hypostasis of beings with the *shape* that is a given for the senses and with the *content* of the matter of objective individuals that is a given for intellecution. In other words, neither the view that beings are *phenomena* nor the view that being exist *in themselves* is true. Neither the independence of shape nor the independence of matter in specific given situations corresponds to the reality of beings. The *shape* (*morphe*) is the "eternal" and unchanging *idea* that is impressed on matter and gives it hypostasis, that is, permits matter to be *something* and to *appear*—to constitute a form (*eidos*)/potentiality to become visible. And matter is not similarly eternal content of the reality of beings, the fundamental given that is shaped (that acquires form) in order to be manifested as substance or essence. No, it is the concurrence of energies, of modes/principles of the dynamic realization of relations, their coordination in the *how* of a unique harmony, which constitutes matter and its specific differentiation into a variety of substances. Ordered reality as a whole, the innumerable variety of forms/substances, is not the *what* of sensory observation and intellectual conception but the *how* of the harmony of the rational qualities, "a musical harmony producing a unified and divine hymn of praise of the power that maintains the universe."24

What, however, is the *energy* in itself that constitutes not only the dynamics of the realization of the relations of harmony between beings, the universal becoming of life, but also the material hypostasis of beings as a concurrence and union of "units" of activated re-

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shared communally as rational energy, that is, as the power of every human to participate in the same knowledge.

To the degree, then, to which human existence is rational, it is also ek-static: it apprehends energy as a principle (logos) of epistemic participation. Every other being is an activated event of participation in Being as a result of a concurrence of energies, without the power to operate the same outside of its essence—to operate a participation in the energy that constitutes the essence of the other beings. In humans, however, this energy outside of their essence (participation in the dynamics that constitute Being) defines the mode of their existence: the existential otherness of each human subject as-toward the common human essence. The power of knowledge is common to each human (is a property of the nature or essence of humans—a natural energy) but becomes accessible to us only through the individual bearer of epistemic energy: we refer to the what of knowledge only because we know the how of its individual bearer. The what of knowledge makes us cognizant of the nature that has the power of knowing, whereas the how of knowledge discloses the existential otherness of its individual bearer. Knowledge, however, is not identified either with the nature that has the power of knowing or with the individual existence that always knows in a unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable manner. For this reason we also acknowledge in the epistemic capacity of humans (or in their capacity to will, to make, and to love) a natural energy that is distinct both from nature and from individual existence.

The philosophical investigation of the reality of energy cannot proceed beyond these formulations without the risk of making the concepts arbitrarily independent of the immediacy of experience. Energy (energeia) can be defined by philosophy only through the experience of the only sensible essence that has the power of acting (energein), that is, through the study of human existence and of its ek-static character—only as the essence-creating power of an ek-static nature or essence. Ek-stasis constitutes a mode of existence that permits the essence or nature to be manifested and to be shared in as a rational principle of existential otherness—a rational principle that does not fade away as an ephemeral concept "but becomes an essence straightaway, having become a nature": it becomes a real "product"/creation (a pragma/pepragmenon) of the energy, an event of participation in the dynamics of the relations of life, an activated power of participation in the existential otherness of the bearer of the energy. The result of the energy (every "product"/creation of the energy) is invested with being (ousioutai) because it possesses an essential otherness both with regard to existence and with regard to the nature of the actualizing power. A painting by van Gogh is in itself a canvas with colors and in a phenomenological sense a representation of a person or landscape. And yet a painting by van Gogh is at the same time a unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable rational expression (logos) of the otherness of van Gogh, a result of the existential energy of van Gogh that has been invested with being and is always revelatory of the ek-static differentiation of van Gogh's existence from the common human essence, the common mode and principle of participation of humans in Being. When we encounter an expression of van Gogh's sublime creative principle that is new to us—when we stand in front of another of his paintings—we say: this is van Gogh.

Philosophically, then, it is not possible for us to approach the energy except as the essence-creating power of an existential ek-stasis—essence-creating because the result of the existential ek-stasis is set within the dynamics of the relations of the "becoming" of life and constitutes a dynamics of relations permitting epistemic participation both in what has been actualized and in the existential otherness of the agent of the actualization.

It is this combination of epistemic participation with the existential otherness both of the bearer and of the result of the energy—in the clarification of knowledge as a unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable participation in the otherness of the dynamically actualized essences—upon which the position and method of apophatic epistemology is focused.

The further clarification of participation in energy as an existential event always disclosive of hypostatic otherness, and also disclosive of the judging, willing, making, and loving energy through the mode of existence, must be the subject of another chapter introducing the ontological question.
Chapter 2.3

From the Knowledge of Truth to the Utility of Knowledge

§ 19. The Augustinian Roots: *De Utilitate Credendi*

The first utilitarian version of knowledge naturally appeared in the field of law. If the social coexistence of humans is a point of departure for the formulation and recognition of truth as common reason, it is simultaneously the point of departure for subordinating the knowledge of truth to the usefulness of serving the needs of society as a whole.

More specifically, the attempt to define the distinction between good and evil, just and unjust, by laws (and consequently, objectively and impartially) may have truth and virtue in view, that is, the realization of the social *nature* of humans. But such an attempt may also become autonomous as a utilitarian means or instrument that merely serves what is of collective advantage rather than the social truth of the dynamics of relations.

Nevertheless, the demand that the legal distinction between good and evil, just and unjust, should be "objective" and therefore impartial is not an element that initially and self-evidently accompanies the application of justice. In most mythological, and also early historical, traditions, the power to bestow justice is identified more with a personal gift of wisdom, of familiarity with human nature, and of "discernment" (which is usually characteristic of some of the "elders" of the community) than with a given framework for determining cases. Justice is not exhausted in the law—in an
a priori schematic evaluation of conduct. The law simply attempts to demarcate justice, to draw some common boundaries around cases of the same type. Yet every case in its specific reality remains an immediate manifestation of the existential otherness of each human person and can only be judged justly on its own merits.

In any event, as soon as a demand appears for a leveling and impersonal "objectivity" in the bestowal of justice, and the law becomes autonomous as a utilitarian means or instrument that serves what is of practical benefit rather than social truth and virtue, there emerge immediately certain requirements if it is to be ensured that the law will be applied effectively:

First, the distinction between just and unjust must be definitive (predetermined "once and for all"), clear and unambiguous.

Second, the boundaries of this distinction must be acceptable to all, must be indisputable, and consequently must be supported by evidence and be persuasive in themselves.

Third, the determination of the boundaries must have the greatest possible universality, that is, it must not leave any acts or events in life without specific prescription.

It is evident that the requirements that emerge from the attempt to make the bestowal of justice a beneficial work of the greatest efficacy lead to a particular methodology by which knowledge is approached (here specifically: knowledge of the terms and cases of justice and injustice), a methodology that inevitably gives priority to the utility of knowledge and serves the presuppositions of this utility, necessarily placing in a second division any kind of verification that can inhibit the practical utility of knowledge.

The requirement that the distinction between what is just and what is unjust should be something predetermined ("once and for all") assigns to the concepts that mark this distinction a stable and immutable content. For a law to be "true," it must correspond to given categories of thought and common understanding that are unquestionably definitive of what is just and what is unjust.

The requirement that the distinctions between what is just and what is unjust should be supported by evidence, persuasive in themselves, and indisputable assigns to the concepts a character of effectiveness that becomes a criterion of the veracity of the concepts. For a law to be "true," it must be thoroughly persuasive that its content is beyond doubt; it must be acceptable by everyone as possessing definitive authority.

Finally, the requirement for the greatest possible universality of the terms of the distinction between what is just and what is unjust objectivizes the events and the acts as cases of just or unjust conduct that are to a greater or lesser extent assimilated to each other and therefore rendered abstract. The unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable character of each human expression is inevitably obscured or ignored with a view to containing it within the universal terms of objective definitions. And the common definition of these assimilated cases assigns to the concepts that define what is just and what is unjust a schematic universality; it "fixes" life immovably within the terms of the universal concepts that cover a whole body of assimilated cases. For a law to be "true," it must correspond to this artificial universality of formalized concepts and cover the whole body of cases that it seeks to define.

It belongs to research in the history of jurisprudence to determine when precisely and by what stages legal thinking became autonomous as a useful means or instrument serving a purpose of purely practical benefit rather than one of social truth. It also belongs to research in the history of philosophy to determine when precisely and by what stages the utilitarian version of knowledge and its accompanying objectification exceeded the bounds of the demands of justice and came to be imposed as an epistemological method in the broader field of cultural life and the sciences—at least in the case of the so-called Western European civilization, in which the utilitarian approach to epistemology primarily arose, with its epistemic consequences for technological development.¹

Could one perhaps identify the historical roots of a utilitarian epistemology in Plato's understanding of the authority of the laws, or in the apodictic persuasiveness of the Socratic elenchus, or in Aristotle's attempt to define justice with the help of mathematical analogy, or even in the systematic organization of the verification

¹. See Wolfgang Schluchter, Die Entwicklung des okzidentalen Rationalismus (Tübingen: Mohr, 1979), 34, 36, 154, and 253.
of syllogisms that was again founded by Aristotle, himself being the father of logic? Each of these areas of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy merits a separate and extended study with a view to establishing or refuting the origin of utilitarian epistemology among the ancient Greek philosophers. All we can say here by way of summary is that any attempt to trace utilitarianism back to the ancient Greek philosophers is bound to fail because it would come up against their very clear denial that they could exhaust the knowledge of truth in correct reasoning, that is, in approaching knowledge intellectually by a systematic method primarily for the purpose of its utilitarian exploitation. Moreover, it is generally accepted that the Aristotelian tradition inhibited the development of logic until early modern times, at least in the form we have come to know it in recent centuries: as the presupposition for “positive” knowledge.

This does not mean that European thought did not learn from the Greeks certain rules by which the rational method could function correctly. But our question concerns the point at which and beyond which this method ceased serving the many-sided possibilities of approaching physical and metaphysical knowledge and became subject to the “positivism” of utilitarian intentionality. The point of departure for historical research on this question might well be the information presented by the distinguished medievalist M.-D. Chenu, namely, that in the second half of the twelfth century, when the *logica nova* (the second part of Aristotle’s *Organon*) made its appearance in the West, jurisprudence to begin with—and immediately afterward theology and the natural sciences—began to draw methodological supports from Aristotle for the more effective rationalistic structuring of knowledge.

At any rate, a series of historical developments following Aristotle’s entry into the West (in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) is capable of providing a sound basis for the conclusion that the abuse of rationalism, that is, its being accorded a generalized autonomy, was established precisely at that time. The question nevertheless remains whether it was the entry of Aristotelian methodology into the West that gave the decisive push to the utilitarian version of knowledge and the positivist objectification of rationalism as an epistemic power that this entailed, or whether this methodology was inserted into an epistemological approach that already existed in medieval Europe and was directed toward a utilitarian intentionality.

What is certain is that Aristotle became widely known for the first time in Europe through the translation of the *Organon* into Latin (from Arabic translations, not from the Greek original) only in the second half of the twelfth century. We cannot speak of Aristotle’s influence in the West before that time because his texts were available only to isolated Greek scholars. We can, however, speak confidently of the profound and historically documented influence that Roman law had in the organization of the social, political, and cultural life of the Latin West. We can also speak of the attempt that began in the ninth century, with the foundation of the Frankish Empire, to make the cultural basis of the new *imperium* entirely independent of the Eastern Roman Empire (because at that time

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2. The first part of the *Organon* comprises the *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, and the *Prior Analytics*. The second part comprises the *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and the *Sophistical Refutations*. Some editions of the *Organon* also add *On Generation and Corruption* and *On the Universe*.


4. These are the centuries of the acme of Scholastic rationalism, the first philosophical system in history that organized knowledge as a complete corpus, that is, as a closed and dogmatic ideology. It interpreted the whole of physical and historical reality in a definitive and final way and set out this interpretation systematically with “axioms,” “principles,” and “laws” of rationalistic positivity. This totalitarian ideology found its political expression in the theocratic vision of the papacy’s claim to universal jurisdiction, in the concentration of all authority—political, spiritual, legislative, and juridical (the *plenitudo potestatis*)—in the hands of the Roman pontiff. With the *Summa theologica* (1266–72), Thomas Aquinas introduced the principle of *papal infallibility*, thus establishing the axiom of an infallible leadership, the visible representation of a dogmatic authority not susceptible of rational doubt. Earlier, in April 1233, Pope Gregory IX had instituted the *Holy Inquisition*. And in 1252 Pope Innocent IV introduced torture as a method of examination in the trials of heretics, thus completing the model for all later totalitarian regimes for neutralizing opponents. Within two centuries we had a full development of the rationalistic positivity of knowledge, together with the directly utilitarian exploitation of this objectified and self-sufficient knowledge through the creation of authoritarian structures of sociopolitical “effectiveness.”
a cultural basis was also a prerequisite for political unity). Historians are unanimous in maintaining that it was chiefly Augustine who was used to provide such a basis—a basis that was exclusively Latin, without any Greek influence. And Augustine, who knew little Greek, and consequently was not familiar with Aristotle’s works, but whose learning was based chiefly on the legal thinking of Cicero, Tertullian, and Ambrose of Milan, offers us ample reason for attributing to him the first transposition of the epistemological presuppositions of Roman law into the broader context of the spiritual life of the West.

It is not difficult to find numerous examples of legal formalism, absolutized intellectualism, and utilitarian positivism in almost every aspect of Augustine’s thought. The fact, for example, that is remarked on most often in the relevant literature is the way Augustine (twelve centuries before Descartes) identifies both knowledge and existence with intellection. Only the intellect has the power of doubting, and therefore of self-confirming, existence—because the intellect cannot doubt the fact that it has the power to doubt. Thus only the intellect also possesses the certainty of knowledge, that is, the power not to doubt at least the fact that it can doubt. And the certainty of knowledge is an individual experience of happiness in comparison with the unhappiness of doubt. Happiness here does not simply mean emotional well-being. It means “rationalistic eudaemonism.” Intellectual knowledge has a eudaemonic character because it secures for the individual a self-sufficiency and safeguarding of that individual’s certainties, seeing that the prerequisite of positive knowledge is the intellectual capacity of the individual.

The epistemological and also ontological and moral (sociopolitical) dimensions of this “rationalistic eudaemonism” are developed systematically through the central idea of the twenty-two books of Augustine’s De civitate Dei, which is that of justice. The human intellect in a definitive manner ratifies the given values, laws, and presuppositions of natural justice and is given access through these firm certainties to the divine or true law, that is, to the knowledge of the truth that can only be assured through the terms of the presuppositions of justice (only as obedience to the authority of the given divine order).

One could go on to give many more relevant examples from Augustine’s thought, but here I should like to draw the reader’s attention to what is perhaps the most direct argument for the utilitarian understanding of knowledge, presented in a particularly representative work of Augustine’s, his De utilitate credendi (On the Usefulness of Believing). The title alone of this work may be regarded as a significant landmark in the history of human thought. Religious faith itself, the supreme search for metaphysical knowledge (which in order to be metaphysical must be self-evidently free from industrialities serving nature), is made subject by Augustine to utilitarian demands that strengthen the individual.

The four principles of a positivistic utilitarian epistemology that may be drawn from this work of Augustine’s may be summarized as the following.

First principle: the law of majority opinion (7.19). The most direct confirmation of knowledge and the most palpable proof that we can have to justify a truth is the large number of people who accept it in comparison with the small number who deny it. Truth is on the side of the many. The universality of a truth (the universal power or strength of a truth) is a function of its acceptance in a quantitative sense.

Second principle: the law of authoritative statement (16.34). In cases where knowledge is not offered in an obvious fashion, that is, with the possibility of sensory confirmation or of immediate understanding, the mind of the individual can draw the assurance of positive knowledge by subjecting it to a commonly (by majority consent) accepted authority. Sensible or intellectual obviousness

5. See the selected bibliography at the end of part two.
6. See De libero arbitrio 2.3.7; De civitate Dei 11.26; De trinitate 10.10.12; Soloroqua 2.1.1.
7. This is an expression of Chenu, Introduction à l’étude de Saint Thomas d’Aquain, 49.
justifies practical knowledge, whereas subjectio to a commonly accepted authority justifies faith. And faith is also a positive (specific, not irrational, and at the same time efficacious) knowledge, because without faith it is impossible for human society to be constituted (we even accept our natural parents on the basis of faith, not through the self-evidence of knowledge [12.26]).

Third principle: *the law of beneficial result* (11.25). For Augustine to demonstrate the character of positive (efficacious) knowledge that faith possesses, and also its conceptual distinction from scientific knowledge, he resorts to the confirmation of the beneficial result that accompanies every form of knowledge: scientific knowledge is justified by its practical utility, whereas faith is justified by the happiness it brings to the individual—the highest possible utility.

Fourth principle: *the law of irrefutable proof* (18.36). There are proofs that depend absolutely on rational necessity, that is to say, that confirm knowledge in absolute conformity with the powers and requirements of human logic. For anyone to deny the validity of these proofs means that this person denies his or her rational nature itself, and consequently contradicts his or her very self, seeking to destroy the reality of his or her natural existence.

What emerges with clarity from these four indicative epistemological theses (which sum up, without in any way exhausting, Augustine's theory of knowledge) is the congruity of the presuppositions both for the objective/efficacious predetermination of the law and for the objective/efficacious confirmation of knowledge. Just as the operative rules of the law demarcate the objective/efficacious assurance of social order, so too the definitive, undisputed, and universally accepted attestation of the boundaries of knowledge guarantees the efficacious objectivity of truth—it constitutes some kind of law of truth. Access both to the law and to knowledge obeys the binding necessity of a positive result, that is, it is justified by its utility. For that reason the methodology of such access is also common: it presupposes a specific mode of the operation of reason, the homogenizing of the functioning of the intellectual capacities of individuals, and it draws its objectivity from the measurement of its return as useful work.

This epistemological position (*stasis*), formulated here in an elementary way, perhaps in an excessively schematic manner, at any rate marks historically the end of one era and the beginning of another. In this new era philosophy seems progressively to detach itself from the umbilical cord connecting it with its origins, from the primordial "love of wisdom." Knowledge is no longer a dynamics of relations, an immediacy of experience or "vision of the soul," a universal event of erotic approach to truth, an undetermined adventure of freedom, and an existential goal in itself for humankind—it is no longer the dynamic realization of the fullness of existential possibilities for humankind. Knowledge is now linked definitively with the need for a useful result; it is turned into a utilitarian object, subject to the demands of the self-assertion and comfort of the individual.

It is not by chance that Augustine is commonly recognized as the fountainhead or father of this new era—the father of Western European philosophy and of the civilization that depends on it—regardless of the viewpoint, ideological principles, or methodological presuppositions with which one approaches history. As the foundation both of Scholasticism and of the Reformation; as the theoretical source of political, religious, and ideological totalitarianism and individualism; as the forerunner both of Descartes's *Cogito* and Kant's critique and ethics; and as the inspirer of the leading exponents of intellectualism and also of mysticism and Pietism, Augustine summarizes in a single root and principle the many branches and frequently conflicting offshoots of European civilization—of the only civilization that embodies a dynamic globalism and constitutes, in relation to every other cultural phenomenon, a new era.

§ 20. The Scholastic *Adaequatio*

The Augustinian roots of a utilitarian epistemology grew to reach their full philosophical development in medieval *Scholasticism*. We call Scholasticism the philosophical teaching of the "Schools" or the method of the Scholastics (*scholastici*) who were the teachers of the schools, a type of educational establishment that developed in Western Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and based its teaching chiefly on a training in correct syllogistic reasoning.
A Scholastic training in the correct use of syllogisms usually began with a text commonly accepted as authoritative in some branch of knowledge (e.g., the Bible or the works of Aristotle). Thus the study and exposition of the rational structures of the text often took the form of commentaries interpreting or supplementing the text, which is why we sometimes identify the Scholastic with the scholiast. Scholastic philosophy came to an end historically with the beginning of the radical doubting of the given and self-evident authority of its texts/sources, that is, from the time when the product of the Schools, correct syllogistic reasoning, was made independent of preexisting authorities and became in itself an authority for interpreting the rules, axioms, and principles that govern physical, ethical/historical, and metaphysical reality. That is why the great flowering of Scholasticism, the synthetic summae of syllogistic reasoning, occurred at the very end of the Scholastic age.

We are discussing Scholasticism as a philosophical school or method, but in reality it was a cultural phenomenon with much broader dimensions. For about a century—from the end of the twelfth to the end of the thirteenth century—Scholasticism represented in Western Europe a veritable cultural explosion. On reading the texts of the period and the relevant historical testimonies, one would say that there was a universal sense of enthusiasm, even intoxication, accompanying an absolute confidence in the powers of the human capacity for syllogistic thought—powers of positive and efficacious knowledge, and of the thinking subject's mastery of the truth of natural, historical, and metaphysical reality. Through the laborious efforts of the Scholastics to determine in a systematic manner the common laws, presuppositions, and principles that govern both correct reasoning and physical, historical, and metaphysical reality itself, human thought was revealed as the most effective means of asserting and confirming the value of the individual, who was oppressed by the totalitarian structures of Western medieval society. Human thought was revealed as the most direct technical capacity for securing a powerful and useful result. By using the techniques of Scholastic reasoning, you can persuade or neutralize an opponent, you can construct an objectively obligatory knowledge (that is, a positive and indisputable science), you can make physical reality subject to the purpose of the production of useful work by exploiting the knowledge of the rational principles and laws that govern it.

Western medievalists such as Gilson and Chenu speak of the first substantial "renaissance" that was realized with Scholasticism in Western Europe. Here the term renaissance is being used literally. It signifies a completely new mode of life, new points of departure and presuppositions for the realization of human life. Western man discovers the fascination of science, and science before anything else is the technique of dialectics, because fundamentally it is this that gradually constructs a body of positive and effective knowledge in any branch of science. What unites Scholasticism as an integral school or method is chiefly the technique of dialectics, even if this technique serves a broad range of aims and inquiries: the legalistic rationalism of Anselm's rationes necessariae, the coherent conceptualism of Abelard's Sic et non, Richard of St. Victor's systematization of approaches to mystical experience, Ockham's nominalism (foreshadowing the development of English empiricism), Bonaventure's idealistic determinism in his Itinerarium mentis, Duns Scotus's realism, and the synthetic summae of intellectualist positivism in Thomas Aquinas.

The different aims and enquiries of the Scholastics are unified by the common technique of dialectics, without this meaning that the technique of dialectics was unknown before the Scholastics, or that the Scholastics were not taught dialectics principally by Aristotle. But what unifies the Scholastics and differentiates them from every previous philosophical school and tradition is that for the first time they used dialectics to construct an objectively obligatory knowledge. They exhausted the possibility of knowledge as positive and indisputable science in syllogistic proof, in the intellectual capacity of the human subject. And it is precisely the identification of knowledge with intellectual conceptualization, the attribution of absolute value to the technique of dialectics for approaching indisputable knowledge, that constitutes a new beginning in cultural life.

For the history of philosophy, this new beginning signifies more specifically the entry into an age that we have come to call the age of
subjectivism, the age in which we still live today. And subjectivism in this case does not imply the relativization of knowledge, that is, a variety of different atomic versions of it. It implies that we accept the capacities of the human subject as fundamentally the unique means or mode of approaching knowledge—independently of whether it has to do with intellectual capacities, or powers of sensory perception or mystical intuition, or with a priori moral judgments and experiences, or with the self-consciousness of the human spirit as opposed to physical reality, or, moreover, with the existential experience of the individual, or with the individual's rational conformation to the "semantics" of physical and historical structures.

In this sense subjectivism recapitulates every school, tendency, or current of philosophy from Scholasticism and later—even the schools or tendencies diametrically opposed to Scholasticism or even to each other. And on the basis of this fact, we can say that the Scholastic "renaissance" divides the history of philosophy into two. It is the boundary mark dividing two eras: the era of common reason and the era of subjective reason, of the absolute and self-evident priority of the subject. Despite the odd exception that may be noted in each of the two eras, the rule is that with Scholasticism the knowledge of truth ceases to be a dynamic participation in the universal "becoming" of the relations that constitute reality and life, in the common reason of life—to be true (alētheuein) ceases to be identified with sharing in common (koinōnein). Henceforth the knowledge of truth, either as understanding, or as experience, or as an approach to phenomenicity, or as an approach to reality in itself, is inevitably a function of the atomic capacities of the human subject—the human subject defines and exhausts the presuppositions for the knowledge of truth.

I am attributing the origins of subjectivism to Scholasticism, but this seems fundamentally to contradict the historical situation at that time: Scholasticism originated and developed within the Roman Catholic Church, which at that time represented an institutionalized denial of any form of subjectivism. It exhibited the most rigid structures of centralized authority in the portrayal of truth and imposed its totalitarian ideology on the communal life of the

West. But the phenomenon is not necessarily contradictory. On the contrary, it inaugurates a new historical rule: the very means that are used to demonstrate that truth is objectively obligatory and to impose the authority of the visible bearer of truth in a totalitarian manner are turned into occasions for doubting and ultimately for working against any authority and its representatives.

The aim of the Scholastics is clear: to safeguard objectively and indisputably (that is, to prove obligatory for every thinking individual) the authority of the metaphysical ideology of Roman Catholicism, which constitutes the basis of the cultural (and by extension the political) unity of the people of Europe. If in a first phase the Latin tradition of the Roman Church (and specifically Augustinian theology) offered a basis for Charlemagne's political ambitions regarding the differentiation of the Western from the Eastern (and Hellenized) Imperium Romanum, in a second phase Scholasticism came to provide the ideological support for this differentiation and autonomy of the West. In a purely apodictic manner, it lent itself to strengthening the objective validity of Roman Catholicism's metaphysics, sought to prove its logically binding character, and systematized the organizational efficaciousness of the institutional bearer of this ideology.\footnote{9. "Augustine's understanding of the relationship of faith to knowledge, according to which the latter cannot be anything other than the rationalization of the former, soon prevailed and exercised a powerful influence on succeeding centuries. . . . The transformation of theology into an organized scientia began as early as the period of the Carolingian renaissance . . . was continued in the eleventh and twelfth centuries . . . and reached its peak in the thirteenth century . . . reinforcing by its method all those teachings . . . that aimed at subjecting the human conscience to ecclesiastical authority" (Panayiotis Kondyli, Hē kritikē tēs metaphysikēs stē neoterē skepse [Athens: Gnosi, 1983], 30, 219).}

In any event, it is quite unfounded for anyone to assert that Scholasticism emerges as the result of the conscious commitment of Western intellectuals to the vision of cultural and political unity represented by the papacy's aspiration to world dominion. Clarifying the intentions of individuals exceeds the powers of historical research—even if texts such as the Contra errores Graecorum of Thomas Aquinas lend support to such a project. At any rate, what
can hardly be doubted is the close dependency of Scholasticism on the general climate of the age in which it appeared. For Western historians themselves, the parallelism or even organic correlation of Scholasticism with phenomena such as the following is commonplace: the rationalistic expression of the organizational structures of the popes’ centralizing power in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which seeks to guarantee the institutional bearer of ecclesiastical ideology a manifest and indisputable authority and effectiveness; or the famous “investiture controversy,” which aimed at the concentration of all authority—spiritual, legislative, juridical, and political (plenitud potestatis)—in the hands of the bishop of Rome; or even the phenomenon of the impressive Gothic cathedrals, which give material expression to the techniques of Scholastic reasoning, these being the first examples of the technological violation of natural matter and its subjection to the human understanding, while at the same time being wonderful artistic expressions of the autocratic and emotional imposition of ecclesiastical power and majesty on the human individual. "The people who built the Gothic cathedrals were the ones who also constructed the theological Summae," concludes Chenu,10 and Jacques Maritain adds, "Theology is the first technology of the Christian world."11

These historical correlations and analogies are of preliminary interest to philosophy in the degree in which they can demonstrate the mode of the process of the change that has occurred in the purpose of philosophical inquiry, the passage from the knowledge of truth to the usefulness of knowledge. In particular, the linking of the Scholastic form of reasoning with the technique of the construction of Gothic cathedrals presents us with an illuminating image for understanding both the Scholastic version of the material by which knowledge is constructed (i.e., concepts) and the technique that follows such construction.

The technique of Gothic architecture is based on a structure of small chiseled stones of uniform shape. The stones form columns, and the columns are divided into composite ribbed piers, with the same number of ribs as those in the vaulting that receives them. The arrangement of the columns and the division of the piers create an absolutely fixed skeletal system that neutralizes the weight of the material by balancing the thrusts of the walls. The theses are reinforced by the systematic refutation of the antitheses, the supports prevail over the weights placed on them, the weight of the material is neutralized by the rationally arranged static balance. This technique conceals a profoundly analytic spirit relentlessly dominating the construction. This spirit considers the forces, analyzes them into diagrams of statics, and petrifies them in space.12

The new structure of the organization of knowledge that Scholastic philosophy introduced for the first time in the history of human learning corresponds to this. The formulation and development of a truth is arranged systematically, with a variety of divisions. A complete treatise is divided into parts, the parts into chapters, the chapters into paragraphs, and the paragraphs into articles. Each assertion is established by systematic refutation of the objections, and progressively, phrase by phrase, the reader is propelled toward the full intellectual clarification of a given truth.

The fundamental unit of the technique of construction is not the morphological otherness of each stone—the principle of the dissimilarity of the material that presupposes and constitutes a relation with the material, a respect for the material, and a marking out of its rational/expressive potentialities. No, it is the a priori form that will be given to the stone by the chiseling, with a view to making the material subject to the rationalistic demands of static balance. Correspondingly, a unit of the technique of syllogistic reasoning is not the otherness of personal experience—the principle of a personal, unique, and dissimilar understanding, which through the symbolic semantics of the concepts constitutes an event of communion and relation. Instead, it is the a priori epistemic content of the concept that for the Scholastics constitutes the unit of knowledge.

10. Introduction à l’étude de Saint Thomas d’Aquin, 58.
It is with this content that the understanding of the individual must coincide if that individual is to attain the possession of truth.

The epistemic content of the concept constitutes the unit of knowledge and is an a priori given, for what the individual understanding grasps through the concept is the very truth and reality of the object to which the concept refers. And the content of the concepts coincides with the truth of things because the human intellect is an actual microcosm of the divine intellect, where the concepts (forms/essences/causes) of beings have been “eternally” conceived. Consequently, what the individual human intellect conceives as a concept coincides with the transcendent causal principle or with the essence in itself of what is thought: *Et tertio modo definitur verum secundum effectum consequentem.* Thus the content of the concepts corresponds to the Being of beings, and the intellectual conception of truth is absolutely consistent with ontological truth. In other words, the individual intellect conceives of and exhausts the whole of truth, and there is no truth outside of intellectual conception: *Ergo nec veritas nisi in intellectu—veritas est rectitudo sola mente percepibilis.* The ultimate and most complete definition of truth is the coincidence of the concept with the object of thought: *Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus.*

The individual intellect conceives of and exhausts the whole of truth, not only because the content of the concepts corresponds to the essences of beings but also because the rational articulation of the concepts as syllogisms and judgments that clarify objective reality corresponds to the rational structure and order of things and events. And the rational structure and order of things and events reflect the divine reason, of which the human reason of the individual

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13. “And truth is defined in a third way according to the effect that follows.”
14. “Therefore neither is there any truth except in the intellect—truth is the correctness perceptible only by the mind.”
15. “Truth is when the thing and the intellectual concept are equivalent to each other.” This classic phrase, which summarizes the thrust of Scholastic epistemology, owes its first formulation to Isaac Israeli (between about 850 and 950). It became more widely known, however, and was established through its use by Thomas Aquinas: see *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, ques. 1, art. 1.16.
16. “Every apprehension of the intellect is from God—the thing is said to be true by comparison with the divine intellect” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.16.5, ad. 3m; and 1.16.6, ad. 2m).
became the matrix for the West’s subsequent approach to philosophical questions, almost in its entirety. Soon, however, the identification of the real and the noumenal ceased to draw its self-evident character from a metaphysical conviction about the correspondence of human reason to the divine reason and sought its verification in its direct effectiveness. The rational balance of intellectual systems no longer aimed at reaching the truth but at making the system effective—because effectiveness provides the only positive possibility for verifying the system. Ultimately, apodictic verification (i.e., utilitarian effectiveness) took priority even over nature, and nature itself was made subject to the logic of effectiveness (like the stones with their chiseling). A whole civilization that set the problems of truth on the level not of nature but of “culture” (i.e., of the priority of intellectual structures and systems—violating nature if necessary for the sake of effectiveness) was born with Scholasticism.

Finally, the axis of truth and life was transposed from the community to the individual, from the dynamics of participation and communion to the individual possession and use of truth and life. If the scientific knowledge of nature is verified by its utilitarian effectiveness, it is also the case that history too is justified by the verification of the effectiveness of the laws and structures that govern it. The effectiveness of historical laws and structures is measured by the standard of the needs of the individual, of the individual’s rights to life. The balancing of individual rights, the complementarity of rights and obligations, is also an object of positive definition, that is, it is scientifically accessible. It is made subject to the rationale of effectiveness, violating nature (i.e., individual otherness) and assimilating individuals to each other by their submission to the authority of structures and laws of utilitarian objectivity—an a priori programmed “universal happiness.” This idea of the authority of structures and laws to which every attempt at clarification or verification is subject, both of the natural and of the ethicohistorical spheres of becoming, becomes in the West after Scholasticism the matrix of all the sociopolitical systems—from theocracy to Marxism.

§ 21. The Cartesian Cogito

Along with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, Descartes is the third name that is fundamental to the new philosophical and cultural era of utilitarian knowledge. A natural offspring of Scholasticism and direct continuator of Augustine’s positivism, Descartes is at the same time the first great figure of this new era because he was the first to lead philosophical thinking to the extreme consequences of what was implied by intellectualism.

The starting point for Descartes was not metaphysics but the positive knowledge of physical reality. What gives us certainty about our knowledge of nature: the senses or the intellect? The senses, of course, testify to reality through direct experience, but although the experience of the senses is always definitive and given, the objects of the experience of the senses are mutable and unstable. How can anyone know with certainty through the senses what a piece of wax is, when wax presents itself to the experience of the senses in different forms and states: rock-hard, melted and running, or vaporized in a gaseous state? The knowledge conveyed by the senses is circumstantial and fragmentary. Consequently, it is relative. That is why the experience of the senses gives us information that is frequently contradictory or unstable, leading to confusion rather than to positive knowledge.

In contrast to the senses, the intellect can lead us to epistemic certainty. This is because the intellect has the fundamental ability to doubt every circumstantial and fragmentary given of sensory knowledge or mental conception. That is, whereas the senses only receive, without being able to doubt the certainties of immediate experience, the intellect is able to doubt both its own conceptions and the information conveyed by the senses. And the progressive intellectual doubting of each certainty—the application of "systematic doubt"—is able to lead to a partial but nevertheless absolutely clear knowledge, that is, to a certainty empirically and intellectually not subject to doubt. Such absolutely clear certainty is for Descartes, as indeed for Augustine, the very knowledge of existence that emerges from the ability to doubt: Si fallor, sum.17

17. "If I am mistaken, I am" (Augustine, De civitate Dei 11.26).
More specifically, by doubling through the intellect every given item of knowledge, we arrive finally at the ultimate possibility of doubting, that is, at the impossibility of doubting the fact that we can doubt. This impossibility of doubting any further is the first positive epistemic certainty: I cannot doubt the fact that I can doubt; consequently I know positively that I can doubt.

But doubt, Descartes goes on to say, is the functioning itself of my intellect. It is the fact that I apprehend, that I think. And it is I who am thinking and understand positively that I can doubt. Consequently, I cannot doubt the fact that I exist in view of my doubting and my thinking. Thus the fact that I think leads me to the certain and positive knowledge that I exist—it is the intellect that has precedence and confirms the fact of existence as positive knowledge. I cannot confirm that I am thinking without establishing with certainty that I exist. Existence is confirmed by thought. I think, therefore I am: Cogito ergo sum.

For Descartes, however, the cogito was not, as it was for the Scholastics, a proof that the human mind is a microcosm of the divine mind. It is simply "a proof of the ability that the human intellect has received from God to arrive at direct intuitive knowledge." That is why not every conception of the human intellect (every idea, every act of reasoning) necessarily constitutes positive knowledge (necessarily "reflects" in a positive fashion the conceptions of the divine intellect). The human intellect, however, can arrive at absolute certainty with regard to a partial object of knowledge, and this partial epistemic certainty can become the model and starting point for positive knowledge. It is on this principle that Descartes bases the autonomy of human thought and science: its independence of any transcendent constraint or authority.

The first positivistic consequence of the cogito for Descartes was the clarification of the distinction between the soul and the body: I know that I exist because I think, without knowing what precisely is the "I" that is thinking. The fact that I think assures me directly that I exist, that is, that I hear, will, imagine, and so forth. But this direct assurance is something other than the knowledge of the mecha-
the mechanisms of nature. Thus physics for Descartes can only be mechanistic, because for the truth of nature to become accessible to us as positive science, it must be subjected to a mechanistic version of human reasoning: Mechanicae meae, hoc est Physicae. ... Mechanicam, nihil aliud esse quam verae Physicae particularum. 18

Through the certainty assured to him by the identification of the existent with the intellectual, Descartes enters into the realm of metaphysics. His problem does not cease to be the safeguarding of positive knowledge within the bounds of physical reality, but after the condemnation of his contemporary, Galileo, by the Holy Inquisition, it is evident that he is anxious to prove that a mechanistic understanding of physics does not exclude metaphysical certainty. 19 (The Roman Catholic Church in his time, even though it had by now officially recognized and celebrated Scholastic philosophy as its institutional ideological expression, nevertheless was fully aware that the path opened up by the doctores angelici led directly to a parting of the ways with metaphysical certainties, and therefore the Holy Inquisition persecuted with fire anyone who dared to follow the utilitarian epistemology of the Scholastics to its ultimate conclusions.)

Descartes accordingly undertook to verify, by means of the scientific positivity of intellectualist "realism," the proof of the existence of God that the Scholastics who had preceded him had elaborated less completely. In the fourth chapter of his Discours de la méthode (Discourse on Method) of 1637, the existence of God is demonstrated by the exclusive instrument of the intellect's capacity without the need of resorting to the help of faith. The intellect's capacity guarantees the conception/knowledge of the universal idea of the being of, and by inference of the existence of, God. From the intellectual contemplation of my own limited existence and intellect, I draw the idea of a perfect existence and intellect—a being that contains all the perfections of existence and intellect. And because intellectual conception is the only way in which we can confirm a truth, we prove the existence of God by conceiving of the idea of God. By our intel-

18. "My mechanics is physics. ... Mechanics is nothing other than a particular instance of true physics."
19. See his correspondence with Mersenne in the volume Correspondance of his complete works.

lect we conceive of God as a perfect being, and consequently existence is included in this idea in the same way as the truth that the sum of its angles is equal to two right angles is contained in the idea of a triangle, or that every surface being equidistant from its center is contained in the idea of a sphere, or even more clearly than these truths. Consequently, that God, who is this perfect being, exists or subsists is at least as equally certain as any geometrical truth. That is why "an atheist cannot be a geometer." It is impossible for him to have an intellectual understanding of a triangle because he is unable to have an intellectual understanding of God.

What, in brief, are the fundamental consequences for philosophy of the Cartesian cogito?

In the first place, as is evident from the above, the Cartesian cogito is the definitive severing of philosophy from any source or method of knowledge outside of the individual's intellectual capacity, the definitive breach with any established authority—whether of natural objectivity or of transcendent revelation. Knowledge is guaranteed neither by the objectivity of the givens of sensory experience, nor by the authority of divine supernatural revelation, nor by the common reason of the social reality of life. Positive and certain knowledge is summarized and exhausted in the capacity of the human individual to achieve intellectual comprehension. The human individual, as a thinking subject, becomes the absolute center or pivot of knowledge. Every sensible, intellectual, and mutable reality is made subject to this center if it is to be confirmed as positive knowledge—nothing is confirmed as really existing before it is conceived in the individual's understanding.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Romantic movement (Schelling, Hegel, etc.) relied chiefly on the significance for philosophy of Descartes's "renewed idealism"—renewed in relation to that of ancient Greece. The Idealists presented Descartes as the supreme idealist philosopher of metaphysics, setting Cartesian intellectualism against the empiricism of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, that is, the elevation of sensory experience as the sole path to positive knowledge and its only method ("Nothing in the intellect unless first in the senses").
But this bipolar dualism of intellect and senses (res cognitans/res extensa), which in fact goes back to Descartes, has a somewhat secondary significance for the history of philosophy and the evolution of civilization: the role of Descartes, so decisive for the shaping of the so-called modern age, cannot be restricted to that of an absolutized idealism. What changes the course of philosophy and of civilization in the modern age is not the idealistic character of Cartesian realism, nor is it the empirical character of British realism—this antithesis simply perpetuates the medieval rivalry in the West between the nominalists and the realists. No, it is the shifting of the axis of knowledge to the positive certainty that only the human individual has the ability to realize (by the intellect or by the senses)—and this shift was first effected by Descartes.

For this reason we are able to say that the distance between Cartesian idealism and British empiricism is negligible in comparison with that which separates the Cartesian “idea” from the Platonic idea and from the Aristotelian form. The immense gulf that separates Descartes from ancient Greek philosophy is the fact that with him the certainty of knowledge “as a result of the subject” becomes autonomous and is severed from any dynamic reference to natural and social “becoming” or to transcendent Being (and Heidegger showed convincingly how with this severance nihilism enters almost imperceptibly into European history20). The determinative principle of knowledge is individualistic, not in the sense that “man is the measure of all things”—because this principle is able to contain both the “private” and the “common” human reason, and with it all the richness of the soul’s epistemic powers, the operation of the “infinite parts” of the human soul—but in the sense of the “measure of all things” being the capacity of the individual alone, detached and rendered absolute: sometimes only the intellect, at other times only the senses, and later only intuition or only the awareness of phenomena or only the dialectical capacity of the spirit of whatever other fragmentary aspect can be devised—that alone is raised to an absolute criterion and instrument of positive and indisputable knowledge. This absolutization of the fragmentary, which was established by Descartes, the reduction of the powers of knowledge to a single area or subsection, this is what inaugurated “a civilization with the ancient Greek criteria turned upside down.”

To what extent was Descartes an innovator in relation to Augustinian and Scholastic philosophy, and to what extent did he remain tied to the philosophical tradition that preceded him?

Modern students of Descartes, such as Charles Adam, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien Laberthonnière, and Henri Gouhier have declared that a characteristic difference distinguishing Cartesian from Augustinian and Scholastic philosophy was the priority Descartes gave to physics over metaphysics. Although as a rule the Scholastics based their metaphysics on physics, Descartes founded his physics on metaphysics.

In reality, it was the Scholastics who first used the positive knowledge of physics as “the third term of the comparison” (tertium comparationis) between temporal and transcendent Being—as a point of departure and basis for positive metaphysical knowledge. The relationship of beings with Being/nature as a whole, and the relationship of Being/nature as a whole with God (the cause of Being), can lead to the analogical knowledge of God because it concerns a formal mathematical analogy with only one unknown term (God). That is, it is possible for us to recognize in the particular physical beings certain properties (predicates) that point not to their circumstantial phenomenicity but to that which they are as beings—as facts of participation in Being. It is precisely these properties (the predicates of Being) that by an intellectual tracing back to the absolute (regressus in infinitum) can manifest in a positive fashion the perfections of Being, that can, in other words, make known to us the transcendent properties of God.

Descartes’s thesis is altogether more radical. It is no longer an intellectual tracing back to the absolute that assures us access to metaphysics (leaving us simultaneously at the unresolved point of the syllogistic suppositio). On the contrary, it is intellectual contemplation itself that constitutes metaphysical knowledge because it is free of any predetermination of sensory experience. Metaphysical knowledge is the possibility of positive certainty that accompanies the immediacy of intellectual contemplation, and it is precisely the

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metaphysical possibility of intellectual contemplation that becomes the basis for establishing physics as a positive science. Thus, thanks to metaphysics, physics becomes an object of scientific knowledge—metaphysics and physics are summarized and exhausted in the individual’s powers of intellectual conception. The transcendent concept of God does not differ in its scientific positiveness from the geometrical concept of the triangle. After Descartes the problem of metaphysics within the context of European philosophy is identified with the problem of the positivity of knowledge, that is, with the presuppositions for the construction of indisputable scientific knowledge. With Leibniz and Wolff metaphysics was to conserve some final props of apodictic reference to the transcendent, but with Kant metaphysics became fixed definitively within the framework of a scientific/rationalistic this-worldliness: within the framework of moral judgment. From Descartes’s Rationes existentiae more geometrico dispositae, we pass in a seamless fashion to the Kantian version of “religion within the bounds of pure reason” (die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft).

Chapter 2.4

From Utilitarian Knowledge to the Totalitarianism of Absolute Systems

§ 22. The Kantian “Achievement”: Turning the Subject into an Absolute in Order to Determine the Objective

With Kant European philosophy withdraws definitively from the “battle of the giants with regard to substance.” Its primary problem is no longer the problem of Being, the truth of existence as otherness and freedom from space, time, decay, and death. The problem of European philosophy is now knowledge in itself, the presuppositions for the construction of an indisputable and utilitarian science.

There has been much talk of the “Kantian revolution”—the revolution Kant represents in the history of European philosophy. This “revolution,” however, appears to be predetermined by and trapped in the framework marked out for philosophy by Augustine, the Scholastics, and Descartes, the framework of the new “monism,” which is no longer the monism of the Presocratics or the Stoics, the monism of the one substance, but the monism of the Subject. The

1. “We must dispel the persistent—and still today widely held—idea that it was Kant who introduced the Copernican revolution—the primacy of epistemology—into philosophy, that by demonstrating the limits of knowledge he destroyed traditional metaphysics, that he established the primacy of practical reason, etc. In reality, all these had been commonplaces of the European Enlightenment for decades. What Kant had to do was to discover them anew, albeit in a most profound manner” (Kondylis, Kritikē tēs metaphysikēs, 402–3).

2. The expression is that of Yvon Belaval, “La révolution kantienne,” in Histoire de la Philosophie 2, vol. 36 of L’Encyclopédie de la Pléiade (Paris: Galli-
human individual, regardless of its existential relativity, corruptibility, and transience, is the beginning and the end, the presupposition and the goal of truth and knowledge.

Kant’s “revolution” lies in the fact that it summarizes and expresses in a single philosophical theory and attitude the new era that began in Europe with the Protestant Reformation. Just as the Reformers “rebelle” in the realm of theology and ecclesiastical institutions by simply taking Roman Catholic religious ideology to its ultimate conclusions, so Kant also “rebelle” by taking Scholastic epistemology, the shifting of the pivot of truth to the realm of the human subject’s epistemic capacities, to its ultimate conclusions. His aim was to free the individual’s approach to knowledge from any obligatory reference to binding doctrines and objective authorities, to found it on the demands of the critical capacity of the individual: to refute the Scholastics’ presuppositions about the objective authority of natural theology and intellectualist metaphysics.

Accordingly, Kant summarized and expressed the critical attitude of a pragmatic individualism that predominated in the Protestant world from the end of the seventeenth/beginning of the eighteenth century—especially after the appearance of the devotional movement of Pietism, which stressed the primacy of practical piety over against dogmatic polemical theology. Pietism represented the most radical and practicable critical doubting of institutional doctrinal authority—faith as well as knowledge were judged by Pietism within the terms of their practical comprehension and application by every individual. The child of a pietistic family, Kant was brought up with the principles of this moralist movement and pursued his first studies within the same environment. His teacher at grammar school was Albert Schultz, who belonged to the original branch of Pietism founded in Frankfurt in 1670 by the Alsatian pastor Spener, and his professor at the University of Königsberg was Martin Knutzen, again a Pietist but also a student of Wolff. Without reference to Kant’s pietistic upbringing, what is perhaps the most basic of the factors that shaped his philosophy is overlooked.

Kant’s first and last problem is metaphysics, but metaphysics within the limits of the epistemic powers of the subject. This is because it is not possible for us to arrive at a greater or different quality of knowledge than that which our individual epistemic capacities—our sensory experience and intellect—permit us. The intellect judges the epistemic data of sensory experience—not objectively imposed “reason” but the individual intellect. With the knowledge of sensory experience as its starting point, the intellect is led to synthetic judgments, that is, to a priori truths, which refer to experience without also emerging from experience. (Such truths are, for example, the whole, the first, space, time, the soul, and God.) But it is impossible for these synthetic judgments to be received as objective reason, that is, as truths in themselves. They can only be received as products of the functioning of the individual intellect that are rendered legitimate either through experiential verification and improvement (as in physics), or through utilitarian necessity (as in mathematics).

Thus truth ceases to be an objective requirement and becomes the congruence of intellectual functions that permit human knowledge. Metaphysics no longer refers to truths in themselves but to the way in which truth is approached as toward-us—metaphysics is identified with the theory of knowledge (Erkenntnislehre). The intellect, with all its a priori principles, never acquires any physical or metaphysical knowledge independently of experience. That is why metaphysics cannot be “the science of the absolute” (as Wolff defined it, summarizing Descartes and Leibniz), for the “absolute” truths that emerge from analytical and reductive syllogisms do not constitute knowledge. The conviction that one has positive knowledge of the suprasensory on the basis of syllogistic/dialectical methods is simply illusory.

Metaphysics is the science of the boundaries of human reason. Its field is defined by the data of experience and our a priori synthetic judgments. We recognize the objects of experience only phenomenologically and not as they are in themselves, just as we also recognize a priori synthetic judgments as rational powers (belonging to the noumenal sphere) and not as realities. This critical function of pure reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft), which marks the boundaries of human knowledge between phenomenal and nou-
menal truths, and within these boundaries organizes the referential relationship of a priori judgments to the data of experience in a systematic fashion, is metaphysics.

God is a synthetic judgment, a fundamentally rational possibility, a simple concept (bloßer Begriff), which nevertheless constitutes truth as-toward-us, because it refers directly to moral experience. The moral imperative of the human conscience is pure reason's experiential starting point for determining the primary cause and ultimate goal of moral practice, that is, of God. In his work Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone (Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft), 1793), Kant poses the question of the origin of religion in ethics, that is, of the interpretation of moral prescriptions as divine commandments, on the basis of a philosophical anthropology. Against supernatural revelation he sets the logical necessity of religion, and interprets the basic principles of Christian faith as imperatives of practical ethics. "Christ is the personified idea of the moral principle."

The radical nature of Kant's thought, at any rate, lies in the fact that it traces the epistemological problem back to the absolutely first starting point of the epistemic capacity of the subject, and excludes any imposition from without of obligatory syllogistic inferences or axiomatic pronouncements, any necessary reference to truths in themselves. It accepts the assertion of the Scholastics that the sensory experience of objects constitutes knowledge to the degree that it coincide with intellectual conception. But this coincidence (adaequatio) has no axiomatic and supernatural reference or interpretation—it does not presuppose either the transcendence of the form (idea/essence) of beings or the comparable correspondence of the divine and human intellects that would have permitted access to the essence (truth in itself) of beings. Although the coincidence of object and concept seems merely to "translate" sensory experience into form and content, it summarizes further functions of knowledge within the limits of the capacities of the subject: the power of the sensory perception of phenomena, of the comprehension of phenomena, of the unifying of phenomena of the same kind into a single concept. This passage from the sensory perception of phenomena to the comprehension of phenomena and from there to the formation of the concept is a result of the critical function of the mind.

Kant lays down that the mind's critical function is fundamentally possible as a result of three a priori intellectual powers of judgment, that is, of rational correlation. (He describes them as a priori judgments because they do not owe their origin to sensory experience but constitute in themselves functions of pure reason.) These three powers are: (a) the categorical relation, that is, the capacity of the intellect to refer multiple categories or predicates to a single essence, to link the coincidental with its immutable presupposition, the multiplicity of characteristics of the same kind with the one essence of phenomena of the same kind; (b) the hypothetical relation, that is, the capacity of the intellect to regard the temporal succession of two different phenomena as a relation of cause and effect—a relation necessarily hypothetical because the bond of cause and effect can in certain circumstances be reversed; and (c) the relation of reciprocity, that is, the capacity of the understanding to bring together the different particular essences into a whole, to arrive at unity out of multiplicity, to affirm the reciprocity of the additional in the space of the coexistence of objects and of the successive in the time of the sequence of events.

In all three of these intellectual functions or a priori judgments, we have the realization of the coupling of an inference with the terms or presuppositions that constitute it. But the function of the coupling in all three cases leads the intellect ultimately to the critical apprehension of inferential unities that cannot be referred (as terms or presuppositions) to another inference outside of themselves, and consequently they constitute ideas of an absolute unity. These ideas are: (a) the absolute subject, that is, the individual self, which cannot be a predicate of something else; (b) the world, as the absolute consummation of the succession of causes and effects; and (c) God, as the absolute unity of the presuppositions of the multiplicity of atomic subjects and the cosmic whole. Thus Kant arrives, but by his own route, at the division of metaphysics established by Wolff, namely, at psychology, cosmology, and theology.
But the ideas of the self, the world, and God that emerge from the critical function of pure reason have not the slightest relation to reality. They are “noumenal” truths, products of the capacity or mode by which the atomic understanding functions—they represent not realities or truths in themselves but only a priori judgments. They remain intellectual hypotheses until the moment we discover an area of experience from which we can derive a content for these concepts. And this area of experience is practical reason, or ethics. The critical function of practical reason (Kritik der praktischen Vernunft) manifests the necessary character of the idea of the self, the idea of the world, and the idea of God and consequently verifies them as values governing the interpretation of experience. We unify external experience, making a totality, only with the help of the idea of a single world. And we unify our interior/subjective experience, making a totality, only with the help of the idea of the absolute subject, that is, the self. In a similar manner we unify the demand of practical reason for absolute morality and the demand of this same reason for absolute happiness only with the help of the idea of an absolute being that can realize this unity, that is, God.

But why is the demand for morality a demand of practical reason? For Kant to show that morality is a consequence of the practical use of reason (of the same reason whose practical operation leads to a priori judgments laying the foundation for the possibility of science) and to exclude the axiomatic or impositional character of the moral demand from without, he makes his point of departure the assertion that all the moral judgments that are formed spontaneously in every person have a relative value, that is, are dependent on presuppositions and limitations. They are judgments/evaluations that refer to empirical goods, and consequently are subject to intentionality that practical reason can either accept or doubt. Even the evaluation/demand of happiness must be subjected to conditions with a view to its realization being attained and justified. There is only one moral judgment that is not subject to any limitation or any presupposition, and that consequently does not serve any doubtful intentionality. This is a good volition in itself, the will to realize the good. Without this will any other good whatsoever can be shown to be not good, whereas the will itself to realize the good cannot possibly be limited by any other presupposition. That is why Kant identifies a good volition in itself—the will to realize the good—with the supreme form of duty, that is, he identifies it with the demand for a morality that is absolute and free from any binding conditions.

Kant passes from practical reason to the moral imperative, that is, to the idea of duty, in a manner that is consistent with his critique—with the judging function of reason. A good intention is an a priori judgment that gains an empirical content, that is, one that is verified as a value governing the interpretation of experience, only when its determination takes the form of an imperative, a Sollen, that is, the form of duty. Duty is neither a presupposition nor a result of practical reason. It is practical reason itself as empirical necessity, as moral demand in itself without conditions and presuppositions, that is, as universal and absolute moral law. Thus the subjectivism of the moral demand is reduced to a rational rule with absolute authority. That is, by following the path of Kant's critique, we are able to formulate a moral command, a categorical imperative, that draws its categorical (absolutely necessary and therefore obligatory) character not from some metaphysical authority or dialectic argumentation but only from the very function and requirement of the practical use of reason. Kant undertakes to formulate this rational rule in his famous phrase: "Act always in such a way that the [subjective] maxim of your will can at the same time be regarded as the principle of a universal law.”

This phrase represents a truly remarkable achievement. The good intention of the subject, as an a priori judgment of pure reason—the purely intellectual conception of a will that seeks the good without conditions and presuppositions—proves to be a value regulative of the whole of experience by taking the form of a categorical imperative and consequently of a necessary and generally binding duty, without violating in the slightest the purely rational demand, that is, the function of a priori judgment.

Thus this phrase summarizes an ethics that establishes the absolute authority of pure reason in its practical application, the authority that is constituted by the functioning of the subjective intellect made absolute in the realm of objective duty. The human person is self-defined morally, is called to be subject to himself or herself alone, to the functioning of his or her reason. But because it is precisely the function of reason that makes the human person human (that constitutes the humanity of every person), the subjection to subjective reason is for Kant a subjection to humanity as a whole. The reduction of the individual rational will to a maxim of universal human law signifies turning the subject into an absolute in order to determine the objective, reducing the individual to the objectivity of humanity as a whole, and this reductive absolutization is the foundation of ethics—the human person is himself or herself a moral end. That is why Kant’s categorical imperative is also expressed in a second formulation of equal validity with the first: "Always act in such a way that you deal with humanity both with regard to your own person and with regard to others, always as an end in itself and never as a means." 4

By these formulations Kant arrived at what has been regarded as the central point or greatest achievement of his "revolution": the bridging of the antithesis of subjective and objective, of atomic intellectual certainty and dogmatic authority. If pure reason in its practical application proposes objective laws and principles to us, our subjection to these rational propositions is nothing other than subjection to our atomic rational will, which constitutes in itself a universal law. Every other perception of ethics is necessarily of an alien origin, subjecting human behavior to aims and intentions that are dictated by factors outside humanity itself. Only the ethics of duty, which flows from the critical function of subjective reason, guarantees humanity’s moral autonomy and makes humanity its own moral legislator.

individualized morality's elevation to the absolute. And this individualized morality inevitably represents a degree of efficacious and consequently utilitarian evaluation, a conventional estimate of objectivized human relations, without the slightest reference to the existential problem, to the adventure of human freedom, that is, to the realization of humanity's existential truth and authenticity or to its existential failure and alienation.

The subjection of human conduct to a general rule with absolute and indisputable validity, a validity drawn not from transcendent obligatory "principles" but from the objectivization and absolutization of an impersonal atomic intellectual function that has been made universally uniform, inaugurates a new kind of totalitarianism in human history, that is, an alienation of the personal otherness and freedom of each specific human being. This is the totalitarianism of the "concentrated force" of atomic demands, of the ideal rule for the regulation of the rights and obligations of the individual. Such totalitarianism alienates and violates personal otherness and freedom not in the name of the "infallibility" of a tyrannical authority but in the name of an impersonal "humanity," that is, of a single capacity of the human subject (the intellectual capacity), which is made absolute and claims absolute objectivity.

"Humanity" as an abstract ideal value in itself and as morally an end in itself (both the humanity of the individual and humanity as a whole—the subjective intellect and the abstract formulation of intellectual demands) becomes, with Kant as a starting point, the theoretical foundation for all later philosophical, social, and political visions of "general happiness." And every ambition to attain "general happiness" is by its nature a totalitarian ambition because it allows no margin for recognizing and respecting humanity's deviation, dissent, or personal failure, its inability or refusal to be happy in accordance with the predetermined "principle" or program of happiness. Behind Kant's moral imperative the inhumanity of the appalling totalitarian systems of the twentieth century already begins to take shape precisely because this imperative cannot envisage the adventure of human freedom, the specific human being who refuses or fails to "act always in such a way that the subjective maxim of his actions [in the economic, political, cultural, and domestic spheres of his life] can at the same time be regarded as the principle of a universal law."

§ 23. The "Closed" Hegelian System

Hegel's philosophical genius appears to have been aware of the fundamental ambivalence of Kantian metaphysics. It is not possible for the critical functioning of the intellect to exhaust the dynamic of life, the antitheses that constitute the "becoming" of life—the failure, the pain, the "activity of the negative element," which belong equally to the reality of life and to the sovereignty of the intellect over phenomenicity. The critical functioning of the intellect, at any rate, makes possible the formation of a scientific theory of knowledge, tracing our collection of subjective intellectual demands back to an indisputable principle. But this scientific knowledge is manifestly relative. It is a comprehensive convention that ensures commonly accepted and undisputed definitions confirmed by subjective experience. It has, however, no relation to absolute knowledge, the knowledge of the absolute.

There is no doubt that in Hegel's case, too, the main problem is the systematic completeness of the presuppositions of knowledge. The relationship between the knower and the known, concept and noumenon, subject and object, also remains the starting point of Hegel's problematic. We have seen that in the case of the Scholastics the center of gravity in this bipolar relationship falls on the "external," on the object in itself that is metaphysically predetermined and therefore becomes accessible to knowledge only as a result of the similarly metaphysical gifts of the human mind. In Kant's case the center of gravity shifts to the "internal," to the critical capacity of the subject's intellect (a capacity that leads the sensory intuitions to a priori categories and in this way forms epistemic experience), whereas the object is left simply in the ontological indeterminacy of phenomenicity. Now, in Hegel this bipolar relationship is made absolute in itself as an ontological reality, and it is this that constitutes the ontological event. The center of gravity shifts from the terms of the relation to the relation itself, from phenomenicity and
subjectivity to their relationship in itself, a dynamic relationship or, better, a “dialectic” of opposites, a relationship of “reconciliation” and ultimately a synthesis of opposites.

For Hegel what we understand, experience, and express by the term subject is an event that is realized only in relation to the objects from which it is distinguished and with regard to which it constitutes a subject. The subject only exists in antithesis to objects, and contains this antithesis. Its definition is a synthesis of that which is and that which is not—it presupposes that which is not (i.e., the objects) in order to be that which it is (i.e., the subject). The same is the case with objects. They are objects only in relation to a subject. Their objectivity (that the objects are) is defined with regard to a subjectivity (with regard to that which the objects are not). The being, the hypostasis of the objects, is not a thing in itself, a stable given, but a movement of reference to a subject and of a return to themselves—a movement of reference that presupposes a return and a movement of a return that contains the reference.

We know the subject itself (as thought or experience) only when we make it an object, that is, when we distinguish the event from its content. The event, however, of the subject is not exhausted in the objectification of its content, but is realized by its dynamic/dialectic detachment from its content and its return to its content—to its self-definition that presupposes the objectivation of its truth and its reidentification with this truth.

Consequently, the given starting points of intellection and experience (the subject and the objects) cannot be considered autonomous and be taken as definite identities without ceasing to constitute truth and true knowledge. What we call subject or object is fundamentally a thesis, which, however, is not conceived of or experienced without the dynamic reference to its antithesis and to the resolution of the antithesis, of the initial thesis and the referential antithesis. In other words, the dialectical dynamic that Hegel expresses by the terms in itself, for itself, and in and for itself (an sich, für sich, an und für sich) is not a methodological scheme, means, or

instrument for clarifying thoughts and experiences but is the event of the intellectual or experiential approach to knowledge—it is the actual becoming of intellection and experience. And the dialectical becoming can never be set out in a definitive scheme because it is manifested on every level of intellectual or experiential approach by a new and particular form on each occasion.

If, then, the knowledge of existents is only dialectical, nothing is true as a definite and given ontic identity. The only mode of verification is that of dialectical becoming, the all of the dialectical dynamic (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) and not the fragmentariness of the definite appearance that assures us that something is. The Being with which reason always begins represents only one arbitrary abstraction. It is identified with nothingness because it refers to a nonexistent definitiveness, seeing that what exists only becomes—it constitutes an event of a dialectical dynamic.

This reduction of the existent to an event of the dialectical dynamic is not a work of the intellect but a work of the spirit. In contrast to the intellection that objectivizes and stabilizes the content of both phenomena and noumena, the spirit does not rest in definite identities. It is that which is absolutely restless, pure activity. It is the absoluteness of existence that is realized only as freedom from any definitiveness, only as a dynamic movement of ceaseless distinction, antithesis, and renewed synthesis. The spirit differs from the intellect because it is only the former that is distinguished from externality so as to realize itself with regard to externality. It is distinguished from its very existence so as to understand itself as existence. It even accepts the externally imposed denial of its subjectivity, that is, an involuntary pain or failure, relying with regard to pain and failure on an absolute affirmation of the self.

This movement of the spirit that produces the self through its antithesis to what is not the self (an antithesis even with regard to the intellectual content itself of its subjectivity) points to a path of knowledge that abolishes the logic of “correct reasoning.” The logic of correct reasoning presupposes definite concepts that are articulated by the act of thinking in reciprocal relationships in order to form definitions on the basis of the principles of identity.

\footnote{See, for example, \textit{Wissenschaft der Logik}, vol. 1, pt. 1., bk. 1., chap. 2, § A.c, in \textit{Werke}, v 1. 5 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969), 122f.}
contradiction, and "exclusion of the third," whereas the "logic of the spirit" follows the autonomous dialectical movement, the becoming of existents, arriving at knowledge by the use of categories/concepts that are also clarified dialectically, without being absolutized in themselves as units of knowledge.

Thus not only the categories of subject and object but also the category itself of being, as a definite concept in itself, are inevitably incomplete. The latter is clarified only in the degree that it presupposes its denial, that is, by the dialectic of antithesis to nonbeing, and ultimately by being raised to a level higher than that of the thesis and of the antithesis, to the "qualitatively higher" synthesis, which is the category of becoming. Similarly, the categories of "I consist of" and "I pass by" find their real significance in the category of "I exist," or the categories of "to be born" and "to die" in the category of "to live."

This passage from thesis to antithesis and from there to the "qualitatively higher" is the actual function of the spirit that summarizes both the intellectual approach to knowledge—the dialectical clarification of the categories/concepts—and the event itself of being. Knowledge is a becoming, and this becoming defines and exhausts being. For everything that is constitutes a dynamic event, a dialectical relation, the same relation that also constitutes knowledge: the relations of form and matter, rational and pragmatic, particular and general, the limited and the absolute, identity and antithesis. Man has the power to know this becoming not because he disposes of a particular capacity, the intellectual one, but because he is spirit and in the spirit the common dialectical structure that constitutes the becoming both of nature and of knowledge is summarized, manifested, and revealed.

The identification of knowledge and reality, which is not covered by the category of being but is grasped only by the "logic of the spirit," is expressed by Hegel by the term idea. Idea for Hegel signifies the wholeness, the dialectical unity of subject and object, of concept and noumenon, of rational and pragmatic, of spiritual and material, of succession and coexistence—a unity of "in potentiality" and "in act," of the infinite and the finite. Every philosophical approach prior to Hegel, every coupling of what in our thinking are antithetical concepts, every phenomenological or logical contradiction, is restored in the dialectical unity and wholeness of the "idea," because the "idea" is the only real truth, the truth of being as becoming.

For Hegel the dialectical unity of the "idea" resolves even the very ancient philosophical antithesis of materialism and theism. God, who is infinite spirit and absolute subjectivity, is only in dialectical antithesis with nature, which is material, finite, and objective. He constitutes existence (not simply a concept) in the degree in which he "denies himself" within the context of the finite world in order to be confirmed as truth (the creative cause of the world) in the becoming of nature and of history. The One is set against multiplicity as order to be realized as relation. The Absolute Subject realizes its existence only in relation to the objectivity of nature. The self-realization of God is the existence of nature, and nature is the otherness of the Absolute Spirit, his alienation from himself but also the power of return to the self-awareness and identity of the Absolute Subject. "Ohne Welt ist Gott nicht Gott"—"Without the world God is not God," says Hegel.

Similarly, neither does the material reality of the world, finite and objective as it is, constitute truth in itself save only in its dialectical antithesis with the infinite and the subjective, and the "raising" of the thesis and the antithesis to the reality of natural becoming. This dialectical becoming, which constitutes the material reality of the world, also constitutes an absolute idea. It is a "spiritual" reality, an "objective spirit," as Hegel says. An objective spirit means a reality in itself but not for itself, the spirit without self-awareness. The material reality of nature is the result of an "exodus" of the Absolute Spirit from itself. But the "return" of the Spirit to itself, which makes it an existent and intelligible Subject (God), is not accomplished within the boundaries of objective Spirit—Hegel does not resort in the end to the convenience of pantheism. The synthesis of the dialectical antithesis of God and the world is accomplished only by means of human self-awareness. Human self-awareness is the only possibility for the Infinite Spirit to have awareness of itself through the finite (in relation to which alone it really exists), but also is the
only possibility for the finite to have awareness of itself through the infinite. Thus the existence of God and Man’s knowledge of this existence are the same thing: “The self-knowledge of God is the knowledge human beings have of God—Man knows as much about God as God knows about himself.”

The self-consciousness of the human subject in Hegel’s system includes definitively and completely every possible ontology and epistemology. Every ontological and epistemological antithesis, peculiarity, or particularity finds its solution or completion in the dialectical wholeness, whose bearer is the human spirit. And this wholeness is not simply a subjective intellectual fullness but a dynamically accomplished and developed action—it is the activity of the spirit, its attempt to realize itself as freedom from any antithesis, peculiarity, or particularity. The action of the spirit produces, directs, and gives purpose and meaning to the universal becoming, that is, constitutes history. History recapitulates the becoming of God and the becoming of the world, the evolution of the Absolute Spirit that is accomplished by his finite appearance, that is, in the historicity of the human spirit.

The extreme consistency of the Hegelian system is the apotheosis of the human spirit in its historicity. But it is also the starting point for specific theories and interpretations of particular phases and expressions of Man’s historical life—the state, justice, religion, the mission of peoples. Within these particular phases and expressions of human history, the Spirit realizes itself, God confirms himself and overcomes dichotomy, and “the powers of the age are summarized in the becoming of the peoples.” The state, for example, is defined by Hegel as “the justification of the connection between the divine and the secular,” as “the objective morality that gives shape to God in space and time.” A people creates history from the moment it liberates the Spirit from nature, incarnating the becoming of God, by its hypostasis as a state. This is because although the state, like justice and like religion, represents objective obligations, it still presupposes the meaning, purpose, and reason of freedom—the state, justice, and religion are the terms for the social realization of freedom.

The meaning of history was revealed for the first time in classical Greece, where the Spirit was liberated from the first time from nature. And in the modern age this liberation was achieved chiefly within the boundaries of German Christian civilization, where the greater part of the dialectical liberation of the Spirit was realized in the field of ethics and lawful political life. It is not by chance that Hegel was interpreted as the theoretical basis validating the supremacy of the German people and that the totalitarian structure of his philosophical system found its historical embodiment in National Socialism. The practice of the “closed” Hegelian system is Man’s self-deification, not in an abstract and general form but in specific historical instances such as that of the “Hegelian auto-suggestion” of German supremacy, as we have known it in the twentieth century, or of the metaphysical absolutization of the proletariat as it emerged from the Marxist reversal of the Hegelian system.

It has been said that with Hegel “philosophy comes to an end,” that is, it reaches the greatest possible synthesis and completeness. The aphorism has not proved to be correct as a historical fact, yet it expresses a profound truth as an axiological assessment. In reality, Hegel’s genius succeeded in constructing a single unifying philosophical theory of the knowable and the intelligible, which, even if not persuasive in its entirety or in its hermeneutic implications, does not cease to be an impressive witness to the possibility of raising philosophy to the level of a theory of universal ontological unity, of which Man is the existential recapitulation or image. After Hegel the philosophical oppositions of idealism and materialism, of nominalism and realism, of positivism and mysticism, of empiricism and transcendentalism, seem entirely fragmentary, myopic, and sterile. The epistemological problem returns with Hegel to its ontological presuppositions, and ontology itself recovers the dimensions of a universal unifying idea, in a way in which previously it had only done with the Greek syntheses of the fifth and seventh centuries AD—chiefly in the work of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor.

But the undoubtedly positive elements of the Hegelian system are not sufficient to compensate for the fundamental ambiguities—which, moreover, came to the fore and were emphasized in
the stages of the evolution of philosophy that followed immediately after Hegel. The fully rounded synthesis and systematic comprehensiveness with regard to a philosophical theory of the knowable and intelligible, of ontology and epistemology, that Hegel achieved became in the end totalitarian and “closed” because it remained tied to the fundamental presuppositions of Western metaphysics, to the “monism of the human subject.” The intellectual requirements of the human subject laid claim in the Hegelian system to an ontological hypostasis. They “rationalized” reality in accordance with the needs of an epistemological method and reduced the realization of the rational goal to objectivity. Thus the systematic organization of knowledge acquired an arbitrary priority in relation to knowledge itself. The term Panlogism was applied to the Hegelian system precisely because it managed to assimilate metaphysical causality, material causality, and formal causality to the unique cause that is reason as it operates within the bounds of human logic. It was difficult for ambiguities to be indicated in a truly brilliant system simply by a few phrases. Historical experience alone of the products of Hegelianism, especially Marxism, is sufficient to show how ontologically uninterpreted the hypostasis of matter was left by Hegel, how ontologically ambiguous human freedom remained, how tragically distorted the truth of history became through being forced into an intellectual straitjacket. These fundamental topics—the truth of matter, of freedom, and of history—remain ontologically ambiguous when the main axis of the system of interpretation is nothing other than the “monism of the human subject” (regardless of whether it is spiritualistic or materialistic) and the self-evident authority of the reduction of the particular to the general, of the relative to the absolute. Behind this reduction there looms inevitably the threat of the totalitarian organization of human life, of the direct tormenting of people “in the name” of the comprehensiveness of the system (regardless of whether it is spiritualistic or materialistic).

6. See, for example, Heidegger’s aphorism in his Nietzsche, 2:200: “Hegels Metaphysik... die Metaphysik der unbedingten Subjektivität des sich wissenden Willens, d. h. des Geistes ist” (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961).

§ 24. The Marxist Reversal

For Marx the image of reality that Hegel gave to us is correct but upside down. It presents an interpretation of the world and of history that is methodologically correct but not real. If we are to restore its real truth, we must reverse it, and this reversal was undertaken by Marx.

The methodological correctness of Hegelian theory lies fundamentally in its dynamic version of reality, in the identification of the real with the act of becoming. The onticity of beings is neither a given metaphysical identity nor a static intellectual assertion. It is an event of dialectical dynamics, an autonomous act of becoming. This becoming for Hegel is the “movement of the spirit”: the texture of reality is spiritual, and the only real truth is the dialectical unity of the “idea.”

Marx sees in the Hegelian version of reality a philosophically arbitrary stance, an arbitrary intentionality that vitiates the methodological correctness. For us to interpret dialectical becoming as a dynamic evolution of the “idea” means that we are transforming the real into the imaginary solely for the sake of preserving the “sacri-

ty” of a theological argument.

Reality for Marx is only material, without arbitrary idealistic extensions and embellishments. It is that which it is—the eternal cause of its own self. Philosophy does not have the right to resort to factors outside the world in order to explain the genesis, structure, or functioning of material reality, because if it does, it enters into the vortex of abstract hypotheses and cuts itself off from the immediacy of life and action.

Marx is a materialist in the classic sense that the term acquired in the history of philosophy. His own materialism only differs methodologically from classical philosophical materialism, being dialectical rather than static and mechanistic. But this does not mean that the dialectics of Marxist materialism are an advance on the problematic of classical materialism. Matter for Marx too is self-evidently given and ontologically unexplained—a philosophically absolutized a priori “principle” (of a purely metaphysical character). Science gradually gives us more and more information about
the composition and properties of the various forms of matter, but for philosophy matter remains, purely and simply, a given reality in itself, the reality that is conveyed to us by the senses. The information conveyed by the senses “mirrors” material reality in the human mind and conscience and allows us to infer the laws by which this reality is constituted. But it is the reality that comes first, whereas the concepts, the ideas, the categories, and the dependence on logic are only the reflection of reality in the mind. The world is exclusively material in its entirety. What exists, and what becomes in the world, is a variety of states of the transformation of matter because the essence of matter is movement.

But the movement of matter is also given, self-evident, and ontologically unexplained—Marxist materialism is dialectical not because it refers its dialectics to the becoming that constitutes matter or to its structure but because it interprets the dialectical dynamics of human relations on the basis of the material factor alone, that is, it accepts matter and material things as the exclusive cause and determining presupposition of social and historical becoming. What interests Marx is not a philosophy that can interpret the world but a philosophy that can transform human society and history.

This last phrase brings us very directly into the atmosphere of Marxist theory, much more so than any attempt to position Marxism in relation to classical materialism. The aim of Marxism is to dethrone philosophy from its theoretical chair and embody it in historical practice, with the aim of bringing about a radical change in the structures of communal life.

It is not by chance that Marx’s ambition to turn the Hegelian system on its head found its initial inspiration in Feuerbach’s extreme doubting and critique of philosophy—of the philosophy that preceded him as a whole as well as Hegelianism more specifically. Feuerbach maintained—and Marx remained absolutely faithful to this line—that the mode by which philosophy had functioned until his own day contributed directly to the alienation of Man. And this was because philosophy transposed the problems of human life, the only real problems, to the realm of abstract theories, making its inquiries subject to a religious problematic. He worked

hard to determine the First Cause of beings and the proofs for and against the existence of God, he changed nature to an object of metaphysical theory, and he denied the use of the sensory experience of things in the name of an abstract intellectual knowledge of beings in themselves or phenomenologically—a version of sensory experience that reoriented Man away from the real givens of life.

Feuerbach attempted to review philosophy once again from the beginning, cleansing it from its idealistic alienation. The center of his philosophy is Man alone, Man as sensible existence and in a direct relationship with sensible nature. Ontological reality cannot be an intellectual concept. It must be the sensible character of things, as human beings know them through their senses, their desires, their needs, and their suffering—arriving at knowledge through the enjoyment of objects.

However, this return of philosophy to the reality of the sensible givens of life, the philosophical bringing of life into contact with its immediacy, which is the taking of food and the use of material things, has in Feuerbach a descriptive and assertive character and in this respect remains tied to the methodology of pre-Hegelian philosophy. Marx perceived early on that what was lacking in Feuerbach was the dynamism and breadth of Hegel’s holistic conception, the tracing back of the existent to self-creative effectiveness, to the transcending antitheses, that is, to the dialectic of becoming.

For Marx the Hegelian subject as an epistemological category remained his fundamental starting point. The subject is a fact that is realized only in relationship with the objects from which it is distinguished and toward which it constitutes a subject. But this dialectical relationship of subjects and objects is not for Marx the dialectic of the spirit, the becoming of the “idea.” It is the social becoming. The self-awareness of the subject is defined by the givens of the relations that constitute the social whole. It is not a spiritual self-awareness, a self-awareness of an abstract existing, but a social self-awareness, a product of social being. The subject produces itself through social relations that are specific and practical, relations of the production and consumption of material goods. This
social production constitutes life, the act of becoming, the dialectical synthesis of subject and object.

More specifically, Man for Marx is a subject of relations of production, defining these relations of production in the measure in which he himself produces objects of social use with an exchange value. But he is also an object of relations of production, defined by these when he only offers his labor as an exchange value without enjoying the fruits of the full value of the products of his labor. This dialectical antithesis of subject and object of relations of production constitutes the social reality and is expressed in the form of the economy, which is the pragmatic basis of life. The dialectic of antitheses, together with the synthesis of antitheses, is expressed in the economy by the reduction of both the fruits of production and productive labor to the reality of trade, that is, to their exchange value—an intellectual reality because it only exists by convention, and also a social reality because it corresponds to specific acts of human life. Thus the producer trades the value of his products, and the worker the value of the working hours he gives to the producer.

Man is by his nature a productive subject. He becomes, however, an object of relations of production—he offers his own self as an exchange value, that is, his productive labor—when he does not have ownership of the means of production (land, tools, machines, etc.). Thus the relations of production are split into relations of ownership and relations of dependent labor, creating the social classes. And because dependent labor changes Man into an object of the process of production, it enslaves him to the interests of ownership, and therefore shapes a social class of oppressed people who, with greater or lesser forcefulness, claim their rights over the products of their own labor. Thus the social classes find themselves in a constant dialectical antithesis, in a state of constant conflict. Class conflict runs through history, taking different forms according to what at any given time are the modes and what are the means of production. Marx classified the modes of production that were known historically until his time as Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and capitalist. These modes correspond to the different means of production in each period.

The means and the modes of production constitute the real basis and structure of social becoming. Social becoming is, before anything else, a network of productive relations—an interaction of material productive powers and of the mode or technique of the organization of labor. The productive relations are codified as relations of ownership, payment of wages, contracts of exchange, independent labor, and so forth. And the capitalization of the relations of production forms the legal and political structures of society, and also the corresponding conscious and ideological constructions that accompany them. The real basis for this is only the economic texture of communal life. The legal and political superstructure, like the ideological superstructure in its various forms (family, morality, art, religion), is a product or epiphenomenon of the relations of production, a superedifice (Überbau) raised over them: “The productive mode of material life in general defines the functioning of social, political, and spiritual life. It is not the consciousness of humans that defines their being, but their being that defines their consciousness.”

The entire edifice of communal life, with its infrastructures and superstructures, does not cease for Marx to be in dynamic dialectical movement determined by a fixed law. The necessary cause of this dialectical dynamic is the fundamental contradiction that characterizes the functioning of relations of production. Production is a collective enterprise, whereas the appropriation of the fruits of production belongs to individuals. And the bearer of this dialectical dynamic that is provoked by this contradiction is the social order that is enslaved to the need of dependent labor, the class of nonpossessors, the proletariat (from the Latin proletarius). These lay claim to liberation from their dependents, that is, from their subjectivity itself—their rights over the means of production that they themselves operate, over the fruits of their own productive labor, and the possibilities of participating in the organization of the modes of production. Their demands lead inevitably to conflict because they represent a dynamic that seeks to dissolve the entire edifice, seeing that the logical outcome of these demands cannot be anything but the abolition of trading—of exchange values—that is, it can only be common ownership (communism). Such an abolition signifies the radical revolutionary overturning of society, and consequently a new form of society in which the means of production will belong
to all; what is produced will be distributed according to the needs of each, and thus the social classes will disappear.

In other words, once we accept the economic-materialistic structure of society and of the historical dialectic, we must identify the becoming of this dialectic with the dynamic of revolution. The revolution is a theoretical necessity for a scientific-dialectical interpretation of history and also a pragmatic hope of the liberation of people—the only real liberation, which is economic. The revolution will lead to the common ownership of the means of production and consequently to the realization of the vision of the classless society, the vision of the "general happiness" of Man.

The dynamic of the revolutionary dialectic is actualized more immediately where the capitalist system of production prevails. Through the use of machines as means of production and their constantly increasing yield, for the first time in economic life the phenomenon of surplus value (Mehrwert) appears. Marx called "surplus value" the profit realized by the owners of the means of production from the difference between the real time of the labor needed for the production of products and the time that was paid for. That is, surplus value is nonrecompensed time, the difference between the cost of the time taken in production and the time recompensed for production—the degree of the exploitation of the worker's labor by the capitalist-owner of the machines.

And because the variations in the yield of the means of production also differentiate the time needed for the production of the product, the fullest definition of surplus value is the difference between the mean time of the labor socially necessary for the production of an item of merchandise and its price. Thus surplus value is necessarily and inevitably drawn directly from the market and contains within this value the price of the product.

Surplus value is increased with the continual improvement of machines, that is, with the reduction of the time needed for production, whereas at the same time this increase of surplus value permits investment in more profitable production. This cycle of the transformation of surplus value into greater powers of production, which leads to an increase in surplus value, is called by Marx the accumulation of capital (Akkumulation des Kapitals). The accumulation of capital is always realized at a rate that is incomparably faster than the increase in the recompense of labor because the fixed capital (the material means of production) increases, through technological advances, faster than the fluid capital (the capital reserved by the enterprises for the payment of wages). Thus the gulf between the relations of ownership and the relations of labor continually widens—the rich constantly become richer and the poor constantly become poorer.

At the same time, although in an early phase the accumulation of capital leads to an increase in production and consequently the need constantly to increase the labor force, in a later phase the improvement or automation of machines or the inability to find markets for the products limits the needs for labor, creating armies of impoverished, unemployed workers who offer their labor for ever-lower wages, increasing in this way the surplus value of the products and consequently the accumulation of capital. Thus in this later cycle too the gulf widens between ownership and labor, sharpening class conflict and preparing the way for revolution.\footnote{Marx did not foresee, however, that the capitalist system would have the foresight and the ability to evolve in such a way as to avoid these early polarizing cycles by transforming the dynamic of labor into a dynamic of consumption, that is, by factoring in an increase of the wages and therefore of the purchasing power of the labor force. Thus the danger of revolutionary uprisings was avoided, as well as that of diminishing profits, because the increase in wages entailed an increase in consumption and consequently the stimulation of production.}

This sociological analysis is set by Marx within his broader philosophical argument, because it faithfully embodies the schematic structure of his dialectics. Within the "becoming" of productive relationships, which constitutes society, the accumulation of capital represents the "thesis," the increasing impoverishment of the proletariat represents the "antithesis," and the revolution and abolition of the classes represents the necessary and inevitable "synthesis" and completion of the dialectical dynamic. In other words, the idea of revolution in the Marxist system is the Hegelian idea itself of completeness. It assimilates social causality, material causality, and formal causality (productive relations, the use of matter through
technology, and the interpretation of history) to the law of the
messianic vision of a classless society. It is no longer the activity of
the spirit, the dialectic of self-realization as freedom from nature, that
constitutes the “becoming” of the world and of history. It is the
dynamic of the relations of production, the dialectic of class conflict,
that constitutes the revolutionary “becoming” of social and historical
reality, the self-realization of society as freedom.

What, ultimately, are the philosophical consequences of the Marxist
reversal of the Hegelian system?

In the first place, an entirely new philosophical language, a lan-
guage of unambiguous and radical criticism, whose aim is to
rescue philosophy from the aphasia of idealist abstraction and to bring
back to it an immediate sense of real life. Marxism appears—at least
in Marx’s early works—more as bearing a message of the revolu-
tionary change of human society and less as being a fully worked-out
proposal of abstract thought for interpreting reality. It is a philos-
ophy that seeks embodiment in the dynamics of everyday life, giving
Man the power to create history with his own hands, to destroy
the structures that oppress and alienate him, to liberate labor from
enslavement to the interests of an oligarchy, to demonstrate the
value that the materialist view of life has—transforming the world,
its goods and sources of enrichment, into a gift that can be offered
equally to all.

This new philosophical language, however, does not cease to be
bound to its historical origin. Born from the womb of Hegelianism,
Marxism too is a genuine child of Western metaphysics, however
much Marx himself wanted to place himself at the opposite pole
of the metaphysical debate. When truth is exhausted in the intel-
lectual capacity of the subject, this capacity constitutes the sole and
absolute metaphysical principle of philosophy—the subjection of
knowledge and experience to the authority of the intellect. Con-
sequently, when I say “Western metaphysics,” I do not necessarily
mean certain articles of faith or a particular theological program, or
even the phenomenological distinction between idealist and mate-
rialist systems. I mean in the first place a common and unified tradi-
tion of presuppositions and methods of philosophical inquiry that
has as its point of departure the question “How is it possible for us
to arrive at ‘correct,’ ‘objective,’ and ‘indisputable’ knowledge?” The
demand that reality should be subjected to the intellectual capac-
ity of the human subject, the exhaustion of truth within the limits
of a watertight system of intellectual definitions that interpret the
whole of reality axiomatically and conclusively, and the systemati-
zation of this interpretation with “axioms” or “principles” or “laws”
of “scientific” positivity are the common metaphysical basis of both
the idealist and the materialist versions of Western philosophy. And
Marxism does not escape from this basis.

Even in the case of Marxism, we must therefore speak again of
the same “monism of the subject” that we saw decisively marking the
course of philosophical inquiry in the West. However much the sub-
ject, as an autonomous hypostatic reality, appears to vanish within
the Marxist system, because it is regarded as a product of social
being, Marxism does not cease to constitute a subjection of reality
as a whole, or of universal experience, to the intellectual definitions
that the subject succeeds in forming—so that truth is exhausted in
the subject’s intellectual capacity.

Marx bases his philosophical theory on a relentless historiceco-
economic determinism, on the formulation of “immutable” laws that
govern relations of production and in consequence social institu-
tions and the process of historical “becoming.” With the help of
these given laws of rationalistic determinism, he believes that he
can now interpret not merely the phenomenon of capitalism in the
West but the whole of human history, independently of eras, social
conditions, and civilizations. From this point of view, Marxism may
be compared to parallel phenomena of the age—it coincides histori-
cally with the high point of rationalistic positivism experienced by
the West in the nineteenth century: the naive triumphalism and con-
viction of the “positivists” of the period, the undisguised mythifica-
tion of the authority of science. It is characteristic that to strengthen
the scientific validity of Marxism, Engels repeatedly compared it to
Darwinism (Darwin’s theory of the evolution of biological species),
emphasizing the mechanistic determination that governs both the
natural and the historical process of “becoming.”
To be sure, Marxism's "scientific positivism" does not have the descriptive fixity of the results of "observation" and "experiment" within the framework of Newtonian physics or mechanistic biology. But it is still a closed positivism in the rationalistic self-sufficiency and completeness of the dialectical schema. It decodes the "principles" and the "laws" of the historical dialectic definitively and finally, and thus can henceforth interpret everything with authority, subordinating life and thought to dogmatic "directives."

With these epistemological givens it is inevitable that in the course of its historical development Marxism would begin to exhibit all the symptoms typical of the totalitarian systems with their metaphysical authority that have been known in European history. The axiomatic interpretation of historical and social "becoming" must necessarily be embodied in a specific representation, in a visible center. Every kind of rationalism (beginning with that taught by Roman Catholic Scholasticism) is of its nature an ideological dogmatism because its "objective" truths are not susceptible of rational challenge. And ideological dogmatism is accompanied by a visible representation of the authority of the dogma and a totalitarian subjection of the faithful to this representation.

It is thus by a natural process that in the twentieth century was born the "Vatican" of Marxism, namely, the infallible authority of Moscow. The popular disturbances in Russia in 1917 were relentlessly pressed by the authority of the Soviet bureaucracy, and this repression was extended to every local Marxist movement throughout the world because the representation of truth can only be concentrated in a single seat. The concept of party discipline and the principle of infallibility, the rationalistic understanding of the unity that institutionalizes every Marxist group bureaucratically, is the organic consequence of the "scientific" positiveness that is fundamental to Marxism—precisely as it was fundamental to the whole structure of Roman Catholicism.

This "Vatican" also inevitably gives birth to its own "Protestantism." The interpretation of the principles of the historical dialectic and of economic determinism, always on the basis of Marx's writings (sola scriptura), has divided Marxism into almost as many sects as there are Protestant offshoots from Roman Catholicism basing themselves on the Bible. And just as we can no longer speak in the West of Christianity without specifying which Christianity we mean, so we cannot speak of Marxism without explaining which Marxism we mean: the Marxism of Stalin or of Trotsky, of Togliatti or of Mao, of Tito or of Castro. Nor should we forget the groups and "grupuscules" of "leftists" (gauchistes) that constantly appear, each of which claims to represent the absolute pinnacle of Marxist orthodoxy, adhering with mystical fanaticism to the letter of Marxist dogma.

There is no doubt that historically Marxism is the system of philosophy that in an immediate and certain fashion has managed, in the way it has organized communal life, to achieve the most impressive embodiment in specific social practice. And it is precisely the historical embodiment of Marxism in specific politicosocial regimes that has clearly revealed the organic setting of Marxist theory in the philosophical debate that was realized by the Scholastics and their successors in Western Europe. The only thing that we can infer theoretically or predict from the case of Descartes, Kant, or Hegel is what we have seen constituting a specific historical reality in the case of Marxism: that the "monism of the subject" of the Western philosophical tradition cannot lead to forms of real life but only to the inescapable totalitarianism of a rationalistic authority, even if it clearly purports to aim at freeing the human subject from every form of slavery to nature or necessity.

Marxism had to undergo the most atrocious savagery known in history: from the "Gulag archipelago" with its tens of millions of victims, the nightmare policing of people, their obligatory submission to the religious worship of those who exercised authority, the collapse of every form of the freedom and rights of the individual—it had to undergo the raw violence of military occupation to reduce the countries that were known as the "Eastern Bloc" to obedience to the Marxist ideal, to drown in blood the uprisings of the workers and people of East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. This enormous and most painful price had to be paid for all the seeds of the West's philosophical creation of totalitarianism, from
Augustine’s utilitarianism to Hegel’s *Panlogismus*, to be manifested within Marxism—for totalitarianism to be manifested as the “internal logic” of Western metaphysics.

The internal undermining of Marxism by its metaphysical creations themselves led even to the alienation of its own revolutionary dynamic, to its undisguised subjection to the definitive forms of a simplistic logical identification of objective schemata with sclerotic structures. In order to become a practical form of politics and a social regime, Marxism was obliged to deny the core of its dialectical dynamic, the idea of revolution. It became subject to the laws and the presuppositions of the capitalist system—of the system that it wanted to overthrow. It evolved into state capitalism, with the same autonomy exercised by the centralizing and bureaucratic structures of the system of production, the same deterministic relationship of capital and labor that denotes the human “material” to a neutral and secondary factor of the need for the growth of capital. The messianic ambitions for the creation of a classless society were sold off because the centralizing bureaucracy inevitably gave birth to its own rigid aristocracy. The international ideal of Marxism too was swallowed up by the avaricious greed of the Russian communist oligarchy for military and economic might—the “great Soviet fatherland of the proletariat” was transformed within a few decades into a typically capitalist and imperialist superpower (with the insignificant difference that in its own case its capital was state-owned rather than owned by individuals).

Roughly seven centuries after Scholasticism and four centuries after Descartes, the problem of rational knowledge, the mode of humanity’s approach to truth, marks philosophy’s trajectory with the stamp of an exceedingly painful historical experience, an experience filled with much human blood, with much tormenting of people, and sometimes with tragically insoluble confusion. This historical experience burdens the philosophical quest with a vast responsibility because it appears that it is within its own boundaries that the authenticity or the alienation of life, the hope or the torment of human beings, can be discerned.

§ 25. The Culture of the Enlightenment

The European Enlightenment (Aufklärung) is surely something more than an ideological trend or theoretical system, something more than a philosophical tendency or “school.” It is an epoch; it is the “modern age” of European history, an age of “enlightenment” of European man after the “darkness” of the Middle Ages, the totalitarian imposition of religious authority as the prevailing ideology. It is a culture, that is, a universal mode of life.

What is established as a universal way of life is basically a fundamental attitude or choice, the endowment of human existence and human action, the objective world and the use of the world, with a new significance.

For us to trace the course of such a development in a realistic (rather than abstract) manner, perhaps we should regard the Enlightenment as fundamentally a personal enterprise or achievement, and not confine ourselves to the a posteriori estimation of the nature of the phenomenon. Before being an age and a culture, the Enlightenment is found here and there in a few isolated individuals. A very small number of people managed successfully, using their pens and their spirits alone, to oppose the prevailing ideology and its then all-powerful institutions with a new interpretation of life and of reality.

Europe was only just emerging from the tragedy of the wars of religion. The Protestant Reformation, even if regarded as a decisive step in the “coming of age” of European man and a precursor of the Enlightenment, had rather intensified the anxious clinging to metaphysical authority. To be sure, it abolished the institutional bearer of this authority, liberating individual responsibility and a critical approach to religious faith. However, it continued to make the “here and now” depend on the “beyond” through an obligatory fidelity to rational and regulative schemata. On the other side, Roman Catholicism remained the first and supreme example of the totalitarian organization of authority—totalitarian in the sense that the word acquired in the twentieth century. It was a religious autocracy rich in obvious proofs of worldly power, material wealth, and means of applying psychological pressure, with astonishing
mechanisms for policing ideas and establishing its own religious ideology. One only needs to recall mechanisms such as the Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei, the Congregatio de Propaganda Fidei, the Inquisition, the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, or the network of control over the greater part of European universities and schools, or even the social care administered by the monastic orders, for one to understand the extent and the strength of the centralizing power exercised by the Roman church over the people of Europe—even if its formal political processes had been significantly restricted after the Middle Ages.

These all-powerful structures of authority were opposed by isolated figures and groups from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. To mention only the better-known names, these figures include Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Henry More, Berkeley, and Shaftesbury in England; Bayle, Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Diderot, Maupertius, Buffon, d’Alembert, Condillac, La Mettrie, Meslier, Bonnet, Turgot, Du Bos, and Malebranche in France; and Wolff, Leibniz, Thomasius, Pufendorf, Holbach, and Lessing in Germany.

The men of the Enlightenment did not always share the same views, the same starting points and theses. They do, however, share common goals. These are: (a) to oppose dogmatic and intellectualist interpretations of reality with the empiricism and direct evidence of experimental science; (b) to set the rights of the individual, as derived not from any transcendent authority but from "natural" justice, against an autocratic understanding of power; (c) to assert the sensory experience of the material and the specific against the spiritualized "metaphysical" version of the really existent; (d) to propose the regulative principles of human reason, the appreciation of beauty, and the well-being of the senses and of the body against a tormenting anxiety about sin/transgression and moral guilt; (e) to put a relativism when making comparisons, and a skepticism when conducting research, in the place of the schematic absolutization of historical phenomena and traditions; and (f) to replace the ascetic approach to life on earth with the affirmation of biological life and its instinct for self-preservation and with the pursuit of utilitarian ends in this world.

Kant summarized the aspirations of the Enlightenment in a single polemical claim: that Man should be freed from every traditional claim—from the traditional claim of any institutional or theoretical authority whatsoever, any rationalist system, or any transcendent/metaphysical legislation. He wanted the human individual to acquire self-determination, "to take his life into his own hands," to organize the effective meeting of his needs and desires by his own capacities.

Modern studies on the Enlightenment, especially the very comprehensive treatise of Panayiotis Kondylis, Die Aufklärung, present this polemical character as a defining element and unifying axis of this multifaceted phenomenon.

The polemical character of the Enlightenment is to be located in its opposition to the religious tradition of the West. Before anything else the Enlightenment was a militant antireligious movement, not always atheistical but in all cases anticlerical—in opposition to Christianity as the men of the Enlightenment knew it in its Western European institutional form, as Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Even though this opposition escalated in a large number of variations, in diverse and often contradictory points of view, the central mark of the Enlightenment, as an integral historicosocial phenomenon, was its polemical opposition to the prevailing religiosity of the age.

Here I will note in brief the more characteristic features of this polemical opposition—chiefly as we encounter them in the first theoretical presuppositions of the formation of the modern paradigm.

First of all, there is the assertion of matter and the senses. This assertion has a polemical character because it is based on and presupposes the rejection of both the ontological and the regulative priority of the spiritual and the intellectual, the denial of any regulatory authority with transcendent/metaphysical validity. For the men of the Enlightenment, the great opponent was Roman Catholic

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Scholasticism and the intellectualism that went with it (which left its mark also on Protestantism)—the attempt to safeguard the abstract principles of metaphysics with the capacity of the intellect alone. On this attempt and, specifically, on the apodictic version of the hypostasis of the existent and the real as an intellectual object (res cogitans) was based not only an abstract rationalist ontology but also an axiomatic regulative ethics, and concomitantly the whole of the social edifice of autocratic power structures and arbitrary hierarchies.

In order for them to mount an effective opposition to this edifice as a whole, the men of the Enlightenment were obliged to shift the affirmation of the existent and the real to the immediacy of sensory experience, to replace apodictic proof by syllogism with empirical/experimental verification. Even Descartes’s dualism, the distinction between res extensa and res cogitans, had to be rejected because it perpetuated the intellect’s priority in affirming the existent. With Kepler and Galileo, and finally with Newton, the men of the Enlightenment provided evidence for their conviction that Nature, the sensible world, is the sole object of positive and definitive knowledge. And Nature is the universal Whole, subject to empirical investigation and quantitative measurement, organized with stable laws and a rational structure. The functionality of Nature is a given necessity an inescapable law, without margins for the irrational and fortuitous.10

Reason cannot be set aside, but it is regarded as a natural given in conjunction with experience. By using experience and reason in conjunction with each other, human beings are able to decode the given law of Nature, and by knowing the laws of the way it functions, they are able to tame it and make it serve their own needs through technology and industry. Thus technological and industrial development acquires in people’s minds the sense of a militant and revolutionary liberation of humanity from the impoverishment of passively accepting some empirically indeterminate regulator of their fate.

But Nature is not only the cosmic All. It is also humanity as a whole with its social phenomenology and the laws governing it. “Man does not stand over and against Nature, but is absorbed into it, so that his distinguishing characteristics disappear and he becomes a simple case of the application of natural laws.”11 From this “naturalistic” understanding of Man and society, and also from the emphasis on the sensible/material factors that form the social phenomenon, is generated the first attempt in positive science (by analogy with natural science) to articulate a political economy. It is science that illuminates and reveals the law of nature, that notes the conjunctions of the phenomena and informs us about the results that emerge from specific causes.12 The phenomena of economics are freed from the indeterminable factor of human conduct and are regarded as natural phenomena analogous to those manifested in animate and inanimate matter. The circulation of blood, for example, in the human body offers the model for the definition of a cyclical flow of the economy.13 And this conviction about the stable rational structure and order of the physical All is transferred as a presuppositional principle to the world of economics, as the basis of confidence in its “natural” and autonomous functionality, that is, the attitude of “laissez faire, laissez passer et le monde va de lui même.”14

Such naturalistic estimations fundamentally preclude the mixing of axiological criteria in the definition of economic behavior, just as they also preclude the otherness or the unexpected that every human relationship retains even in a relationship of economic exchange. Political economy (as formerly ethics in general), by simply asserting the sensible and the specific, lays claim to the title of a pragmatic science faithful to the blueprints of Enlightenment empiricism.

A second characteristic mark of the Enlightenment’s polemic is the emphatic promotion of the autonomy of the subject, an absolutized individualism.

10. Ibid., 1.2.2.

11. Ibid., 1.2.3, p. 154.
13. François Quesnay, Tableau économique (Versailles, 1758).
14. “Let things happen as they will and the world goes on anyway.”
To be sure, individualism as a theoretical position and concomitant principle of social practice is not an isolated phenomenon, nor was it generated historically by the Enlightenment. It accompanies the rejection of the Greek identification of being in communion with being true (the criterion of the communal verification of knowledge that prevailed from the sixth century BC to the fifteenth century AD). Individualism is correlated with the historical appearance of the understanding of logos as ratio (as an individual facultas rationis: an individual criterion of verification). And it has its roots probably in Roman legalism just as it also does in a moralistic centering on the individual—the juridical alienation of Christian experience that appeared in the West as early as Tertullian, Ambrose, and Augustine—developing into a general epistemological attitude in the so-called “Carolingian Renaissance” (ninth century) and most of all in Scholasticism.\(^{15}\)

In the case of the Enlightenment, individualism made its appearance as a polemical thesis against the religious presuppositions that gave birth to it and nurtured it. The religious opponent made individuality autonomous with a view to controlling it more fully through the demands of authority and an ascetical morality. Indeed, it could be maintained that Western theology adopted intellectualism, and the individualism that accompanied it, precisely out of a fear of the freedom entailed by the epistemological priority of personal relationships/communion, the priority of experience—because the intellect, as an individual power of positive knowledge, has a need to relate to objective criteria of confirmation, a need to refer to authority. The same is true for individual moral progress: it is assured and measured only by subjection to the objective rules of a codified asceticism. Thus, through the authority of the institutional bearer of truth and the ascetic code that such a bearer administers, the control and discipline of the autonomous individual are achieved.

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A third characteristic mark of the polemics of the Enlightenment is the raising of biological life to an ontological truth determinative of the existence of Man, and to a regulative principle determinative of his individual rights.

This claim of the Enlightenment also has a polemical character because it clearly militates against the one-sided religious absolutization of the soul or of the spirit as a defining element of the existence of Man and a point of reference for his conduct.

Indeed, one could speak of an aggressive resolve that the men of the Enlightenment show not simply to prove the priority of the biological factor but also to obliterate any awareness of Man's existential superiority in relationship to other animate beings. They do not hesitate to depreciate Man and disparage him so as to succeed in confirming his autonomy; they strip him of any existential particularity that would refer to a metaphysical origin.

They want Man to be a simple link in the chain of evolution (evolutionism in biology makes its appearance within the framework of Enlightenment apodictics from the beginning of the eighteenth century) not because scientific research at that time could provide

adequate justification for such a hypothesis but only because their antime
taphysical ardor wanted to identify Man with the animal, de

fined existentially and genetically by its bestial nature. "Evolution

ism became indispensable for deriving the spirit from matter."17 It is
the spirit and the soul that must necessarily be proved to be aspects
of biological function, "extreme powers of the autonomous func

tioning a purely material whole," a "mechanism" that includes the
psychic element in it in a generic mode.18

The same militant resolve wanted, moreover, to see human ex

istence only as a chance occurrence within the universe. For the first
time speculation arose about the existence of life or even rational
beings on other planets, with the idea of doubting the uniqueness
in the universe of Man's earthly existence and his privilege of being
the "crown" of creation as a whole. Stripped of every metaphysical
charism of soul or spirit, Man is no longer either the center or the
goal of some divine creation. He is not a "microcosm" in which some
kind of existential adventure of freedom of relationship between
created and uncreated comes together and is recapitulated. He is
not a "mediator" of this relationship or an "image" of God. He is
merely a coincidental product of nature on the crust of the earth,
and perhaps also on the crust of other planets.

We thus arrive, of course, at a strange paradox that has been
noted by students of the Enlightenment. In the name of freeing
Man from metaphysical dependency, of asserting his existential
autonomy and dignity, and his absolute value, Man is ultimately
disparaged and depreciated. He is subjected wholly to physical de

pendencies and needs. He humbles himself willfully by laying claim
to the existential level of animal life and of chance natural occur

rence.19 And all this is for the sake of a "realism," of a "coming down"
to reality, of a "deliverance from any romantic illusion," which does
not always persuade one that it is not another form of obsession.

17. Ibid., p. 339.
18. La Mettrie, L'Homme Machine, vol. 1 of Oeuvres philosophiques (Ber

lin, 1774), 347.
19. "The paradox arises that as the defender of the dignity and privileged sta
tus of Man, that very theology is put forward that from the viewpoint of modern
rationalism was originally regarded as hostile to Man and deprecatory of him"
(Kondylis, Aufklärung, 348).

In any event, the ontological grounding of human existence
only on the biological factor opened up the way to a new interpr
etation of human history and the factors that constitute it. There is
no divine providence, nor is there any existential adventure of free

dom. Consequently, there is no "original sin" either that binds Man
to guilt and subordinates him to rules and institutions designed to
secure his "redemption." Human history is the phenomenology of
the evolution of the instinct of self-preservation—the natural urge
of self-preservation is the given rationality of nature, with its drive
toward the founding of organized societies and its setting of regula

tive principles for the assessment at any time of the possibilities of
avoiding violent death and of satisfying the need for food.20

One could conclude in general terms (taking account of a very
broad range of views) that "laws of nature" or "natural rights" were
for the men of the Enlightenment those obligations that, when met,
permitted the organized integration and rational harmonization of
the particular individual manifestations of the instinct of self-pres
ervation so as to make social life possible. The rights of individu
als are natural rights. They are dictated by the "right of nature," the
rationality or strategy innate in nature for ensuring the preservation
of the self.

From this theory there emerges a new kind of utilitarianism—
new in relation to the utilitarianism cultivated for centuries by the
Western European religious tradition. In both cases there is the
same concern for securing benefits for the individual. The difference
lies only in a change of aim or goal. Individuals are no longer made
subject to ascetical rules and legal obligations for the sake of an
"eternal interest" and their metaphysical assurance. They are made
subject to rationalistic rules for safeguarding their instinct of self
preservation, rules of social coexistence that guarantee their natural
rights, that is, the reciprocity that facilitates biological survival.

At the same time, the new interpretation of history introduced
by the Enlightenment—history as the phenomenology of the evolu
tion of the instinct of self-preservation—also revalues the factor of
work. It is no longer ideas on leading personalities that shape history

20. See, for example, Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, chaps. 14 and 19, cited by
Kondylis, Aufklärung, 189ff.
but the evolution of types of work and factors affecting production. Work, however, is valued only as an element shaping history, not as a positive creative act. On the contrary, work is identified with non-utility and therefore has a cost that requires compensation. It is a transaction with a specific price. The distinguished contribution of Ricardo to the development of the science of economics lies chiefly in his analysis of the concept of work as a measure of relations of exchange, and in his making it autonomous as a measurement of inutility. The relationship between supply, demand, and prices reflects the "natural" relationship between contentment, pain or labor, and the satisfaction of the instinct of self-preservation.

Marx himself is a typical example of a man of the Enlightenment who was also a naturalist, not only because of the interpretation he gives to the origin of society, describing the animal-like (tierisch) instinct of self-preservation that leads to the division of labor as a causal principle, but also because of the overarching theory of natural law that in his view governs both the evolution of the conditions of production and the social and political focus that follow this normative evolution.

The philosophy of the Enlightenment brings together an incompatible set of ontological interpretations and ethicoregulative demands.

The problem presented by this incompatibility is not just theoretical, for the disparate elements do not represent merely abstract theories. The ontological interpretation of the existent refers to the very distinction between the real and the phenomenal or imaginary, as it does also to the existential cause of the facts of nature and their causal principle. If we ask, "What is real and what is simply imaginary or a subjective impression?" "What is the cause or origin of existents?" the reply that we give to these questions determines the

meaning of human existence and human action. That is, the motives, purposes, and modes of behavior of our daily lives depend on our reply.

From another angle, the ethicoregulative demands are also in their turn a presupposition for the creation of human society. They are required for the organized, reciprocal servicing of individual needs through the division of labor and the distribution of responsibilities, obligations, and rights. This pragmatic presupposition cannot be relativized as a mere convention because it actually constitutes a definition of the needs of human beings, or at least implies the evaluation of these needs, and consequently is an interpretation of their existential goals and therefore clarifies the meaning of human existence and human practice.

Social practice itself, then, in its ethicoregulative models (choices/evaluations/priorities of criteria and goals), presupposes an attribution of meaning to human existence and activity, and consequently an ontological interpretation of the facts of nature and of life—an interpretation of which the majority of people may or may not be aware. And conversely, every philosophical proposition offering an ontological interpretation of nature and of life has as its real support a specific attribution of meaning to human existence and activity, that is, certain ethicoregulative principles for the organization and functioning of society.

This intrinsic connection between ontology and ethics often becomes problematical for the Enlightenment, if indeed it does not result in irreconcilable antitheses and stark inconsistencies. This is because ontological interpretations are chosen solely for polemical purposes and their ethical consequences are ignored or rejected, while at the same time regulative principles incompatible with the chosen ontology are adopted. Or else, an a posteriori attribution of an ontological content is attempted to ethical choices and evaluations that again have been preferred for polemical purposes.

To be more specific, we have seen that the starting point and motivation of the Enlightenment was a militant hostility to metaphysics and to the institutional bearers of metaphysical authority. Consequently, the critical problem for the men of the Enlightenment was

21. "Consciousness, of course, is fundamentally the consciousness of nature. It first appears among humans as a perfectly foreign, all-powerful, and unassailable power. With it relations between humans are purely animal-like and it imposes itself on them as it does on the animals. It is thus a purely animal-like consciousness of nature" (Die deutsche Ideologie, in Siegfried Landshut, ed., Frühschriften [Stuttgart: Kröner, 1971], 357-59).

whether or not they accepted the ontology most consistent with their antimetaphysical stance, which was materialism: the identification of the real and existent exclusively with the sensory and material. The problem was critical precisely because of the ethicoregulative consequences that a materialist ontology entailed.

Materialism attributes to the self-generated action/motion of matter the origin of every phenomenon, and consequently of the "psychological" functions of human beings—intellection, judgment, imagination, will, and so forth. As a consequence, it makes these functions subject to the determinism that governs material things, to the necessity and "logic" of self-preservation and instinct. It thus, however, rules out any possible exercise of free will: the freedom of self-determination and deliberate choice of how to act by the human subject.

Materialism therefore rules out any possible moral deontology. Because the actions and choices of human beings are directed by natural necessity, there is no margin for assigning individual responsibilities or making moral evaluations. The consistent application of a materialist ontology entails the nullification of every value and every regulative principle. What is needful (deon) is identified with what is (on); morality is absorbed into the inexorable law and necessity that govern nature. "Even a criminal act," said the Marquis de Sade, "can in itself provide pleasure, precisely because it is natural, whereas the moral law is artificial."23

This moral nihilism was treated with considerable reserve by the men of the Enlightenment. Some of them were thoroughly alarmed—the dilemma it faced them with was not an easy one. They wanted to remain consistent in their denial of the priority of the metaphysical, but they were not disposed to accept the nullification of ethicoregulative principles, that is, of the very presuppositions that formed human society. Before anything else, their struggle was directed toward the liberation of Man—the rejection of metaphysics had this liberation principally in view. But if they adopted materialism in a fully consistent manner, they would be compelled to accept a new servitude, this time to the determinism of nature. They would have to regard nature as an autonomous given, determinative of every existence and every action, and therefore submit to the transcendent authority of its own intentionalities—they would have to transform "freedom with regard to the supernatural into dependence on the natural."24

In the face of this critical problem, the choices and attitudes that could be adopted varied significantly. There were men of the Enlightenment who, in their anxiety to avoid a moral nihilism, attempted to reconcile their thinking at least with the ontology of the Western European religious tradition, insisting only on anticlericalism, on a criticism of the historical forms of institutional Christianity in the West. Others, taking another line, conformed to a general theistic ontology that was not tied to any specific religious tradition. But the approach that finally prevailed and has remained (to this day) a central feature of the culture of the Enlightenment was to turn away from the ontological problem altogether and focus attention exclusively on the functioning of regulative principles, divorcing what is needful from what is.

Of course, such a divorce is from the outset deliberately artificial, a calculated avoidance of the problem. But it is an approach that has established itself universally—as if it responded to some deep predisposition of the human psyche. The culture of the Enlightenment refuses to consider the ontological question. It allows no room for an interest in truth as such. It is content to rely on a utilitarian intentionality and to escape to the imaginary self-sufficiency of a comfortable life, the hedonistic "liberation" of Man from the existential problem itself.

A reliance on the productive functionality of regulative principles, solely on the basis of the phenomenology of biological individuality and the social coexistence of human beings, proves to be an artificial solution precisely because of the inconsistencies and contradictions that it presents.

The men of the Enlightenment insist on the utilitarian autonomy of ethicoregulative principles—autonomy with regard to any


preliminary assigning of meaning to morality or any ontological presupposition concerning it. But even the principle of utility remains abstract if there are no criteria for evaluating needs, no criteria for assessing some kind of intended social functionality. So the men of the Enlightenment sought such criteria in the given and autonomous functionality of nature, in the innate "rationality" of nature. And although they identified this natural "rationality" with determinism, at the same time they appealed to it as a criterion of social functionality. They resorted to the "authority" of nature in order to impose on human freedom a version of the criterion of causality as a sociofunctional criterion. The freedom of human individuals was obliged to obey principles of behavior that did not presuppose such freedom, because they are principles of natural determinism inimical to freedom.

Thus the regulative principles of good and evil are defined on analogy with the natural and instinctive feelings of like and dislike, of pleasure and pain. The regulative character of natural and instinctive feelings reflects the "rationality" of instinctive self-preservation and aspires to natural atomic self-sufficiency, that is, to a satiated self-love. The men of the Enlightenment, however, did not entrust the collective/social attainment of this goal to the "rationality" of natural instinctiveness. It is evident that they make it dependent on personal freedom, and therefore program the attainment of the goal with binding rules of "natural" validity—with complete indifference to the contradiction involved.

One could pick out very many specific instances of such inconsistency from among the works of the Enlightenment. Hume, for example, regards the interests of the individual as the primary motive for the enacting of justice, making moral judgments about right and wrong dependent on the feelings of pleasure and pain. Yet at the same time he still considers justice as an "obligation" and indeed as a "natural obligation," in contrast to any "moral obligation." Even thought he takes it for granted that Man is only nature, he is not disturbed by the inconsistency of resorting to this very nature as a source from which to draw obligations. A contrasting
dexample is offered by Pierre Bayle's attempt to establish a moral deontology of atheism by drawing regulative imperatives from the harmonious structure of nature. Although he rejects any concept of a real "fall" and of "original sin," he nevertheless relies on an unexplained (and ontologically unfounded) difference between human nature and some ideal "naturalness." The same is true of Adam Ferguson, who seeks the dynamic of historical progress in the predetermined process of natural evolution. He seems not to notice the contradiction that exists in the coupling together of two radically antithetical concepts: that of the freedom presupposed by the dynamic of historical progress and the necessity of the law of nature.

The confusion of terms between what is needful (deon) and what is (on), between moral obligation and natural necessity, between freedom and determinism, did not perturb the men of the Enlightenment. The overcoming of the confusion would have required first an ontological interpretation (not, of course, an intellectualist and nonexperiential one) of the mode of existence of nature and of humanity: an interpretation of the difference between impersonal and personal existence, between natural necessity and human freedom, between biological intentionality and the unexpected aspect (or "otherness") of personal activity. But for the men of the Enlightenment, to have concerned themselves with ontology would have entailed a risk of deviating from the rules of "scientific" thought, a risk of sliding into metaphysics. For that reason it was pragmatically excluded from their debates.

One could summarize the typical examples of philosophical inconsistency mentioned above—the confusion between what is needful and what is—in a brief statement: in the Enlightenment conforming to necessity is proposed as the foundation of freedom.

2.7.2, pp. 171–81.

This absurd contradiction was, of course, later presented by Marx as an utterly "scientific" thesis, which, transformed into an ideological "vision," inspired and continues to inspire millions of unsuspecting adherents throughout the world. (Cornelius Castoriadis paints a brilliant picture of this phenomenon when he draws a comparison between Marxists and people who get together in a political party with the idea of working energetically to ensure the next eclipse of the moon!)

But the creation of this absurd contradiction belongs without question to the men of the Enlightenment—one can easily identify it in the works of the most characteristic representatives of the movement. They were the first to treat history as a deterministic succession of periods designating the evolution of the material means of human sustenance. And among them, the pioneer in this materialistic interpretation of history is the man regarded as Marx's "godfather," Adam Smith. Taking the theory of the four stages in the evolution of the material conditions of human life, Adam Smith combines the principle of individualism with a naturalistic economic theory to produce an argument for deterministic development. The priority of "natural" law in history is supported by an anthropological thesis about the similarly "natural" sociability of Man and the determination of his behavior by the natural necessity of social coexistence.\(^28\)

I should emphasize that the logical inconsistencies or philosophical gaps that the "repudiation" of the ontological question provoked in Enlightenment thinking were frequently noted by the men of the Enlightenment themselves—they were not "oversights" or unconscious errors. The priority, however, that the men of the Enlightenment give to their polemical objectives is such that the contradictions and gaps slip easily into the second division—they do not trouble them or provoke any further discussion.


For Voltaire, for example (and not only for him), it is clear that the drawing of regulative principles from the "rationality" of nature comes into open conflict with the reality of what we call "natural evil": degenerative diseases, earthquakes, or any other natural disasters reveal a kind of "irrationality" in nature that is radically incompatible with the principles of harmony and programmatic effectiveness.\(^29\)

By contrast, Diderot asserts that an ethics that attempts to draw its universal validity from "natural justice," that is, from a hypothetical biological homogeneity among humans, comes into conflict with the direct experience of the biological heterogeneity of individuals and groups. Thus a general ethics based on natural justice is impossible. It would need to be divided into as many moralities as there are differences in the biological "texture" of the human race.\(^30\)

Many similar examples of inconsistencies and contradictions could easily be found. Those men of the Enlightenment who relied on an extreme materialism tried to attribute the appearance and development of human thought to biological and social factors. At the same time, they themselves emphasized the primary role of ideas—in the form of intellectualism or superstition—in the formation of sociohistorical phenomena. Yet others strenuously maintained the conventional and relative character of the ethicoregulative principles, while at the same time fighting against the extreme but logically consistent implications of their thesis: unmitigated skepticism and the nullification of any axiology.

To be sure, an indifference to the ontological clarification and interpretation of the givens of life ultimately signifies the denial or absence of any interest in distinguishing the real from the imaginary. Abstract generalizations, phenomenological readings, and arbitrary assimilations all ultimately contribute to forming an imaginary substitute for reality, which takes the place of a "scientific object." And this imaginary substitute or ontological void that is the


foundation of "science" cannot be unrelated to its impasses on both the theoretical and the realistic levels.

The chiefly ontological question, if it is entertained at all, remains very marginal to the mentality imposed by the culture of the Enlightenment, a mentality that endures to this day. What was principally repudiated within the context of this culture was the core or basic assumption of any proposition offering an ontological interpretation: the problem of the causal principle of what exists, and consequently of the criterion by which the real is distinguished from the imaginary.

Parallel to the abstract idea of an innate "rationality" in nature, the culture of the Enlightenment also cultivated belief in a presuppositional "randomness" with regard to the existence of nature, as a way of responding to the problem of a causal principle. The contradiction this involved again did not give rise to much concern. If nature forms a unified and functional whole thanks to an abstract and teleological "rationality," how is it conceivable that this rationality should emerge from irrationality, from an assumed randomness?

And yet the most acute minds that have ever appeared in the history of thought, such as those pioneers of the Enlightenment, or their many modern successors, appear not to appreciate that randomness itself is a causal principle that is just as metaphysical as Plato's ideas or the Ens absolutum of the Scholastics, and, moreover, without any clearly rational foundation. For it is supremely arbitrary and no more than a statement of dogma to infer a strictly natural causality—with inexorable laws of predetermined necessity—from the principle of "randomness," to attribute the nature that we conceive of as rational to the inexplicable, obscure power of "randomness," to the blind game of "chance." And it is naive of us to seek to base our organization of society on the regulative principles of natural "rationality," if at the same time we offer as a response to humanity's existential problem is the chaotic sovereignty of chance.

But the historical presence of the Enlightenment—and not only the Enlightenment—has demonstrated, with specific items of real experience, that rational contradictions and inconsistencies are no barrier to the construction of a universal belief, which, even if it is militantly antimetaphysical, does not cease to possess a purely re-

THE ONTOLOGICAL QUESTION
Chapter 3.1

The Ontic and Ontological Definitions of Being

§ 26. The Ontic Version: Determinism and Axiology

The words *ontology*, *ontological*, and *ontic* derive from the Greek verb *to be* (*einaı*), especially from the form of the verb that permits us to express the fact of participation in being. This nominal form of the verb, which is the neuter present participle with the definite article (*to on*, genitive *tou ontos*), also gives us the etymology of the word *ontology*. This is “talk about being” (*logos peri tou ontos*), anything we have to say about the fact of participation in being.

But what does the verb *to be* mean? It is precisely the philosophical uncertainty about the meaning of this verb that we call the “ontological question.” And the ontological question presents itself as soon as we free ourselves from the self-evident content of the verb “to be” in the way we use it in our everyday language.

In our everyday language we use the verb *to be* with a view to attributing identity, activity, passivity, or state to the subject of our sentence. The verbal coupling, however, of the subject with a predicate that manifests identity, activity, passivity, or state also functions in everyday language as the declaration or confirmation of the existence itself of the subject. If the categorical determination that we attribute to the subject is true, this means that in the first place the subject itself is true—that it exists or subsists. Thus the verbal coupling of subject and predicate acquires an independent meaning, for this alone asserts and confirms the existence of the subject. That is
why we can also say that the verb to be, having now become autonomous, functions linguistically in three principal ways.

First, it functions in the sense of subjective existential confirmation. We use the verb I am as synonymous with the verb I exist. We identify being with the fact of subjective existential self-awareness, with the self-confirmation that I have as the bearer of reason, that I constitute a real existence, and that I have awareness of my existence.

Second, it functions in the sense of the assertion of phenomena. We confirm that something is when this something becomes directly accessible to our senses, when its presence is manifest, that is, when its presence is assured by sensory experience.

Third, it functions in the sense of objective assertion. We declare that something is when that something can be verified by everybody, that is, when it can stand as possibly occurring in common experience, even if at the time of its assertion it is not accessible to everybody’s experience.

Philosophy’s ontological question begins beyond all three of these meanings of being, beyond the linguistic marking of what exists. It begins when we go beyond the meaning of subjective, phenomenological, or objective assertion, when we go beyond the assertive or descriptive way in which the verb to be functions in the everyday use of language. The philosophical problem takes off once we ask ourselves what it means for something to be and what it means for it not to be, what being means as a reality in itself rather than as a common mark of existents, what being means not as the assertion of facts of experience or as self-awareness of the subject but as the opposite to nonbeing, to nullity, to nothingness.

A first step in going beyond the simple assertion expressed by the verb to be may be taken within the context of language itself by making use of the other verbal form to which I referred at the beginning of this section: the participle. In Greek we use the present participle of the verb to be (ēnai), namely, ὄν, οὐσα, on (in its masculine, feminine, and neuter forms), as well as a product of the participle, the noun ousia (“essence” or “substance”), in order to determine what is really existent. But in this case, our determining goes beyond a simple affirmation and expresses a first interpretation of the mode by which every existing thing exists—and this mode is by participation in being.1 The Greek language leads us to view everything that is as a fact of participation in reality as a whole or in the general affirmation of Being; it leads us to regard every existent as a particular manifestation of the fact of Being.

The use of the present participle of the verb to be in order to signify what exists brings us closer to the ontological question—that is, to a series of questions that delimit and define the ontological problem more fully: if linguistically we distinguish participation in Being from Being itself, does this distinction correspond to any reality that also holds true outside the linguistic realm of semantics? Do we have access to the reality of Being beyond the fragmentary fact of every particular participation in Being? What ultimately is the relationship between beings (ontai) and Being (einai), and how do they differ? Does participation in Being exhaust the fact of Being, or does Being constitute a reality in itself in which beings participate without exhausting it and from which they draw their onticity—in other words, do beings have their cause in Being?

With this very brief analysis, we have already arrived at an overview, or a first definition, of the two basic modes, methods, or schools that have been known in the history of philosophy whenever philosophers have considered the ontological question. There are two philosophical approaches to the ontological question, which I would call the ontic and the ontological versions of Being. I must immediately add that these two philosophical theories are distinct from each other not only with regard to the answers they give to the ontological question but more importantly with regard to the way in which they pose the question about Being. The mode of the question and the reply to the question are organically dependent on each other because the way in which we pose the ontological question already constitutes a philosophical thesis—it predetermines the direction in which we will move in our search for a reply. This will become clearer as we develop our discussion of the ontic and ontological versions of Being.

1. Note that in Greek the word metoché means both “participle” and “participation.” For the sake of clarity, in what follows a being as an existent will be spelled with a lowercase “b” and being as existence-in-itself with an uppercase “B.” —trans.
I call the first version ontic because it accepts—regards and understands—Being as on (the neuter present participle of the verb to be). Very simply, we can summarize this version of the response to the ontological question as follows: What is it that makes beings be? We are inquiring about being, about the onticity of beings. But the way in which we pose the question commits us a priori to the investigation of Being as a specific thing (kai ti), to the search for what (something specific) makes beings be. Our question consequently predetermines the ontic character of Being, for it refers to being as if it were some kind of on.

Of course, there is no question of our consciously identifying the Being we seek with some kind of on, because we are concerned not with a particular instance of participation in Being but with a summary of the general possibilities of Being, with Being-in-itself. Yet our question presupposes a specific bearer of the general possibilities of Being—a bearer or factor that is reified as the desired objective and admitted definition. The ontic character of Being is predetermined by our question because we seek to endow it with a definitive identity—not the definitive identity of participation in Being but the definitive identity of the cause of Being. The ontic character of Being does not lie necessarily in the conceptual version of einai as on but in the definitive version of Being (einai)—the version in which beings (onta) become accessible to us as beings (onta).

Consequently, we are able to speak in this case of a definitive identity (an identity of definition) and a conceptual difference between beings (onta) and Being (einai). And this conceptual difference lies in the fact that we distinguish Being from beings in the way we distinguish cause from effect. When we ask, “What is it that makes beings be?” the way our question is formulated oblige us to accept the relationship between Being and beings as a relationship of cause and effect—seeing that beings are because a sought-after factor exists that makes them be.

At the same time, a deterministic theory of the relationship between beings and Being also ties us to maintaining the axiological supremacy of Being in comparison with beings. In searching for Being as that which makes beings be, we predetermine it as a presupposition of the onticity of beings, and consequently as axiologically superior to beings, seeing that beings depend on it for their onticity or beingness. In human thought the relationship of dependence is always an axiological relationship: that which is dependent is always inferior to that upon which it depends, for the cause is axiologically superior to the caused. Thus what makes all the other beings be assumes the status of the highest Being, being regarded, in accordance with Aristotle’s expression, “the highest being, the divine” and “the most valued genus.”

Aristotle has often been regarded as the ontic version of Being’s most characteristic representative in the history of philosophy. And it is true that this version found much substantial support in his treatises. Aristotle, however, does not make a causal distinction between beings and Being in the point of departure for his ontological theory. If we look for a reply to the question “What is it that makes beings be?” in Aristotle’s writings, we have to admit that it is actuality (energeia), which is identical for Aristotle with the form (eidos), that makes beings be. Beings (onta) participate in Being, that is, they constitute ousiai, or substances, thanks to the actualization that is realized by the eidos, the form of the beings. The form actualizes the matter, giving it a specific identity, that is, a logos or rational principle. It gives it existence, making it be something. Without the actuality that is realized by the actualization, nothing is. Before being (einai) we can only postulate “being in potentiality” (dynametia), that is, matter that has the potentiality to be something if it is endowed with form—but the conception of this potentiality appears


3. “The form [eidos] is the definitive formula [logos]—the cause, i.e. the form, by reason of which the matter is some definite thing; and this is the substance [ousia] of the thing—their substance according to the formula [logos]—for each thing must be referred to by naming its form [eidos]—the species [eido] according to which [things] are named—it is in respect of its form that we know each thing” (ibid., 2.2.996b8, 7.17.1041b8, 7.10.1035b16, 7.10.1035a8, 3.3.998a7, 4.5.1010a25, trans. Barnes).

4. “Further, matter exists in a potential state [dynametia], just because it may attain to its form; and when it exists actually [energeia(i)], then it is in its
to be fundamentally purely conceptual, an intellectual schema that helps us understand being as the actuality of the form.

How, then, is Being actualized as a rational principle endowed with form, that is, as the substance of Being? The reply that Aristotle gave to this question was perhaps the most critical one for the development of philosophical metaphysics. If we suppose matter to be "being in potentiality" (the potentiality for it to be something), the transition to "being in actuality" constitutes a change, a passage from something to something else, and consequently a movement. Change is impossible without movement. Therefore, for "being in potentiality" to be actualized, for it to become "being in actuality," movement must exist. And movement always has some initial cause or principle: "Everything that is in motion must be moved by something." That "something" that moves a being from the state of being "in potentiality" to the state of being "in actuality" can be another being, that is, an "effective cause" that endues matter with form by having the form, that is, the end or goal (the "for the sake of which") of its effective activity "in mind"—and then we say that the motive of the activity is intellectual.

But apart from the effective cause of the movement (the intellectual motive) that occurs outside of matter, there is also a cause of movement that is found within matter itself. Aristotle accepts that matter constitutes "being in potentiality" because it contains not only the potentiality of the movement that endues with form but also the motive that urges it toward its actualization—the principle capable of producing motion. This second (interior) motive Aristotle calls the "object of desire" (orektos). Matter "desires" form,


5. "Everything changes from that which is potentially [dynamis] to that which is actually [energeia(i)]—every change is from something to something—for it is that to which rather than that from which the motion proceeds that gives its name to the change—there are as many types of motion or change as there are of being" (ibid., 12.2.1066b15-16; Physics 5.1.225a1, 5.1.224b8, 3.1.201a8, trans. Barnes).


8. "And the object of desire and the object of thought move in this way: they move without being moved" (Metaphysics 12.7.1072a26, trans. Barnes; see also On the Soul 3.10.433a17-20).

contains the dynamic tendency to acquire form, and has the love of the form: form is "matter's object of love." Without this love (erōs) that constitutes matter as a potentiality to be something, the reality of matter in itself remains inexplicable. And we gain nothing if we fabricate eternal essences, like the Platonic ideas, and transfer reality-in-itself to these, if there is not within these essences a principle capable of causing change and consequently movement.

Aristotle's matter therefore has a dynamic structure: it subsists as a potentiality, as an erotic impetus toward form, the rational principle that substantiates beings. When we say potentiality (dynamis) we must mean not only the potentiality for movement but also together with it the principle capable of producing motion. Even if we refer pure potentiality (an unrestricted conceptual possibility) to the eternal essences/ideas, again this potentiality would have remained without actualization in the absence of the principle capable of producing motion—"For that which has a capacity need not exercise it." In other words, Aristotle's dynamis on ("that which is potentially") does not refer to matter as if it were a passive presupposition or inactive factor that simply represents the possibility of being moved externally in order to be constituted as an existing thing. On the contrary, "that which is potentially" refers both to the kinetic potentiality of matter and to the principle that exists within matter and is capable of producing motion. If matter represented simply the potentiality of movement alone (the possibility that matter should give substance to form), it should exist eternally as a stable, permanent, and immutable given. Matter, however, is also subject to corruption; it perishes. Precisely because it contains the principle capable of producing motion, it also contains the possibility of non-motion, that is, of decay.


10. "Nothing, then, is gained even if we suppose eternal substances, as believers in the Forms do, unless there is to be in them some principle which can cause movement" (ibid., 12.5.1071b14-16, trans. Barnes).


12. "Perishing is not a motion" (Physics 5.1.225a32; Metaphysics 11.11.1067b36-37).
Ultimately, matter is potentiality (dynamis),\footnote{See ibid., 2.336a15ff., 2.337a17ff.; Physics 5.1.225a34–225b3.} and its nature is dynamic,\footnote{"But it is impossible that movement should either come into being or cease to be; for it must always have existed. Nor can time come into being or cease to be; for there could not be a before and an after if time did not exist. Movement also is continuous, then, in the sense in which time is" (Metaphysics 12.6.1071b6–10, trans. Barnes).} because it is "capable both of being and of not being,"\footnote{"It is clear that actuality is prior to potentiality. And I mean by potentiality not only that definite kind which is said to be a principle of change in another thing or in the thing itself regarded as another but in general every principle of movement or of rest... For from the potential the actual is always produced by an actual thing... there is always a first mover, and the mover already exists actually" (ibid., 9.8.1049b5–8 and 24–27, trans. Barnes).} of constituting movement or of being subject to decay. The possibility of being and of not being, of producing form or of perishing, lies precisely in the material composition of sensible things: "Matter is that which is potentially each thing,"\footnote{Ibid., 14.4.1092a3–4, trans. Barnes.} the potentiality of the movement that endues with form, but also the principle/motive force of producing form or of perishing.\footnote{Ibid., 14.4.1092a3–4, trans. Barnes.} We have distinguished between the potentiality of motion and the principle capable of causing motion. In a similar way, however, we must also distinguish between the principle capable of causing motion and motion in itself. This means that when we say that there exists in matter a principle capable of producing motion—the object of desire (orektos) or love (erōs) of the form—we are not attributing the cause of motion to matter in itself, because motion precedes the principle capable of producing motion—otherwise this principle would always have remained a possibility that was never actualized. Besides, as mentioned above, the principle capable of producing motion also presupposes the possibility of nonmotion, that is, of decay, whereas motion itself is neither generated nor decays but always is ("For it always existed"); it has the character of eternity.

There are two arguments that persuade us of the eternity of motion. The first concerns motion’s relationship to the substance (nature) of beings, that is, to the transition from a being in potentiality to a being in actuality. If motion were subject to generation and decay, this transition itself would also be subject to decay, in which case the possibility of the continuous participation of beings in Being (their participation in which endues them with form) would be destroyed along with the nature/substance of beings.\footnote{Ibid., 7.7.1032a20–22, trans. Barnes.} The second argument concerns motion’s relationship to time. Time is not generated, nor does it decay. Otherwise there would be no before and after. And time without motion cannot exist. Thus if time is eternal, motion is also eternal.\footnote{Ibid., 7.7.1032a20–22, trans. Barnes.}

The eternity of motion implies that actuality is prior to potentiality, that is, that movement exists before any transition from potential to actual.\footnote{Ibid., 7.15.1039b27–31, trans. Barnes.} We must therefore suppose a first source of actuality (energeia) that produces the motion existing in the world, without itself being moved—a first mover that has never moved from potentiality to actuality.\footnote{"The actual is not moved by the first mover (energeia), but it is moved in some way by it; for the mover moves it in some way, and the mover is the first principle of generation" (Physics 6.6.255a10–15, trans. Barnes; see also Metaphysics 4.8.1012b30–31).} Precisely because the transition from potentiality to actuality is incompatible with the first mover, which exists prior to any such transition, its substance must be purely actual: "There must, then, be such a principle, whose very substance is actuality."\footnote{Metaphysics 12.6.1071b19–20, trans. Barnes.} And because motion is the transition from potentiality to actuality and this transition is impossible for the first mover, it follows that the first mover, as purely actual, is itself immovable.

At the same time, because the first mover must be purely actual and in no circumstances potential, and because potential being is matter, it becomes evident that the first mover is immaterial and...
noncorporeal. And because motion neither is generated nor decays, but always is, at least as a temporal change from before to after, and without this temporal change nature does not exist, it follows that the source of motion, which is the first mover, is also eternal actuality.

Aristotle becomes even more specific in the formulation of his ontological definitions when he identifies the first mover with God. It is evident that he borrows the word "God" from everyday speech without discussing or analyzing the semantic content with which the established linguistic usage had charged the term. By identifying the concept of God with the concept of the first mover, he promotes it to a fundamental category of philosophical debate. Aristotle's God becomes the starting point or presupposition for the interpretation not only of the ontic of beings but also of Being itself. That is to say, it becomes established as a logical necessity—a presupposition if the becoming of the world and of life is to have rational meaning.

Once God has been identified with the first mover, he becomes "the first and most important principle" of movement and consequently of Being, because he is himself a nature that is "separable and unmoving." He is a separable nature because he has no cognizance of the state of potentiality, as all other beings do, since he is pure actuality, the source of all actuality and the fullness of actuality. As an unmoving nature that is absolutely actual, God is "self-sufficient and has no need of anyone." He neither needs nor admits of external interventions: "There are no external actions in him." As pure actuality, God is also pure form, that is, a form that exists only as an intellectual conception, not as a material shape. And because pure form is only conceptual and is simultaneously pure actuality, we infer that "God's activity is intellecction." God thinks the pure form that is his own substance and actuality "without parts and indivisible." Thus the activity of the intellecction of the self constitutes in God the active possession of Being, that is, life-in-itself, and for this reason "the activity of God is immortality, that is, eternal life." "We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God." The identity of thinker and object of thought, of actuality, and of form is life at its highest level, that is, absolute happiness (eudaimonia), "the single and simple pleasure." The happiness of God is "a contemplative activity," "what is most pleasant and best" of contemplation, the active concentration on what is best in itself, which is the one simple form of pure actuality, the identity of thinker and object of thought.

God is one, unmovable, living, and simultaneously eternal. He "cannot have any magnitude," seeing that he himself moves time, which is infinite, and nothing finite has the power to move something infinite. Without passion and immutable, "the nature that is best and free from decay," he is the source and cause of beings, their constitutive principle: "All things are from God and were framed for us by God." The world owes him not only its origin but also its conservation and the guarantee of its order, harmony, and measure: "As is the steersman in the ship... even so is God in the universe."

By identifying Being with actuality (energeia), actuality with movement, movement with the presupposition of the first mover, and the first mover with God, does Aristotle really lay the foundations for the ontic understanding of Being?

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23. Ibid., 12.6.1071b20–21.
25. Ibid., 11.7.1064b1.
26. Ibid., 11.7.1064a35.
31. Ibid., 12.7.1072b19–21, 12.9.1074b22.
32. On the Heavens 2.3.286a9, trans. Barnes.
35. Ibid., 10.8.1178b7–8, trans. Barnes.
37. Ibid., 12.7.1037a5–6, trans. Barnes.
38. Fragmenta Aristotelica 13.1476a32.
40. Ibid., 6.400b8, trans. Barnes.
There is no doubt that Aristotle’s version refers Being fundamentally to the onticity of beings, that is, to form, which presupposes the transition from potentiality to actuality: this transition/movement constitutes the substance/nature of beings, the event of their participation in Being/becoming. This event endues beings with form. It permits beings to appear and consequently to emerge from oblivion, to be true (to be that which they are and not something other than themselves). Consequently, the connection between Being and beings presents itself fundamentally as an etiological relation (a relation of cause and effect), whereupon Being acquires a definite character. It becomes subject to the definition of the cause.

At the same time, however, Aristotle detaches Being from its correlation with beings when he refers the problem of Being to the first mover. This detachment becomes both evident and attainable with the double sense of *energeia* (as both activity and actuality). In the case of beings, Being is identified with *energeia* as movement, whereas in the case of the first mover, Being is identified with *energeia* as immovability. Being is actualized both as movement, constituting the *nature* of beings, and as immovability, representing a principle that transcends nature. This means that Being is subject to the definition of the cause, but also that it transcends the definition of the cause. In the first instance Being establishes the manifestation/knowledge of what is a being by nature, and is consequently the foundation of natural science. It enables us to subject the data provided by the senses to *rational* (*meta logos*) examination; it constitutes the rational principle (*logos*) of the existence of beings. In the second instance Being is referred to the *principle* (*archê*) of existence prior to any natural onticity and beyond any defining causality. It enables us to work back to the existent as an existent, that is, to Being-in-itself, and consequently lays the foundation for another science “prior” to the natural variety, namely, first philosophy: “Indeed if there is no substance other than those which are formed by nature, natural science will be the first science; but if there is an immovable substance, the science of this must be prior and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first. And it will belong to this to consider

being *qua* being—both what it is and the attributes that belong to it *qua* being.”

According to Aristotle, then, our ascent to Being-in-itself, independently of what exists by nature, makes metaphysics possible, whereas the sense of Being as *nature* (cause of beings) imprisons us in the realm of natural science, making metaphysics, or first philosophy, impossible—and this imprisonment of “metaphysics” within the boundaries of natural science was attributed by Heidegger both to Thomas Aquinas and to Hegel and Nietzsche. This transcendence of natural science allowed Aristotle to assign definitions to God that repudiate any deterministic relationship. God is alive but has no dimensions. He is pure activity or actuality and yet is himself immovable. He is absolutely self-sufficient and yet the steersman of the universe. He is the cause of movement, and consequently of forms, and yet he himself does not contain the archetypes of the forms “in his mind” (*en noōs*): he only thinks being in its universality—“he thinks himself.” He is the beloved object of matter, that to which the dynamic-erotic impetus of the shaping of matter refers. He himself, however, remains pure form without being objectified schematically.

Ultimately, Aristotle’s first mover—God—transcends not only the definition of the cause of that which exists naturally but also human thought itself, which derives its definitive character from nature. The human mind thinks by referring to intelligible things, which means that as thinking it distinguishes itself from the object of thought, defining the object of thought in an ontic manner (i.e., as an entity). Only God is “a thinking on thinking” (*noēsis noēsōs*), an identity of the mind and the object of thought. Only he thinks without defining the object of thought and without being defined with regard to the object of thought. We must conse-

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43. See *Metaphysics* 12.9.1074b15–1075a10; see also N. G. Angelis, “The transcending of physics in Aristotle” [in Greek], in *Philosophia: Yearbook of the*
quently transcend human thinking in order to see (contemplate) God beyond the defining fragmentariness of thoughts. It is on this double transcendence of both nature and human thought that Aristotle bases his ultimate approach to the truth of Being.

It is clear from the above that with regard to the problem of Being—as in the case of many other philosophical problems—Aristotle proved to be the point of departure of distinctions that were made later. We find in him all the presuppositions for asserting that the ontic as well as the ontological versions of Being were both derived from his texts and that his own theories made possible both of these approaches to the ontological problem. This assertion will become clearer when we also come to analyze the ontological version of Being in the pages that follow.

In the history of philosophy, however, at least in the way it has developed within the context of the Western European tradition, Aristotle has been regarded as the most characteristic representative of the purely ontic version of Being. The explanation for this may be sought in the assumptions underlying the understanding of Aristotelian texts that medieval Scholasticism bequeathed to Western European philosophy.

The Scholastic approach to Aristotle, and its understanding and interpretation of his texts, is undoubtedly a product of the historical conditions in which the medieval West first became acquainted with Aristotle’s writings. Aristotle became more widely known and began to influence Europe’s spiritual life in two stages. It was only in the middle of the twelfth century that the second part of the Aristotelian Organon (the Analytics, Topics, and Sophistical Refutations) began to be translated into Latin (from the Arabic version, not from the Greek original). Until that time Europe only had access to a few fragments of Aristotelian logic from the Categories and De Inter-

diatione in Boethius’s translation and commentary. In the second stage, in the middle of the thirteenth century, the Latin corpus aristotelicum was completed by the translation of the remaining books, the Ethics, Physics, Metaphysics, De Anima, and so on.

It was the century, however, that came between the first and second stages of the Latin translation of the corpus aristotelicum that proved decisive for the understanding and interpretation of Aristotle in the West. It is commonly observed by historians that in the course of this century Aristotelian logic came to be accepted in Europe as if it comprised the whole of Aristotle’s philosophy and was assumed to be the only instrument for acquiring correct, positive, and indisputable knowledge. The truth is identified with the outcome of methodological exactitude, and knowledge is exhausted in the obligatory inference of correct syllogistic thought. Thus when the Latin translation of Aristotle’s works came to be completed, it was already too late for the Westerners to accept the relativity of the technique of syllogisms within the structure of Aristotle’s philosophy as a whole—wild enthusiasm for the efficaciousness of correct syllogistic thought left no room for understanding the dynamism of Aristotelian contemplation (theòria).

Aristotle has long since been established in people’s minds as the father and fount of intellectualism, the supreme guide both to the subjection of truth and knowledge to the subject’s intellectual capacity and to the exhaustion of rational reliability within the bounds of the individual’s intellectual conception.

In the realm, more particularly, of the ontological question, Scholastic thought hastened, upon the first translation of the Organon alone, to use the technique of Aristotelian logic to prove the existence of God through correct syllogisms and thus radically reverse Aristotle’s perspective on the problem of Being. And this first arbitrary act not only distorted Aristotle’s metaphysics within the context of the middle and later periods of Scholastic philosophy but also irretrievably altered the angle of all later approaches to


44. For the very important theme of the first entry of Aristotle into the medieval West, see Martin Grabmann, Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode (Graz: Akademische Verlag, 1957), ii, 66ff., where the fundamental bibliography is also given. See also M.-D. Chenu, La théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle, 3rd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1969), 20.

45. “La ‘crue’ suprême de l’aristoléisme, avec les Ethiques et la Politique, en plein XIIe siècle, ne submergera les apports antérieurs qu’en consacrant leur efficacité” (Chenu, La théologie comme science, 21).
exist in itself before any physical onticity and beyond any physical
causality. By contrast, in Thomas Aquinas the tracing back of move-
ment to the prime mover is detached from the problem of Being-
in-itself. It is made subject to the logically obligatory regression of
effect and cause, moved and mover, with the aim of arriving finally
at the necessity of the given first mover, thus demonstrating its ex-
istence. And it is precisely the apodictic verification of the existence
of the prime mover that permits Aquinas to make his analogical cor-
relation of physical being with transcendent being, that is, his ap-
proach to the "object" of metaphysics with the help of the analogy
of mathematics. 48

In other words, once the problem of philosophy is no longer
centered on investigating the truth of Being, the truth regarding the
power to exist in itself, but the problem of Being is restricted to the
possibility of applying an objectively credible apodictic methodol-
ogy with a view to defining Being positively as an object of knowl-
edge, then inevitably metaphysics is transformed into an apodictic
epistemology, into a theory about the possibilities of knowledge in
itself. This consequence was revealed unambiguously by Kant, but it
had already been predetermined by Aquinas when he asserted that
the "object of our scientific knowledge is God." 49 And whether the
object of scientific knowledge is physical or transcendent, the
version of Being that is implied is inevitably ontic, imprisoning both
epistemology and ontology in a static schematization that destroys
the dynamics of life's rational principle.

We can now summarize precisely what we mean in philosophical
language when we refer to the ontic version of Being. For something
to be, it must have a given and definitive onticity. Onticity signifies
given properties that define the being, which make it be something.
One of these properties is also existence, which has its cause in an
initial onticity endowed with the property of transmitting existence,
that is, of creating beings.

46. See É. Gilson, L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale, 6th ed. (Paris: Vrin,
1972), 25.
47. See Chenu, La théologie comme science, 9–13.
48. See Christos Yannaras, Person and Eros (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Or-
thodox Press, 2007), § 70(c).
49. See Summa Theologiae 1.1.7.
Thus, in the ontic version of Being, substance and onticity are identified with each other. Substance is not the event of participation in Being, the dynamic becoming of existence; substance is the definitive identity that emerges from the package as a whole of properties and determinations of each onticity. These properties may be natural (accessible to the experience of the senses) or they may be super-natural (accessible only to the intellect), but in both cases they constitute the principle/presupposition of ontic identity. They demonstrate the reality (onticity) of the defined substance.

In the consequently ontic version of Being, there is no room for existential freedom and otherness. God himself is defined by his reality/onticity (by the attributes of self-causation, cause of beings, pure act, etc.). He cannot be or be something other than that which intellectual conception and necessity impose on him in order to be God. Existence is absolutely predetermined by its substance—which is why the existence of God can be proved rationally by the logical clarification of the necessity of the attributes of his substance. It is only the substance (the sum total of the predetermined attributes) that makes existence be that which it is, that is to say, that gives it onticity, with the consequence that existence in every case determines substance. Thus the ontic version of Being establishes determinism as the basic presupposition for understanding existents and abolishes the possibility of existential freedom and otherness.

Every possibility of existential differentiation is traced back to nature, not to a capacity for existence to be self-determined. And the natural differentiation of the possibilities of existence is unavoidably axiological—an axiological evaluation of the attributes of each substance. With an evaluation of this kind, we distinguish rational from irrational existences, and likewise created existences from the uncreated God.

The Scholastics showed that the existential differentiation of created from uncreated is naturally predetermined and necessarily axiological because the very process of our inferring the concept/substance of God becomes possible only when we attribute to him the perfections of Being. We identify in particular sensible and finite beings certain properties that can, by an intellectual regression to the absolute (regressus in infinitum), manifest the perfections of Being, that is, can make known to us by analogy the transcendent attributes of God. Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great summarized these attributes in the following predicates: unum, verum, bonum, res, aliquid (one, true, good, thing, something). Every being is real as an entity, as a thing (res). By transcending its particular manifestations, it is always one (unum). In contrast with the other beings, it is that which it is, that is, something (aliquid). With regard to the knowledge that we have about it, it is true (verum). And with regard to its volitional intentionality, it is good (bonum).

The Scholastics named these five predicates of a being transcendentalia (transcendentalia). Their reference to God constitutes a transcendental analogy, that is, an intellectual extension (extension) of these predicates beyond the bounds of the relativity of sensible objects to the realm of the axiologically absolute. Thus we can know the attributes of God’s substance or essence, namely, unity, goodness, truth, supreme onticity, and supreme otherness, by the aid of the intellect (per lumen intellectus), through the analogical elevation of the perfections of beings to the absolute and transcendent perfection of God, which is by definition the Cause of every perfection, the first and supreme Value.

Moreover, it is precisely the possibility of intellectual extension to the axiologically absolute that differentiates, in a likewise axiological manner, Man’s rational existence from the irrational existences of other beings. It is only by the power of thought that perfection can be investigated and determined. The concept of value, of the good or of virtue, is defined on the basis of the rules of logic (virtus moralis bonitatem habet ex regula rationalis). That is why what is not good or without value (sin and evil) is a transgression of the rules of logic, an actual deep-seated disobedience with regard to reason. And this is because human reason is an existential microcosm of the divine reason, which summarizes the eternal laws of the good and of existence.

Thus Scholastic metaphysics summarizes Being and the good in the intellectual and axiological definition of the absolute. It

50. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae 1a.2ae.1, ad 1m.
establishes the ontic and axiological version of the absolute as the definitive and causal principle of every natural, moral, and social law. Human existence will either submit to the axiological authority of absolute reason or rebel violently against this authority, shaping at least Western European history in the modern age that succeeded the Scholastics, an age of tragic polarization between totalitarianism and revolution.

§ 27. The Ontological Version: Phenomenology and Nothingness

I call ontological that version of Being that emphatically denies the definitive character of Being, or the character susceptible of definition—the character by which beings become accessible to us as beings. This denial means that the ontological version inhibits us from putting the question about Being in the same way in which we put it with a view to defining (and consequently knowing) any particular being. We are inhibited from asking what Being is because our self-evidently interrogative what determines the definitive character of that which is sought, its exhaustion in the static nature of a final definition. That is, it prejudgets its ontic status.

Detaching the ontological question, the question about Being, from the way in which we pose it with a view to defining/knowing beings also inhibits us from regarding Being as toward beings (i.e., in relation to, or dependence on, beings), or from accepting as a presupposition that it is a cause or attribute of beings. This is because every predicative reference to beings necessarily has a definitive character—it is defined as a predicate with a view to being attributed to beings. Consequently, the ontological version, precisely because it excludes the definitive character of Being, also excludes the sense of Being as cause of beings, the etiological correlation of beings and Being, and therefore any comparative/axiological evaluation of Being. With these as givens, however, what possibility remains for formulating the ontological question?

We owe to Heidegger the first coherent expression of the ontological version of the question about Being. He was the first representative of the view that the etiological correlation of beings and Being leads inevitably to the ontic version of Being, because it subordinates Being to the definition of cause. That is why he himself rejected this correlation, refusing to posit the ontological problem as a question about the relationship between beings and Being. He shifted the ontological question from the relationship to the difference between beings and Being, and summarized in this difference the ontological version of Being. Thus the antithesis between the ontic and ontological versions of Being is described by Heidegger with clarity: The question about the relationship between beings and Being leads us inevitably to the etiological reference to Being, to the necessity of the metaphysical tracing back to the First Principle of beings, to the axiological evaluation of Being as a supreme divine Being, and consequently to its ontic version, thus establishing the classic metaphysics that is subject to the methodology of physics, whereas the question about the difference between beings and Being refers the ontological problem to Being-in-itself, to Being as Being (and not to Being as a being), liberating metaphysics from the methodology of physics by which beings become accessible to us as beings.

Following Heidegger, then, we can summarize the ontological version of Being in the question What is the difference between beings and Being? Heidegger believes that he finds the first mark of this difference in Heraclitus’s enigmatic phrase “Nature loves to hide.”

Nature, says Heidegger, is the first naming of Being. Consequently, Being, according to Heraclitus, “loves to hide,” and it is in this respect that it is differentiated from beings, which are manifested (phantainontai) and are thus phenomena. We do not know Being (einaio) in itself. We only know that beings (onta) are in the degree that they are manifested (phantainontai)—that is, we only know the mode by which beings are, and this mode is the event of the manifestation that in no way exhausts Being.

52. The writings of the Presocratic philosophers have as their subject what today we would call “ontology.” See also the much later confirmation of this identification by John Damascene, Dialectica 31, in P. Bonifatius Kotter, ed., Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos, 5 vols. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1969–87), 1:94, 27: “Being and becoming are the same.”
The ontological difference between beings (onta) and Being (einaï)—the difference between Being (einaï) and being manifested (phainesthai), both in Being-in-itself and in the mode by which beings are—is investigated by Heidegger by recourse to the etymology of the Greek word ἀλήθεια, which means “truth.” Ἀλήθεια, with its privative alpha, is non-léthē (“nonoblivion”). It is the opposite of lanthanein (“to be hidden”), which is phainesthai (“to be manifested”). Beings are true (i.e., “not hidden from our perception”) precisely as phenomena, as the denial/priviation of lanthanein, and consequently as a rising up from the Heraclitean hiddenness. Thus truth as manifestation becomes the starting point for a dynamic understanding of the Being of beings: the mode by which beings are, their rising up from oblivion, the event of their “coming into light” (ans Licht kommen). The truth of beings (that which beings are) is not identified with their material or ideal onticity in itself, that is, with a given “substance,” but is understood as an actualization (energeia), as the event of rising up from oblivion. We do not know beings as substance (ousia) but only as presence (par-ousia), that is, as phenomonicity. And here phenomonicity does not signify the opposite to reality, merely the external appearance of existence. It signifies the actualization of existence, which is a rising up from oblivion (létē) to truth (a-létheia), from absence (ap-ousia) to presence (par-ousia).

We are discussing here the mode by which beings are, and we are saying that this mode is the event of manifestation, the rising up from oblivion or from absence. This means that what belongs to the event of the Being of beings is not simply the reality of the manifestation, the dimension of presence, but also that which constitutes the manifestation, that is, the continual rising up from absence. Absence and presence are presupposed for beings to be. That is why we can also say that beings are manifested as presence and are both as absence and as presence. In other words, self-hiding (oblivion or absence) belongs as much to Being as does manifestation (truth or presence). And because for us oblivion or absence signifies the nullifying of a being, we are forced to accept this nullification as a presupposition of reference to Being, at least to the degree that we also accept the manifestation.

Thus nothingness no longer refers to the mental conception of the opposite to substance (to the concept of nonexistence logically derived from the concept of existence). Nothingness belongs to Being, because the latter constitutes the presupposition of the phenomonicity of phenomena. Consequently, we preserve Being from any ontic version (from any obligatory tracing back to some divine cause or eternal idea) only if we include nothingness within the possibilities of Being and regard existence simply as phenomonicity without any other ontological foundation or presupposition. The world, beings, and the human presence “swinging” (schweben)—they are phenomena in suspension, in the ontological reality of nothingness. Substance is no longer the a priori eidetic/intellectual definition of a being, nor is it the Being of a being, the actualized rational principle of Being. Substance is the event of existence to which belong both Being and nothingness, the manifestation of the “abyss-like foundation” or the “bottomless base” (abgründiger Grund) of existing things.53

The mode by which we apprehend the continuous rising up from absence is temporality. Beings are in the degree that they are manifested, that is, they rise up into the phenomonicity of temporal presence. Time is a presupposition for the apprehension of the truth of beings, of their rising up from absence to presence. It is the “horizon” where beings are apprehended as that which they are, that is, as phenomena. We have no other mode for apprehending Being outside of the temporality of presence. Beings are only as opened up to time, that is, only in the degree in which they are manifested. Time is thus interpreted as the apprehension of Being—without time Being is unthinkable and without Being time is unthinkable.54

Within the synecdoche of Being, non-Being, and time, the apprehension of the Being of beings proves to be necessarily phenomenological. The truth of beings is exhausted in their temporal rising up from oblivion or nothingness, in the distinction of tem-

53. See, for example, M. Heidegger, Zur Seinsfrage (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1959), 33, 38; idem, Einführung in die Metaphysik, 62, 64; idem, Was ist Metaphysik?, 9th ed. (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1965), 209.
54. See, for example, M. Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, 10th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1963), 235, 404, 405; idem, Was ist Metaphysik?, 17–18.
porality/presence from absence, and ultimately in the confirmation of the epistemic distancing from substance. Knowledge is not a tracing back from the phenomenon to the universal "idea" or the mental conception of its substance. It is the awareness of manifestation or oblivion as the *mode* by which that which is *is*, the apprehension of the *event* of manifestation as defining time—of the only horizon where that which *is* comes into the light, where it is *manifested*.

This ontological understanding inevitably refuses to be content with a simplistic version of the problem of truth. It denies that truth is a coincidence of the notion with the object of thought, that substance may be restricted to a defined and positive idea or static concept. Here the apprehension of truth is awareness or experience of distance from the substance, of presence or absence, as the case may be, a restriction of the knowledge of beings to the *mode* by which these are *manifested*. That is, it is not nothingness. Knowledge is no longer an objectively rounded intellectual certainty but instead awareness of relatedness as regards the hidden substance—ultimately, an anxious struggle with oblivion or nothingness, a consciousness that oblivion or nothingness is the reverse side of temporal manifestation.

The apprehension or experience of distance from the substance, that is, the knowledge of beings as *phenomena*, ends up by being an experience of the distance between Man and objective beings in their inaccessible substance or essence. Man apprehends the *mode* by which beings are—the truth (nonoblivion) of beings as manifestation and manifestation as temporality. But the apprehension of manifestation, that is, the consciousness of time, as a capacity exclusive to Man, is nothing other than the necessary and sufficient condition of the phenomenicity of phenomena. It does not annul the self-concealment of substance, the distance between Man and the hidden substance or essence of beings. This experience of distance is an experience of alienation (*Entfremdung*), the agony of homelessness—what Heidegger calls *die Unheimlichkeit des Daseins, das Unzuhause*.\(^{55}\) Man is "cast out" into a world where the phenomenicity of phenomena, the ephemeral temporality of ontic manifestation, refers one to the ontological reality of nothingness. The relationship of Man to the world is nothing other than an anxious struggle with nothingness.

As an anxious struggle with nothingness, as an existential experience of the ontologically "swinging" phenomenicity of phenomena, the ontological question undoubtedly represents a philosophical stance that is literally a breaking of idols. It strips away from the ontology of the ontic/intellectual categories of the Western European tradition the illusion of certainty offered by the conventionally standardized understanding of the valid forms of the syllogism, undermines the self-sufficiency of intellectualist subjectivism, and demolishes the "self-evident" foundation of philosophy on the *cogito*. Stripped of the metaphysical or conventional props of logical necessity or a priori moral judgment, ontology reveals the menacing (*das bedrohende*) void of absence as an ontological presupposition of the manifested onticity of beings—nothingness as the hidden substance of every being. Nothingness proves to be the only metaphysical reality, and this "revelation" of Heidegger's ontology constitutes perhaps the most critical and decisive turn in the history of European philosophy. What is thus created is indisputably the most radical transcendence of the ontic version of Being, the liberation of metaphysics from the necessity of tracing back to a First Principle of beings, the axiological evaluation of Being as the highest being.

However, the question arises: To what extent does this turn also represent a real liberation of Western philosophy from imprisonment in a definitively defined and static/ontic version of existing things? To what extent does Heidegger's thinking succeed in arriving at an ontological interpretation of beings and Being, of their relationship and difference, rather than simply at a new epistemological version of these? To what extent does he leave both the matter of beings and the epistemic capacity of Man uninterpreted? With Heidegger do we really find ourselves beyond the identification of metaphysics with epistemology, which the Kantian "revolution" established at the boundaries of Western philosophy?

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\(^{55}\) See *Sein und Zeit*, 189.
I have said, following Heidegger, that beings are manifested as presence and are as presence and absence. As presence, beings are conceived as temporal phenomena, and as absence and presence, beings are things conceived by means of thought and speech. The separation of presence from absence lies in apprehending beings in that which is, that is, it lies in thinking. Thinking (noein), as a presupposition for the conception of beings as absence and presence, proves also to be a presupposition of the separation of presence from absence, that is, a presupposition of the determination of the phenomenal ontic of beings, of the conception of beings as individual entities. Phenomenology insists that this individuality does not constitute an ontological reality in itself but must be understood as an actualization (energeia), as a rising up from absence to presence, that is, as temporality. But temporality signifies the apprehension of Being as a rising up from absence to presence, and this apprehension entails a separation of absence from presence, and consequently a determination of temporal manifestation as ontic individuality. Even as an actualization of temporal manifestation, individuality remains ontic, seeing that beings are manifested only as objects, only in the apartness of ontic individuality.

But if we accept temporal manifestation as ontic individuality, we consign its other aspect, oblivion or nothingness, to an indeterminacy that is almost mystical. Being, substance, conceals itself as presence and absence, as manifestation and also as continuous rising up from oblivion. This self-concealment, however, cannot be conceived of both in ontic categories and in nonontic categories. When ontic categories are maintained in the first stage of the self-concealment of substance, in presence, and are replaced in the second stage, in absence, by the nonontic categories of oblivion or nothingness, the problem of substance or of Being—the ontological problem—remains in philosophical suspension. It is not possible for presence, one of the two aspects of the problem of substance, to be conceived of as temporal manifestation with ontic categories, and for only the other aspect, absence, the case of nonmanifestation, to be left in order to establish the difference of existing things from any ontic version of substance, that is, substance as self-concealment.

We can accept that temporal manifestation does not exhaust the truth of a being, that truth is not an ontic category, that it is a rising up from oblivion, the actualization of manifestation. But although the rising up, the actualization of manifestation, is apprehended as time—and time is made a presupposition of the phenomenicity of phenomena—the phenomena themselves can only be conceived of as ontic individuals with the aim of distinguishing them from nonmanifestation. However much oblivion or nothingness is emphasized by phenomenology as the other aspect of the phenomenicity of phenomena, the ontic individuality of phenomena is not impaired. The passage from absence to presence, the separation of the two, even if interpreted exclusively as temporal phenomenicity, does not cease to define objects in the separateness of individuality. And individuality exhausts only one of the two aspects of the problem of substance, leaving the other suspended in an arbitrary identification with oblivion or nothingness, that is, leaving a gap in what is ontology in the narrow sense. Heidegger was aware of this gap. It is known that in Sein und Zeit he confined himself to the interpretation of humanity's Being that represents the unique possibility of apprehending time, that is, of apprehending the mode by which that which is is. He had promised a second part, however, on ontology in itself (under the title Zeit und Sein), in which the problem would have been not humanity's Being but Being-in-itself, an ontological hermeneutics of Being as Being. And this second part never got written.

In other words, the dynamic character of truth in Heidegger's philosophy is confined to the apprehension (Verständnis) of Being as temporality or absence, as the manifestation or the nothingness of a being. It has to do with a mode of understanding Being by the human subject, not with an interpretation of Being as Being.56 Heidegger's proposition constitutes an epistemology that

56. Cf. also Emmanuel Lévinas's aphorism, which is similar to the judgement presented here: "Sein und Zeit n'a peut être soutenu qu'une seule thèse: l'être est inséparable de la compréhension de l'être (qui se déroule comme temps), l'être est déjà appel à la subjectivité" (Totalité et infini, 4th ed. [The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974], 15).
§ 28. A Discontinuity: The Identification of Being with Personal Otherness

In its ancient Greek origins, the ontological question was connected at the outset with a philosophical view of the world, the contemplation of beings. Endowed with the capacity for mental reflection, humans advanced beyond the sensible seeing/looking at objects to their mental scrutiny/contemplation as beings. They therefore wondered where objects are, and they sought to define Being as truth, that is, an enduring and permanent existential possibility or actualization and not simply as a phenomenal presence. The possibility of the question both presupposes human thought and defines the truth of Being as an intellectual reality. It is only thanks to thought that humans can transcend the simple affirmation of the presence of sensible things and trace their way back to the logos of their existence. And it is only thanks to the intellectual reality of the logos of beings that it is possible for humans to wonder about the truth of Being, about the enduring and permanent possibility or actualization of existing. On the one side, then, the human mind, and on the other the intellectual reality or logos of beings, represent the two fundamental coordinates of the ontological question within the context of ancient Greek philosophy.

We have seen above that these defining coordinates do not subject the truth of being at all to subjective apprehension—they do not exhaust the truth or the logos of being in the coincidence of the concept with the object of thought, as in the case of Western European intellectualism. For the Greeks reason (logos) possessed an undeniably referential character, and consequently the individual apprehension of the logos of beings and of events (of the referential character of existence and of the events of life) is realized (is verified) only as communion within the limits of humanity’s living together, that is, as common reason (koinos logos). Knowledge has no other way of verification other than through rationality, that is, by referentiality or communion.

Rationality (logikotēs), however, is the mode both of knowledge and of life, and this means that the fundamental coordinates of the ontological question, thinking and being, are subject to the given rational principle (logos) of reality, to the laws of the referential correlations that maintain the harmony of the cosmos—the realization of Being inevitably follows the logos that is given in itself and accessible to the understanding, which makes existing things true as cosmos. Thus ancient Greek ontology gives us a wonderful concept of reality as rational harmony and order. Not only is the substance of beings rational, but also their measures/limits, along with the laws of participation in the universal realization of Being, constitute relations of rational beauty.

Even the divine creator of the world is subject to this given rationality, which means that this ontological understanding fundamentally allows no room for qualitative differentiation, creative surprise, or new rational achievements of life and knowledge. The rational and hence predetermined realization of Being separates the beauty of existence from the ugliness or chaos of nonexistence, yet excludes the unexpected and freedom. Consequently, the place of history becomes exceedingly problematic within the context of ancient Greek ontology. If truth is identified with the givenness of reason, then truth cannot constitute history. The only truth that we can extrapolate from history is simply the moral evaluation of human acts, the conformity or disobedience of humans to the rational harmony and order of life.

On this basis one can appreciate how radical the challenge was that was presented to Greek philosophy by its encounter with the Christian perception of the fact of existence: the historical revelations of the truth of God and the understanding of the world as a product of freedom.

The Christian Church was born historically within the borders of the Hellenistic world, the Hellenized Roman imperium. It conveyed, however, a view of existence and of the world radically different from the Hellenic. In the biblical tradition of the Christian

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60. For the encounter of Hellenism with the Christian Church, I would recommend reading the section “Hellenism at the historical origins of Christianity” in John Zizioulas’s brief historical study “Hellenism and Christianity: the encounter of two worlds” [in Greek], which is found in vol. 6 of the Historia tou Hellēnikou Ethnous (Athens: Ekdotikī Aithinon), 519–59.
Church, the truth of existence—that which the Greeks called Being—is identified neither with the phenomenicity of phenomena nor even with the intellectual reality of the given logos of existing things. Existence is not defined by the intellectual reference of phenomena to their given logos or substance but is revealed as a historical event, as an actualized happening, accessible to knowledge only as direct experience of personal relation. What the Greeks defined by the verb to be (einai) corresponds in the Judeo-Christian tradition to doing/happening/acting (dunamis/symbainein/energein).

Thus for the Greeks the reference to the first principle or cause of Being, that is, to the truth of God, turns out to be a logical necessity from their observation of the world and their attempt to interpret it, whereas for the Judeo-Christian tradition, God represents a specific historical intervention and action, and is revealed historically in the way that a person enters our lives and becomes known to us. The first possibility of reference to the existence of God is a historical event, the call of Abraham: God calls Abraham and converses with him "face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exod 33:11). The reference to God begins with this historical experience of the unexpected call, not with the intellectual tracing back to the logical necessity of a first mover or of a cosmogonic principle. And the knowledge of the existence of God is the event of a personal relationship with him, or of personal communion with the experience of human beings who have enjoyed this relationship—faith/trust in an inherited experience. The God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is the God of historical revelation and of personal relationship—"the God of our fathers."

Such an understanding, which coordinates existence with historical manifestation and knowledge with the experience of personal relation, has no difficulty in acknowledging the truth of God even in a historical intervention "in the flesh"—in accepting that God is also revealed as a specific historical person, as Jesus of Nazareth, within precise coordinates of time and space. For the Greeks, however, such a theophany was literally "foolishness," because God is bound by the given logos of his substance or essence. That which God has to be on the basis of Greek ontology (utter being, separate and immovable nature, pure act, and pure form) predetermines his existence and renders the conjunction of the terms "Godhead" and "incarnation" impossible. The incarnation of God is a logical contradiction, a crossing over to another species.

In the case, then, of the historical encounter between Hellenism and the Christian Church, two utterly different and fundamentally incompatible ontologies and epistemologies came face-to-face with each other. Each side, however, represented an astonishing dynamic of life that transformed the antithesis into a creative challenge. The Christian Church was called to respond on the basis of its own epistemic experience to the ontological questions of the Greeks. And Greek philosophy was called to test the powers of its epistemological method to verify the ontological event of existential otherness, its freedom from any substantial predetermination. The creative synthesis that was accomplished within the context of these challenges represents not only a supreme achievement of Greek philosophy (which, even though gradually and integrally Christianized, did not cease to preserve its Hellenic identity) but also a radically discontinuity in the more general history of philosophy.

The first to achieve this were the Greek Fathers of the Church, in an uninterrupted succession from the second to the fifteenth century. Most of them, parallel to the historical role they played in ecclesial life, also represented philosophical dimensions of often astonishing importance. Naturally, Western European historiography and philosophy, with the strict separation and contrast they introduced between theology and philosophy (a contrast unknown and unintelligible to the Greek world in both pre-Christian and Christian times) were ignorant for many centuries of the philosophical contribution of Greek theologians of the early and middle Christian period—just as they were also ignorant of a large extent of the theological character of ancient Greek philosophical literature, usually restricting the contribution of the Greeks to the sector of epistemological method alone. The reclassifications, however, that are properties that define his essence.

61. The theological aphorisms of the ancient Greek philosophers usually begin with the words: "It is necessary for god to be..." and continue with the
being made today in the study of the history of philosophy allow us to see the organic extension of ancient Greek philosophy in the early and middle Christian centuries as a marvelous and radical discontinuity in the history of philosophical investigations.63

West, where as early as the twelfth century theology was identified with the official ideology of the Roman Catholic Church, which was represented as "infal- libly" by the papal leadership alone. Thus doctrine took on an axiomatic character and became detached from the experience of the ecclesial body and the experiential approach to truth. It was transformed into an abstract ideological formulation possessing absolute authority that allowed no room for creative philosophical work or new expressions of lived experience. And the control that the Vatican exercised for centuries over the metaphysical convictions of Western intellectuals, punishing any deviation, obliged philosophers to set very clear boundaries between the freedom of philosophical inquiry and the rigidity of theological dogmatism. It is therefore perhaps not by chance that, more broadly, the ontological debate gradually lost momentum in Western philosophy after the Middle Ages, to end up in the identification of metaphysics solely with the theory of knowledge.

63. For centuries Western historiography has been accustomed to date the end of Greek philosophy to AD 529, that is, to the year in which the last Neoplatonic school of Athens was formally closed by order of the Emperor Justinian. The centuries that followed this closure—the entire period of Greek cultural life within the borders of the Eastern Roman Empire—Western historiography has regarded as philosophically "dead." And it has been accustomed to identify the resumption of philosophical developments with the appearance of Scholasticism, to which it attributed the only historical continuation of ancient Greek philosophy. It was only toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the important publication of the first edition of K. Krumbacher’s Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur (1891), that some Europeans began to discover that despite its "medieval darkness" the Greek Empire of the Christian East (which the Westerners had mockingly been accustomed to calling "Byzantium") had some texts to offer that might be of philosophical interest. Thus there appeared in 1895 an article by Ludwig Stein entitled "Die Continuität der griechischen Philosophie in der Gedankenwelt der Byzantiner" (Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 9 [1895]: 225–46) in which the central idea, however, is that although the continuity of ancient Greek philosophy was naturally assured in Europe by the "Renaissance," nevertheless the preservation of the philosophical heritage of the Greeks was also due to the "Byzantines," chiefly through commentaries on classical texts. This idea held the field in the climate created by the flourishing of "Byzantine" studies in the following decades, and led to the recovery and study of the less creative spirits of "Byzantium," who were the commentators on ancient texts: Michael Psellos, John Italos, Michael of Ephesus, Theodore Metochites, and so forth, while at the same time the interest of scholars turned to identifying the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic influences on the works of the Greek Fathers. As a result of these activities, there ap-
a brief synthetic exposition of the theses that constitute the "dis-
continuity" we are discussing, chiefly with regard to the history of
the ontological question. Nevertheless, if we are to attempt simply
to list the names of those who make up the galaxy of the leading
figures in this sector of philosophy, we should note the following:
as precursors and founders, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyon,
and Athanasius of Alexandria; as major contributors, the great Cappadocians, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of
Nyssa; as the creator of the fullest philosophical synthesis, Maximus
the Confessor, with his predecessors in the same undertaking, Le-
ontius of Byzantium and Theodore of Rhaithu, and his successors in
its systematic elaboration, John Damascene and Photius the Great;
and ending up in the last particularly perceptive, and therefore
radical, distinguishing of Greek identity from the European Renais-
sance—in the fourteenth century—with Gregory Palamas and Nilus
and Nicholas Kavasilas.

We are discussing the historical challenge that Christianity repre-
sented for Hellenism and vice versa. In the first phase this challenge
took the form of the need for the truth of Christianity to be formu-
lated in categories that could satisfy the philosophical outlook of
the Greeks. And it was the Christian apologists of the second cen-
tury who undertook to respond to this need—with Origen as the
chief figure in this respect. At the same time the Gnostic movement
obliged Church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Clement
of Alexandria to distinguish the presuppositions of a Christian epistemo-
logy from the intellectualist distortion both of biblical revela-
tion and of Greek philosophy as represented by the Gnostics.

In this brief sketch, however, we must dwell more on the his-
torical challenge that seems to lead directly to the philosophical de-
bates of the fourth and fifth centuries, namely, Sabellianism. Sabel-
lius taught in Rome at the beginning of the third century. His theory
summarized in a systematic way a theological argument known at
that time in the West as monarchianism. Monarchianism (from the
term monarchia, or "sole rule") sought to reconcile the Greek philo-
sophical understanding of the oneness and unity of the divine sub-
stance with the Christian experience of the historical revelation of
the triadic God. For the adherents of the monarchianist tendencies,
as we call them, God is indisputably one, an absolute and unified
nature, as Greek philosophical thought presupposes and defines
him—whereas the Son of God and the Spirit of God, of whom bibili-
cal tradition speaks, are only modes64 of the actualization (energeia)
of the one God or existences adopted65 into the divine life.

These monarchian ideas were put into systematic order and im-
proved by Sabellius by borrowing from the Christian biblical tradi-
tion the term person (prosōpon), which was used for defining the
trinitarian character of God. Sabellius accepted that God is one sub-
stance and three persons. But to the term person he attributed the
semantic content with which the Greeks understood it: the mean-
ing of prosōpeion, the actor's mask—which had the same sense as the
Latin persona, that is, the sense of a social role and an active
capacity.66 Consequently, the three persons of God are for Sabellius
three prosōpeia, roles or modes by which the one God is manifested
in history: in the Old Testament as Father, in the New as Son, and in
the Church as Holy Spirit.

Toward the end of the third century, Sabellianism was brought
to Libya, and the disputes that it caused there provoked the inter-
vention of Alexandrian scholars. The Alexandrians summed up
the wider position of the Christian East, that is, an approach that was
more biblical and less Hellenic. They started from the historical ex-
perience of the three persons and attempted to understand the how
of the unity of the substance, the one God. By contrast, Sabellianism
reflected the general position of the West and more particularly of
Rome, a position more Hellenic and less biblical that posited the
given reality of the one God and asked questions about the ontologi-
cal definition (the substantial what) of the three persons.

Greek philosophy's categories of substance and hypostasis
were used in the intellectual dispute that aimed at defining the

64. Latin modi, from which the label "modalism" derives, which designates a
particular branch of Monarchianists.

65. Latin adoptitae, from which the label "adoptionism" derives, which des-
ignates a particular branch of Monarchianists.

66. For the use of the terms prosōpon and persona in the Greco-Roman
world and their links with ancient Greek tragedy, see Zizioulas, "From Mask to
ontological content of the concept of the person. The Alexandrians used for the Godhead the expression three persons, three hypostases (tria prosōpa, treis hypostaseis), which originated with Origen, whereas the Westerners preferred Tertullian’s formulation: one hypostasis, three persons (una substantia, tres personae). Their difference seems irreconcilable because the two sides understood the term hypostasis, more or less, in the sense that had been given to it by the Greek philosophy of the period: almost identical with the term ousia (substance). More specifically, for the Stoics, who first used this philosophical category, hypostasis is differentiated from substance only conceptually, with the aim of distinguishing the real existence of substance from the universal Being that is manifested in substance. Among the Neoplatonists the distinction between substance and hypostasis is also blurred because it is transposed to the distinction between substance and the transcendent One, which is inaccessible to the intellect: the hypostasis manifests the real (existential) character that substance draws from the One.67

On the basis of these intellectual nuances, the use of the term hypostasis permits different ontological interpretations of the Christian experience of God. The Westerners see in the formula “three persons, three hypostases” the danger of an interpretation leading to tritheism, if substance is identified in an absolute sense with hypostasis, or to quadrithesism, if the hypostases are taken to be “lower divinities” and substance is referred to the transcendent One of the “main divinity.” Conversely, the Easterners reject the formula “one hypostasis, three persons” because it is evident that it refers the real/existential character to one Godhead, leaving the three persons “unhypostasized”—without ontological content.

This confusion reached its most acute phase at the beginning of the fourth century with the appearance of Arianism, which arose in Alexandria in the climate of a radical opposition to Sabellianism. The intention of Arius and his followers was to safeguard the truth of the historical experience of a personal God. They did not want the three persons of the Trinity to be regarded as masks or transient expressions and manifestations of one (monarchical) divine substance, and for this reason absolutized the personal/existential otherness of the three hypostases and relativized their substantial unity and identity. They distinguished between substances in order to preserve the hypostases in the Trinity by denying the homousion, the consubstantiality, of the Son with the Father. Remaining imprisoned, however, in the semantic identification of substance with hypostasis, they returned inevitably to precisely that which they wished to deny, that is, to the Greek understanding of one absolute divine substance (of the divinity of the Father). Thus they preserved the existential alterity of the personal otherness of the Son, but only by downgrading his substance to a created one.

The Arian controversy troubled the Christian East for many decades, but the debates that arose were decisive for the preservation of Greek philosophy within the limits of the life of the Christian world and prepared the way for the radical "discontinuity" of the Cappadocians. It cannot, at any rate, be maintained that the aim of these debates was the preservation of Greek philosophy or the formation of a philosophical system that provided an intellectual "justification" of Christian experience. It is certain, however, that these debates were conducted within the Greek world and that they openly express the need of the Greeks to reply on the basis of their Christian experience to the ontological questions of their philosophical tradition and outlook. And it is equally evident that priority was given to experience rather than to the demands of intellectual rigor, hence the confusion in the terminology. Even the attribution of three substances to God does not trouble the Easterners if by the term substance (ousia) they can defend the real existence of the three divine persons, as revealed in history.

For methodological reasons the contribution of the Cappadocians may be approached initially on the level of terminology. They were the first to clarify the terms substance (ousia) and hypostasis and distinguish them from each other. The opinion of scholars is divided as to whether this clarification of terms was based on Aristotle. At any rate, we may accept that at least it "echoes" the Aristotelian

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distinction between primary substance and secondary substance. The hypostasis takes on the character of Aristotle’s concept of primary substance: it refers to individual otherness, to the “peculiarity of each existence.” It differs from the substance or nature with regard to the uniqueness and dissimilarity of its properties. Hypostasis is the specific existence, “this particular man or this particular horse,” whereas the substance corresponds to Aristotle’s secondary substance: it is the general, the community of attributes, the universal form or species. Substance is man-as-a-whole or horse-as-a-whole, the sum total of the properties that differentiate not every particular existence but one entity among existences of the same species from other entities of a different species.

Using this distinction, the Christian experience of the one and simultaneously triadic God arrives at a satisfactory formulation that also corresponds to humanity’s actual self-knowledge of itself. God is consubstantial and trihypostatic, just as Man is consubstantial and polyhypostatic. The substance does not negate the real (hypostatic) character of the particular existences. And no particular existence exhausts the reality of the one universal substance.

But neither has the ontological question, as it has now been posed in the Christian Greek world, been exhausted, nor does it find a complete answer simply in the distinction between substance and hypostasis. The initial difference between the Greek and the Judeo-Christian approaches to Being (the difference between the intellectual inference of the logical necessity of God and the historical experience of the personal God) imposes a radical reformulation of the ontological question: Does substance have ontological priority, that is to say, does it predetermine the existential character and fact of hypostasis as a given and necessary logos, or is it the hypostasis that has ontological precedence and consequently the substance only becomes accessible through the experience of the historical manifestation of the existential event? In other words, is it the given substance that constitutes Being, and consequently also the hypostatic (real) character of particular existences, or is it the specific existence that hypostasizes Being (makes it a reality/hypostasis) and consequently the substance signifies only the common mode of existence of hypostases of the same species?

We owe to the Cappadocians both the clarification of the presuppositions of the question and the response to the question—a response that inaugurates a new stage in the history of the ontological debate. If we restrict ourselves again to the level of terminology, we can formulate this response fundamentally in the identification of the terms hypostasis and person: the person constitutes the hypostasis of Being, the mode by which Being subsists as existential reality. The person does not exhaust the hypostasis by its participation in the given Being (in Being-in-itself). The fact of participation in Being (substance) does not have ontological priority by defining the onticity (real existence) of the person. It is the person itself that defines and exhausts Being—the persons make Being a hypostatic reality.

In other words, it is not that the person is in the first place and then subsequently exists as a person—the person is not a predicate that we attach to a given being once we have first established its ontological hypostasis, its substance, its participation in Being-in-itself. We know Being only as a hypostasis of personal otherness, and otherness signifies freedom from any predetermination of substance or nature.

Moreover, this does not mean that the substance is canceled or proved false as a common logos definitive of hypostases of the same species. What is canceled is the possibility of identifying the common logos definitive of hypostases of the same species with Being-in-itself, that is, with the factor that constitutes the hypostasis of what exists—of regarding the logos of participation in being (of the substance) as a given, that is, of making it existentially autonomous, of giving it ontological priority in relation to its hypostatic realization.

Being does not exist in itself beyond or before its hypostatic realization. It exists only “in persons”; persons make Being a hypostatic reality. And the substance, the common logos of participation in Being, does not take precedence ontologically by defining the mode of the existential hypostasis but is inferred as determining the sameness of species of hypostases, whereas the hypostases themselves realize the common logos of their existential sameness of species.

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68. See Aristotle, Categories 5.2a11–16; Metaphysics 7.13.1038b9–16.
each by a *mode* that is unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable: they have a common *logos* of substance and an absolutely different *mode* of existence.

The absolute otherness by which the person *hypostasizes* the person's substance (renders it a hypostasis) constitutes Being and identifies it with existential freedom from any *substantial* bond, *rational* dependence, and *natural* predetermination. Being is identified with freedom, because it is realized only as personal otherness, only as a hypostatic event of self-awareness, self-determination, and self-actualization.

This ontological theory is in its origins theological, to the extent that it emerges from the historical experience of God within the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition: this experience does not, through the category "God," impose on the human intellect the necessity of tracing back to the existence of an absolute substance, with a view to interpreting the principle of Being, of movement, and of actuality. What it does is affirm the intervention in history of a person who is free of any predetermination of substance, cause, or rational principle, because this hypostasizes the substance and the actuality (renders it a hypostasis).

When Moses sought the identity of the God whose will he was to proclaim to the Israelites, the reply was "I am he who is" (Exod 3:14). God identifies the hypostasis of existence, the reality of Being, with his personal identity. It is not the divine nature or substance that has precedence as an ontological necessity and compels God to be a person, as it compels him (by the same logic, that is, "according to the *logos* of substance") also to be immortal, infinite, almighty, and so forth. Such an approach would have transferred the principle of Being to a necessity ontologically prior to God, the necessity of the given *logos* of the divine substance—in which case the principle of the knowledge of God would have had to have been located in our subjective mental conception rather than in historical experience. God is God because only he, without any prior cause, bond, or predetermination but only as personal otherness and freedom, constitutes his Being, gives hypostasis to his substance and to his actuality: "And when God spoke to Moses, he did not say, 'I am the substance' (*hé ousía*), but 'I am he who is' (*ho oun*); for he who is is not from the substance but the substance is from he who is; for he who is has assumed the whole of Being in himself."

Thus the radically new thesis that the Greek Fathers (led by the Cappadocians) formulated and that summarized the Church's experience was that they replaced the Western monarchism of the one substance with the ontological principle of the *monarchy of the Father*. When the Church speaks of the unity of God, of the one and simultaneously *triadic* God, it refers this unicity not to the priority of the substance but to the ontological principle of the personal/triadic life of the God who is one person, the person of *God the Father*. The personal existence of God (the Father) constitutes his substance, that is, his Being, making it hypostases: in freedom and out of love, he generates the Son and causes the Holy Spirit to proceed. The ontological principle of the personal otherness and freedom of God refers not to a *substantial* power in itself but to the fact that God is *Father*, he who generates and causes to proceed the Son and the Spirit. What God is is defined by the personal freedom of the Father, and *exists* (is hypostasized) as an event of freedom, that is, of the communion of personal hypostases. When Christian revelation declares that "God is love" (1 John 4:16), it is referring not to a particular property of God's "conduct" but to what God is as the fullness of triadic personal communion.

In this perspective love is shown to be the primary ontological category, the only *mode* by which Being is realized hypostatically as freedom and otherness. We can speak of the one God without subjecting the freedom and otherness of the three hypostases to the single rational principle of an *a priori* definition of substance, thanks to the Father's love that constitutes the divine Being as a hypostatically realized freedom of personal communion. The freedom of love is the *mode of existence* that hypostasizes the Godhead, precisely because it repudiates any possible dependence, predetermination, or necessity. God is God because what he is as existential reality has its principle in the freedom of the Father's love, the freedom that

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69. This phrase owes its original expression to Gregory of Nazianzus (Oration 45.3, in J.-P Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* [PG] 36:625C), and the final form used here, to Gregory Palamas (On the Holy Hesychasts 3.2–12, ed. P. Christou [Thessaloniki, 1962], 666).
hypostasizes the Being of God as a communion of the love of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit unbounded by any necessity.

By the same mode of love, God hypostasizes not only his substance/Being but also his activity (energeia). For the Greek Fathers this means that God acts by enduing the world with hypostasis (i.e., he creates the universe and the various species), not because he obeys some logical or essential necessity but freely out of love alone. The mode by which God actualizes (energetai) the creation of the world is the freedom of love—the world is not a product of necessity, but a product of freedom.

Thus the existence of beings hypostasizes not Being-in-itself (which would then inevitably have to be identified with the divine Being) but the activity (energeia) of God’s personal freedom—something analogous to the mode by which a work of art hypostasizes the personal otherness and freedom of the creative activity (energeia) of the artist. The world consequently is neither a phenomenal reflection nor an existential outflow of divine Being, but a result of God’s creative activity (energeia), and therefore also has its own ontological hypostasis essentially different from God (as in its essence or substance the work of art is different from the artist). And the world’s matter is not a given and ontological inexplicable reality; it has a rational constitution and is a result of the conjunction of activities (or “energies”), actualized rational principles (logoi) of personal creative otherness.70

In the case of the world, then, we are not dealing with an existential reality that draws its hypostatic character from some given essential predetermination. The world hypostasizes not a given Being—archetypal “ideas” or “rational principles” that exist in the divine substance or the divine intellect—but the activity of the love of the three divine persons that is free from any predetermination. The ontological principle of the world’s hypostasis lies in the freedom of God’s creative love, in the volitional, administrative, and providential activity or energy by which God externalizes the mode of his own existence and life.

And because it is precisely love that constitutes the mode both of the existence and of the activity of God, the world reflects (or better, images) the rational principle/manifestation of the divine existence and life. The order, harmony, and beauty of the world are not products of an essential and necessary rationality (the subjection of existing things to ontologically autonomous principles, presuppositions, and laws governing what is fitting). They are in the image/rational principle/manifestation of the mode of love—of the only mode of existence that hypostasizes Being. The universe is only as a cosmos: as an adornment of harmony and order, as the dynamically actualized cohesion and communal succession of beings. And the universe is a cosmos on account of its having been ordered triadically. The wisdom and the beauty of the reality of the world echoes and images the activity of the triadic love that is constitutive of life.

The cosmological consequences of the ontology that the Greek Fathers of the Christian East represent, as well as its repercussions in the fields of epistemology, anthropology, or philosophical ethics, cannot be subjected to any broader analysis in this section. My intention in the above pages has only been to give a brief account of the new direction that the ontological debate took among the Greeks in the course of the early Christian centuries—a direction that undoubtedly constitutes a radical discontinuity in the history of philosophy. In consequence of this first break with what had gone before, which was realized chiefly by the Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries, there followed very fruitful inquiries and debates that led to some outstandingly dynamic philosophical syntheses, especially in the seventh and ninth centuries and finally in the fourteenth century. The organic positioning of these creative debates and achievements within the historical unity and development of Greek philosophical problematics ensured, thanks largely to the possibilities offered by the dynamic of ancient Greek epistemology, the attribution of knowledge to the communal achievement of common reason, and the insistence on the identification of being shared (koinōnein) with being true (alētheuein). But this is another major subject that also requires a separate treatment.

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70. See above, § 18; also Person and Eros, § 31.
The contribution of Greek philosophy to the ontological debate comes to an end in the fifteenth century with the subjection of the Greek East to Turkish rule and the headlong Westernization of the intellectual outlook of the Greeks in subsequent centuries. And Westernization implies an organic severance from the continuity of the Greek philosophical (and more generally spiritual) tradition—a severance that had already been effected as early as the eighth century, when the Frankish West, at least, saw as a presupposition for its historical existence the essential de-Hellenization of the Christian basis of its civilization. The ontological theories of the Greek Fathers of the Christian East were abandoned or even rejected by the Scholastics in order to facilitate the construction of modern European philosophy on the basis of the ontological priority of substance or essence, the logical predetermination of existence, and the restriction of knowledge to the limits of the intellectual capacities of the subject. Thus there emerged a civilization “with the Greek terms reversed”—as we have often noted within the context of this outline introduction to philosophy.

Chapter 3.2

Freedom and Necessity

§ 29. The Problem of “Universals” (Universalia): The Givenness of Existence

We have seen above that the ontic and the ontological versions of Being define two fundamental approaches to what we call the ontological question: the question about beings and Being, the relationship and the difference between them. Two fundamental approaches imply at least two different ways of posing the question and responding to it, and consequently at least two different “paths” or methods of knowledge designed to enable us to approach the reality of existence in itself.

The difference distinguishing the “paths” or methods for approaching the knowledge of Being inevitably relativizes this knowledge. A comprehensive self-evident and consequently commonly accepted exposition of this relationship or this difference between beings and Being must be regarded as fundamentally unattainable, seeing that every exposition is the product of a particular (and partial) epistemic path. The only truth referring to the ontological problem that seems to avoid this inevitable relativization is subjectively existential experience, that is, the awareness and certainty that each person has about his or her existence. This subjective experience is commonly given, belonging as it does to the nature or definition of being human: Man is the only being that possesses existential self-consciousness and consequently awareness of the existential event.
For this reason, only Man posits the question about Being in a universal sense; Man is the only bearer of the ontological question.

Man's fundamental conviction, then, about the reality of his subjective existence is a knowledge that avoids the relativity of the different versions or approaches, precisely because it constitutes an experience that is common to all and felt directly. Naturally, for this experience to be formulated and made known, it must inevitably be presented systematically, that is, it must be subjected to one or other of the common ways that we use for the transmission of knowledge. This does not hinder us, however, from recognizing in humanity's existential self-consciousness (before the eventuality of the transmission of knowledge) an initial and self-evident knowledge of the existential event.

Without replying to the ontological question, this initial and self-evident knowledge is nevertheless useful as a basis on which to construct our ontological investigations, both in the case in which these investigations lead to the ontic version of Being and also in the case in which they lead to the ontological version. We could say, perhaps in an overschematic fashion, that in the case of the ontic version the starting point of the human subject's existential self-consciousness is summarized in thinking (noein)—in the given power of humanity to infer, by a mental process, from subjective existential experience to the necessity of Being-in-itself; whereas in the case of the ontological version this starting point is centered on the consciousness of time (chronizein)—on humanity's ability to raise the subjective experience of time to a universal “horizon” of the manifestation of existents.

In both these cases the investigation of ontology (the attempt to establish an epistemic approach to Being), although based on a subjective starting point, inevitably possesses an analogic or inferential character: the knowledge of Being is organized either by tracing back existential self-consciousness by an intellectual process to the principle of existence (to what “is absolutely” or to Being-in-itself) or else by tracing back the operation of consciousness that constitutes the experience of time to an objective attestation of the universal correlation of truth and oblivion, of Being and nothingness. In both cases the approach to the knowledge of Being is undertaken by tracing back the subjective to the universal, the particular to the general, the relative to the absolute. Thus in both cases we have a polarization between the existential experience and the generalized attestation. I describe this as a polarization because it concerns a contrasting distinction between absolute (released/freed from particular systematizations) and relative knowledge: the subjective experience constitutes a self-evident certainty held in common, whereas the generalized attestation is only a projection that cannot constitute positive knowledge, because it is inevitably relativized by the difference of what is inferred and also by the modes or methods of the act of inference.

This polarization of the possibilities of knowledge between subjective experience on the one hand and the generalized assertion of the fact of existence on the other has always constituted (by means of a variety of theories and formulations) a fundamental problem of philosophy. With which of the two sides of this epistemic polarization will we identify truth in itself and the fact of existence? To what extent does the truth correspond to self-certified subjective experience, and to what extent is truth relativized by the differences in the modes and methods of human knowledge? In any event, we cannot ignore the fact that if even self-certified subjective experience is to be formulated and communicated to others, it must be referred back to the generality of the different paths and methods of the transmission of knowledge. The analogic presupposition of this transmission, however (the tracing back of the subjective to the universal, of the particular to the general), is also a human capacity that is given in common and is self-evident. Thanks to this capacity, not only are we able to formulate subjective experience and communicate it but we can also attain cognitive access to the subjective experiences of others. And because knowledge of the fact of existence can be equally a subjective certainty and a power of inferring back, how can we rule out that the fact of existence itself can be equally true both as a subjective reality and as an analogic reference—that is, that existence draws its truth both from its subjective identity and from its reference to the universal and the general?
This last possibility is also supported by the direct experiential attestation of the reference of existents to groups of the same kind: this reference does not simply consist of a taxonomic classification that humans carry out mentally so as to facilitate their cognitive access to beings. It constitutes a differentiation of the modes by which the existence of beings is realized. And certainly about this modal differentiation as a starting point is also provided by the fact of humanity's subjective existential self-consciousness: existential self-consciousness (as also the power to transmit knowledge) belongs to the mode that differentiates humans as a whole from all other beings, to the mode by which humans are, that is, to the substance of humanity, to the existential homogeneity of all humans.

Conversely, other elements that differentiate the mode of existence reduce (and gather) the variety of beings into groups of the same kind, differentiating each group from the other groups on the basis of the otherness of each species. Thus the question about the truth in itself of the existential event comes back with demands for a more generalized theory: if the existential event is defined and exhausted within the limits of the individuality of each existing thing, how do we interpret the uniformity that unifies the mode by which the different varieties of beings are? What ultimately is the really existent: the uniformity of the mode or its particular realization?

We know that Plato aligned himself unreservedly with the first option: the truth in itself of the existential event is identified with the mode of participation of beings in Being (with the substance of beings), and the uniformity of the mode refers the varieties of existing things to a substantial (and not simply phenomenal) differentiation. The particular uniform realizations of every given mode of existence are ephemeral, finite, and liable to dissolution, whereas the formal/existential uniformity is timeless, unlimited, and indissoluble, and for this reason is really existent. Really existent means self-evident, without any preceding cause or other limitation. The formal/existential marks of the same species refer analogically to ontological realities that constitute the models of particular existents. These are the "true" existences, things that are "beings in themselves, eternal beings, true beings, and exemplars." Plato calls them ideas because the human soul has seen them (the verb "to see" is idein) in the "supracelestial place" where they are to be found and where the human soul has preexisted.

Only the ideas are. Only they constitute Being-in-itself. Beings simply participate in Being, in the degree in which they con-form to the originals of the ideas. And this con-forming is always imperfect and incomplete because beings are limited by matter, and consequently by time, space, and decay. The existence of particular and sensible beings is realized only thanks to their essence, that is, their participation, by means of their form, in the reality of the ideas. And humans apprehended the Being of beings because it is inferred from their formal sameness of species, that is, from their substance—it is traced back to the idea by the operation of "remembering" (anamnesis), because the soul knew the ideas in the supracelestial place of its preexistence.

Thus, within the framework of Platonic ontology, the individual and subjective draws its ontological content from the general and universal. It is an imitation of the idea, a sensible copy of the idea. It is only thanks to its formal/existential con-formity to the given, definitive, and immutable universality of the idea that the particular and individual exists. Individual existence is given and predetermined, absolutely subject to the rational principle/mode of the participation (of substance) in the prototype of the idea. The ideas have a dynamic referentiality; they can be correlated and combined; they have "a power of communion": the idea of movement or of stasis, for example, can be combined with the idea of the particular being. But the referentiality and the correlation of the ideas also follow given principles/laws of a hierarchical order and predetermined harmony, without which nothing is. Thus even the existential self-consciousness of the human subject or, more broadly, the powers of the human soul (the rational, inceptive, and appetitive faculties) simply express and formulate the power of the referential correlation of the ideas, without any possibility of deviating from the given principles/laws of this referential correlation or attaining freedom from them.

Each such deviation is a moral infringement, a contravention of the good, because what is good is the predetermined principle of order and harmony that constitutes life. Conversely, virtue is the
knowledge of the principle that brings the communal realization of life into harmony, the anamnestic ascent to the vision/contemplation of the ideas and of their hierarchical correlation. Consequently, there emerges from this understanding a philosophical ethics and a political philosophy (a specific mode of life) that aspires to the really wonderful vision of the realization of cosmic harmony within the bounds of the polis or city, without, however, leaving even the slightest room for individual existence to be free of its given existential relativity or its fate. The rational and moral harmony of the natural world and the political microcosm do not permit the human subject the consciousness of existential onticity that realizes life in a free, unique, and unrepeatable manner. Onticity is constituted only by nature or substance, only by the general and the given, only by the idea or the laws of the referential correlation of the ideas.

Aristotle denied the division and ontological distinction between the individual and the general, the subjective and the universal, as it had been expounded by Plato. If we attribute real onticity only to the universal ideas, then particular and sensible things remain in themselves without ontological content and must therefore be considered nothing. Aristotle’s problem does not cease to be the relation of onticity to the form, the eidos, of existing things. If this relation, however, leaves out the given of matter, if it refers onticity exclusively to an existential/formal homogeneity, then the undoubtedly real character of the givens of experience remains ontologically inexplicable.

The combination of form with Being also remains the starting point of Aristotle’s ontology. Form cannot be an addition to a being, something that we add to the being once we have ascertained its onticity. It is impossible for us to ascertain an entity before we have inferred its form. We have no support for supporting existence where lack of form rules out the manifestation of the existing thing. Whether material or immaterial, sensible or intelligible, the form alone is the presupposition of the existing thing. It is this that constitutes Being, the possibility for it to be that which it is, that is, the onticity of existents.

However, if the form constitutes the Being, the onticity of existents, we cannot transfer the forms, as ontological realities in themselves, to a “place” outside their actual realization, which is specific beings. It serves no purpose if we create eternal (ontologically self-complete) ideas. We do not reply to the question about the Being of existents if the ideas do not effect the giving of form to existents, that is, if it is not these which give onticity to existents. The aspect of the participation of existents in the ideas refers the reflection of the self-subsisting ideas to the form of the existents, leaving the onticity of existents without explanation. It may constitute an excellent poetic image, but not also an ontological interpretation. For us to interpret the onticity of existents, we must bring the ideas down from their supracelestial place and see them as forms of specific existents, that is, as the ontological content of each being separately. Only then can the combination of form with Being constitute an ontological interpretation.

Aristotle consequently does not distance himself from the Platonic view that identifies the power to exist with the enduring of a being with form/logos. It is simply that he does not distinguish the universality of the form (as self-subsisting idea) ontologically from every specific dynamic realization of a being. The very realization of a being is governed by shape (morphē). The idea subsists in beings as form (eidos), that is, the principle/presupposition and purpose/goal of their onticity, not as an ontological reality apart from existing things. The form is inseparable from the existing thing, giving it logos/existence/substance—the form is the substance that is according to reason, whether this concerns a material or immaterial existing thing, or a sensible or intelligible one. Thus the form is identified both with the rational substance of material things and with the rational/intellectual part of the human soul, or with the minds that constitute the kinetic substance of the celestial bodies, or ultimately with the absolutely pure intellect that is God.

The word Aristotle uses to clarify the equivalence of the power to exist with the form (morphē) is entelechy (entelecheia)—with this word he replaces the Platonic participation of existing things, through their form (morphē), in the given and preexisting ideas. The Aristotelian eidos is not simply the reflection in existing things
of the ontological reality of the ideas. It constitutes the full and complete (entele) reality of a being, the "being complete" (enteleis echein) of an existing thing, the reality that contains (enechei) its cause simultaneously with its purpose or goal—the form is identified with the entelechy. There is no other ontological principle capable of realizing the existential fulfillment (telos) of each being, of effecting its transition from a potential being to an actual being, that is, of completing the existence of each one severally. Only the form enables beings to encompass the beginning or cause and also the end or goal of their existential reality. The form is the entelechy.

On the basis of these fundamental definitions, we can now go on to pose the question: Is Aristotle's entelechy a given, definitive, and immutable predetermination of existence—a predetermination that from among the ontological choices available to us excludes the possibility that existence should remain not subject to any causal beginning and given end, that excludes, in other words, the dynamic indeterminacy of the event of existence, the unforeseen formations and realizations of the becoming of existence? Is Aristotle's entelechy incompatible with the existential otherness and freedom of at least the human subject, the only sensible bearer of an active self-consciousness and capacity for willing?

The first thing we can say in response to these questions is that the sense of an "external" predetermination of existence is fundamentally absent from Aristotle's thinking. An essential aspect of his contribution to the ontological problem is without doubt his apprehension of, and emphasis on, the unity of the existing thing, that is, his transcendence of Platonic dualism, of the polarization between the sensible and the intelligible nature of the data of experience. In view of the fact that the form makes beings encompass the beginning/cause and the end/goal of their existential realization, we can conclude that both the particular individual form (the kath'ekaston, or "primary substance") and the uniformity of species with regard to form (the katholou, or "secondary substance") converge in the infrangible relation of onticity and form, a relation that constitutes the singular realization of the existing thing. Consequently, the unicity of the form (morphē) by which that which is is—that is, the morphic altery of the existing thing—finds in Aristotle's entelechy its ontological basis and support. Within the context of Aristotelian ontology, however, we can identify this morphic altery with the existential altery? Can we see in the unicity of the form (morphē) the achievement or the manifestation of the dynamic indeterminacy of the existential event?

This last question—the problem of existential altery, of the dynamic indeterminacy of the fact of existence—cannot be posed within the context of Aristotelian ontology. Nevertheless, Aristotle's insistence on transferring the ontological principle of the existing thing from the world of the ideas to the form (eidos) of the being, that is, to the morphic realization itself of the existential event, is not entirely unrelated to the problem. Without definitive/eidetic identity the eventual dynamic indeterminacy of existence loses its ontological principle—existence loses the power of being (or of dynamically becoming) itself. We are able to say, then, that Aristotle's entelechy, the form (eidos), does not predetermine the fact of existence as an ontological principle because it does not lie "outside" of itself, as the Platonic ideas do. It simply defines it. It makes it encompass its identity as its inceptive potentiality, and draw from this the beginning/cause and end/goal of its realization. From within such a hermeneutic theory, it is not unreasonable to discern in the Aristotelian identification of form with entelechy an anticipation of the personal principle of the existential event, in the way that this principle was defined by later Greek philosophical thought (especially the thought of the fourth and fifth centuries AD).

The problems that arise from this identification of form with entelechy do not, however, stop here. If the form makes beings encompass the beginning/cause and the end/goal of their existential realization, if it is this that constitutes Being, the unitary onticity of the existing thing, then how is it that this onticity is sometimes ephemeral and liable to dissolution, and at other times timeless and indissoluble? For what reason is the individual form of sensible things subject to decay and annihilation, whereas their morphic uniformity—the eidetic onticity of intelligible realities—is incorruptible and immortal?
Aristotle replies to this question by saying that the form on its own does not constitute substance (the fact of participation in Being). There must exist a subject of the form, that is, a bearer of the beginning/cause and end/goal to the event of existence. And the subject is matter (which is subject to shaping) or the mind as "the place of forms" and the active realization of forms, whereas "thought and object of thought are the same" and "thought and the object of thought are not different." In the case, then, of sensible beings, the subject (matter) is ephemeral and subject to dissolution and therefore the form is perpetuated only by the continual succession of sensible realizations; whereas in the case of intelligible realities, the subject is the mind that effects the realization of the form in a manner free from the transience and decay of matter: "The mind which is actively thinking is the objects which it thinks." "Thought in this sense of it is separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity."

Thus the identification of form with entelechy allows us to conclude that the subject of the existential event is the passive (in the case of matter) or the active (in the case of the mind) bearer of the eidetic realization of Being, without any other possibility of participation (volitional and therefore free) in the realization of the purpose or end of existence. In other words, existence is neither predetermined by the ontological principle of the idea, nor is it self-defined as a dynamic and undetermined becoming. On the contrary, it is given as an eidetic realization, subject either to the transience and decay of matter or to the eternity of the identification of mind with the object of its thought.

But what happens in the case of human existence, where the subject of the form is both the sensible body and the mind? Fundamentally, this "bipartition" of the human subject does not permit us to refer the form of humans, and consequently also their existential entelechy, to only one of the two elements that constitute the subject—only to the mind or only to the body. For us to be able to identify the form with the entelechy also in the case of humans, we must transcend both the external configuration of bodily shape and the simple assertion of mental activity and refer to the factor that unifies the mind and the body, making them a unitary realization of life. This factor is the soul.

This is not the place for a systematic investigation of the various meanings Aristotle attributes to the word soul. What I must stress is precisely the multifaceted character of Aristotle's theories about the soul, and especially the emphatic contrast with the cut-and-dried certainty of the Platonic definitions. We should remember that for Plato: (1) the soul is ultimately and definitively the principle of life, a principle that excludes death (i.e., nonlife) and consequently is itself immortal; (2) every soul is immortal, because it participates in immortality in itself, that is, in the idea of immortality; (3) the idea of immortality excludes corruption and annihilation, and consequently the soul, which participates in immortality, also participates in incorruptibility; (4) in its relation to the body, it is the soul that governs, whereas the body is submissive ("is a servant"); and (5) the immortality, incorruptibility, and "governing principle" of the soul make it very like the divine, whereas the transience, corruptibility, and submissiveness of the body make it very like the mortal. These briefly stated theses convey a suggestion of the Platonic understanding of the soul as an autonomous entity ontologically different from the body and absolutely predetermined by the properties of its universal substance, that is, by the participation of the soul in general in the eternal and given ideas of immortality, incorruptibility, and so forth. Naturally, the ontological predetermination of the soul by the ideas does not annul the subjective self-consciousness and identity of the ego, at least as it is indirectly inferred through an analysis of the functions of the soul: thinking, contemplating, purifying itself, loving, and so forth, or through the certainty that is expressed chiefly in the Phaedo that it is the same subject that upon death "moves its home from this world to that one there." But it is not the subjective self-consciousness and identity of the ego that as an ontological principle consti-

5. Ibid., 3.5.430a17–18, trans. Barnes.
tutes the fact of the soul's existence. The ontological principle lies in the *katholou*, the general, in the given properties of the common substance of souls. That is also why the problem of the existential otherness of the *kath' ekaston*, the particular, finds no resolution within the limits of Platonic ontology.

In the same rapid fashion, we may now summarize the meanings Aristotle attributes to the term *soul*. Basically, the soul is the ontological principle that *inheres* within each animate being (human, animal, or vegetable). That is to say, it is the entelechy or form of animate beings.\(^6\) The *entelos echin*, the "being complete" or the full and complete existence of animate beings, is not exhausted in the unity of matter and form, in the completed morphic realization, but refers to the soul, which constitutes the active becoming of the life of the being, the self-movement in virtue of which the being is alive. And this self-movement can be broken down into many powers (*dynameis*) or parts (*moria*): the sensitive, the appetitive, the nutritive, the augmentative, the reproductive, and others.

More particularly, in the case of humans we can distinguish even more parts or powers of the soul—such as the intellective, the deliberative, the critical, the cognitive, and many others—to a point at which their number seems infinite and makes Aristotle wonder whether it is possible for us to attempt to make such distinctions and divisions in the soul: "The problem at once presents itself, in what sense we are to speak of parts of the soul, or how many we should distinguish. For in a sense there is an infinity of parts.\(^7\) And it is chiefly the soul's imaginative faculty that reveals to us the difficulty we have in regarding it as separated into parts or portions, because this faculty alone can neither be easily distinguished from

nor identified with the remaining ones,\(^8\) but seems to summarize and unify all of the soul's cognitive powers.\(^9\)

With regard to the sum total of the soul's cognitive powers that we call "mind" ("with which the soul knows and thinks")\(^10\), we must ask ourselves whether there are any margins allowing us to correlate the mind with the soul—seeing that the soul is the "entelechy of a natural body," whereas the mind is a subject identified with the eternity of the intelligible. In contrast to the philosophers who preceded him, who either identify or distinguish mind and soul, Aristotle does not regard the answer as clear-cut ("We have no evidence as yet"), but confines himself to the conjecture that the mind "seems to be a different genus from the soul" and subsists not as an actuality but rather only as a potentiality,\(^11\) that is, as a subject of the onticity of intelligibles, a presupposition of the incorruptible and eternal reality of intelligibles. That is why we cannot say that the mind has the slightest commingling with the body,\(^12\) and must consider it very likely that the mind is to be distinguished even from the soul, just as the eternal is distinguished from the perishable.\(^13\) On another occasion, speaking again of the mind, Aristotle sees it as slipping into the soul "from outside," like a divine element.\(^14\) And despite the fact that the relationship between an "unmixed" and divine element (like the mind) and a perishable element (like the soul) cannot be presented with any clarity, it is evident that the divinity of the mind enables the soul to be "the place of forms," the mind constituting the active realization of all the forms ("because it thinks all things") in the

\(6\) "The soul is an actuality (*entelechia*) of the first kind of a natural body having life potentially in it—the soul must be a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially in it—the soul is in some sense the principle of animal life—It seems that the principle found in plants is also a kind of soul" (ibid., 2.1.412a27–28, 2.1.412a19–21, 1.1.402a6–7, and 1.5.411b27–28, trans. Barnes).

\(7\) Ibid., 3.9.432a22–24, trans. Barnes.

\(8\) Ibid., 3.9.432b1–3.

\(9\) Ibid., 3.7.431a17.

\(10\) Ibid., 3.4.429a10–11, trans. Barnes.

\(11\) Ibid., 2.2.413b25, trans. Barnes.

\(12\) "It follows that it can have no nature of its own, other than that of having a certain capacity. Thus that in the soul which is called thought... is, before it thinks, not actually any real thing" (ibid., 3.4.429a21–24, trans. Barnes).

\(13\) "For this reason it cannot reasonably be regarded as blended with the body" (ibid., 3.4.429a24–25, trans. Barnes).

\(14\) "It seems to be a different kind of soul, differing as what is eternal from what is perishable; it alone is capable of being separated" (ibid., 2.2.413b26–27, trans. Barnes).

\(15\) "It remains, then, for the reason [nous] alone to enter and alone to be divine" (Generation of Animals 2.3.736b27–28, trans. Barnes).
human soul—and only in this perspective can we understand Aristotle’s enigmatic phrase “The soul is in a way all existing things.”

But if the individual mind is an eternal and imperishable reality, whereas the individual soul is ephemeral and perishable, how is it possible for us to insist on the unitary entelechy of the human subject, and in what sense ultimately does the eternity and permanence of the Platonic soul differ from that of the Aristotelian mind? If the mind survives after death, to what ontological reality does this survival refer? Aristotle leaves us with these questions largely unanswered. Later commentators on his texts see the necessity for the immortality of the mind as a relic of Platonism—marginal, however, and incidental to Aristotle’s theory. It is at any rate certain that immortality does not refer to the given properties of a universal nature, seeing that the Aristotelian nous neither constitutes a nature nor participates in a nature. Consequently, the ontological principle of existence is not transposed to the immortal (and therefore given) nature of the mind but remains identified with the form. The mind is immortal, just as God is immortal, not because it has an immortal nature but because it has it in an unmixed form—the form defines the divinity of God, not his immortality. Thus, in the case of the human subject, the disappearance of the individual material form also signifies the extinction of existence, an extinction that is not nullified by the immortality of the individual mind. The mind is immortal precisely because it is unmixed (distinct from the soul and the body), without participation in our individual onticity. For that reason its immortality is not our own immortality; it does not render our being immortal.

The Platonic challenge of the theory of the ideas remained a creative stimulus for Greek philosophical thinking many centuries after Aristotle. The stimulus centers on the problem of the ontological principle of existing things. Is it their morphic/existential commonality of form (their common ousia or eidos) that constitutes a given onto-

17. It was chiefly Averroes’s view that became generally known in the West. See, for example, P. Mandonnet, Siger de Brabant et l’averroïsme latin au Xille siècle, Les philosophes belges, vol. 6 (Louvain, 1911).

logical reality and predetermines the existence of individual (kath’ ekaston) beings, or is the tracing back to the universal (katholou) simply an intellectual achievement of human beings—the mode by which the human understanding classifies existsents in order to identify them? Do the universal concepts/ideas reflect the eternal models and the rational blueprints of each existent, or is the ontological principle of existence (the presupposition of existential onticity) comprised within the individual presences of beings and the universals are simply bare concepts/inventions of the human mind?

In Plato himself—and even more so in Aristotle—the problem of the universal and the individual (the primary distinction between intelligible and sensible realities and their ontological comparison) certainly retains aspects of a dynamic indeterminacy that permits the transcendence of clear-cut schematizations. In the case, however, of the later philosophers—of the postclassical and medieval periods—there is a clear tendency toward objective formulations and the gradual rationalizing of the problem.

The starting point of this later phase of the debate is usually attributed to the Neoplatonist Porphyry (AD 233–300), who in a succinct and systematic manner formulated three specific questions: whether the universals (genera and species) constitute self-subsistent entities or whether they are simply products of the human intellect; whether as entities they are corporeal or whether they are incorporeal; whether they possess existence apart from the objects of sense or whether they exist only within these. Porphyry himself did not reply to the questions he raised. By formulating them, however, he stimulated a long and persistent search for philosophical solutions, a search that was pursued chiefly among the Alexandrian commentators on Aristotle and was continued by the later Byzantine Aristotelians. It was not long before the debate was transplanted

into the realm of Christian Greek thought, leading eventually to the very full clarification of the ontological distinction between \textit{ousia} and \textit{energeiai} by referring the ontological principle of existents not to given substances and intellectual predeterminations but to the personal freedom and deliberative and creative activity (\textit{energeia}) of God—as noted in the preceding section.

The more important developments concerning the problem of universals, however, took place, of course, in the West. It is usually believed that the problem passed to the West through the translation into Latin of Porphyry’s \textit{Isagoge}, or \textit{Introduction}, by Boethius (AD 480–524). It had already been addressed, however, by Augustine, who bequeathed to European philosophical thinking the fullest intellectualist schematization of the Platonic theory.

Augustine accepts the eternal and absolutely predetermined character of the existence of universal ideas, only he transfers the ontologically autonomous “world” of the Platonic ideas to the substance or essence of God. The ideas/forms exist outside and independently of sensible beings. They have in themselves a given and complete essential perfection, because they are encompassed within the essence. They have always preexisted in God as concepts, forms, species, principles—\textit{principia}—in the same way as the exemplary models of his creative work preexist in the mind of an artist. But because in God all things are essence, the ideas also belong to the divine essence. They therefore precede sensible beings both temporally and ontologically: the ideas were impressed in beings in the course of the creation effected by God as Word and constitute the ontological \textit{principle} of beings, absolutely predetermining the form/mode and end/goal of the existence of sensible things. Sensible things exist only by participation in the essential and eternal \textit{principle} of their intellectual/formal uniformity of species that is contained in God. And their participation

is an \textit{assimilation} to the divine exemplary perfections, a rational likeness, a manifestation of the divine Word.\textsuperscript{21} Thus the image of reality that Augustine gives us refers to a given inviolable, sensible impress of the exemplar of the divine ideas that belong to the rational essence of God, to the essence of God as Word. Form, order, and productivity are the modes by which this impress is realized, and these models constitute the relationship of likeness between God and the world. Without these modes the universe is neither intelligible nor existent.

Such a theory, of course, leaves the matter of the world ontologically without explanation and attributes to individual existents an iconic/imitative character and ultimately a character of nonreal existence. In order to address the problem of matter, Augustine resorts to a schematic interpretation of the simultaneous creation (\textit{concreatum}) of forms and matter by God: matter is also created by God, but as a formless given (\textit{iformitas}), and constitutes existence and onticity as soon as it is endowed with form on the basis of the given ideas in God.\textsuperscript{22} This interpretation is schematic because it attributes the creation of matter to God but not also its ontological principle. If we attribute the ontological \textit{principle} of matter to God, we end up in pantheism. If we transfer the ontological \textit{principle} of matter to matter itself, we must accept, along with Plato, the eternity and self-existence of matter. Augustine does not offer a solution to this problem. He asserts that only the intellectual ideas/forms and the laws that govern existents have their ontological \textit{principle} in God, yet matter remains a \textit{penitus nihil}, a reality with no substantial content at all.

The evolution of the problem of universals in the West did not in any essential way break free from the foundations laid by Augustine,\textsuperscript{23} however much the variants presented by realist and conceptualist theories appeared to be fundamentally contrasting.

\textsuperscript{21} See, for example, \textit{De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber} 16.58, in J.-P. Migne, ed., \textit{Patrologia Latina} (PL) 34; \textit{Retractiones} 1.26 (PL 32.626).
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{De Genesi ad litteram} 5.5 (PL 34:326); see also ibid., 1.15.29 (PL 34:57).
\textsuperscript{23} See Martin Grabmann, \textit{Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode}, vol. 1 (Graz: Akademische Verlag, 1957), 308.
In the ninth century John Scotus Eriugena, in his attempt to avoid the Augustinian version of the *substantially* divine character of universal ideas—a version that transforms the world into a poor reflection of the divine substance—accepted *universals* (genera and species) as the first (and prior to the creation of the world) spiritual *creations* of God, thus distinguishing the archetypes of beings from the divine essence.

Subsequently, originally with Anselm and Abelard and later with Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, Scholasticism, although relying manifestly on the Platonic/Augustinian version, attempted also to incorporate the Aristotelian theory by resorting to the solution of making all three aspects of the problem of *universals* compatible with each other: universal ideas (*universalia*) preexist in themselves in the essence of God and are ontologically prior to sensible things (*in Deo ante rem*); they exist in sensible things as *kinds* or *species* and endue them with form, producing beings in the world (*in mundo in re*), but they are also put together subsequently in the human mind as abstract concepts (*in intellectu post rem*).

Neither Eriugena's thesis nor that of later Scholasticism overturned the *complete* ontological self-sufficiency of *universals*, the ontological uncertainty of *particulares*, and the referring of the ontological *principle* of existents to the realm of intellectual substances/realities. Matter remains again without ontological explanation and its reality substantially null (*nullum esse habet*), just as individual existence remains a given, absolutely subject to the necessity of the predetermination of its substance. To this day, matter, alterity, and freedom are still concepts without ontological content within the bounds of Western European philosophy.

To be sure, *universals* in the sense of metaphysical absolutes came to be radically doubted in the West with the appearance of nominalism, which also marks the beginning of the controversy over universals (*Universalienstreit*)—with its chief representatives Roscelinus (circa 1050–1123) and Ockham (1300–1349). The nominalists identify knowledge either with direct empirical obviousness or with the possibility of referring back to direct empirical obviousness. Consequently, the knowledge of the real is definitely exhausted in the empirical immediacy and obviousness of the individual, whereas the universal ideas do not really exist outside our mental conception. It is thinking that classifies individual entities into genera and species, and thus the attribution of the character of a real *natura communis* to the result of this classification (i.e., to the universal ideas/forms) is ruled out. *Universals* are simple names/concepts (*flatus vocis*).

It is evident that nominalism does not represent a new ontological proposition or interpretation but simply turns away from the ontological problem and contends with the idealistic realism of Augustinian and scholastic Platonism only on the level of the theory of knowledge: by stripping the intellectual conception of its metaphysical character (depriving the universal concepts of their given transcendent ontological content), nominalism transfers the possibility of knowledge to the individual empirical validation of the real, abandoning metaphysics to the concerns of subjective belief. And *belief* for the nominalists means the acceptance of transcendent principles and axioms without intellectual examination (*fideismus*), an acceptance that philosophically has the character of a simple *hypothesis* (*suppositio*).\textsuperscript{24}

Nominalism thus makes the clear-cut division between philosophy and theology, the restriction of philosophy only to the search for positive knowledge, definitive and fixed in the West. It is commonly regarded as a precursor of the *skepticism* of Montaigne, Charron, and others; and the *empiricism* of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, and others; and also the reduction of the ontological question to the level of an axiomatic dogma—thus introducing into European history an unbridgeable polarization of faith and knowledge, of a given transcendent authority on the one hand and a subjective positive certainty on the other. Faith presupposes the subjectification of the individual's understanding to an axiomatic Principle (of a religious, ideological, or authoritarian character) and a merely emotional relationship with what is believed, whereas knowledge is based on direct obviousness and on the syllogistic or experimental proof of this obviousness. The combination of skepticism with unexamined

\textsuperscript{24} The probability of the existence of God is evident to all, and is more probable than its opposite, but cannot be proved: "Postulit probabilis, et est probabilior sua opposita, sed minime demonstrata" (Ockham).
belief becomes, with nominalism, the classic syndrome of Western
European history.25

These last statements are not meant to imply that nominalism
-dominated the West from the moment it first appeared and that
this provided the solution to the controversy over universals. On the
contrary, the facts of historical phenomenology confirm that the
appearance of nominalism inaugurates and constitutes the contro-
versy, which, however, gradually dies down as the focus of European
philosophy shifts steadily from ontology to epistemology.26

Nominalism undoubtedly succeeded in bringing about such a
shift because it offered idealistic realism an opportunity of authori-
tative survival by its transformation into a "realism of belief." The
transcendent predetermination of truth and of knowledge gradually
(and not without resistance) cedes its place to subjective cognitive
certainty, but only with regard to what concerns natural experience.
In the area of metaphysical belief and the universal values of life,
the transcendent predetermination of truth remains the immovable
support of religious, ideological, or political authority and the institu-
tions representing them.

For that reason, and despite the originally very sharp opposition
between nominalists and realists in the Middle Ages, in later cen-
turies the nominalist tendency to make the possibilities of knowl-


26. The student of the ontological theories that were developed in the
West—at least from Augustine up to the Scholastics—finds much cause to won-
der whether the ontological debate among Western Europeans was not always
the arena in which the quest for a positivistic epistemology was conducted.
What was primarily sought for was objective and indisputable knowledge, such
as could be accessible to the intellectual capacity of the thinking individual.
For the individual's intellectual conception to be objectively true, the objects
of thought had to correspond to the essence of the things, to reflect the ideas/
principles of existents, to have a transcendentally given ontological content.
Consequently, the individual's human intellect had to be a microcosm of the
divine intellect, which meant that God was pure mind, absolutely actualized
essence, and so forth. The predetermination of these ontological theories by
epistemological considerations is often very obvious, long before the appear-
ance of nominalism in the West, or the various phases of hostile reaction to it.

eedge independent of any transcendent reference possesses, as a
rule, a transcendent axiology as a complementary dimension. Even
the most radical denial and avoidance of the problems of ontology
(as, for example, in the case of Marxism) is accompanied by a re-
ference to the transcendent character of some given universal ideas
or some other that is definitive of life. Metaphysical transcendence
does not refer inevitably to the ontological content of universal con-
cepts. It simply moves across to the axiological absolitization of the
universal principles and presuppositions of knowledge or of a more
effective organization of communitarian life. This transcendence, at
any rate, is always based on an unexamined belief—the subjection
of the individual understanding to an axiomatic Principle—and on
a merely emotional relationship with what is believed.

The medieval controversy over universals—the polarization of
the transcendent (transcendens) and the immanent (immanens),
esSENce and existence, the universal and the individual, faith and
knowledge, theoretical principle and practical realization—seems
to end up in the West in the modern age in a tacit and unavoidable
compromise. The very sharp polarization of these contrasting pairs
is contained self-evidently like an inherent element in every expres-
sion of so-called Western European civilization: certainly knowl-
dge draws its axiomatic character not from the given ontological/
transcendent reality of the universal ideas but only from the syl-
llogistic/mathematical or experimental proof of the real. Reference
back, however, to the given and transcendent character of univer-
sals is preserved in the form of an absolutized axiology almost at
every stage of spiritual and communal life. Even in the most violent
outbursts of liberalism in the last few centuries, the problem of Eu-
ropean Man seems to be a quest for the most perfect or most cor-
rect or most effective universal ideas for the organization of life—for
the most ideal objective program to which individuals can submit
with a view to achieving universal happiness—a quest for the most
complete model of a renunciation of freedom producing the great-
est happiness.

No nominalism, skepticism, or empiricism can possibly over-
turn the definitive priority of universals within the context of West-
ern European life, seeing that within this context freedom and
existential otherness remain bare concepts without ontological content, without a hypostatic bearer. 27

27. It may perhaps be useful not to leave this section without referring to two of the more characteristic consequences of the absolute priority given to universals in Western European cultural life—one of them religious, the other political. The first is the teaching concerning the absolute predestination of each individual human being, a teaching that was first formulated by Augustine and later accepted officially by the Roman Catholic Church (see the conciliar decisions listed in Denzinger, Enchiridion Symbolorum 621, 628, 1567), as it was also (even more emphatically) by the Reformation. Just as in the mind of an artist the purpose or end of his creation, together with its idea/form, is given and predetermined, so in the divine intellect the final salvation or perdition of each individual human being exists eternally as a predetermined end. So long as God in his essence is omnipotent, the becoming of beings (and consequently the exercise of human freedom) cannot deviate from the given universal intention or plan existing in the knowledge of God as an absolutely predestined existence. And because not only knowledge but also will belongs to the essence of God—and is therefore also absolute and unlimited—evil cannot be realized without divine consent. Consequently, we must accept that God predetermines how and by whom evil is realized, just as he predetermines how and by whom good is realized. That is why Augustine also speaks of the “terrible necessity of sinning” (dura necessitas peccandi). Thus even the salvation of humanity has its cause only in God’s choosing to bestow divine grace, not in individual freedom—freedom cannot constitute an existential event because the ontological principle of the existential event lies in the given essence, not in personal otherness (God himself is predetermined by his essence to be God; his godhead and its properties are imposed on him as an essential necessity). To be sure, Roman Catholic theology in modern times has attempted to soften Augustine’s teaching, chiefly in reaction to Protestantism, which adopted even more extreme positions on absolute predestination (divine grace is used by Man as an object that is entirely passive and devoid of freedom like wood, stone, or a beast—cf., for example, Formula Concordiae, Art. 1. De peccato originis/Affirm. 3. Art. 2. De libero arbitrio/Affirm. 1). Thus an “improved” version was advanced by Roman Catholics, that the predestination of Man by God is not realized in an arbitrary or one-sided manner but with justice because it is founded on God’s foreknowledge, which eternally foresees the good disposition and receptivity of those predestined for salvation. Nonetheless, one is tempted to add that if this is the Christian understanding of human freedom, then the vast wave of atheism that has overwhelmed the West in recent centuries may justly be described as a movement for the liberation of humankind. (On this point see also § 33 of the present work.)

The second consequence is the political philosophy that arises from the definitive priority of universals in the context of Western European cultural life. In earlier chapters of this book, I have spoken of the genesis of totalitarianism in Europe and the ideological roots that it has in the writings of Augustine and the Scholastics. Here I would only wish to draw attention to the distorted idea of ancient Greek political philosophy that appeared in the Western European world at the time of the Renaissance and subsequently, especially after the French Revolution, within the more general climate of the “reversal of the terms” of the ancient Greek cultural inheritance. The ancient Greek city-state (polis) was regarded as a model of “democratic” political organization, a model, however, stripped of its fundamental presuppositions: the active contribution of each citizen to the realization of life as ordered harmony, the identification of what was shared communally with what was true, the identification of the good with the success of the citizens in realizing the ideal logos of the justice and order of the “cosmos.” In Western Europe the ideal of social harmony, justice, and order was predetermined not by the given truth of the “decorum” by which alone life was realized but by the ideological working out of a program for the specific organization of social life. This program shifts the realization of the communal good from the citizen to the ideological presuppositions and structures of the organization of society—leaving to citizens only the right to express their preference periodically by casting their vote in favor of this or that program from among the previously prepared programs setting out how society should be structured. Thus the parliamentary system has been put forward as the supreme achievement of political freedom and good governance, whereas in reality it alienates citizens from the possibility of themselves deciding, judging, and organizing their lives. The parliamentary system has turned the citizen into a passive titleholder of the legal right to vote, whereas the management of the public good is assigned exclusively to the central authority, which even with a tiny majority, or one artificially created (by the electoral laws), exercises total control over the basic requirements of human life, pulling the strings of a faceless bureaucracy. It is no longer the human community that succeeds in establishing the social reality of life as a dynamic achievement, but it is a dependent and therefore unenterprising body of civil servants that rules public life by mechanically applying the set a priori “political” program of the central administration. And the citizens’ right to exercise a vote at intervals so as to choose who will determine the way they lead their lives is regarded as a safeguard against totalitarianism.
the multifaceted movement we usually call existentialism. Sartre's philosophy owes its origins to Kierkegaard, the founder of existentialism. Its contribution, however, to the investigation especially of the ontological question presupposes chiefly the phenomenology of Husserl and the fundamental ontology (Fundamentalontologie) of Heidegger, who is the closest to the phenomenological branch of existentialist philosophy.

The antecedents of Sartre's ontological expressions lie in Kierkegaard, without, however, this provenance also indicating an identity of ontological theories. Kierkegaard's aim was not fundamentally the systematic formulation of a new philosophical proposition, and certainly not in the realm of ontology. If his work marks an important step in the course of Western European philosophy, it is because he was the first in the modern age to restore philosophical inquiry into the knowledge of existents to the domain of subjective experience. And it is in this domain that later Sartre also seeks the ontological content of freedom.

More specifically, in Kierkegaard's case we have a rather violent reaction to what has been regarded as the crowning achievement of Western European philosophy: a reaction against the absolutization of the objective character of knowledge, against the replacement of a transcendent authority by an equally absolutized intellectual certainty—a reaction against the transformation of the metaphysically given objectivity of universals into rationally (and therefore universally) obligatory truth. Kierkegaard denounces this transformation—which undoubtedly found its most brilliant expression in the Cartesian cogito and Hegelian dialectics. He denounces it because this transformation overturns the subject's real existential experience for the sake of the subject's merely intellectual conceptions, and, moreover, because it leads to an abstract/intellectual version of reality, that is, to treating the nonreal as real, to reversing the terms of truth. In a nutshell, for Kierkegaard European philosophy from Descartes to Hegel absolutizes thinking, annihilating the thinker and nullifying the fact of the subject's existence.

To be sure, Kierkegaard's violent reaction is restricted chiefly to epistemology. What is denied, strictly speaking, is the fictitious certainties of philosophical knowledge that succeed in displacing the only kernel and axis of real knowledge: the anguishadventure of existential self-consciousness. The ontological presuppositions of existential self-consciousness, however, are only suggested indirectly in Kierkegaard: assuredly they have to do with a theocentric ontology—with the identification of Being with the personal existence of God. But this identification cannot be analyzed simply by the use of reason. It serves only the shift of the axis of the powers of knowledge away from intellectual conceptions toward the subjective experience of that which transcends mind, an experience of the tragic dialectic of finite and infinite, of temporal and eternal, which constitutes human existence. The knowledge of Being is not shared in through reason, does not constitute an event of communion, but is experienced as the suffering and struggle of the subject in its contrast with the Absolute, a contrast that is transcended (always subjectively) only within the limits of the repetition and the instant—when the subject repeats once again the timeless and unending content of his or her existence from within the experience of the annihilation of time in the instant.

Thus Kierkegaard does not avoid being imprisoned in the subjectivism of Western European philosophy. His version of the existential event—whether concerning God or human beings—remains individualist and ontic. The theocentric ontology presupposed by his typically Protestant thinking projects onto the personal existence of God the experiential certainty, preceding any thought, of the individual ego (an ego that is also isolated in itself, before any event of relation). The relation of the human individual to the absolute (yet individual) Thou of God sheds no light on the ontological question but simply serves the shift of the axis of knowledge from intellectual self-sufficiency to the dynamics of existential self-consciousness. It serves an epistemology that is radically apophatic, but nevertheless certainly subjectivist. That is why the ontological presuppositions of existentialism too, as Kierkegaard established it, can have either a theistic or atheistic character without destroying the "form-enduring" element of existentialism: the new "instrument" of philosophy, which is subjective existence as tragically experienced suffering.
If with Kierkegaard the shift of the axis of knowledge to existential experience assumes the character of a violent reaction to every form of intellectualism, in Husserl’s case—some decades later—the inference of the presuppositions of knowledge preceding thought is posited as a starting point for turning philosophy into a strict science. The requirement that philosophy should constitute a strict science was imperative for the Western European philosophical tradition at least from the time of Descartes. It remained unfulfilled, as Husserl believed, because philosophy did not succeed in establishing presuppositions that would lead to knowledge as a direct showing forth that could be accepted without any doubt.

What Husserl was seeking was that we should be led to a sober intuition of things freed from any intellectual or emotional elaboration, released from the circumstantial character of individual experience—that we should search diligently for “pure reason” in the initiatory logos of the manifestation of things. That is to say, we should “bracket” (einklammern) every coincidental and fragmentary datum of experience, such as the a priori schemata imposed on the intellect, so as to be able to attain a primary direct vision (Schau) of things, the only one that can lead us to the manifest and indisputable starting point of the knowledge of phenomena, that is, lead us “behind the things themselves” (zurück zu den Sachen selbst). 28

This primary vision is realized, according to Husserl, in our consciousness—consciousness constitutes the necessary and sufficient condition of thephenomenicity of phenomena: things are, so long as they appear, before any intellectual marking or empirical confirmation. And things appear (phainontai), are phenomena, thanks to the referentiality of consciousness—to the ability of consciousness to refer/respond to things as cognitive conformation. The referentiality/response of consciousness to things, which makes their primary cognitive manifestation possible, is called by Husserl Intentionalität. 29

When they are revealed to our consciousness, things are. They realize their essence—they demonstrate, that is, their only real truth, which is that which refers to their conscious phenomenicity. No knowledge can be advanced or any reality confirmed before this initiatory and primary correlation of consciousness and things that makes the phenomenicity of phenomena possible. We could say that for Husserl there is a “referential reciprocity” of consciousness and things that constitute the “principle” of knowledge: consciousness does not exist before or independently of things (it is always a consciousness of something), but equally things are only insofar as they appear to our consciousness. Consequently, any intellectual or experiential tracing back whatsoever to things “in themselves,” to the “objectivity” of things, is arbitrary and fictitious, seeing that it is only the initiatory referentiality/correspondence of consciousness to things that endues them with appearance/reason/meaning so that they are confirmed fundamentally as existents. Existents are known as existents, and consequently exist, only because fundamentally they appear to our consciousness—that is also why the essence of things is pure phenomenicity. And because their phenomenicity, which defines and exhausts the confirmation of their existence, depends on the subject (the existential bearer of consciousness), it is inevitable that the subject takes on a transcendental character (transzendentales Ego). 30

In the case of both Heidegger and Sartre, existentialism borrows the phenomenological method of inferring the knowledge of the existent from Husserl. Existentialism, however, attempts by this method to advance beyond simply seeing consciousness as the presupposition of the phenomenicity of phenomena. If Intentionalität constitutes for Husserl the initial “principle” of the knowledge of the existent, for the existentialist philosophers this initial “principle” can be broadened beyond the referential reciprocity of consciousness and things to arrive at the experience of the universality of the event of existence.

More specifically, the goal of the existentialists remains the manifestation of the essence of things on the level of primary subjective experience. The disclosure of the essence, however,

29. See ibid., 79ff., 203ff.
is not confined to conscious referentiality and to its subjective bearer—the event of existence is not exhausted in the subjective attestation of the phenomenicity of phenomena, and therefore the ego is not established as a transcendental "principle" fundamentally "constituting" the existent. The manifestation of things on the level of primary subjective experience is broken down by the existentialists into the elements or the possibilities of awareness of the mode by which every existent is. And precisely because subjective experience discloses the universality of the mode by which whatever is is, we can speak of the manifestation of the essence on the level of primary subjective experience and can base a systematic ontology on this experiential disclosure.

More particularly for Heidegger, what we call "existing" is a fundamental and initiatory experience of an "existing-in" (In-Sein), which has the sense of direct accessibility—the experiential possibility that my self, my fellow human beings, objects, the world should become accessible to me. This signifies that existence is not fragmentary and just itself—the given and self-evident subject, Being-in-itself—but existence is present or being present. That is, existence presupposes a there (Da) within which it is—and this "there" is experienced by us in the initial experience of nearness or accessibility. Thus neither is the "principle" of knowledge restricted only to the conscious capacity of the subject but is transposed to the experientially prior and more universal awareness of being situated (Befindlichkeit)—to the primary (before any information deriving from the intellect or sensory experience) intuitive sense that we are situated in a "there," the accessibility of which is our first experiential knowledge. And the awareness of being situated becomes possible thanks to an equally initial openness (Erschlossenheit) of existence to the "there"—the power of existence to "be opened up" to the "there," to make it accessible—while at the same time this "openness" makes existence itself accessible to itself, defining it as "presence."

Consequently, the primary experience of existence-in (accessibility) is broken down into a dynamic awareness of being situated through the openness of existence to the "there"—that is, it is broken down into primary existential (existentiale) experiences that constitute knowledge and define existence. The Being of existence becomes present to us in a fundamental and initial manner as experience of the "there" (Dasein), and knowledge of the "there" is achieved primarily by analysis of existential experiences. In other words, the "there" (Da) defines the existing (Sein), but it is itself only defined as-toward existence, that is, only by the analysis of existential experiences. Thus something that lies "outside" of existence defines the Being of existence, while at the same time existence recognizes that which is "outside" of itself only by the analysis of its own experiences.

On the basis of this last statement, we can go on to say that the primary experience of Being becomes possible thanks to the ability of existence to stand-out (ex-istanai), to stand outside of itself—because only by openness to the "there" and awareness of being situated in the "there" do its self, its fellow human beings, and objects become accessible to it. That is why Heidegger, from a certain point onward, changes the way he writes "existence" from Existenzen zu Eksistenzen, suggesting by this second form of the word the Greek existēmi ("I stand aside from" or "outside of").

The ek-static character of existence for Heidegger reveals its essence, its ousia—the word ousia goes beyond its ancient Greek sense: it refers not to the what but to the how of the existent, to the mode of its participation in Being. Ek-stasis manifests the essence of existence, precisely because it refers to the mode by which existence is as "Being-there"—the essence of existential "Being-there" lies in its ek-static character (das Wesen des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz). And because ekstaticness manifests to us the mode by which human existence is, and consequently the mode that differentiates human existence from every other existent, it follows that it also manifests to us the mode of nonekstaticness, that is, the essence of every other existent thing. That is why we can also base a systematic ontology on the existential experience of the human subject.

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31. The phrase comes from Sein und Zeit (42), where Heidegger has not yet established his way of writing Ek-sistenzen, although he does presuppose its meaning. See the later analysis of the phrase in his study Über den Humanismus, 14ff.
In contrast with the ek-static character of human existence, every other existent presents itself as something that is simply set before us (it is presence-at-hand, Vorhandenes). When we say simply, "It is set before us," we mean the possibility for it to be something or not to be something—both possibilities belong equally to the modes of existence, that is, to the essence of the existing thing. It is only because it acquires accessibility with regard to humans that what is simply “present-at-hand” becomes a dynamic existent, being manifested as what has become (Seiendes). Consequently, the character by which what has become (Seiendes) becomes accessible to us belongs from the outset to its definition: what has become is manifested to us only as “something-toward some possibility” (etwas um zu . . .), something that is given to us to be “at hand,” that is, "handed" to us—it is a readiness-at-hand (Zuhandenes).

This analysis of the primary approach to existence is of course phenomenological, not because it exhausts the ontological question in the simple assertion of the phenomenicity of existents but because it investigates the phenomenicity of phenomena as a primary existential experience of the subject and attests to the mode of existence (the essence of the existent) in experience. In their Being humans always have an apprehension of the mode by which beings are, which means: beings appear, are phenomena, because they “arise” in the existential experience of humans. We know human existence only as existence—"the "there" of the accessibility of beings as phenomena. And we know the Being of beings only as presence, only as a “rising up” in the existential awareness of humans. This “rising up” is the truth of beings, their nonoblivion, that is, their phenomenicity.

We are discussing “rising up,” and consequently an activity or event, not an objective state. The activity of the “rising up” of beings in the existential experience of the subject is the event itself of the existential ek-stasis of the subject in the “there” of the accessibility of beings. The mode by which humans are (as ek-stasis in the “there” of the initial accessibility), and also the mode by which beings are (as “rising up” to the experience of accessibility, that is, as phenomena), are apprehended as a common activity (energeia), and this activity is time. Time is the apprehension of the unified mode by which Being is universally actualized (energetical)—the apprehension of ek-stasis as accessibility and of accessibility as a “rising up” to phenomenicity. Existence “becomes temporal” as “thereness” by means of ek-stasis, and the “thereness” “becomes temporal” as phenomenicity by means of “rising up.” Thus the ancient problem of philosophy, the antithesis between subject and object, is transcended, in view of the essence of both (the mode by which both are), being apprehended only in the dimension of temporality. Time constitutes a fundamental ontological category—the presupposition of the apprehension of Being. And humans are the only beings that in their Being always have an apprehension of Being, that is, of time. For only humans have the possibility of standing-aside, and the ek-static possibility of human existence is the possibility of continuing in time (chronizein). Consequently, too, it is only on the study of humanity's Being that a “fundamental ontology” can be based.

I have said that the ek-static power of humans is the power of continuing in time, and time is the only “horizon” on which beings appear, on which they rise up from oblivion, or become true. Oblivion is nonmanifestation, that is, something that we can only conceive of as a negation, as an annihilation of the manifestation, as the nothingness of the manifestation. But we apprehend the manifestation too only as a negation of oblivion (lêthê), only as truth (a-lêtheia)—as the nothingness of lêthê. These statements may give the impression of a game played with concepts, but only if we take them simply as intellectual inferences from the negation to the thesis and from the thesis to the negation. For Heidegger, however, these statements represent the only possible analysis of the primary experiential process by which we apprehend the manifestation as temporality. Oblivion and truth, absence and presence, are apprehended only by reference to nothingness, and this presuppositional reference is not simply an intellectual inference but is the ek-static referentiality itself of existence that allows us the possibility of continuing in time (chronizein).

Thus nothingness no longer has the sense that an intellectualist metaphysics gave to it. It is not nonbeing, the semantic opposite to being, an abstract concept that becomes attainable only in virtue of the concept of being. The reference to nothingness con-
stutes the presupposition for the apprehension both of presence and of absence, that is, of both the "stages" by which essence— the mode of Being—becomes accessible to us. Nothingness refers to the mode of the initial existential experience of apprehending Being, to the mode of standing-aside, that is, to location in time. The possibility of being located in time presupposes the reference to nothingness—it is correlative to the possibility of experiencing nothingness. Because we have the primary experiential power of experiencing nothingness, the power of negation, we are able to achieve the ascent to truth, and apprehend manifestation as a rising up from oblivion, that is, as temporality. Nothingness consequently refers to the essence of existents (to the mode of Being), because it constitutes the presupposition of ek-stasis with regard to the initial accessibility (the presupposition of continuing in time), and also the presupposition of "rising up" to the initial accessibility (the presupposition of appearing).

If, then, within the context of "fundamental ontology," we deny the simplistic and arbitrary ontic version of Being in a consistent manner (if we distinguish to einai from to on) and seek the knowledge of Being (to einai) in the mode by which that which is becomes accessible to us, we must accept that without nothingness (to méden) nothing is, and consequently that nothingness is to be identified with Being. The mode by which beings become accessible to us as phenomena refers us both to Being and to nothingness as if to a common and unified presupposition.

The identification of Being with nothingness has its epistemic confirmation in the existential experience of anxiety. The ek-static apprehension of essence (ousia) as absence (ap-ousia) and presence (par-ousia) is realized in the anxious experience of being-in-the-world (in-der-Welt-sein). Human existence is "thrown down" in the world, where all things "sway" (schweben)—are phenomena suspended—in the ontological reality of nothingness. Ultimately, the ek-static character of the human "essence" proves to be the power of a "rising up" in the awareness of nothingness, a manifestation of the "abyssal foundation" or "groundless ground" (abgründiger Grund) of beings and of existence, an anxiety at being confronted existentially with nothingness.

Thus we also arrive at Heidegger's definition of freedom. Freedom does not refer primarily to the will; it is not a second-order (in relation to existence) property of humans (their ability to choose, once they have first come to exist). Freedom belongs to the very mode by which humans are, to the given ek-static character of human existence. Ek-stasis signifies an uninterrupted dynamic projection into the unlimited possibilities of the "there," which is apprehended as temporality. Thus freedom is identified with the initial possibility of existence to become continuous (Faktizität), to be realized as ek-stasis into the accessibility of "thereness," that is, to become temporal. That is why freedom, moreover, constitutes the ontological definition of truth: it is impossible for truth to be realized without the freedom of ek-stasis into temporality. The essence of truth is freedom (das Wesen der Wahrheit ist die Freiheit); freedom is the mode by which truth is as the activity of rising up into temporality.

The essence of truth is freedom, not in a general and abstract sense but the freedom of specific existence—the mode by which my ontic self becomes an ontological event, an encompassing of all the possibilities of Being in an ek-static being true and being temporal. Within the possibilities of the ek-static realization of being true that constitute the freedom of my existence, nothing is completed or limited; all is event. Thus even my death is not a future boundary marking an end but one of the possibilities of being temporal/being true, now as a subjective event, that is, one of the possibilities of my own ek-static being—the possibility of freedom. This is not freedom from the fear of death, an escape from the problem of mortality, but freedom as the mode by which existence comes into being at every instant, by assuming through the ek-stasis all the possibilities of Being, and therefore the ontological identification of Being with nothingness, the possibility of death. My freedom is freedom toward death (Freiheit zum Tode), because death makes entirely specific, here and now, the mode of my own existence to realize ek-stasis as an ontological identification of Being with nothingness.

With Sartre the application of the phenomenological method to the investigation of the ontological question leads to the most radical
consequences that the "monism of the subject" can have for philosophy. A telling example that perhaps emphasizes the extreme character of Sartre's achievement is the following antithesis: whereas Greek philosophy in the early and middle Christian periods succeeded in achieving a very full clarification of the communal/dynamic sense of Being (by detaching the hypostasis of Being from ontic individuality and identifying it with the person who is realized existentially only as an event of communion and relation), what Sartre does is to achieve a very full clarification of the individualist sense of Being—a sense that bases a whole culture on a position diametrically opposed to the Greek one.

Even in the case of Husserl or of Heidegger, the "monism of the subject" of the Western European philosophical (and cultural) tradition retains some last inconsistent props, because the sense of Being continues to presuppose a "movement" outside of the subject: the "referentiality" of the consciousness or the "ek-stasis" of existence into the universal mode of Being. If the subject in itself, however, defines and exhausts the possibilities of approaching the existential event, any investigation of the sense of Being beyond its individuality and given self-consciousness—which is exclusively determinative of the phenomenic of phenomena—is inevitably arbitrary. Consequently, for us to attain a coherent approach to the ontological question, we must give up any inferential theory of the existential event and rule out from the possibilities of Being any eventuality of reference or relation.

It could be said that in Husserl's case the ontological problem is still tied to the necessity for the subjective knowledge of Being to be confirmed as akin to the givens of temporal reality. And it is this kinship that is assured by referentiality to consciousness. Referentiality promotes consciousness to being a necessary and sufficient condition of the phenomenicity of phenomena, and consequently to a thesis/presupposition for endowing the existent with meaning. But Heidegger too, in his attempt to resolve the polarity between subject and object (as established by the Cartesian cogito), assumes objective reality as a coordinate of the primary existential experience of the subject—replacing intellectual inference of the universality of Being with existential ek-stasis, which constitutes the only possible knowledge of universal being-temporal/being-true.

Sartre's ambition is to advance even further, to extend his thinking to a prephenomenological analysis, that is, to push the analysis into a phase before even the unavoidable referentiality of knowledge, bracketing knowledge, or regarding the power of cognition as a given, and relying on an analysis of Being prior even to conscious relationship and prior to existential ek-stasis to being temporal/being true.

How does consciousness be before reference to some content? How does consciousness be before reference even to its own ego? It is existence in the state of nonrelation and nonreference, bare of any "interiority" and of any content "of the world"—that is, without subjectivity and without otherness with regard to the objective world. We say that in this state existence precedes essence: it has prece-
dence in itself over any inferential correlation, and consequently over any reference to the universality of an essence. It is that which is and nothing else.

In this state of kenotic emptying of any content and of any referentiality—a state that we can attain experientially only by living an experience of nausea—our consciousness reveals to us the possibility of existence without a particular mode of existence. That is, what it reveals to us is Being-in-itself (être-en-soi), Being that does not refer back to itself, as (self-)consciousness does, but simply and solely is itself. Every existent without consciousness (i.e., every other being apart from Man) is that which it is and cannot on its own not be that which it is.

This last phrase means that Being-in-itself does not include otherness; it is never posited as different from another Being. The principle of identity arises from this theory not as an antithetical reference to otherness but only as self-assertion: it marks the "dense opacity" of Being-in-itself. The principle of identity is not a synthesis of the elements of the otherness of the existent but an

32. See Sartre's La nausée, where he dramatizes this experience in a fictional account.
33. Le principe d'identité... désigne l'opacité de l'être-en-soi. ... L'en-soi n'a pas de secret: il est massif (L'Être et le Néant [Paris: Gallimard, 1943], 33).
absolutely primordial and indissoluble synthesis: of itself with itself. Every existing thing in itself is only itself and exhausts its Being in a simple and undetermined manner in being itself.

This description of a thing-in-itself (en-soi) derives not from an intellectual analysis, nor from a phenomenological version of the objects of worldly reality, but from the ability of the human consciousness to annul its referentiality and by this self-annulment to give meaning to the nonnothingness of the thing-in-itself. This ability betrays a particular mode of existence that permits human beings to be that which they are not and not to be that which they are. Sartre calls this particular mode of existence pour-soi (for-itself). Being-for-itself (être-pour-soi) signifies a Being that refers back to itself. Consequently, the pour-soi entails a Being that is different from itself, a mode of not being a convergence with itself but a relation with itself, a question about the Being of its own self.

Consciousness reveals the Being that is not itself as the nothingness of itself. Yet this nothingness constitutes the Being in the state of in-itself. That is why Sartre declares that Man is the being through which nothingness is introduced into the world. Within his Being Man contains the question about Being, but the reply to this question can only be achieved by the revelation of Being-in-itself, that is, by the nihilism of pour-soi, the nihilism of conscious referentiality. Nothingness is the only reply to the question about Being, a reply that is not thought up but manifests itself in the consciousness as the hidden essence of every existent. Nothingness is the essence of every existent, because even when Man nullifies the nothingness in his Being and in relation to his Being (annuls the en-soi, being himself pour-soi), he realizes the nothingness within Being, seeing that Being itself is nothingness with regard to Being-in-itself.

Being-for-itself, through which nothingness is ushered into the world, constitutes the definition of freedom. Freedom is not fundamentally a power of choice between different possibilities but the presupposition for the nullification of nothingness, which constitutes humanity's Being. Freedom is, to be precise, the indeterminacy of not being our Being, and consequently our power to produce Being as "facticity" (facticité),35 that is, to be ourselves that which we are not and not to be that which we are: facticity is a relationship of consciousness with itself, a relationship constitutive of temporal experience, of the succession of before and after, of antecedent and subsequent. Consciousness is experienced as a fact or event recapitulating itself in that which it is going to be, and nullifying the past that represents its Being. It distances itself from its Being by distinguishing the later from the earlier, and this distinction constitutes it as consciousness—seeing that the identification of its self with its being would have abrogated it, would have lead it to the state of en-soi. That which distinguishes consciousness from its Being is that which separates the earlier from the later, that is, the nothingness—the property of consciousness in experiencing its self continuously as a nullification of its Being, a nullification of the past. Freedom, then, is this facticity of consciousness, the "distancing" of its self from its Being, a distancing that the consciousness creates through "secretion" (en secrétant) the nothingness of its Being, projecting itself into that which it is to be as an uninterrupted and undetermined refutation of the en-soi.

Thus what we call freedom cannot be distinguished from the Being of "human reality." We cannot say of ourselves that first we are and later we are free. We can only say that there is no difference between our Being and our being-free. In other words, we are unable not to be free, seeing that freedom is the given mode of our existence, our given distinction from the en-soi. "I am free means: I am condemned to be free." Freedom is condemnation and absurdity (absurdité), seeing that we do not choose freedom but are free because we are unable not to choose, and the not-choosing is in reality the choice of not-choosing. The foundation of freedom is its self-nullification, and on this given foundation we experience our obligatory freedom as a presupposition of the ego's existence.

The only way of preserving our life and holding it in esteem is for us to affirm this unavoidable freedom of ours dynamically in historical action. Historical action, the conscious and responsible

34. "... la synthèse de soi avec soi" (ibid.).

35. From the Latin factum = the Greek gegenos, "fact" or "event."
resistance to the absurdity of existence, confirms our given human freedom as the only possible opportunity (occasion/chance) for meaning to be offered to our lives and the world that surrounds us. Thanks to the "condemnation" of freedom, existence precedes any predetermination of essence or nature, and we are nothing other than our lives, that is, our historical action. The power to act opens up before us a knowledge of ourselves without any indeterminacy, placing in our hands our very destiny. As human beings we mobilize our own selves in life, ourselves sketching our physiognomy, and beyond this physiognomy there is nothing. This means that in our ephemeral lives we are burdened with the highest responsibility: to endue the absurd with reason, meaningless with meaning, and nothingness with content; to constitute life as a facticity of freedom. We are "thrown" (jetés) into this responsibility, and assuming it constitutes our very Being, with the result that there is no pardon, consolation, or escape.36 "Man is that which he does,"37 his historical action being his manner of being that which he is, even if that which he is is confirmed at every instant as "a useless suffering." This is to live the absurd to the limit, creating (historically or artistically), filling the void that is bereft of meaning with beauty or with hopes: it is a form of "heroic despair," an absolute and tragic faith in Man and the ontological primacy of his freedom, a noble and despairing ethics.

Despite Sartre's global reputation (greater indeed than that experienced by any other philosopher in his own lifetime), I would venture to say that the most important aspect of his philosophical contribution to the investigation of the ontological question remains largely unknown. And I would summarize this contribution in the assertion that for the first time in the history of Western European philosophy the ontological problem rediscovers in Sartre the radical quality of the Greek theological debate. However paradoxical it may seem, Sartre's ontological views represent for Western philosophy its highest theological moment—Sartre is without doubt the most important theologian of the West's philosophical tradition.

36. See ibid., 642.

Why do I attribute a theological dimension to Sartre's work and indeed view it as the most important aspect of his philosophy? Because only he brings the ontological problem back to its theological starting point, that is, to the question about the given or otherwise character of existence, about the identification of the existential principle of being with either freedom or necessity. In the history of Western metaphysics, only Sartre is led to the ultimate consequences of an ontology that refuses to exhaust the problem of God in the requirements of a deterministic theory of the world, or in the presuppositions of a cognitive certainty not subject to doubt, or in the necessity of a utilitarian value theory. For Sartre the problem of God (as formerly also for Greek philosophy of the early and middle Christian periods) is judged fundamentally by the question of the given or otherwise character of existential otherness—that is, it is judged by the ontological content of freedom: either freedom constitutes Being as an event of communion and self-trascendence, and consequently as existential otherness (in which case only the triadicity of God responds to the problem of the hypostatic principle of Being), or freedom is the given and uninterpreted mode of the existential otherness of the subject, in which case its realization necessarily nullifies Being as essence or nature (and then the existence of God is absolutely contradictory).

The Greek philosophy of the early and middle Christian periods would certainly have confirmed Sartre with regard to the boundaries of the dilemma: either freedom as love or freedom as nothingness.39 Both of these constitute equally existential possibilities: either the possibility of the triadic mode of existence—the mode that hypostasizes Being not as a natural necessity but as a personal otherness through loving self-trascendence and self-offering—or the possibility of the individual mode of existence—the mode that annuls Being as existential hypostasis, with a view to the realization of individual otherness through rendering the subject autonomous with regard to his or her Being itself.

This second existential possibility responds unquestionably to the given of the experience of the biological and psychological

38. See the previous chapter, § 28.
39. See Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 46.
mechanisms that form the autonomy or ego of the human subject—
given that are analyzed by Sartre with very sensitive and exceptionally perceptive observations. And the analysis leads to the formation of a coherent ontological theory that in a most consistent manner rules out any illusory escape from the absurdity and tragicness of freedom. Existentia is autonomous, the human individual is presented in Sartre’s pages as a self-consciousness in constant confrontation with nothingness: such an individual experiences the void of the absence of God, the “original fall” of coexistence in the world—this “hell” that is “other people” as a direct play of the subjectivity of the individual, the primordial “nakedness” of the inescapable objectification of the body—such an individual experiences existence as a “useless suffering.”

The nullification of the intellectualist illusions of Western metaphysics is Sartre’s particular and therefore very important contribution in the domain of ontology. It is chiefly through Sartre that the epistemological theism of European theology has been shown to be a most consistent ontological nihilism. If the existential principle of Being is not the person as the hypostasis of Being (the “monarchy of the Father”⁴⁰) and the freedom of trinitarian “mutual perchesoris” but is the necessity of one divine nature or essence that precedes existence because it constitutes Being-in-itself; Being as its own cause (causa sui), then the very concept of the existence of God is contradictory and absurd, seeing that the facticity of existence necessarily nullifies Being-in-itself. In that event, not only is Man absolutely subject to the condemnation of a freedom that necessarily “leads to” nothingness but even God is the absolute of necessity, the absolute of the identification of his self with himself, hence the nothingness of existence—an intellectual hypothesis (suppositio) of no concern to Man.

⁴⁰. Without ignoring the contribution of others, such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, to this demonstration. See, for example, the chapter “Der europäische Nihilismus” in Heidegger’s Nietzsche.

⁴¹. See above, § 28.

§ 31. Referentiality and Ekstasis: The Dynamics of the “Mode of Existence”

With the phenomenological school and the “philosophers of existence,” the linking of the ontological question to the problem of freedom comes to be focused on the content of the terms referentiality and ekstasis. Both of these terms rely on the fundamental definition of the initial potentiality or primary nucleus of knowledge—that is, they rely on the very presupposition that gives rise to the ontological question. They identify this presupposition with the existential self-consciousness of the human subject that as a fact of experience precedes any definitive function or necessity, and consequently is confirmed as a fact of freedom even before the eventuality of any relationship or choice whatsoever. At the same time, this existential self-consciousness, as the initial experience and realization of freedom, also defines the existential difference distinguishing humans from all other sensory beings—a difference that provides the basis for the general investigation and systematic ordering of the ontological question.

We have seen that referentiality summarizes the ontological understanding of Husserl’s phenomenology: the inceptive “logos” of the manifestation of things, before any intellectual noting of it or experiential confirmation of it, must be traced back exclusively to the primordial referentiality of consciousness that makes the things evident, that gives them existence—which is why the essence of things is their pure phenomenicity.

The inference of the essence of existents from their referentiality in our consciousness does not imply that the hypostasis of existents is dependent on consciousness, that without consciousness the world is nonexistent. It only implies that even Husserl is enmeshed in the necessary priority that epistemology has in the context of the “monism of the subject” (a priority with regard to ontology and its fundamental question about the hypostatic constitution of matter, a question that by remaining unanswered judges the realm of Western metaphysics in each of its phases)—that is, it implies the entrapment of the fact of existence within the boundaries of the possibilities of the cogito. (We should not forget that Husserl's
referentiality is drawn fundamentally from the sense of the cogito as “referred experience”—a sense represented by Husserl’s teacher, Brentano—and from the inference of the Scholastic adequatio from the mind’s inceptive capacity for “orientation” toward the object or for “direct apprehension of the object.” (42) The absolute and primordial given is subjective consciousness, whereas the external objects that make up the content of consciousness have no relation to the absolute, only to the accidental. Husserl calls the accidental character of external objects (external with regard to consciousness) transcendental, giving the word a different meaning from the one in current use: “transcendental” refers to that which transcends consciousness, which lies outside of consciousness, and it is accidental because it presents itself to us in a succession of appearances from which our unified and synthetic conscious understanding is constructed.

The world consequently depends on consciousness not with regard to its real existence but with regard to its meaning. It has meaning only thanks to the referentiality of consciousness—only through the ego and the active (conscious) referentiality of the ego. Referentiality for Husserl is not a property of consciousness but the mode by which consciousness is manifested, and without this mode there is no consciousness or even any content of consciousness, that is, any presence of existing things. So we are concerned here not with the relationship between existing things and consciousness but with the fact itself of existence, which springs from the mode by which consciousness is, that is, from its referentiality. In Husserl’s philosophy, the fact of existence cannot be posited outside of the referentiality of consciousness: all we can say is that referentiality is simply referential, not ek-static. Consciousness only refers without "standing-outside." Consciousness cannot "stand-outside" of the referential meaning of the existent; it cannot as experience be prior to its referentiality.

But the referentiality of consciousness is not exhausted in endowing what exists with subjective meaning. In Husserl’s philosophy, as in every aspect of Western metaphysics, the goal is absolute objectivity through the positivism of subjective certainty. Husserl arrives at this objectivity by introducing the idea of the pure (conscious) ego and the primary form of a nonego, an alter ego, that constitutes the presupposition or guarantee of the verification of the sense that the referentiality of consciousness attributes to the world. That is to say, within the ego a relationship is formed with the ego of others, a relationship that constitutes intersubjectivity (Intersubjektivität), in virtue of which the ego forms an objective concept. Consciousness cannot see the world unless it gives it meaning. This meaning, however, which constitutes the world through the ego, becomes, thanks to the alter ego, something transcendent (something external) within the pure subjectivity itself, a transcendentality existing within the ego. Thus knowledge is neither a subjective conjecture nor an objective given but the ideal relation of subjectivity and objectivity, a relation that has its source and center in the ego. That is also why the ego is reduced by Husserl to a principle of the ideal absolute.

If in Husserl referentiality cannot be ek-static, in Heidegger ek-stasis cannot be referential. Ek-stasis nullifies referentiality because as an initiatory power of the subject it makes what is outside (the "there"—the Da—within which—"there"—the subject is) existent, and it is not the outside that defines the power of ek-stasis (as it defines the power of reference, being the content of consciousness and consequently a presupposition of its referentiality).

With Heidegger we are invited to give up even the last self-evident prop of metaphysics, which is the sense of the ego as an ideal absolute. Being is released from the conscious operation of the subject and is transposed to the fact of phenomenicity. Being is sought as truth (a-letheia), that is, as a fact or activity of appearance. This search attributes to the Being of beings a dimension other than that of self-evident onticity, the dimension of appearing, that is, of rising up from oblivion, from the nothingness of absence. And this dimension or horizon where beings appear as that which they are, the

horizon where it becomes apparent in what sense it is possible for them to be beings, is only time. Time is the horizon where the apprehension of Being becomes possible.

Why do we describe time as a horizon? It is because before time becomes an awareness of the succession of before and after, it constitutes the condition or presupposition of existential self-awareness as "Being-there" (Dasein), that is, the first and inceptive power of endowing existence with meaning, a power that also precedes and renders possible the awareness of temporal succession. In other words, even before the awareness of temporal succession, time is the capacity for temporal existence, the capacity for humans to exist as ek-stasis in the "there," to give meaning to the "there," that is, to existing things as phenomena, as risings-up from nothingness. The capacity, consequently, for temporal existence is the power itself to "stand-outside." It is the ek-static character of human existence that constitutes it as a self-awareness of existential thereness (Da-sein).

Thus ek-stasis abrogates referentiality as an ontological category, seeing that it alone establishes and constitutes the possibility of the appearance of the existent, the possibility of the "outside"—of the outside that also constitutes the presupposition of every reference. The assertion that Man is the only being that exists temporally means that Man "stands-outside" (ex-istatit) without being referred. Referentiality is the mode of consciousness, whereas ek-stasis establishes the possibility of conscious reference, the possibility of phenomenicity.

It could be argued that the compartmentalization of the ontological content of the terms referentiality and ek-stasis is not unconnected with the reliance of Western European ontological theories on the bipolarity of essence and existence, or Being and Being-there, or to exist and existent. Using the criteria of the Greek philosophical tradition, we could recognize in this compartmentalization too the age-old problem of Western European metaphysics: the inability for the bipolarity of the ontological theories to be overcome in a satisfactory way—which is reflected also in the epistemological divorcing of subjectivity from objectivity.

To be sure, in both Husserl and Heidegger this ontological polarization and epistemological disjunction are transferred, with exceptionally brilliant analyses, to the context of the inceptive possibility of any philosophical problematic, which is the existential self-awareness of the human subject. But despite the brilliant dissection of this self-awareness, their ontological theories "slide" inevitably into the determinacy of mystical absolutizations—of the ego (tranzendentales Ego) or of the nothingness that "is introduced into transcendence as its primary structure," as Sartre clearly concludes from his reading of Heidegger.43 Certainly more realistic than Heidegger and more acutely innovative, Sartre would prove with rational clarity that the ultimate ontological consequence of relying on the bipolarity of essence and existence, to exist and existent, is the essential nothingness of a being, and that what is more rationally coherent is a bipolarity between Being and nothingness—seeing that existence and the existent only represent for human knowledge and experience an ephemeral suspension between these two fundamental presuppositions of any ontological argument.

With the criteria of the Greek philosophical tradition, a nihilistic conclusion to the ontological argument becomes inescapable if we deny any ontological content to the activities or energies of the essence or nature, that is, if we reject the category of the essence's energies as a third term of the ontological argument along with essence and existence. In the great philosophical controversy between Greeks and Latins in the fourteenth century, the subject of the ontological content of the energies marks the definitive philosophical (and by extension cultural) divergence of the West from the Greek tradition.

In an earlier section of this book (§ 18) we analyzed the ontological content that Greek thought attributed to the term energies (energeias)—in the context there of the epistemological argument, the search for existential presuppositions for the reality of apophatic knowledge. Here it will be necessary for us to deal only with the role of the energies in resolving the mutual exclusivity of referentiality and ek-stasis.

43. L'Être et le Néant, 55.
We saw in § 18 that the energies are the only ontological category that presents a philosophical approach to the hypostatic constitution of matter and overcomes the polarization between the sense of beings as phenomena and the sense of beings in themselves—the energies permit the only approach to the fact of existence that does not leave matter ontologically unexplained. We also saw that the philosophical investigation of the energies has as its real starting point the study of the ek-static character of human existence: only Man has the power of standing outside of his own essence (the common mode and logos of participation in Being), not in order to be identified with the essence of other beings but in order to "participate" in the energy that is constitutive of the essence of other beings, in the dynamics of the relations that constitute the participation of beings in Being. Man exercises (energei) his participation in the dynamics of the relations that constitute Being outside of his essence—he "stands-outside" (ex-istatai) by participating (by the energy of participation and not by his essence) in the energy that is constitutive of the essence of other beings, and this "participation" is the knowledge that is exercised as reason (logos). At the same time, however, the ek-stasis (participation in the dynamics of the relations that constitute Being) also defines Man’s mode of existence: the existential otherness of every human subject with regard to the common human essence. The energies refer to the essence of Man; they are those capacities that characterize the common mode of participation of humans in Being (the capacities for cognition, desire, creation, imagination, and love), while simultaneously revealing their existential ek-stasis with regard to this common mode, that is, the existential otherness of each specific human being. Man operates (energei) outside of his essence, and this energy outside of nature is the unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable principle (logos) of the existential otherness of each human subject—an active power of participation in the existential otherness of the bearer of the energy. And the result of the energy can be for it to become an essence as the principle of the existential otherness of the one operating or acting; it can possess an essential otherness both as regards the existence and as regards the nature of the one operating or acting. We saw in § 18 how evident this essentialization (ousiōsis) of the result of the energy is, especially in the realm of artistic creation.44

So if the ek-stasis defines the energy of the subject outside of the essence, in a manner that always reveals the subject’s existential otherness, and the referentiality defines the "participable" character (the logos character) of the ek-static energy and also of the result of the ek-static energy, then the ek-stasis is certainly referential and the referentiality is potentially ek-static. The ek-stasis is certainly referential because it is exercised only as participation in the dynamics of the relations that constitute Being, or as an open possibility of participation in the otherness of the one operating, that is, as a dynamic invitation to relation. And the referentiality is potentially ek-static because it can determine both the participable character of the ek-static energy and the participable character of the nonek-static result of the energy.

Consequently, within the context of the position that arises from introducing the energies as a third factor in the ontological problem, we can speak of ek-static reference and also of referential ek-stasis, freeing these two terms from being tied to a Husserlian or Heideggerian ontology. For now referentiality is no longer confined to the given (and consequently without any real margin for a cognitive/communal dynamic) correlation of consciousness and the content of consciousness, to a correlation of phenomena and the horizon of their appearance—the referentiality is not confined to a necessary and sufficient condition of the phenomenicity of phenomena. Nor is the ek-stasis exhausted in the precognitive sense of the there of existence through the ability to subsist in time—the ek-stasis does not "return" to the ex-istamenos, the one who has "stood-outside," nullifying its epistemic result, that is, proving the appearance simply to be temporality and consequently ontologically correlative to nothingness.

But on the acceptance of the energies as a fundamental ontological category, it became evident from the above that we also accepted the concept of participation as a fundamental epistemological

44. See also the more extensive analysis in my Person and Eros, § 21, on the homogeneous and heterogeneous character of the energies with regard to nature.
category. A fuller clarification of this concept may be obtained from yet another comparison—still in the domain of phenomenological ontology. Specifically, the term participation (méthexis) seems to resemble in meaning the term immédiat (directness or immediacy), which was introduced into discussions of phenomenology by Emmanuel Lévinas for the purpose of denying the character of referentiality as relation (contact). The concept of relation in Lévinas’s view preserves the ontic difference between the referent and the horizon of its appearance, and consequently dictates the thématisation (thématisation) of the terms of the relation.

Lévinas’s aim is to transcend the inescapable thématisation that is imposed by the apprehension of the terms of any ontological problematic using objective values, and to realize Husserl’s goal, the “return to the things themselves.” How can we arrive at things before the thématisation imposed as a result their being endowed with meaning (Sinnggebung)—an endowment with meaning that objectifies the terms of the relation and consequently subjects what has been endowed with meaning to the initiative and authority of the subject that endows it with meaning? In other words, how can we avoid the inescapable “slide” of ontology into the totalitarianism of the subject (divine or human) that dominates history?

Lévinas’s reply is that we can achieve such an avoidance only through the experience of immédiacy, that is, by approaching the existing face-to-face, because the “face” does not simply recapitulate the content of the existent in its form but abrogates the distinction between form and content because it allows us to receive the “other” beyond any thematic objectification and consequently before any projection of the capacity of the ego. This idea of an existent that we receive only in its exteriority before any representational objectification is a trace of the infinite, and what is infinite is the “absolute Other”—that is, whatever as a concept transcends any representational objectification. That is also why immédiacy as access to the “absolutely Other” is the very metaphysics that can free history from any peremptory possession of truth, from any programmatic steering toward some “fulfillment.”

But it is evident that the immediacy of the face-to-face is only possible for Lévinas thanks once again to a subjective capacity before the capacity for representational objectification—that is also why the experience of the “absolute Other,” even if it only emerges from a consistent reliance on the phenomenological method, ultimately becomes a mystical one in the “ontological neutrality of the language,” abandoning reality not in its distance from objects but in its distance from the utopia.

Consciously or unconsciously faithful to the rejection or ignorance of the ontological category of the energies by the whole of the Western philosophical tradition, Lévinas is led inevitably to the polarization between the ontic existence and the mysticism of the “absolutely Other” (which is none other than the ganz Andere of the mystics of the Western Middle Ages), a polarization absolutely correlative to the adaequatio of concept with the object of thought.

By contrast, within the context of the reception of the ontological content of the energies, onticity is admitted and the thématisation/objectification of the terms of relationship is denied, because knowledge is realized as participation in the dynamics of the mode of existence—participation in the ek-static going out of the energies of the subject or in the active (rational) constitution of the matter of the objects. Participation does not limit the immediacy of knowledge simply to the reception of externality (before any representative objectification) as a trace of the “absolutely Other” but demonstrates the immediacy to be referential to the “rational” hypostasis itself of “things,” to the dynamically activated “praxis” of the world. Thus being-in-the-world does not mean: I exist among the objects of the cogito or among the results of the temporal rising up from nothingness. Being-in-the-world means: I exist as personal ek-stasis, which in turn means: I “stand-outside” (ex-istamai) of conscious referentiality (the self-evident phenomenicity of phenomena) in

the experiential immediacy of general participation in the
dynamics of the logos of cosmic becoming. And because this ek-stasis is
personal, it inevitably remains referential, without thematizing the
terms of the reference (neither the subject nor even the world), see-
ing that personal subjectivity exists only as active self-transcendence
of ontic individuality and the world only as dynamically activated
"praxis." The active self-transcendence of individuality and the ac-
tivated "praxis" of the world preserve the fact of reference and rela-
tion on the level of the difference between the energies (which are
participable as experience of the logos of existential otherness), not
on the level of the ontic difference of the thing referred to from the
horizon of its appearance.

In other words, both referentiality and ek-stasis define and in-
terpret the mode of existence of the human subject, which becomes
accessible to us only through the energies of our nature—those
capacities that characterize the common mode of participation of hu-
mans in Being, while at the same time permitting their existential
otherness with regard to this common mode and their participable/
rational sharing in this otherness, as it does knowledge/participation
in the otherness of other essences and other individuals. Refer-
entiality and ek-stasis belong equally to the dynamics of the mode
of existence, dynamics that reveal the person as the only hypostatic
realization of Being and the only active power of the hypostasization
of Being.

On the basis of this ontological understanding and the mutually
complementary content of referentiality and ek-stasis, we can ap-
proach the problem that above all judges the realism of any philo-
sophical initiative: the problem of the ontological interpretation of
the human body.

It would not be overstating the case to claim that the reality of
the human body constitutes the most realistic confirmation of the
ontological character of the energies of essence or nature, and also of
the mutual correlation of referentiality and ek-stasis. But before we
demonstrate the philosophical coherence of this assertion, we must
remind ourselves how philosophically unresolved and ontologically
uninterpreted the reality of the human body remained not only in
the ancient Greek but also in the medieval and modern ontologi-
cal approaches that ignore or reject the problematic of the energies.
As a rule, the question of the body is dealt with by the metaphysi-
cal absolutization of those elements that come to be accepted as
given starting points for the constitution of reality. These elements
are matter and spirit—each on its own (in monism) the cause of the
other and of every reality, or the two together (in dualism) equally
absolutized in their temporary or permanent unity constituting that
which can be known.

To be sure, the history of philosophy does not lack approaches
that attribute the fact of existence to some other "principle" prior
even to matter and spirit—to some factor that constitutes the ori-
gin of Being or Being-in-itself. This transposition of the ontological
principle to before the inaugural hypostasis of sensible and intel-
ligible realities attributes a character that is always relational and
sometimes dynamic (a character of dynamic becoming) both to
the spiritual and the material manifestation of what exists. But this
transposition of the ontological principle has not bequeathed us any
interpretation in the history of philosophy of the hypostasis itself of
matter, that is, of its ontological constitution or of the mutual peri-
choresis, or interpenetration, of the two in the essence of the differ-
ent realities (of body and spirit) that constitute human existence.

To support this observation about the inadequacy of the ontol-
ogical interpretations of the human body without getting bogged
down in detailed historical references, it is sufficient for us also to
focus our attention on those fundamental categories of the theory
of knowledge that at different times have summarized philosophi-
cal definitions of the fact of existence through seeking their possible
correlation with the reality of the human body. We will then ascer-
tain that even within these terms there is nobody who has dealt with
the human body hermeneutically or who has opened up approaches
for its ontological interpretation.

Fundamentally, it is not possible to identify the body with the
essence or nature of Man. By the term essence or nature, we refer
to the specific mode of participation of humans in Being, that is, we
define the real character of the common properties that characterize
Man universally and differentiate him from every other being. And
these properties are not exhausted in Man's corporeality; they are not confined to the totality of the functions that constitute it. Even if we accept (in company with the most naive of materialists) that every intellectual, psychological, or spiritual function and capacity has an exclusively biological/somatic origin, even then the concept of the Man's essence or nature cannot be identified solely with the body: for Man is differentiated from every other animal because he has the capacity to "distance himself" from his body, to reflect upon his corporeality, to distinguish himself as a subject from the needs and desires of his body, that is, to examine the very functions that constitute his biological organism. This capacity belongs indisputably to the mode by which Man is and consequently to the essence of Man. Therefore the human essence is not exhausted in corporeality and in the totality of the functions that constitute it. 47

Nor can the body be identified with the hypostasis of Man. By the term hypostasis we define the existent/real character of the particular and specific manifestations of a universal essence or nature, that bearer or principal factor to which the essence or nature owes its specific constitution and realization. If the hypostasis of Man, in accordance with the above definition, is each particular and specific subject, individual, or ego, then not even the concept of hypostasis can be identified with the body of Man alone and the totality of the functions that constitute him. For Man's biological organism does not constitute something that is existentially self-complete; his functions do not possess autonomy; they are not realized as an entity that is a goal in itself. Beyond theoretical analyses or investigations by deductive reasoning, the modern science of psychology, even in its most positivistic versions, has proved unquestionably that what we call subjectivity or the ego precedes and determines the operation of biological corporeality—which is why an anorexic infant itself causes its own death, suggesting that its "soul" is deter-

minative of its existence or hypostasis to an incomparably greater degree than the regulative mechanism of its biological functions. 48 The example is very revealing: if the biological functions that constitute and maintain Man's corporeality defined the fact of existence or the hypostasis of the human subject exhaustively on their own, then there would be no "psychogenic" factor that could limit or check the autonomy of these functions. Now, however, even pragmatic observation itself persuades us that there is no human subject or ego without detachment and distance from the body—in such a way that this detachment and distance is realized by reason, by relationship with persons and objects, by creative action, and by erotic reference. 49

It is not possible to identify the human body either with essence or nature, or with the hypostasis of human existence. In other words, what Man is, both as a species and in his subjective otherness, is not exhausted within the terms of biological corporeality and the functions that constitute it. This conclusion may also be drawn from the analysis of any other epistemological term whatsoever that has been used for interpreting the reality of human subjectivity or of the ego. 50


49. "L'homme ne devient homme qu'en renaissant. À la séparation matérielle de la naissance succède la séparation par la parole qui lui donne sens. En accédant au sens des mots, l'enfant découvre qu'il n'est plus le nécessaire prolongement du corps de l'autre. . . . Le corps dit la parole et fait l'oeuvre, mais la parole dit le corps et l'oeuvre lui donne corps. Dans ce rapport incessant, l'homme se comprend comme une parole devenant chair" (Denis Vasse, Le temps du désir [Paris: Seuil, 1969], 95 and 150).


47. On this Heidegger writes, "Daß die Physiologie und die physiologische Chemie den Menschen als Organismus naturwissenschaftlich untersuchen kann, ist kein Beweis dafür, dass in diesem Organismus dass heist in dem wissenschaftlich erklärten Leib, das Wesen des Menschen beruht. . . . Der Leib des Menschen ist etwas wesentlich anderes als ein tierischer Organismus" (Über den Humanismus, 14).
Yet the body is the most real presupposition for the existential appearance both of the common mode by which Man as a universal is, that is, of the common essence or nature of Man, and also of the otherness of every human subject, that is, of the hypostasis of the specific human being. We accept, of course, the universally acknowledged inability of the body to exhaust the existential fact of human subjectivity or the ego, but we cannot deny that it is the body that constitutes the initial hypothesis for the existential appearance of the subject or ego. Therefore if we are to attempt an ontological interpretation of the human body, we must analyze this presuppositional relation of body and subject or ego in a more systematic fashion.

The existential realization of any nature is the hypostasis and that alone. It is only by means of the hypostases that we infer the nature, the common mode and logos of existential homogeneity. Beyond the specific hypostases, the nature has no existence—there is no humanity beyond or apart from the human subjects. This does not mean, however, that the essence or nature is simply a "bare concept," an abstract mental conception of the common mode or logos of the existential homogeneity of human beings, of the properties that differentiate them from every other animal. Within the context of the existential experience of the subject, we live the reality of the nature as a fact that "is preceded" (not temporally but ontologically) by the hypostatic otherness.

More specifically, if essence or nature is the common mode by which Man as a universal is, then each human hypostasis is realized only as an ek-stasis from this common mode (only as a fact that presupposes and simultaneously transcends the common mode or logos of the nature), that is, only as existential otherness with regard to the nature. For example, all human beings (Man as a universal) possess speech, intellect, will, desire, imagination, and so forth. Each specific human being, however, speaks, thinks, wills, desires, imagines, and so forth with absolute otherness, that is, in a manner that is unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable. The distinction between the common and undifferentiated character of the given powers or potentialities of the nature and the otherness of their existential expression can only be accessible fundamentally and empirically in terms of our bodily organism. Certain biological functions of our bodily organism manifest a tendency to be independent of the hypostatic otherness of the subject or ego, that is, they appear as needs in themselves (needs for nourishment and sustenance, for pleasure and perpetuation, etc.) that certainly put a restraint on hypostatic otherness—and then we are speaking of accidents of nature (imper- somal natural urges or instincts) that are passive experiences or sufferings (pathé) of the subject (because on their account the subject suffers the inhibition of its existential otherness).

The tendency of bodily needs to be existentially independent of the hypostatic otherness of the subject or ego is inevitably inhibitory of hypostatic otherness, without ever being definitively differentiated from the hypostatic otherness—which is why we also speak of a tendency to independence rather than a definite distinction. Nevertheless, through the experience of this tendency we live the reality of our nature as a fact that is "preceded" by our hypostatic otherness. This does not imply that in addition we lack experiences of "psychological" urges, instincts, or sufferings that also manifest the tendency to become existentially independent, as "natural needs," of the hypostatic otherness of the subject or ego—and consequently have a character that is inhibitory of hypostatic otherness. Certainly, the ontological reality of our nature includes both the human body and the human "soul." But what concerns us here is that we should emphasize the admittedly relative and dynamic but nevertheless existent and clearly evident appearance and realization of this nature within the boundaries of the human body.

We can ascertain the same relative and dynamic character in the existential manifestation and realization not only of our nature but also of our hypostasis within the context of its corporeality and the functions that constitute it. Every human body has an absolute biological otherness that is expressed fundamentally in its form (from its physiognomy to its fingerprints), in its functions (which is why the body only tolerates a grafted piece of tissue or organ from a foreign body, if it does not actively reject it, without ever fully assimilating it),51 and also genetically (in the unique and

uneatable character that the DNA has which constitutes the subject's corporeality). 52

Nevertheless, however relative and paradigmatic the assertion might be of the existential manifestation and realization of both the nature and the hypostasis of humanity within the boundaries of the body, it does not nullify the fundamental event of this realization. I call this an event (gegonos) in recognition precisely of the relative and dynamic character of the realization—which is never definitive, fully formed, or complete. The body realizes and manifests, without ever completing and exhausting, the existential reality of humanity's nature and hypostasis. We could repeat the same assertion with regard to the human "soul" or "spirit." Ultimately in both cases, in the case of the body as well as the soul, we are referring to tendencies, functions, or showings-forth that realize and manifest both the nature and the hypostasis of the human subject in a manner that is always relative and dynamic (never definitive and final)—we are referring to a dynamic how, not to an objectified what, to a dynamically activated event, that is, to a totality of energies through which both the nature and the hypostasis are realized and disclosed.

The evidence of experience and also the findings of science (biology and psychology) preclude us from isolating and fixing or objectifying the truth of the human subject in some specific "moment" or at the "midpoint" of the temporal evolution of some stable factors constituting biological and psychological individuality. 53 We cannot say that biological, along with psychological, individuality just is; we can only say that it is accomplished dynamically by a progressive evolution accompanied by decline and enfeeblement until its final "extinction" upon death. In other words, with regard both to the body and to the soul or spirit, the event of human existence is brought about (energeitai) dynamically, without our being able to identify the totality of the energies that constitute the soul and the body with that which our subjectivity or ego ultimately is, that is, with the hypostatic identity itself of each human being.

Moreover, from clinical observation, specifically in cases of brain damage caused by injury or disease, we can often note changes in the most "subjective" properties of an individual—in the memory, judgment, speech, and movement—and we then speak of the blocking or inhibiting of the function of the corresponding cerebral "centers" defined by neurological science. Physical or pathological injuries suffered by the brain can, moreover, provoke the appearance of uncontrollable biological or psychological urges, as they can more general changes in the subject's personality or "character." Today we can also provoke the same change or "reordering" of the personality or character by the use of certain drugs (which we usually call "psychotropic").

In all these cases, in the absence of philosophical vigilance, an easy interpretation could be accepted that attributes all the biological and psychological elements of the subject's existential otherness to the functioning of specific bodily organs or organic "centers" inflexibly determined by their biochemical constitution. Such an interpretation would be easy but philosophically problematical because even in its most specific analytical conclusions, biochemistry does not cease to be a science that is purely phenomenological: beyond noting and describing primary organic unions of chemical elements or even much more complex functions, it is unable to go on and interpret the mode of existential otherness, as this is actively brought about (energeitai) and manifested through the specific biochemical constitution and function of the particular organs or organic "centers." It is only if we accept the energies (biochemical as


53. The very recent science of chronobiology attempts to determine the biological clock-timed rhythm of the body's biological functions, which is unique in each individual (each individual's biological functions follow a different "clock"). But even if we infer a chronological "constant" of the subject's biological alterity from this from the periodicity peculiar to it, this "constant" will represent not an objectified what of hypostatic identity but yet another indication of the alterity of the dynamic periodical becoming of biological function. See, for example, E. Bünning, The Physiological Clock (Berlin: Springer, 1967); G. Luce, Biological Rhythms in Psychiatry and Medicine (Washington, DC: Pub-
well as psychological) as an ontological reality revelatory of, but not also constitutive of, the hypostatic otherness of the human subject that we can have a philosophically adequate interpretation of the human makeup. \footnote{For a fuller analysis, see my Propositions for a Critical Ontology [in Greek] (Athens: Domos, 1985), §§ 3.12, 3.2, 3.21, 3.22, 3.23, 3.231. See also John C. Eccles, Facing Reality, Heidelberg Science Library (Berlin: Springer, 1970); idem, The Understanding of the Brain (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973); Karl Popper and John Eccles, The Self and its Brain (Berlin: Springer, 1977).}

If the energies constitute an ontological reality (if they are a fundamental and initial given of the existential event), and yet are a reality definitely different from the subject’s hypostasis (as also from its nature), then the mode of existential otherness is realized and revealed through the energies without being identified with the subject’s hypostasis—and consequently any damage, change, or inhibition of the mode of existential otherness (of the psychosomatic functions of human beings) does not affect the subject’s hypostatic identity (i.e., that which human beings are, beyond or before even their psychosomatic functions).

The next step in this line of reasoning would be to say that even the definitive inhibition of the sensory mode of the human subject’s existential otherness (the suspension of the psychosomatic functions and consequently biological death) does not affect and does not nullify the existence and hypostatic identity of the subject. But how is it possible for Man to be as a hypostatic identity without his existence constituting an event—a dynamic realization of otherness without which the notion of identity is nothing more than an abstract concept? This question can only be answered if we accept that the mode by which the existential otherness of the subject’s hypostasis is actively brought about is not bound to be exhausted in the totality of psychosomatic functions, but that the “constitution” itself, or hypostatic core, of human existence is ek-static and referential: Man is, exists, only as an event of ekstatic self-transcendence and dynamic reference, and consequently exists only as toward an absolute hypostatic identity opposite which he constitutes an otherness, that is, from which he draws his identity and his hypostasis. That is also why only the category of the person can render that which Man is in the hypostatic core of his existence before and beyond any psychosomatic manifestation or activity, and only the theology of a personal God can respond to the question of humanity’s ontological truth.
Chapter 3.3

The Cosmic Dimension of the Existent

§ 32. Space and Movement

We have seen above that when ontological investigations rely on the bipolarity of essence and existence, existing and the existent, they leave fundamental gaps in ontology as such: they lead inevitably to the necessity of intellectual/inferential and mystical absolutizations, or else they have to attribute ontological content to the category of nothingness, thus undermining the hypostatic character of the existent.

By contrast, when the energies are accepted as a fundamental ontological category (an initial and real given, constitutive of the existential event), we have seen that they lead to ontological theories that are fully adequate philosophically and possess a coherent realism.

We have reviewed (in §§ 18 and 31) the ontological interpretation of the world's matter and the human body as the problems that most of all judge the realism of any philosophical initiative. And we have ascertained that these realities are most fully clarified philosophically when the ontological character of the energies is accepted.

Parallel to the problem of matter and the body, however, the philosophical adequacy of the ontological investigations that up to now have been conducted in the history of philosophy has always been judged within the terms of two further challenges or aspects
of the ontological debate: the question of space and the question of time.

In the Greek language today, space (choros) seems to have the same meaning as place (topos), or an even broader one, thus reversing the ancient usage. Nevertheless, the way the philosophical question is framed remains close to the Ancient Greek, and we owe it to Aristotle: whether space exists or does not exist, how it exists, and what it is.

Aristotle begins his discussion of the problem by saying how difficult the questions are ("The question, what is place? presents many difficulties"): space is something, but this something cannot be assigned to one of the four elements that constitute sensible existence: space is not matter, even though it is three-dimensional (with length, breadth, and depth, like all bodies), because if it were matter, two bodies would coincide within the same boundaries. Nor is space a form, because the form remains inseparable from the thing, whereas space can retain its form even when it contains different things (e.g., like a vessel that can contain different liquids). Nor is space the end (the goal and purpose) of things, or even the cause of motion.

Then what is space? It is limit, says Aristotle, that is, a defining boundary, the presupposition and potentiality of the definition of sensible things: "The limit is in the limited," in which the magnitude or the matter of the magnitude is defined. Sensible objects are limited, which means: they have boundaries, that is, dimensions and magnitude. Magnitude is defined by space; it is measured as the distance between limits; it extends between the "dimensions" of from here to there, from there to here. And by giving them space, it gives them boundaries; it defines them. The onticity of sensible objects ultimately signifies their definition by their three dimensions: "Now it has three dimensions, length, breadth, depth, the dimensions by which all body is bounded." Thus space, as a measure of dimensional magnitude, is shown to be the boundary of beings, the manifestation of their definitive, and therefore motionless and immovable dimensions: "A motionless boundary...neither moves nor is in motion." Space is a motionless boundary that "contains" the object, or that objectifies the phenomenon in a motionless magnitude. With this as a hermeneutic key, we come to Aristotle's famous definition: "Space is the innermost motionless boundary of what contains it, like a non-portable vessel."

As with many other of Aristotle's definitions, there are two ways of reading this. On the basis of the Aristotelian definition of space, it is fundamentally possible for us to arrive at an absolutely objectified understanding of physical reality as a whole, in which even motion is the "place of a place"—"as a boat on a river"—and void is "place bereft of body." The whole of the world's space consists of successive interpenetrations of the special dimensions of beings until the outer limit of the universe ("There is nothing outside the universe"). "and for this reason the earth is in water, and this is in the air, and the air in the aether, and the aether in the world, but we cannot go on and say that the world is in anything else." These statements gave rise to the formation of a view of the world that held human thinking in thrall for many centuries. The world's sphere was regarded as divided into five concentric regions that were the natural "places" of the five elements constituting reality: earth, water, air, fire, and the aether.

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1. In the classical language (in contrast to Modern Greek), topos is the broader concept, whereas choros signifies a "distinct place," a specifically demarcated space.
2. "The physicist must have a knowledge of place [topos], too, as well as the infinite—namely, whether there is such a thing or not, and the manner of its existence and what it is" (Physics 4.1.208a27–28, trans. Barnes).
8. Ibid., 4.4.212a15–16 and 20–21 (trans. Barnes), cf. 4.2.209b1–2; On the Heavens 4.3.310b7–8.
10. Ibid., 4.2.212a17, trans. Barnes.
These same Aristotelian statements, however, also offer us a second line of approach and understanding: we can rely not on the static function of space that defines dimensions and magnitudes but on its relational character as a "motionless" system of coordinates that allow us to define and measure movement. As contemporary scholars have observed, this second line of approach to Aristotle's theory of space corresponds reasonably well to the demands of modern physics.\textsuperscript{15} It is a fact that a reliance on the correlation of time and space (which is the basic presupposition of the theoretical work of contemporary physics) follows every aspect of Aristotle's discussion of the problem. No question could be posed about time if there were no motion with respect to space.\textsuperscript{16} Consequently, space and time (therefore "number of motion in respect of 'before' and 'after'")\textsuperscript{17} constitute an undivided unity of coordinates defining physical reality.

Aristotle asserts that space "contains" bodies, but he maintains very clearly that, as the "container," space presupposes the "movable body," that which moves or has the power of movement—because as the limit of an immovable body, space would have to be identified with the form of the body. Space, then, is indissolubly correlated with movement, in view of the fact that the contained body is only "what can be moved by way of locomotion"\textsuperscript{18}—"for not everything that is is in place, but only movable body."\textsuperscript{19} That is also why space in itself cannot be fixed immovably in a given "somewhere," for space does not exist "in the sense of being in a place, but as the limit is in the limited."\textsuperscript{20} Space becomes motionless (presents itself to the understanding as motionless limit) because only thus can movement be manifested/measured—"because the displacement of the body that is moved takes place in a stationary container."\textsuperscript{21} The limit of the body in motion is always in relation to the movement, and consequently the immovable limit of a sensible phenomenon is also a phenomenal interval ("for it seems possible that there should be an interval which is other than the bodies which are moved"),\textsuperscript{22} a correlation of stationariness (stasis) and change of place (metastasis).

The notion of a geocentric universe, finite and divided into distinct spheres, dominated Western European thinking throughout the Middle Ages. The confinement of the Western European mind for many centuries within this overschematic worldview seems to have served above all a specific historical expediency: the attempt of the principal channel and regulator of every ideological development in the West—the Roman Catholic Church—to furnish a direct and clear response using Christian imagery to the empirical data of physical reality. In the spirit of the same youthful quest for objective certainties by which the Westerners replaced the personal God of Christian revelation with the Aristotelian first mover, they went to give a literal interpretation of the dynamic/apophatic imagery of the Bible: the existential recapitulation of the whole of creation in the human person was translated into the obligatory reception of an anthropocentric (and consequently geocentric) worldview in sensory and spatial terms, and the different modes of the possibilities of existence were identified with sensory modes (celestial, earthly, and infernal), that is, with indissoluble facts of physical reality.\textsuperscript{23}

The medieval version of Aristotle's understanding of space was only finally abandoned toward the end of the seventeenth century with the appearance of Newton's theory (Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica, London, 1687). Newton had been preceded by

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 4.4.21a9–10, trans. Barnes.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 4.4.21a10–12, trans. Barnes.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 4.4.21b28–29, trans. Barnes.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 4.4.21b27–28, trans. Barnes.

\textsuperscript{16} Physics, 4.4.21b12.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 4.1.21b1, trans. Barnes.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 4.4.21a7, trans. Barnes.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 4.4.21b28–29, trans. Barnes.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 4.4.21b27–28, trans. Barnes.

Copernicus (De revolutionibus orbium coelestium libri 6, Nuremberg, 1543), who had rejected the geocentric medieval model and had accepted the sun as the center of a spherical universe with the planets orbiting it. Copernicus, however, had proposed his theory only as a simple hypothesis based on mathematical calculations. Its confirmation by direct observation was only realized later by Galileo (Dialogo sopra i due Massimi Sistemi del Mondo, 1632). But neither of them denied the real onicity of space in the universe and its finite dimensions. It was only Giordano Bruno (Dell’infinito universo e mondi, 1584) who dared to put forward the view (for which he paid the penalty of being burned alive by the Inquisition) that space in the universe is infinite, without a specific center or axis, homogeneous and without different regions. The earth orbits the sun, and the fixed stars are distant suns with their own planets. Nature’s unity in space also implies the unity of matter—and consequently any realistic interpretation of the distinction between earthly and celestial is thoroughly refuted.

If Giordano Bruno’s understanding of the universe was ultimately incorporated within the framework of Newtonian physics, this was not only because Newton was able to support his physics with the strongest mathematical and experimental proof but also because he offered an approach that was substantially compatible with Bruno on the metaphysical level: if the universe is not geocentric/anthropocentric, it is nevertheless theocentric. Infinite space does not constitute an entity in itself; it is a property of an Absolute Subject—the infinity of the Euclidean void is for Newton a sensarium Dei, a concrete expression of the universal presence of God (Optics, or a Treatise of the Reflections . . . of Light, London, 1704). In contrast to the ontological definition of space as an essence in itself, as Descartes held (Principia philosophiae 2.3, 1644), and the understanding of space as constituted by the relations of material things between themselves, as British empiricism held (Hobbes24 and later Hume25), Newton maintained that space was a property of the Absolute Subject, who is God in his infinity and omnipresence.

Despite its metaphysical buttressing, however, Newton’s understanding of space does not cease to be an “inference of its absolute nature” from the three dimensions of earthly sensory experience. The infinite space of the universe is the same space of earthly sensory experience infinitely countable and infinitely divisible. Homogeneous and uniform, Newtonian space exists in itself, independently of the material bodies that it contains.

Some believe that the initial stimulus for this approach should be sought in the ancient Greek atomist philosophers Leucippus and Democritus. It is an understanding of space, however, that differs markedly from the Aristotelian and medieval models both in the precision of its observations and in its mathematical confirmation. It does, however, presuppose the same reliance on the fundamental ontological self-sufficiency of sensible data (of reality’s expanse) and also on the conceptual adequacy of their definition.

The Newtonian model of physics is also the one on which Kant relies, even though he proposes a different ontological interpretation of space. In Kant’s philosophy space is neither an essence in itself, nor a product of relations, nor a real property of an Absolute Subject. Kant’s intention is even in the case of space to transcend the polarity of subject and object, by applying the epistemological principle that he himself established: the a priori absolutization of the subjective for the determination of the objective.

More specifically, Kant’s space is not an objective given, a reality that we confirm and apprehend through sensory experience—it does not emerge “by abstraction” from the experience of the external world. But neither is space a simple subjective sensation that differs from one person to another, as impressions of taste, sound, and color differ. Space exists within the “construction” itself of our subjective spirit as a necessary and a priori (preempirical) representation or general perception that guarantees the general validity of sensory experience. It is a necessary term for every sensory experience, and its objective “externality” and sensory obviousness are drawn precisely from its character as an unavoidable term for forming our general perception of sensible things. Thus space for Kant is equally preempirically subjective and empirically objective.

25. Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, 1748.
Although it is a necessary subjective presupposition for the construction of sensory experience, at the same time it possesses reality (i.e., objective validity) as a necessary term of all relations through which we perceive all the objects external to us. 26

Despite its phenomenological character, Kantian space has all the characteristics of Newtonian space and vouches for the general validity of the hypotheses of Euclidean geometry. The philosophical interpretation of space (always within the context of Western European thought) only began to change with the non-Euclidean geometries of Lobachevsky and Riemann in the nineteenth century. The starting point for both of these was the observation that Euclidean geometry is only true on the assumption that space is a flat plane. Lobachevsky noted that if space is not a flat plane, that is, if we reject Euclid’s axiom that from any point not falling on a straight line only one parallel can be drawn that does not intersect the first, we can arrive at a series of geometrical propositions entirely different from Euclid’s theorems but with an absolutely consistent geometrical logic. We can establish, for example, that in a curved space more than one parallel can lead from a point to a given straight line or that the sum total of the interior angles of a triangle can be less than that of two right angles. Riemann went beyond the simple theoretical hypothesis of the denial of a flat plane and confirmed that space as a whole is curved, our perception of a flat plane only coming from the fact that the curvature on the small scale of our own planet is negligible. But if space is curved, it follows that it can be unending without at the same time being infinite. The unending and the infinite are two different logically distinct concepts. Unending but not infinite space changed our cosmological perceptions in a radical way. Euclidean geometry was proved to be certainly relative, useful for our limited sensory perception but entirely arbitrary when, treated as an absolute, it tries to interpret the universe as a whole. 27

The geometries of Lobachevsky and Riemann proved to be forerunners of a new model of the universe, although they were quite conservative concepts compared to the revolutionary cosmological theories that were developed in the twentieth century on the basis of the new physics. Albert Einstein’s two theories of relativity (special and general), Max Planck’s analysis of the phenomena of thermic radiation, Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, and Niels Bohr’s quantum theory are the best known and most important but not the only scientific theories whose implications for how we approach the problem of space remain crucial. We must also note here that the amount of material accumulated by scientific observations and propositions in the last few decades is so vast and the speed at which it is being accumulated so rapid (thanks to the headlong development of the capabilities that modern technology offers to scientific research) that the evaluation of this material by philosophical thought or even its simple transcription (from the code of mathematical notation to the language of philosophical discourse) is necessarily still at its very early stages.

Nevertheless, we may safely infer that the propositions and theories of modern physics point toward the fundamental demand that we should abandon the image of the world (and consequently of space) that arises from the intellectual schematization and absolutization of the givens of sensory experience—without this implying that the theories that this abandonment gives rise to are not empirically verifiable. If the meaning of reality in Newtonian physics was fundamentally geometrical, within the context of modern physics reality acquires an experiential significance. The event of observation—the relationship between observer and observed—is the empirical given that replaces the rationalized certainty of schematic objectifications.

In place of the straight line, which is the only means of measuring Newtonian space, the speed of light has come to be accepted,

26. See *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* 1, pt. 1, “1. Abschnitt.” Kant’s definitions include the following: “Der Raum ist eine notwendige Vorstellung, a priori, die allen äusseren Anschauungen zum Grunde liegt. . . . Der Raum ist nicht anders als . . . die subjective Bedingung der Sinnlichkeit, unter der allein uns äussere Anschauung möglich ist.”

confirm that such a quantum is a particle and the latter that it is a wave. Position and velocity merge in the unified event of the actual transmission of light. Yet this merging can be expressed as a reality only in mathematical terms.

So if a ray of light can serve as a measure of length, this is because it contains both position and velocity, always, however, within the context of the event of observation. Position and velocity are not the a priori intellectual perceptions by which we apprehend reality but are the actual event of the encounter between observer and observed. With the transmission of light and mathematical proof alone (the only proof possible) as his starting point, Einstein demonstrated the identity of space, time, velocity, and energy, the identity of a "four-dimensional continuum" that differentiates itself according to the mode of observation.\(^{28}\) The image of the universe as a four-dimensional continuum precludes any schematic objectification and shows space to be energy manifest in the event of the encounter between observer and observed.\(^{29}\)

A study of the "nature" of light summarizes the findings that illuminate the investigation of the space of infinite as well as subatomic dimensions. Quantum theory has demonstrated the identity both of the behavior of light and of the structure of the atom: light is ideal matter and matter contains the properties of light. An atom of matter appears to scientific observation either as a particle or as a field, without in itself being either one or the other but something presupposing both: a closed unity of relations of the smallest quantities of energy that constitute the modes of their appearance and alternate between them in relation always to the intervention of scientific observation. The hypostasis of matter is energy, which is manifested only in the event of the encounter between observer and observed.

The point I wish to make with these very brief and elementary remarks, which I offer merely as a tentative introduction to the

\(^{28}\) See Albert Einstein, Über die spezielle und die allgemeine Relativitätstheorie gemeinverständlich, 10th ed. (Brunswick, Germany: Vieweg, Täpfersfragen, 1920).

\(^{29}\) On the rejection of the requirements of objectivity on the basis of the findings of modern physics, see J.-P. Sartre, L'Être et le NÉant, 369–70.
philosophical problem of space, is simply that the approach to the problem that is philosophically closest to the language of contemporary physics seems to be that which is evident in the formulations and theories of the Greek philosophy of the early and middle Christian periods.

As we saw in an earlier section, this philosophy spoke of the identification of matter and energy fifteen centuries before Einstein showed, in the language of mathematical proof, that energy equals mass multiplied by the speed of light squared. The constitution of matter, in the language of the Greek philosophers of the Christian era, is rational—it is the energy of the conjunction of rational qualities that constitutes materiality.

Moreover, this proposal for interpreting the existential hypostasis of matter does not represent a specialized study of matter in itself, detached from the rest of reality. It does not isolate matter from the remaining natural presuppositions of the constitution of existents. It is of course a particular hermeneutic proposition, but it fits neatly into a more general ontological theory that accepts the energies as the third fundamental category of the ontological debate.

When we attribute the hypostasis of matter to the energies, we are not simply replying to the question about the cause or existential principle of sensible objects—we are not confining ourselves to the interpretation of the origin of sensible objects, inferring that they are the products of the energy of a personal Creator. We are replying simultaneously to the question about the mode by which the energies are “hypostasized” in an existential event, and this mode in the case of sensible objects is motion.

The attribution of motion to the ontological hypostasis of sensible objects is found in Greek philosophical debate even in the Presocratic era. The thinking of the great Greek philosophers of the Christian Church draws on two of the most important figures in the history of the debate, Aristotle and Origen.

For Aristotle motion is not simply the phenomenologically confirmed transposition of objects in space, their going from one position to another. Motion is an event that is attributed to the very constitution of the existent; it is the entelechy of potential being. Potential being is matter, the fundamental stuff that has the power/potentiality to assume a form and consequently to be something. That is also why there are as many kinds of motion as there are forms of being, that is, as there are events of transition/movement from potential (dynamai) being to actual (energetai) being.

We saw above (§ 29) that Aristotle’s form (eidos) is to be identified with the entelechy of being in actuality (energetai on): thanks to its form every existent arrives at the perfect possession of existence, at the full and perfect reality of being, at the reality that contains its cause simultaneously with its purpose. But the form on its own does not constitute essence (an event of participation in Being) if there is no subject of the form, that is, a bearer of the beginning/cause and end/purpose of the existential event. The subject of the form is matter—Aristotle sees matter precisely as the bearer of the potentiality for the eidetic realization of Being, a passive bearer (because it is the recipient of the form), but one whose entelechy (full and perfect reality) is motion, the kinetic potentiality of endowment with form.

Without arriving at what would later be called the hypostatic identification of matter with energy, Aristotle nevertheless opens up the way toward this identification by attributing the perfect possession of matter to motion: motion defines matter as the subject of the form; thanks to motion matter contains (enechei) the beginning/cause and the end/purpose of its eidetic realization, that is, of its existence itself.

With regard to motion we find that once again Aristotle’s discussion is taken up by Maximus the Confessor, who in the seventh

century summarizes and completes the great synthases of Greek philosophy that were undertaken in the early and middle Christian periods. (In view of the introductory nature of these pages, I am omitting Origen’s account of the problem of motion—an account full of brilliant insights aimed at harmonizing Platonic ontology with biblical revelation—given that Origen’s contribution to the problem is important chiefly for the stimulus it gave to the construction of later synthases.)

If, then, for Aristotle motion is the entelechy of matter, and thanks to motion, matter contains the beginning/cause and end/purpose of its eidetic realization, for Maximus the Confessor this eidetic realization cannot exhaust the beginning/cause and end/purpose of movement, because in that event endowment with form would have to be identified with lack of movement, that is, with an existential fullness that is not subject to any influence, attraction, or propulsion toward its realization.

Certainly matter is subject to (paschei) movement, is the passive bearer of the potentiality for the eidetic realization of the sensible object, and this means that the logos of matter (its beginning/cause and end/purpose) lies outside of itself, whereas matter itself is actualized as movement for the realization of this logos. The fundamental realization of the logos of matter is eidetic, but the eidetic realization of the sensible object does not also exhaust the end/purpose of movement. The movement is attributed to the nature itself of the sensible object—not only to the endowment of matter with form but also to the presupposition of the universal/cosmic existential event that is also actualized as a movement of complementary succession and mutual dynamic correlations.

For Maximus the Confessor movement refers to the nature of the sensible object, because this nature is not its own end; its hypostatic realization is energy, a dynamically actualized event, a movement/impulsion toward completion of an end that at the existential limits of the sensible object always remains incomplete. And the existential end (telos) of the sensible object always remains incomplete (ateleston) because its cause or principle of fulfillment always lies outside of itself.

Adopting Aristotle’s sense of the unmoved mover, Maximus identifies this absence of motion with the fullness of the existential event, which is self-existence, the existence that neither exercises nor suffers any influence, attraction, or impulsion toward realization because its self is its own cause and purpose—its self alone constitutes absolute and unlimited Being. Thus, instead of the distinction between sensible and intelligible natures (which, despite being the starting point of almost every ontological theory, is nevertheless still a phenomenological distinction), Maximus introduces the teleological distinction between created and uncreated nature: created nature has its cause and purpose outside of itself, whereas for uncre-
ated nature its own self is its existential *beginning* and existential *end*—it is itself the fullness of Being.

Both natures are "energetic" (they become known and participable as actualized existential event). But in the case of created nature, the energy is a *momentum (phora)* toward the realization of its existential *end* and a fulfillment of its existential *beginning*—a momentum that is manifested as motion—whereas in the case of uncreated nature, the energy is the very self-realization of existence, an event of self-existence and existential fullness that we can only express as absence of motion (*akinēsia*). It would be more consistent, however, to say that uncreated nature is beyond even motion and the absence of motion (at least in the way that we understand these concepts within the limits of our sensory experience), which is why Maximus expresses this transcendence by the paradoxical images of "ever-moving rest" (*aikinētē stasis*) and "stationary motion" (*stasimē tautokinēsia*).\(^{39}\)

Motion, then, belongs to the nature of sensible objects, precisely because sensible objects are created beings: the cause of their existence lies outside of themselves, as does their existential *end* or purpose. Motion realizes sensible objects, and this realization is a dynamically actualized rational principle (*logos*) that has as its inuperable limit its created realization: it tends toward the uncreated *logos* of its existential cause and *end*, without being identified with it.

We must nevertheless hasten to add that this ontological theory as a whole remains an abstract idealistic fabrication—and the concept of *nature* as well as the concept of the *energies* are no more than intellectual concoctions—if we fail to take account of the hypostatic *principle* both of nature and of the energies that is the immediate experiential reality of the *person*. It is only because God is "truly person" that he constitutes uncreated nature—the uncreatedness of God is not a "property" of his nature, a principle that is preceded by his existential hypostasis and naturally and necessarily predetermines it, but is the *personal* otherness and freedom from any cause and natural predetermination or limitation that "hypostasizes" the *Being* of God as uncreated existential event. And the *energies* of God,

which constitute the uncreated *logoi* of created beings, are personal creative realizations, "acts of will," "manifestations," "processions," "bringings into being," "endowings with life," "bestowals of wisdom" of God's freedom and love that are actualized *hypostatically*—"in order to give creation hypostasis and form"\(^{40}\)—seeing that in the case of God's creative will "the actual existence of the act of will is essence."\(^{41}\)

The realism of this ontological theory (the possibility that human beings can have direct experiential access to, and knowledge of, its fundamental givens) has as its starting point the equally personal hypostasis of Man within the limits, however, of created nature. Although a created being, Man (and only Man within the limits of created nature) has the power of realizing the mode of existence of uncreated nature, that is, of constituting a *personal* hypostasis. In the case of Man, it is not personal existence that *hypostasizes* his nature, for his nature is given and created. Nevertheless, the *mode of existence* of this created nature is *ekstatic*, which means: human beings have the existential possibility of *standing-outside* of the createdness of their nature, of *standing-outside* of the limitations of their nature, of *hypostasizing* their existential identity as otherness and as freedom from any natural predetermination.

Thus the approach to the ontological problem, and consequently to the interpretation of the sensory model of the world, acquires the realism of direct experiential access because it is positioned within the epistemic dynamics of the relations between two *personal* hypostases—those of God and of Man—and because only a *personal* hypostasis can have a "distance" of freedom both from nature and from energies, and therefore also an epistemic "proximity" to the existential event of the nature and the energies.

From this perspective the material reality of the world has an *energetic* hypostasis, as the product of the dynamic will of a personal

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\(^{39}\) See *Ambigua* (PG 90:760A).

\(^{40}\) Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius* (PG 29:736C).

\(^{41}\) Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46:124B); see also § 18 above and *Person and Eros*, §§ 20 and 21, where there is a fuller discussion of the *energies*, using as an example of the *substantiation* (*ouisioûsia*) and hypostatic expression of the *energies* the human actuality (*energeia*) of artistic creation.
God that constitutes an actualized event, a created work of a loving invitation to an interpersonal relationship. The energetic hypostasis of matter is manifested by motion, which in the context of this ontological perspective is an erotic movement of the return of creatures to the existential fullness of their energetic cause.  

But this erotic movement is an energy made manifest only in Man’s engagement with God’s call, actualized within creation, to personal communion and relation. And the same engagement also has the dynamic character of a desired goal: humanity’s relationship with sensible beings is a dynamic movement that realizes the fullness of a personal engagement with God’s logos/energy, which is substantiated in the energetic nature of beings. Thus (precisely as dynamic movement) the relationship of humanity with the world constitutes both a given immediacy of experience and a desired goal. That is why the relationship with beings is felt both as the proximity of rational obviousness and as the experience of sensory distance—from (apo-stasis). And it is sensory distance—from that is measured as space.

These ontological soundings seem to lead the philosophical question concerning space to two fundamentally satisfactory responses.

On the level of sensory experience, there is no doubt that space is experienced and measured as the distance-from (apo-stasis) of reference, as a presupposition of the referential manifestation of beings opposite humanity’s subjective self-awareness, or even as a dimensional magnitude between beings (a magnitude that is measured as movement from one position to another), always opposite or as-toward the human subject. This opposite or as-toward that constitutes the sensory and measurable experience of space has as its real starting point the dimensional and finite character of both the human body and every material body. The dimensional and finite character of sensible bodies is experienced as magnitude, distance-from (apo-stasis), distance-between (dia-stasis), transition-to (meta-basis) (or any other category of the coordinates of space),

that is, as relation, which is not, however, completed as an event of existential unity but is polarized in hypostatical autonomous and therefore dimensional individual entities. Thus the relation is actualized only as a movement of realization—a movement from something to something. The “from something” suggests a hypostatic starting point that although tending to realize existence as relation, simultaneously insists on realizing itself as an autonomous existential event, as the “Being-in-itself” of an individual entity. The very corporeality of human beings, the material manifestation of their createdness, seems fundamentally to nullify the possibility of experiencing a relation that would not be polarized by this encapsulation of the sensible object in the existential self-sufficiency of individuality—consequently, it is corporeality itself that imposes the experience of space as dimensional magnitude. Only in the context of the dynamics of falling in love or of participating in the otherness of a real work of art do we find that our experiences of relation are not bound by their encapsulation in the existential self-sufficiency of individuality and consequently nullify the dimensional character of space.

Turning now to the level of a rational approach, that is, to our encounter with the logos of beings, space manifests itself as the mode or the how of the response of the existent to humanity’s rational capacity. Beings appear only on the “horizon” of human reason and only in accordance with reason, that is, only as an energy made manifest in the event of a rational relation. In the same degree in which the event of the relation of humans to beings constitutes a manifestation of reason, it also constitutes an uninterrupted “opposite” of referential immediacy. The “opposite” of the rational manifestation of beings is not measured as a conventional distance (apo-stasis) from humans but “measures” the dynamic ek-static character of the rational reference of humans to beings, and the manifest character of the correspondence of beings to human reason. Thus in this case place (topos) is “recognized” not as experience of the distance between two relatively motionless or relatively moving terms but as an uninterrupted referentiality with a twofold movement that nullifies distance and is experienced as direct rational manifestation. Within this perspective, matter may be the convergence of rational
qualities—an expression of the “behavior” of the *logoi* of an actualized event—and light the material realization of an ideal showing, and the space of the universe as a whole an unending (but not infinite) unity of relations of quanta of energy that constitute the modes of their manifestation and alternate between them, always in relation to the intervention or approach of human reason.

We can consequently attribute the character of *place* to energy itself, or rather to the encounter between the energy of human reason and the actualized event of the rational manifestation of beings. This encounter “fits into”—gives space, the sensory manifestation of rational relation, to—humanity’s ek-static reference to beings and the correspondence of beings to human reason. And if the reason of humans is the ek-static energy of their created nature, and the reason of beings is a result of the ekstatic energy of the uncreated God, then the rational manifestations of space is the event itself of a reciprocal personal relationship that in a strictly “rational” language (like that of mathematics or theology) can be expressed as the experiential reality of an actualized “uninterrupted continuum.” According to John Damascene, “we call the place of God where the energy of God becomes manifest.” 43 This “where” seems to indicate precisely the event of the uninterrupted immediacy of every relationship/ascent of humans to the initial *logoi* of the constitution of existents. When humans achieve the ek-static self-transcendence of individuality that makes experiential access to the personal existence of God possible, the world is revealed “opposite” humans as the uninterrupted *place* of divine personal energy. The world is not the sensible or intelligible boundary that “contains” the personal energy of God, but it is the divine energy that “contains” (*choroi*) or “gives space (*choros*) to” the world, a space “outside” of God that is simultaneously the *place* (*topos*) of God, a manifestation of the uninterrupted immediacy of his personal energy. Just as the personal creative energy of humans (a practical, rational, or loving energy) preserves the immediacy of the personal otherness of their existence (with a universality independent of the sensory presence of the limited corporeality of the creator), so too the distinction between the *essence* and the *energies* of God, without abrogating the natural distance of God from the world, preserves the world as a space of immediate personal proximity to God, manifesting God as the *place* (*topos*) of all things: “God . . . is not contained, but he himself is the place of all things.” 44

§ 33. Time and “Predestination”

In our human experience the consciousness of time is inseparably linked to the awareness of change. Nevertheless, the distinguishing of the reality of time from the occurrence of change seems to go back to the depths of prehistory: in the language of myth, the god Kronos gives birth to children only to devour them. Mythical imagery represents temporal succession in sensory fashion, personifying it as a reality in itself that ceaselessly changes the present into the past, *Being* into non-*Being*.

Upon the first attempts to discuss the problem in philosophical terms, a broad variety of senses of time begins to appear. For the Presocratic philosophers time is identified with the motion of the universe as a whole or with the heavenly sphere itself in its motion. 45 Correlated unquestioningly with motion and consequently with matter (which is the given and beginningless subject of kinetic change), time is also *unoriginated* 46 and *infinite*, 47 an inseparable element of the wholeness of cosmic space, a given *becoming* that is constitutive of everything. 48

In this same space belonging to Presocratic thought, we find an even clearer sense of the relativity of time, a perception of time


44. Theophilus of Antioch, To Autolycus 2.3 (PG 6:1049D).

45. “Some say [time] is the motion of the universe, others that it is the sphere itself. Pythagoras says that time is the sphere of what encompasses us” (Diels and Kranz, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, 1:460, lines 27–29).

46. “Democritus proves that it is impossible for everything to have a beginning; for time is unoriginated” (ibid., 2:102, lines 1–3).

47. “For time itself (according to Zeno) is not thus infinite” (ibid., 1:253, line 27).

48. “Time is the last and the first of all things”; “Time is unceasing and runs wholly in an unending stream, itself begetting itself” (ibid., 1:190, lines 1–2, and 2:384, lines 14–16).
as the definition and order of cosmic becoming,\textsuperscript{49} the perception or measure of physical change.\textsuperscript{50} And in Heraclitus we encounter a radical view concerning the qualitative character of temporal change that makes the very realization of the existent a dynamic becoming of uninterrupted flow,\textsuperscript{51} a synthesis of Being and non-Being—and we can apprehend this synthesis only as an experience of ceaselessly new realizations of the existent event. "Into the same rivers we step and we do not step, we go and we do not go.\textsuperscript{52} "You cannot step twice into the same river."\textsuperscript{53} To be sure, these fragments of Heraclitus do not allow us to take the character of the unexpected manifestations of freedom from every predetermination of the event of existence and attribute it to the temporal flow of an existent's qualitative change, but neither is it easy to dismiss the idea that the fragments sketch out such a theory in the form of a series of images. The cyclical perception of time, which also appears in Heraclitus's thought, seems to refer not to a fixed cycle with the periodical appearance of all events in the same order but to the unification of every manifestation of the existent event by a ceaseless movement of return—a cyclical unification of assembling and scattering, constituting and annihilating, being present and being absent.\textsuperscript{54} In this uniform sense of the existent that combines life with death, waking with sleeping, the young with the old,\textsuperscript{55} one

49. "Anaximander ... said that the infinite was the causal principle of beings ... hence the genesis of beings and their necessary decay; for these grant each other justice and injustice according to the order of time" (ibid., 1:89, 11–15). "Hippasus of Metapontus, who was himself also a Pythagorean, said that there was a fixed time for the change of the cosmos and that the universe was finite and always in motion" (ibid., 1:107, 18–20).

50. "Antiphon and Kritolaos said that time was a concept or a measure, not a hypostasis" (ibid., 2:339, lines 26–27).


54. "It throws apart and then brings together again . . . it advances and retires" (Frm. 91, in Diels and Kranz, Fragmenta der Vorsokratiker, 1:171, lines 13–15; trans. Wheelwright).

55. "It is one and the same thing to be living or dead, awake or asleep, should see not the annihilation of time but its transformation into the immediacy of existential experience, revealing the unitary hypostatic identity of the subject.

With Plato the problem of time is set more clearly within the perspective of the ontological question, that is, the perspective of the interpretation of what really exists. What really exists is the noetic essences/ideas, which are free from a beginning and an end, that is, are unoriginated and immortal, and therefore timeless. For the timeless existence of what really exists, Plato uses the expression aeon ("eternity")—giving the word the sense of life-in-itself and of a timeless duration that knows no limit, or succession of phases or parts, not even mathematical progression.\textsuperscript{56}

In contrast to the eternal nature of the ideas/essences, the nature of sensible objects is temporal; consequently, the apprehension of the nature of time must emerge from the apprehension of the antithetical coordination of sensible objects and ideas—time can only be defined with regard to its relation to the aeon, just as sensible objects are defined only with regard to their relation to the ideas. This relation is ana-logical, a relation of image to prototype. Time constitutes a transient manifestation or a dim copy of the eternity of young or old. The former aspect in each case becomes the latter, and the latter again the former, by sudden unexpected reversal" (Frm. 88, in Diels and Kranz, Fragmenta der Vorsokratiker, 1:170–71, trans. Wheelwright).

56. For the first sense of the word aeon, see Chantraine, Dictionnaire étymologique, 42: "Le sens premier est celui de 'force vitale'. . . Du sens de 'vie', aión est passé au sens de 'durée d'une vie', génération, durée et finalement chez les philosophes 'éternité', (opposé à chronos), considérée comme une vie durable et éternelle." Aristotle attempts to determine the origin of the philosophical meaning of the term: "For the fulfilment which includes the period of life of any creature, outside of which no natural development can fall, has been called its duration [aìon]. On the same principle the fulfilment of the whole heaven, the fulfilment that includes all time and infinity, is duration [aíon]—a name based upon the fact that it is always [aiei einaí]—being immortal and divine" (On the Heavens 1.9.279a23–28, trans. Barnes). But the etymology proposed by Aristotle has been judged to be false: "Diese Etymologie ist natürlich falsch. Aión und aiei gehen auf denselben Stamm aivo, aju (vgl. lat. aevum, sanskr. ayu) zurück, der 'Leben', 'Lebenskraft', 'Lebenszeit' bedeutet" (Conrad Lackeit, Aión, Zeit und Ewigkeit in Sprache und Religion der Griechen, pt. 1, Sprache [PhD diss., University of Königsberg, 1916], 7ff).
the really existent. The concept of the recurrent cycle exists here too, but precisely as a dynamic/kinetic representation of the fullness of eternity or the aeon. The cycle is an image of the plenitude in its wholeness, and time is an image of the aeon that "revolves according to the law of number," a moving image of eternity. And the measurement "according to the law of number" of the moving aeon, that is, of time, becomes possible thanks to the periodical nature of the movement of the heavenly bodies, which Plato sees as "instruments of time."

Aristotle begins his investigation of the problem by posing the question of whether time belongs to the class of things that exist or the class of things that do not exist. He establishes right away that time has two parts or phases that constitute it: the past, which no longer exists; and the future, which does not yet exist. We cannot therefore attribute any substance to time; we cannot regard it as an existent, because the givens that constitute it lack existence.

Our experiential perception, however, accepts time as a succession or flow of instants, that is, of units of time, each of which, in order to be a unit, is indivisible. This unit we call "now": we accept it as the unquantifiable time of now. And if the investigation of the concept of now leads Aristotle to make statements that are exceptionally fruitful in what they entail philosophically, his fundamental reply with regard to the nature of now is confined simply to a division delimiting boundaries: now cannot be a part, measure, or unit constitutive of time as a whole because the units that constitute a unified whole may be multiplied quantitatively without being differentiated qualitatively, whereas it is impossible for the nows to be multiplied without their being changed into the nonexistent past or the nonexistent future. Consequently, now is only a mental boundary, a line dividing the past from the future.

But then what precisely is time? Fundamentally, Aristotle recognizes the correlation between time and motion that Plato made. In our experience there is no doubt that time is linked to motion: "Now we perceive movement and time together." Even if the movement is only a perception of the soul and not a visible change, it is still the case that the consciousness of time is generated. This does not mean, however, that we can identify time with motion. Motion always has a circumstantial character; it is linked only to each being that moves, whereas time is always the same, everywhere and in relation to all things. Moreover, movement can be faster or slower within the same temporal limits, whereas time neither speeds up nor slows down.

Seeing, then, that without movement and change we do not have time, and also that we cannot identify movement with time, we must conclude that time is only a correlative of movement, that is, a movement with presuppositions. Aristotle affirms that a presupposition for movement to constitute time is the presence of a mind that measures the movement as awareness of the succession of before and after. When the soul "perceives the now" as the midpoint (boundary) in the kinetic succession of before and after, then we have time. But when the soul experiences the "now" as "one," without awareness of a "definite" transition from one thing to another thing, then "no time is thought to have elapsed, because there has been no motion either." Consequently, movement must be "numbered" by the soul as a succession of before and after for us to have

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57. "Wherefore [the father and creator] resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity, and this image we call time" (Timaeus 37d5-7, trans. Hamilton and Cairns).
58. "For we say that it 'was,' or 'is,' or 'will be,' . . . These are the forms of time, which imitates eternity and revolves according to the law of number" (ibid., 37e5-6, 38a7-8, trans. Hamilton and Cairns).
59. Ibid., 42d5, 41e5; see also 38c2f. "Such was the mind and thought of God in the creation of time. The sun and moon and five other stars, which are called the planets, were created by him in order to distinguish and preserve the numbers of time" (trans. Hamilton and Cairns).
60. "One would naturally suppose that what is made up of things which do not exist could have no share in reality [ousia]" (Physics 4.10.218a2-3, trans. Barnes).
61. Ibid., 4.11.219a3-4, trans. Barnes.
62. "Now the change or movement of each thing is only in the thing which changes or where the thing itself which moves or changes may chance to be" (ibid., 4.10.218b10-12, trans. Barnes).
63. "But time is present equally everywhere and with all things" (ibid., 4.10.218b13, trans. Barnes).
64. Ibid., 4.11.219a32-33, trans. Barnes.
time. In this way Aristotle arrives at his famous definition: "For time is just this—number of motion in respect of 'before' and 'after'.”

It becomes evident from this definition that Aristotle attributes a relative character to time. He does not regard it as a given ontological reality in itself, a fact constitutive of that which exists. He accepts it only as number, that is, as a measure of motion and of being moved. Yet he is also quick to observe that what we call number always has two senses: it is both what is counted (the arithmetical number) and what we use to count with. With regard to these two meanings of number, Aristotle attributes time to the first: "Time, then, is what is counted, not that with which we count."

Time is what is counted, not as an objective magnitude that is subject to counting but as a number ceaselessly constituted by the progressive succession of before and after. The succession of before and after, which constitutes time as numbered motion, is apprehended as the momentum (the transposition or translocation) of a unit, the passage/transition of which from before to after allows us to apprehend temporal succession (that time “passes”). This mental unit is the now. Time consequently is numbered momentum, thanks to the now that corresponds to the unit being borne along or to the unit of the progression of number. It is precisely as a unit being borne along that constitutes the succession of before and after (and consequently time as the counted motion of an unending unity) that the now is always one and the same. When defined in itself, however, the now is always a different before and a different after. And it is obvious that the first version of the now defines time as a number of momentum, whereas the second defines it as a number of motion. Motion presupposes the otherness of before and after, that is, the event of change that is measured as time—it is motion itself that is measured by time. But time itself is also measured by motion, because the momentum of now presupposes the motion/progression of the number of the succession of before and after: "The time marks the movement, since it is its number, and the movement the time. We describe the time as much or little, measuring it by the movement, just as we know the number by what is numbered."

When we say that time measures motion, we mean that time measures not only kinetic change but also the Being of motion, the Being that is realized as motion. Thus we attribute a temporal nature to every existent whose Being is measured as a succession of before and after. The Being of existents “in time” is contained in time, just as the unit of arithmetical progression that is borne along is contained in number. The Being of existents is borne along by time, and this momentum (transposition/translocation) is realized as the ekstasis of existence, as an ekstatic change, a transition from one existential state or phase to another. So if time itself is a measure of motion, the Being of existents, which are susceptible to measurement by time, is contained in motion (as number is contained in what is numbered) and is realized as an ekstatic momentum, and consequently their Being is numbered—"Things are in time as they are in number."

The measurement of the Being of existents by time, that is, the realization of existence as ekstastic momentum, is verified in a practical way in every sector of actual experience as an event of progressive decay. The ekstatic change that is counted as time is empirically tied


66. "Time then is a kind of number... Time is a measure of motion and of being moved, and it measures the motion by determining a motion which will measure the whole motion" (ibid., 4.11.219b5, 4.12.220b32-221a2, trans. Barnes).

67. Ibid., 4.11.219b7-8, trans. Barnes.

68. "For the number of the locomotion [phora] is time, while the 'now' corresponds to the moving body, and is like the unit of number" (ibid., 4.11.220a3-4, trans. Barnes).


70. "For simultaneously it measures both the movement [kinēsis] and its essence [to eina tēs kinēseōs], and this is what being in time means for it, that its essence [to eina] should be measured" (ibid., 4.12.221a5-7, trans. Barnes).

71. "Clearly, then, to be in time has the same meaning for other things also, namely, that their being should be measured by time" (ibid., 4.12.221a8-9, trans. Barnes).

72. "Every change [metabolē] is from something to something" (ibid., 6.4.234b11); "It is the nature of all change to alter things from the former condition [metabolē pasa physei ekstatikon]" (ibid., 4.13.22b16, trans. Barnes); "Change, in itself, makes things depart from their former condition [ekstatikon hē metabolē]" (ibid., 4.16.222b21, trans. Barnes).

to establishing the fact of decay. "Motion removes [existēsin] what is," says Aristotle—motion transposes existence to an after that is always less uncorrupted than the before. "In time all things come into being and pass away." Birth and decay in living organisms, or increase and diminution in inorganic matter (where increase must be understood as "change in respect of quantity" or magnitude), are the immediate experiential givens that form the awareness of time as "motion with respect to place," that is, the awareness of temporal change within the boundaries of individual existence.

But of "motion with respect to place" there is "on the one hand momentum and on the other increase and diminution"—where momentum, as the obligatory succession of before and after, is the cause of generation and decay, and the cause of their successiveness, the cause, that is, of the continuity of time. Thus the momentum of time "persists" as decay, and the ekstasis of existence "persists" as change that "becomes temporal" in the succession of before and after, being also confirmed as decay. This is a very pragmatic, empirical notion and apprehension of time that can serve as a starting point for also referring the objective cause of physical decay to time: "A thing, then, will be affected by time," says Aristotle, "just as we are accustomed to say that time wastes things away, and that all things grow old through time, and that people forget owing to the lapse of time, but we do not say the same of getting to know or of becoming young or fair. For time is by its nature the cause rather of decay, since it is the number of motion, and motion removes what is."
multiple: it contains each individual soul without nullifying its own self-completion.

It is through the action of Soul on matter that the eternal ideas of Intellect are endued with sensible form and the cosmos comes into being. But the activity of enduing with form obliges Soul to distance itself (or to "fall") from its eternal motionlessness and generate time together with space. Soul itself became time ("brought itself into time") and also space, in which the sensible universe exists and moves. By containing the universe, Soul endues it with time, because the universe lives the life of Soul that is able to move from one phase of life to another. Thus the cosmos "moves in it (in Soul) and moreover moves in its time."—Soul's time (its dynamics of locomotion) becomes the cosmos's time.

And because the universal Soul of the cosmos also contains each individual soul, we find that time is in each soul "seen along with it and existing in it and being with it." Time is not a psychological perception of the objectively realized movement in space of sensible objects but it is the movement of Soul itself that constitutes time, just as the immobility and existential fullness of the first principles constitutes eternity—only Soul has the property of existing in time.

Someone who was directly influenced by Plotinus in his consideration of the problem of time was Augustine—who was also inspired by Plato's contradistinction between the eternal and the temporal. The historical stimulus for Augustine's occupation with time was the challenge presented by Gnosticism, specifically the gnosticism of the Manichees: taking as their starting point the biblical "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...", the Manichees had posed the question whether this "in the beginning" did not necessarily presuppose something prior to the beginning and consequently a precosmic temporality that must be attributed to the divine Being. But if we accept a precosmic temporality, we are presented with the dilemma of either subjecting God's Being to the conditions of a mutable becoming or attributing eternity to God's temporal creative activity and consequently accepting the eternity of the cosmos.

Augustine deals with the dilemma by adopting the Platonic distinction between the eternal and the temporal as an ontological one, that is, as a radical differentiation of two modes of existence, each of which presupposes a different epistemic approach. It is a logical error to attribute the categories of the mutable becoming of created beings to the immutable Being of God, to refer the temporal beginning of the cosmos as a point of change or movement to the unity of life and fullness of immobility of God. The beginning of time, as also its duration and future end, is for God only an immediacy of the present, an immediacy of activity that does not affect the unitary, unquantifiable, and infinite character of God's eternity.

Consequently, the biblical "in the beginning" must be interpreted not as a temporal context within which the world was created but as something entailed by the creation of the world: God created time together with the world; time exists only in connection with the world, not as something that precedes it.

What does it mean, however, that time exists? Augustine observes that time is only measured—the sole way in which we can affirm time is by measurement. And we measure as chronological...
duration a past that no longer exists, a momentary (fleeting) present, and a future that does not yet exist. Aristotle's understanding that by time we measure movement, and by movement, time, does not satisfy Augustine (or else he is unaware of it). The measurable affirmation of what is objectively nonexistent cannot possibly be identified with the measurement of movement or change in sensible objects, for the very simple reason that time measures both motion and motionlessness. It follows that the measurement of time (and consequently the source of its existence) lies elsewhere and not in the movement/transposition of sensible objects in space.

For Augustine time and the measurement of time are before anything else an experience of the soul. The soul has a capacity for "spreading out" (distentio animi); the term spreading out (in Greek, diastasis) comes from Plotinus and conveys successive states (stasesis) or transposed experiences: 87 that which no longer exists as a present event exists in the soul as a memory, and the memory's comparative reference to the future allows the soul to experience the future as foresight. Thus, by memory and comparative correlation, the soul transposes the past and the future into an overview of the present, which means that the soul grasps the reality of duration and succeeds in measuring it. 88

In this psychological interpretation of time, Augustine attributes an ontological content to it by combining (according to the Plotinian model) the experience of time with the mode of existence of the created, in contrast to the experience of eternity that is the mode of existence of the uncreated. What exists as a chronological succession is what cannot exist as an uninterrupted present—succession (sucedere) is the inability to remain the same (simul esse). 89 Thus, whereas for humans time exists because their Being is marked by intervals ("is successive") and is finite, for God there is no past and future because his very Being is only present and without intervals. That is also why the knowledge of beings and of events that God possesses constitutes, together with the accomplishment of their creation, a unitary identity and an uninterrupted present of omniscience and omnipotence. 90

Naturally, within the boundaries of this plenary omniscience, which becomes an essential property of God, there is no room for the unforeseen and the free—what is to happen is already present to God and consequently predetermined by his omniscience. 91 Thus Augustine was the first to introduce the idea of absolute predestination, which was to prove a tragic impasse for European man. The effort of the Scholastics in the Western Middle Ages to reconcile divine omniscience with human freedom by ingenious rational arguments was eventually to clash with the intransigent logical consistency of the Protestant Reformers (Luther and especially Zwingli and Calvin) who openly rejected freedom in the name of divine omniscience.

It could be maintained that in both medieval and modern Western philosophy, debates concerning time have been kept within the same framework of a polarized distinction between temporal and timeless, mutable and immutable, ephemeral and eternal—irrespective of whether their hermeneutical perspective was theistic or atheistic.

Scholasticism's contribution to the investigation of the problem is confined to a systematic refinement of Aristotle’s analysis of time, with special emphasis on the character of eternity as a measure of immutability and on the character of time as a measure of motion.

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87. See Enneads 3.7.11: "So the spreading out (diastasis) of life involves time; life's continual progress involves continuity of time, and life which is past involves past time" (trans. Armstrong).


89. "Time depends on this motion and change, and is measured by the longer or shorter intervals by which things that cannot happen simultaneously succeed one another" (De civitate Dei 11.6 [PL 41:321], trans. Bettenson).


91. 'This omniscient' God (in the sense of a scientific knowledge extended to infinity) in some fashion transforms time into space. He poses questions but already knows the answers. He seems to engage in dialogue with humanity but in the end only speaks with himself... He already knows the future with a necessary knowledge. In this petrified understanding of eternity and divine omnipotence... God looks like a heavenly Policeman, whose glance turns us to stone to the depths of our being and our future... His omnipotence and omniscience turn history into a puppet theater. Thus humanity is nothing, and God becomes responsible for every evil in the world... If he exists, he stands accused' (Olivier Clément, Theology after "The Death of God" [in Greek] (Athens: Domos, 1973), 42–43.
In the synthetic "summas" of the Scholastics, and especially in the *Summa Theologicae* of Thomas Aquinas, the chapters on the eternity and omniscience of God and the predestination of Man perfect the dialectical weaving together of the antithesis of eternity and freedom, time and necessity, laying the foundations for the later deterministic theories of physical becoming that would open the way to the rapid development of the applied sciences.

The passage from the fixed now of the eternity of God to the fixed now of a harmony and order that exists as a given in nature and assures the deterministic character of the changing now was realized almost imperceptibly in the centuries of rationalism that followed Scholasticism. The following syllogism of Spinoza is usually regarded as marking an important stage in this passage: "Since there is no ‘when’ or ‘before’ or ‘after’ in eternity, it follows from the perfection of God alone that he can neither decide, nor could he have decided, anything other than what he has decided." In other words, the restriction of temporal succession to the level of a given perfection renders that very perfection definitive and obligatory, even for its bearer himself, who is God. But if God is himself subject to the perfection of his eternity, there is nothing to prevent this perfection from becoming independent even of God: from its being considered an eternal order of nature that is strictly deterministic, or from natural determinism being identified with God so as to end up in pantheism. In that event the uninterrupted present of eternity is the timeless axiomatic principles and presuppositions of natural becoming, or, in Spinoza’s language, eternity is the emanation of beings from God in the same necessary way that the sum of the angles of a triangle being equal to two right angles flows from the nature of a triangle.

It was from within the same perspective that Leibniz defined the character of the hypostatic *monad*—the initial power (force primitive) that hypostasizes Being—as an essence that contains all its future states. Faithful to the deterministic idea of predetermined eternal harmony, Leibniz maintained that intuition was sufficient for one to see the future in the present as if in a mirror. The most notable exponent of the full implications of this perspective is undoubtedly Fichte, who deduces eternity from the ever-present immediacy of the immutable definitions of correct reasoning, from the timeless "absolute ego"—describing time simply as "the colored glass" through which we apprehend actual things. Returning to the Augustinian roots of the problem, Fichte, in The Vocation of Man (*Über die Bestimmung des Menschen*), presented the uninterrupted present of eternity as that intersubjectivity that conjoints all the finite wills in one primary source: the infinite will of God.

Without any doubt, the polarization of temporal and eternal was transcended most fully on the intellectual level within the context of the dynamic universality of the Hegelian system. For Hegel every antithesis is a relation that presupposes some unity of opposites. This dialectical principle is not very far from the ontological absolutization of motion, which as a momentum that is both correlative and antithetical constitutes the dynamic becoming of what exists. It is precisely by removing the antithesis between motion and motionlessness that the transcendence of the polarization between the temporal and the eternal becomes possible: the notion of existential plenitude is detached from the motionlessness of definite identity and is transferred to the dynamic wholeness of dialectical becoming.

More specifically, time is apprehended by our intellect and our experience fundamentally as a perception of the now. But this now comes from a nonexistent future and it moves into a similarly nonexistent past. Consequently, for time to be constituted, the now, which is fundamentally motionless in our thinking and experience, must be nullified by an opposite movement or dialectical antithesis. Only if we purge time of these empty abstractions of past and future can the now be true as an uninterrupted event, that is, as eternity.

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96. See above, § 24.
In consequence, eternity can be defined only by dialectical reference to time: it is time purged of every empty abstraction—of every past (which no longer exists) and future (which does not yet exist). But time too can only be defined by dialectical reference to eternity, only as "abstract" eternity (abstrakte Ewigkeit): time emerges from eternity as a product of abstraction; it is an eternity nullified by abstraction, an eternity "riddled" with nothingness.

However, eternity defined by dialectical reference to time—as time purged of every nullifying abstraction—is not necessarily to be identified with a static now that has been rendered motionless. We cannot make this identification because the concept of eternity (our intellectual and experiential approach to eternity) is dialectical; it contains the nullifying abstractions as real projections of the past and the future—we conceive of eternity intellectually as a fundamentally motionless now, which is nevertheless in reality projected infinitely into the past and the future. Consequently, the only way in which eternity can be true is for it to contain the becoming of time's dynamic, without this becoming being nullified as past and future—eternity is the simple identity of a nonnullified becoming.97

This nonnullified becoming becomes empirically accessible to us as history. History is the relationship between the eternal and the temporal, between Absolute Spirit and physical reality, between infinite and finite, between subjective and objective—a relationship that is realized as a becoming or progression of the Spirit raised up in self-consciousness with the aim of attaining the idea of freedom. And the idea of freedom as an absolute ultimate goal remains abstract: it is constituted by the mode of human self-consciousness within the boundaries of the moral whole that is the state (im sittlichen Ganzen: dem Staat). The state is the divine idea realized upon earth, because it is there that the destiny of the individual and of humanity is actualized as the rational final end of the historical self-consciousness of the Spirit.98

98. Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Einleitung B.c, "Die Gestalt dieser Realisierung."

It would not be unreasonable to maintain that the Hegelian version of the state brings the Augustinian perception of the predestination of human beings to an actual realization within this world. It is no longer God's omniscience that makes time motionless by predetermining the exercise of human freedom. On the contrary, it is the moral absolute of the ideal state that embodies the dialectical realization of the historical self-consciousness of the Spirit by subjecting the exercise of individual freedom to this dialectic. The way different interpretations (heretical or orthodox) of this Hegelian doctrine have been applied in the twentieth century in the context of both Nazi and Marxist practice (the predetermination of the historical margins of the freedom of the individual by the ideal goals of the totalitarian state) is a subject that has now been studied on the theoretical level,99 and also lived as a tragic historical experience. There is no doubt that behind the horror of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century there looms not only the need for the reductive fulfillment of an ideal "system" but also, more remotely, the inhumanity of Augustinian theology.100

The problem of time in the ontological debates of the twentieth century—and particularly in Heidegger—has been touched upon earlier in this book and need not be repeated here.101 One aspect, however, that should not be omitted even in a rapid review such as ours, because it is essentially different from both the ancient Greek

101. See above, §§ 27 and 30.
and the Western European philosophical traditions, is the treatment of the problem of time within the context of the Greek philosophy of the early and middle Christian periods.

In the preceding section we examined the problem of motion in relation to the ideas current in this period, and from the treatment of motion by the thinkers of this period we can infer how they regarded time. We saw that motion is interpreted as an active moment constituting the hypostasis of existents, a momentum that tends toward the realization of the perfecting end of existence as an event of "logical" or personal relation. Thus in this perspective the event of relation acquires an ontological content and refers to the mode of the hypostatic realization of the existent—the mode of the existence of the person—which realizes and confirms the person's hypostatic identity as otherness and freedom from any natural pre-determination, that is, as an event of dia-logical or inter-personal communion and relation. It also refers to the mode by which the hypostasis of sensible objects is actualized—the mode by which their hypostatic identity is realized and manifested as a convergence of logoi of a cohesive yet dynamic relation traceable to the existential fullness of their operative cause.

So if relation constitutes the mode of existence, then the temporal or eternal realization of this mode is determined by the relation—then time and eternity simply "measure" the event of the relation, even though they come into being as experiences of it.102

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102. "For what time is to those things subject to time, that is what eternity is for those things subject to eternity" (John Damascene, On the Orthodox Faith 2.1, in Kotter, ed., Die Schriften, 2:43); "What time is among sensible objects, that is what the nature of eternity is among supramundane objects" (Basil of Caesarea, Against Eunomius 2.13 [PG 29:596B]); "In the category of as-toward are aeons and times and spaces; without these nothing exists that is conceived of with them" (Maximus the Confessor, Theological Chapters 1 [PG 90:1180C]); "Eternity is, as it were, a measure and boundary of the movement and activity of human thoughts and what they contain, whereas what transcends these remains beyond their grasp and inaccessible to them" (Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius 1.368, ed. W. Jaeger [Leiden: Brill, 1960], 1:135); "For the motion of dividing into segments and hours and days does not constitute time—this is just another word for time. For just as we are accustomed to using the same name for what measures and what is measured, so it is in this case. In a similar way, what we measure by a cubit, whether a floor, a wall, or some other thing, we call a cubit" (Maximus the Confessor, Scholia on the Divine Names).

Eternity can then be interpreted as the unquantifiable now of the totality or plenitude of the relation103—where what we should regard as the plenitude or fulfillment (pléromá) of relation is the identity of existential beginning and existential end or purpose, a self-realization of Being that can only be expressed as absence of motion, even though it does not cease to constitute the referentiality of the life of different hypostases, that is, to constitute love as an ontological category.104 Accordingly, time may then be interpreted as the moved now, that is, as an event of relation that advances continuously toward its plenitudinous realization and therefore uninterruptedly nullifies the unquantifiable character of the plenitudinous present.105

Within this perspective, the fact that we accept the world's temporal beginning does not mean that we attribute a before preceding the beginning of time to the creative cause of created beings, in such a way as to subordinate the creative cause to the necessity of the ensuing effect and to render a deterministic sequence, and consequently time, ontologically autonomous. The before of the beginning is not a before of obligatory sequence but a before of free creative will.106 The creative will of God is the foundation of the hypostasis of sensible ob-
jects, but it is a personal will and consequently free from any necessity of action, that is, the sequence of cause and effect. On the contrary, the hypostasis of sensible objects (the effect of creative action) has an obligatory relation to its active cause, and this relation is measured as time because it has a deterministic beginning. 107 Consequently, the beginning of the world is the start of a relation between the world and its cause, a relation that is measured as time, although the cause of the relation (the free creative will) preexists and follows the relation as unmeasurable, unquantifiable, and immovable eternity. 108

Accordingly, it is not time that has precedence and constitutes an ontologically objective magnitude, an unlimited duration of the necessity of deterministic correlations. It is the event of the relation that has precedence as an ontological given (as the mode of existence of created beings, the movement of the referentiality of existents) and is measured as time. As a measure of relation, time certainly has some character of “objectivity,” in the sense that it cannot be taken simply as a subjective function of the human soul that allows beings to be manifested on the “horizon” of anyone who becomes conscious of them. Manifestation is possible only because their hypostasis is rational and because the hypostasis of humans is personal, that is, capable of realizing through the rationality of beings an immediacy of relation. Beings consequentially are manifested on the “horizon” of a rational relation, the relation of the personal logos of humans with the actualized logos of the hypostatic constitution and “ultimate” referentiality of existents. The subjective/conscious capacity of existing in time is also a personal/rational capacity of humans, but only as a capacity to measure the accomplished rational relation of humans to the things that are. The measuring itself appears to have an “objective” character because what is measured is not a perfected relation (an unquantifiable and uninterrupted presence of immediacy) but a dynamic drive (phora) toward the realization of relation—and the drive constitutes the existential event in itself, not simply its manifestation. For that reason we can also say that time measures the dynamics of the realization of the existential event: the drive of humans toward the realization of a relation with beings that can endure as existential fulfillment, and also the dynamically actualized ascent of beings to the fulfillment of their existential “end.”

Time, however, undoubtedly has a certain character of “objectivity” that is also verified in every area of existential experience as an event of progressive decay. Time is experienced “objectively” as the subjection of the dynamics of the existential event to decay, and as a continuous negation of this dynamics by death. Within the limits of each individual existence, the mutability of time is realized as decay, and the continuity of time proves to be the cohesion of existence in the real succession of generation-decay-death. Thus time seems to measure the failure and disintegration of the dynamic momentum of beings toward their existential “end”—because the “end” of an existent cannot fundamentally be other than existence itself as fulfilled duration.

We can therefore sum up our argument by saying that an interpretation of time that is limited neither to the conventional schematization of the rational process nor exclusively to conscious subjectivity must be based on the ontological content of the fact of relation and consequently on its cosmological dimension. It must accept as its starting point for its account of the problem of time a dynamic/existent inference from the cosmic universality of the human person and from the rational universality of the cosmic event.

More specifically, if we accept that the problem of time is fundamentally a problem of our relation as human beings to the cosmic reality that surrounds us, then the clarification of the problem requires us to see this relation as a complete reality, in such a way that it comprises the relation of humanity’s existential dependence on the world, humanity’s organic appropriation of the world and

107. “Created things have been made, subject to a beginning; they have a temporal beginning to their existence . . . . The existence of things that have come into being is measured by their state of becoming; these have their origin in some beginning” (Athanasius the Great, Against the Arians 2.57 [PG 26:286C–289B]).

108. Human creativity in the field of art offers a possible empirical approach to the truth of these accounts. Basil the Great says characteristically that “the art in the artist is one thing” and “the art in what has received it” is another (On the Holy Spirit [PG 32:180C]). The artist’s art in itself is a timeless reality and its creative expression is absolutely free from any temporal succession, whereas when the artist’s art is expressed in the result of his or her artistic activity, it has both a temporal beginning and a temporal duration that always contain a reference to the beginning of the creation of the work of art.
life-giving assimilation of it to the fact of human corporeity. We are not simply observers or students of the world's reality. We appropriate the world directly as nourishment and as material for our technological accomplishments. And this appropriation is a presupposition for the maintenance of our existence. Without it we could not exist.

Yet although our relationship and communion as human beings with the world, our ceaseless organic appropriation and assimilation of it, constitute the existential presupposition of our individual onticity, this very relationship gradually corrupts human individuality and coordinates it existentially with the progressive decay of every ontic individuality—the decay that is measured as time. The relationship of humans to the world is not only mental or conscious but above all is a dynamic movement of participation in the world, an existential translocation toward the world, but a participation and translocation that is realized and measured (chronoutai—"becomes temporal") as decay. It is an ek-stasis that is capable of changing existence, and this ek-stasis is measured as time. Even though a factor of the existential event (and not a product of intellectual marking alone or of the conscious registering of information), the relationship of humans with the world seems to have its "end" (its essential purpose) outside or beyond its own becoming. It seems to tend toward an unattainable fulfillment, toward a never-ending duration of life. That is why it also constitutes a movement that is never completed (that does not arrive at its "end" or purpose), a ceaseless process of change that destroys the duration and "becomes temporal" as decay.

Consequently, the decay of the individual onticity of humans and its dynamically continuous finitude in death constitute the "becoming" of humanity's relationship with the world, and this "becoming" of the relationship is measured as time. That is, time measures something that is continually becoming and is continually being destroyed: the dynamic realization but also the "final" failure and dissolution of humanity's relationship with the world. This relationship has life as its essential/natural "end," the fulfilling duration of existence, and the failure of the relationship is a failure with regard to this "end" (that is, sin, hamartia, in the original meaning of the word). The relationship is realized as both the decay and the maintenance of life in the enduring finitude of death. It never attains the realization of the uninterrupted present of existential fulfillment, a realization free from any predetermination.

The existential failure of humanity, in the way such failure "becomes temporal" in humanity's relationship with the world as decay and death, is characterized by the Greek philosophy of the Christian era as the Fall of Man. The term summarizes a philosophical debate that has occupied human thought frequently and fruitfully within the context of a wide variety of intellectual approaches—ranging from the theological to the naturalistic or agnostic.

The very notion of the Fall entails a secondary meaning: it is always understood in relation to a nonfall; it presupposes a prelapsarian state, an axiologically superior or existentially fuller level of being, the loss of which constitutes a downgrading, a falling away. Thus when the Greek philosophy of the Christian period characterizes the existential failure of humanity as a fall, it presupposes the possibility of existential fulfillment as a nonfall—the full correspondence of existence to its "end" or purpose, which is the duration of life, the universality of the dynamic realizations of life. And if time is a consequence of the Fall, because it is time that measures the existential failure of humanity in its relationship to the world, and also the ineffectual drive of every existent toward its existential end, then the possibility of a nonfall and existential plentitude should be consequent upon freedom from time or the abrogation of time.

However, the identification of a nonfall with freedom from time has no implication for human existence if it simply represents

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109. "Sin," that is, not achieving or falling away from what is appropriate, is the name we give to shooting wide, rather than hitting the target, to borrow a metaphor from archery. By failing to attain the good and effect a movement that is in accordance with nature, we are borne towards a nonexistence that is irrationally contrary to nature and utterly without being" (Maximus the Confessor, Scholia on the Divine Names [PG 4:348C]).

110. See U. Dierse, "Fall, Abfall," in J. Ritter, ed., Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie, vol. 2 (Basel Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1972), col. 887f., where the philosophical debate concerning the Fall is traced back to Platonic and Neoplatonic thinking. See also in the same study the very full bibliography.
a schematized intellectual antithesis to the experience of the Fall, an inference of logical necessity. For the Greek philosophy of the Christian era, the reference to a nonfall, and consequently to a timeless existence, arises from an experiential approach to the truth of the really existent, that is, it arises from the same starting point as its ontological discussions, one that is fundamentally accessible as historical experience. This starting point is the personal hypostasis of God—as revealed in the creative activity of the formation and conservation of the world, or in God’s direct interventions in history. God constitutes unfallen and timeless Being, the plenitude of life and existence, because he is person—the eternity of God refers to his personal hypostasis; it is not inferred as a necessary property of the concept of God, that is, of the divine essence. And if freedom from time is a function of personal existence and not of the divine essence, the consequences are vital for the similarly personal existence of humans.

We saw earlier that person signifies fundamentally a unique, dissimilar, and unrepeatable existential identity, self-consciousness, and logos. It consequently signifies a mode of existence that is identified with freedom and with referentiality: because God is truly person (absolute existential otherness), he is free from any existential predetermination imposed by his essence or nature, and consequently also from any necessity to correspond to a beginning/cause or end/purpose outside of that which his existence is—he is free from any existential becoming and from any temporal measurement of the momentum of his becoming. The person of God is its own existential purpose: it is this that hypostasizes his essence or nature; the freedom of the person also makes the essence or nature existent and timeless (it constitutes its existential plenitude). And because the existence of God is personal, its otherness is not comparative or dialectical (only the otherness of essences or natures is comparative or dialectical) but is only referential, which signifies that God’s mode of existence is reference, communion, and relation within the bounds of his existential plenitude (and not in comparison to, or by contrast with, any other existence). For Christian experience, as formulated by Greek thinkers, God is personal, with the absolute freedom of existential referential otherness, because he is a Trinity of persons—because his freedom is realized as an experiential mutual perichoresis of the three persons, that is, as a love that hypostasizes the being as an otherness of hypostases, without destroying the oneness of the being. Consequently, the timeless essence of God lies in the freedom of the experiential mutual perichoresis of the three hypostases who realize the plenitude of their personal existence (their otherness and freedom) by means of love: the eternity of God is love as mode of divine existence, the personal referentiality that does not become temporal as a drive toward the realization of relation but becomes fulfilled as hypostatic freedom in the loving self-transcendence of the persons of the triadic communion.

The nonfall, then, is the timeless plenitude of personal life. It is the referentiality of the person that does not come into being as a momentum of relation but endures as a communion of loving self-transcendence. It realizes existential otherness and freedom within the unlimited boundaries of an erotic fulfillment or making whole. By contrast, in the case of humanity we speak of a fall because the personal hypostasis of our created nature refuses to exist as referential otherness, that is, as free from the existential predeterminations of nature (on the triadic model of the plenitude of existence). Although as human beings we are persons, that is, although we can exist in a manner that is free from the createdness of our nature, hypostasizing our nature in an existential reference outside of nature, a reference to the personal freedom of the life of God, we nevertheless make the freedom of our existential referentiality subject to our nature itself as an existence with its own intrinsic purpose. We shift the end/purpose of our hypostasis from the mode of existence of the uncreated to the existential possibilities of the created.

Even in the state of fallenness, the referentiality of our personal existence is not destroyed. It simply fails with regard to its existential end. It aspires to an unattainable end: to the existential autonomy of created nature (as if it were possible for created nature to contain the beginning/cause and end/purpose of its existential realization). And because the desired end is unattainable, the referentiality of the person does not become fulfilled but becomes temporal as a drive toward the achievement of life, which, however, cannot possibly endure within the bounds of nature. Time measures the failure of the
person's drive toward the realization of life as duration within the bounds of nature's existential possibilities: time measures the failure of life, the disintegration and decay of created existence, the adhesion of life to the permanent finitude of death. The life of the person does not cease to be realized by the mode of reference, only now the reference is exhausted within the limits of the physical demands of existential autonomy. It is a becoming of relations (of appropriating the world, of erotic conjunction, of creative participation in communal life) that ultimately serve the perpetuation of nature, not the perpetuation of the person. The personal realization of every relation is not fulfilled as freedom from nature and consequently as duration of life but becomes, as nature's drive toward the unattainable end of life—and the drive is measured as time, time being the measure of an ineffectual relation.

Within the perspective of these narratives, it becomes evident that the categories of timeless and temporal ultimately represent two different existential possibilities, two diverse modes of existence. The mode of existence in both cases (both in timeless and also in temporal realization) is not predetermined by nature and does not constitute any natural necessity but is the result of the freedom of the person—of the only principle that hypostasizes Being or that "undermines" Being by guiding existence toward a mistaken goal or purpose. The timeless mode consequently constitutes not an essential state of property but an existential fulfillment, and therefore cannot be identified with a necessary, absolutized capacity of a fossilizing omniscience, which fixes temporal becoming in a comprehensive foreknowledge. And time is not an autonomous succession of changes, which keeps nature tied to the necessity of decay and death, but a function of a mode of existence that even as the failure of existential duration does not cease to be a realization of the freedom of the person not subjected to any predetermination.

Thus the ontological priority of the existential principle of the person within the context of the Greek philosophy of the Christian era leaves no room for postulating the problem of absolute predestination. The concept of predestination is an inevitable consequence of the ontological priority of essence, and therefore necessarily ac-

companies any philosophical derivative of Augustine's metaphysics. By contrast, Greek Christianity always saw in human freedom an existential dimension that is as undetermined and uncircumscribed as the personal freedom of God. If the personal freedom of God hypostasizes Being within the uncircumscribed limits of the fullness of life, the freedom of the human person reveals the limits of the existential realization of nothingness to be uncircumscribed, nothingness as a mode of existence that nullifies the very end or purpose of existence, transforming Being into an ineffectual becoming. In both cases we have similarly incommensurate realities: the freedom of Man versus the love of God, the self-destruction of life versus eternity, nothingness versus Being. No predestination can predetermine the dynamic indeterminacy of the phases of this confrontation (between the saving love of God and the repentance of Man) without destroying the freedom of Man, and consequently the reality of our personal hypostasis, or the respect accorded to human freedom by the love of God, that is, by the existential cause itself of this freedom.

§ 34. Beauty

The concept of beauty enters into any discussion of ontological question, from the moment the question is posed with reference to the mode or how of the existence of sensible objects. Like space and time, beauty too refers to the how of cosmic becoming, constituting one of the cosmic coordinates of what exists. The very concept of the cosmic, a product of the word kosmos ("ornament" or "adornment"), attributes to reality as a whole the character of decorum (kosmîôtêî) and hence of beauty, identifying beauty as the mode by which beings are in their totality.

But what is beauty in itself, and how is it possible for us to define it using reason? Fundamentally, like the other categories that define the mode of existence, beauty too must be understood within the perspective of a dynamic realization and consequently with reference to privation or absence, to the concept of nonbeauty, to the possibility of the ugly or the obscene. There is one difference, however, that is vital for the philosophical debate, namely, that whereas
the dynamics of the realization of space and time can be defined by human reason by reduction to measured magnitude or to an objective measure for defining the fact of a relation, such a reduction seems to be impossible with regard to beauty. Similarly, the categories of nonspatial and nondimensional or of timeless and eternal also become susceptible of definition by reduction to unquantifiable magnitude, whereas the category of the ugly and the obscene seems to arise more from a subjective evaluation always made according to indefinable criteria and seems to defy any definitive and commonly accepted description.

Even if we go back to the original senses of the word kallos ("beauty"), we will only confirm that the term is identified with the concepts of order, harmony, and decorum, concepts that can be reduced to measurable relations, but not always. A harmony of magnitudes, for example, can be reduced to objective measurements of analogous relations, but not a harmony of colors. The same is the case with the contrary concepts of disorder, disharmony, and lack of beauty. Only in a relative and fragmentary way can they be defined as measurable magnitudes. Moreover, the categories of nonspatial, nondimensional, timeless, and eternal are accessible to experience as unquantifiable magnitudes, through reduction to the intellectual reality of numbers, forms, or other absolute concepts. The categories of disorder, disharmony, and lack of beauty, however, seem fundamentally inaccessible to experience as absolute concepts, seeing that our cognitive experience is exhausted in "cosmic" reality, the reality of the world, which in both its sensible and its intelligible manifestations "is well" (echei kalós), and is the "best" (to kalliston kai ariston). Thus only one possibility remains if we are to define humanity's initial reduction of disorder, disharmony, and lack of beauty to the dissolution of form, namely, that we should regard it as a consequence of the experience of death. However, if in our initial reduction we connect nonbeauty with death, we must then see in beauty not only the mode but also the presupposition of life. It then becomes vitally important that beauty should enter into a discussion of the ontological question.

The linking of beauty with the presupposition of life (the identification of beauty not simply with the mode by which beings become accessible to us in their entirety but also with the mode that constitutes the onticity of beings, their very existence) is also supported by the primordial attempt of humans to represent this mode or how of decorum by perpetuating life within the context of a creative act, of a work of art. The Greek word for art, techné, is derived from the verb techo, which means "I build," "I am the maker (tekton) of a work," "I create." And "I create" signifies "I endue matter with reason (logos)," "I realize a new form (eidos)," and consequently "I bring a new being into existence," "I confine the principle (arché) of an existent." This enduing of matter with reason or form that is realized by art can be an imitation of nature, but it can also be an achievement that nature is unable to bring to completion.

Even in its most utilitarian applications human art was always a search for and a realization of beauty. For it to play any part in human life, a manufactured object (a vessel, a tool, or even a weapon) had to posses beauty, could not lack form or symmetry. (When in the modern age it became possible, using machines and automated

111. "Therefore [Philolaos] was right to call it a cosmos" (Diels and Kranz, Fragmenta der Vorsokratiker, 1:418, line 6).
112. "The cosmos is most beautiful" (Thales, in ibid., 1:71, line 11); "the fairest cosmos" (Heraclitus, in ibid., 1:178, line 14); "to contemplate ... the order of the whole cosmos" (Anaxagoras, in ibid., 2:13, line 21); "Pythagoras was the first to call the aggregate of everything the 'cosmos' because of the order to be found in it" (ibid., 1:105, lines 24–25); "Thus the whole is eternal and infinite and one and homogeneous and could not have been less or more or differently ordered" (Melissus, in ibid., 1:270, lines 15–17).
processes, to produce objects for exclusively utilitarian purposes, objects that were all absolutely identical in form, the term technique [technikē] was evolved to differentiate machine-made products from the achievements of art [technē].) For the most part, however, when art was detached from utilitarian concerns and sought nothing apart from the realization of beauty, the creative significance of beauty was brought clearly into focus, its relationship with the truth of life, that is, its ontological content.

By basing our argument on the primary meaning of words, we could maintain that every work of art is a form of painting. The art of painting in Greek is zōographikē: it paints or transcribes (graphei) life (zōē), making a representation, by the means offered by matter itself, of the logos/mode of life and existence. The relationship of creators with the material of their art becomes a relationship not only exploratory of the existential event but also revelatory of the interpretation that humanity gives to the generation of what exists—before any transcription of this interpretation into an objective set of concepts and its subjection to the conventions of linguistic expression. Even if in their relationship with their material artists do not encounter, or do not succeed in discerning, some logos/mode that is creative (poiētikon) of life, even then through their art they will transcribe their experience of the irrationality of what exists. They will express in their works the formal impression of the simply phenomenal or they will go on further and express the irrational or absurd nature of existence, rejecting even the logos of form and channeling their art toward the aniconic expression of subjective emotions or of the experience of emptiness created by the nullifying of the logos. That is why in the different phases of the history of art we are able to follow, in a manner almost parallel to the history of philosophy, the evolution of the answers adopted by each age to the ontological question—answers that, before becoming rationally structured interpretations, are experienced universally as constituting the "cultural," as we usually call them, coordinates of each age.

Thus, in an entirely sketchy—and therefore overly schematic—manner, we could observe that in ancient Greek art there is fundamentally a reference of the senses to their rational (logikē) reality; there is an attempt to render in the work of art a reasoned (meta logou) vision of the object, beyond a circumstantial impression. And this is because for the ancient Greeks the event of existence presupposes participation in the given logos of the existent, a participation that constitutes the essence and is realized thanks to the form. Matter in itself is without rationality; it is formlessness and disorder before this has been organized by the form-enduing logos to become existence and life. The logos gives form to matter, shaping it and bringing all things together into the harmony and unity of the cosmos, because the logos of a being consists of its insertion into the universal decorousness of the rational mode of existence, its subjection to the logoi/laws of cosmic harmony and order that differentiate life and existence from chaos, which is nonexistence. These laws/logoi are given; they are the rational and moral necessity of life. And the task of the artist is to decipher and manifest these laws, to reveal them by the logos of the work of art, to show the rational relations that ensure harmony and unity, that is, the moral potentiality of life.

For these reasons it becomes evident that in every expression of ancient Greek art (with its high point naturally in the fifth century BC) the artist does not aim at a faithful representation of the physical original, that is, at an artistic copy, but at that kind of portrayal that permits a direct vision of the logos of essence of the thing. The artist realizes a kind of abstraction of the individual and contingent features of the subject so as to bring together those form-enduing elements that are revelatory of the universal essence and lead us up from a particular fragmentary individuality to the universality of the logos that renders it existent.

Thus "a work of art, a sculpture (agalma), uses the beauty of the natural prototype as its standard, not vice versa." The work of art is an agalma, in its primary meaning "glory, delight, honor," because it offers the beholder the joy and delight of a true insight into the world: it expresses the reasonable (meta logou) contemplation

118. "Works of art [differ] from realities, because in them the scattered elements are combined" (Aristotle, Politics 3.11.1281b12–13, trans. Barnes).
of the object, the encounter of the human *logos* with the *logos* of the essence of the existent; it refers sensible objects to their rational reality, which is more real than their circumstantial rendering. We are speaking of the joy and delight that the vision of beauty brings us because it is a vision of the *logos* of life—and this *logos* is manifested by the work of art. The cognition of beauty is not a fragmentary experience (only apprehended mentally or emotionally). On the contrary, it presupposes the coordination of all our cognitive capacities, and this coordination is a dynamic/existential movement toward the beauty of the seen object, an experiential relationship with it, an erotic love for the beauty that is seen—the *erōs* of the human person for the *logos* of life.  

By contrast, the Greek art of the early and middle Christian periods (so-called Byzantine art) expresses a *stance* (*a stasis*) toward life and a sense of what it consists in with presuppositions different from those of ancient Greek ontology and cosmology—yet it retains an understanding of the mode of cognition that is very close to it. For the Byzantine artist the event of existence is recapitulated in the truth of the person and of the *logoi* or energies of the *person*: in the form of the human being, he studies the supreme *logoi* manifestation of the sensory *mode* of personal otherness and freedom, in view of the fact that God himself revealed his personal hypostasis as incarnate in the form of a human being. And in the matter of the world he studies the rational energy of the personal God, an event that is actualized dynamically as a *convergence of rational qualities.

Thus what art is attempting to do is again to enable existents to be revealed in their rational reality, to enable the reasonable (*meta*

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120. Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 204c: “For the beloved is in reality beautiful and graceful and perfect and blessed” (trans. Hamilton and Cairns). For Plato *erōs* constitutes supreme knowledge and therefore also beauty, which is the experiential starting point of love and also the path leading to true knowledge. The “rungs” of progress in knowledge are steps on an erotic ladder representing successive stages in the contemplation/vision of the beauty of bodies and of cultural achievements and of laws and of sciences, which end in erotic *astonishment*, the unexpected vision of beauty in itself, which is unique and eternal, and where the philosopher will remain, with his eyes “turned toward the open sea of beauty and contemplation” (see *Symposium* 210a–211c).

and "things," the beauty of true life that is a relationship with the forms and things as love and self-transcendence—according to the trinitarian model of life.

How is it possible, however, for art with the help of physical matter to represent a mode of existence that, without destroying material individuality, nevertheless abolishes its existential autonomy, the dimensional space of the separateness of individuals, the measured time of the succession of before and after? Certainly such an achievement is not unrelated to the artistic genius of the great Byzantine masters, but neither is it unrelated to the ascetic ideal of Byzantine life. The technique of the icon (restriction to two dimensions; employment of "reverse perspective"; rejection of background depth and of chronological succession of the events depicted; use of colors, poses, expressive gestures) fundamentally takes Greek abstraction to an astonishing level of expression, where what is concrete and specific functions as a symbol of life "in truth" that is the relation of love and communion: it symbolizes, brings together, coordinates, and unifies our particular experiences of personal participation in life.

However, the Byzantine icon is not only a visual proposition, an individual achievement of the artist that is proposed for personal participation and "symbolic" ascent to the universal. It is chiefly an expression and manifestation of a common attitude to life, of a function in life that the artist takes up in order to express it by abstracting so far as possible the elements marking his intervention as an individual. The Byzantines were alive to the fact that it is the ecclesial body of the people as a whole that "paints" the icons by the hand of the artist. Thus the technique of abstraction is not the exercise of an individual's skill so as to transcend the particular and the contingent but the exercise of the subject of the individual's autonomy to a given iconographical form, to whose development the ascetic experience of earlier teachers of the art in conjunction with the general experience of the body of the laity has contributed.

The subordination of the individual's viewpoint to a given iconographic form not only affects the artist; it also affects the person who beholds the icon: the icon does not propose an ideal and in-

intellectually complete vision of a being but calls the beholder to a direct communion and relationship with what is depicted, to a dynamic passing over to the prototype, that is, to the personal or active hypostasis of the subject portrayed. And this passing over presupposes the suppression of areas of individual resistance (individual emotions, individual aesthetic feelings, individual intellectual inferences) with a view to allowing the possibility of personal relationship and participation. The established way of painting icons functions precisely as a stimulus and aid to transcending individual viewpoints and realizing a personal passing over to the hypostasis and not just to the phenomenicity of the subjects depicted.

Earlier in this book I made a brief reference to Western European medieval architecture, which expressed the new human attitude that determined the way modern civilization was to evolve: the rejection of the Greek dynamic of social or communal verification, the elevation of the human subject to the center or pivotal point of any possibility of cognition, the reduction of the existential event to ontic categories absolutely subordinate to the individual's intellectual thought processes and the individual's capacity for reasoning and judging.

This new attitude (stasis) inaugurating an age of subjective reason (in contrast to the common reason of the Greek tradition) also began to be expressed in Western European painting, chiefly from the thirteenth century onward—when the style of Romanesque painting, or the Italian maniera bizantina, was decisively abandoned. If, for the philosophy of the period, truth was exhausted in the coincidence of the concept with the object of thought, we could say that in the visual arts the truth of beauty was exhausted.

122. The Areopagical writings offer an etymology of the word kallós ("beauty") from the verb kaló ("I call," "I invite"), as "calling all things toward itself (whence it is called kallós") (On the Divine Names 4 [PG 3:701C]).
123. "For the honor rendered to the image passes over to the prototype" (Basil the Great, On the Holy Spirit 18.45 [PG 32:149C]).
124. See above, § 20.
125. The eminent historian of Western European art Georges Duby describes the period between 1190 and 1250 as the age of subjective reason ("l'age de raison"); see his L'Europe des Cathédrales (1140–1280) (Geneva: Skira, 1966).
in the coincidence of the form of the object with the capacity of the senses to appropriate the form as subjective enjoyment and psychological emotion.

Thus in the work of Giotto, Lorenzetti, Martini, and Cimabue a *naturalistic* (or better, a photographic) representation of persons, landscapes, and subjects begins to dominate European painting. It was, of course, preceded by the *realistic* sculpture of the statues that were already decorating the cathedrals in the twelfth century-reaching a pinnacle of sensual realism in the colored statues of, for example, the cathedrals of Volterra or Naumburg. The *logos* or reality of the existent is now its "natural" or "objective" quality, that is, the manner in which the existent can be grasped in its entirety by the cognitive capacity of the subject's senses, can be subordinated to the powers of a positive, efficacious, and indisputable sensory knowledge. In the fourteenth century and especially from the beginning of the fifteenth, it seems that the quest to represent the truth of existents visually seems no longer to go beyond their dimensional individuality. In the work of van Eyck, Pisanello, and van der Weyden, style (the use of colors, composition poses, and backgrounds) is entirely subordinated to the demands of representing the "natural" and the "objective": it seeks to persuade the mind by the immediacy of the experience of the senses of the "real" character of what is depicted, and the "real" is thought of only as corresponding to the subjective sense perception of the dimensional and ontic. And this style wants to move us "objectively," to submit to our subjective senses impressions that define and exhaust the given meaning of the topic. That is also why optical illusion, perspective, depth, trompe l'œil, and the play of chiaroscuro become the artist's means of stirring the emotions, of galvanizing our nervous system, of making the beholding subject to individual experience.

Even religious painting abandons the study and investigation of the possibilities of the *salvation* of the sensible and ontic from finitude and temporality, from decay and death. It is only the subject

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matter of the works that preserves a given "sacredness"—the "sacredness" lies exclusively in the allegorical/analogical interpretation of what is depicted. The persons, objects, and landscapes portrayed are those of the everyday experience of dimensional space and measured time, without any ambition to transcend the topical and ephemeral phenomenicity of their ontic individuality. That is also why any young woman can be the model for a painting of the Virgin, or any young man can represent Christ or a saint, or any landscape can stand for the scene of a biblical revelation. Even the angels are presented as fleshly beings endowed with plump materiality. Painting has only a didactic and decorative function, not a revelatory one. It presents images of the world of the senses, to which it tries to give a "religious" meaning, that is, an emotional content.

This subjection of the world to the sovereignty of the subject's senses in painting was to advance in an almost triumphant manner until the first suspicions about the tragic character or irrationality of the "natural," the ontic, and the individual arose and began to be investigated. In this respect the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century broke absolutely new ground, revealing the monstrous forms that lie in wait in every aspect of the real, beyond the fake enjoyment offered by a pleasant phenomenicity. But the purely artistic reaction to the "Renaissance" beautification of the world, which finds meaning only in the pleasure given to the senses, the reaction to the "photographic" naturalism of the aesthetic self-certainty of the subject, was of course delayed and would only burst forth violently and iconoclastically after the eighteenth century. The greatest creative figures of modern Western painting would express with astonishing clarity the frustrated search for the possibilities of a form beyond irrational "onticity," the radical doubting of the ontological identity of ephemeral "forms" and "essences"—and ultimately the dissolution of forms in abstract art and the artist's attempt to articulate the truth of the world again from the beginning, through absolutely primary chromatic and geometrical experiences.

However, even this innovative revolution in the field of Western art in the last two centuries would remain imprisoned within
the "monism of the subject," which binds every phase of the West’s spiritual life without offering any way out. Impressionism and expressionism attempted to detach the logos of the existent from the rest of the demands of a metaphysically given objectivity. They transposed the logos to phenomenicity alone, dissolved the impressions of color, and sought to synthesize the phenomenal in the subjective experience of the moment. Gaugin and van Gogh even rejected fidelity to the phenomenal with the aim of liberating the power of subjective expression, of enabling color to serve a new sensitivity that has its starting point in subjective experience, not in the beholding of the object. A step further and cubism dissolved the unity of the existent into its geometrical elements, and reassembled the picture in a cerebral fashion, rendering every possible optical approach to the subject simultaneously and primitively thanks to the intellectual schematization. Surrealism, finally, with a coherence that was often revelatory, painted “a container without content,” the irrationality of existential experience when the “real” distinction between subject and object is transcended. The work of Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Mondrian sought to lead painting toward an uprooting of its connection with the world, to an expression to the symbolism of the ineffable—of the pure and ideal “chromatic rhythms” and geometric “semantics” of the Absolute—only this ineffable is ultimately only a plumbing of the “depths” of an asphyxiatingly subjective unconscious.

From about the middle of the eighteenth century, aesthetics began to be discussed as “the science of esthetic knowledge,” “the science of the beautiful.” The term was coined by A. G. Baumgarten (1714–62), who wanted to write a new methodological Organon corresponding to Aristotle’s but now with the aim of defining “scientifically” (i.e., with indisputable objectivity) the possibilities of a cognitive approach to the truth of beauty. Naturally, this new “science” could not compete on the epistemological level with “strict logic”—it was a gnoseologia inferior, a lesser form of logic: logica facultatis cognoscitivae inferioris. Yet aesthetics too can become a branch of philosophy if we attribute to it as its content the systematic recording of the laws and rules of aesthetic knowledge—of the knowledge that is conveyed to us by the senses. The senses are a conduit or channel that carries knowledge to the understanding, that is, the possibility of an initial cognitive conception that is “dark and unlit” in relation to the luminosity and clarity of intellectual awareness, something like the twilight between night and day.128

Within a very few decades, Baumgarten’s proposition was universally accepted in the Western world, and aesthetics became firmly established as a branch or heading of philosophical epistemology. The more important stages in its very broad and multifaceted historical development are marked first by the great theoreticians of poetic composition, Winckelmann, Kleist, Lessing, and Herder, together with Goethe and Schiller. Parallel to them, Kant and Hegel brought aesthetics to a high level of development with regard to the challenges it presented to philosophy. And this trajectory was continued by such members of the Romantic movement as Schelling, Schleiermacher, Schlegel, and Novalis; subsequently by F. Th. Fischer, G. Fechner, and R. Zimmermann; and in the twentieth century by E. Utitz, G. Lukács, and N. Hartmann.129

The basic points of the debate that attracted the interest of European philosophy in relation to aesthetics may be summarized (overschematically, of course) as follows. The fundamental object is the analysis of the axiological judgment we make between the beautiful and the ugly—the determination of the criteria, methods, and presuppositions of aesthetic appreciation. The laws and principles

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127. The first description of the boundaries of aesthetics as a branch of systematic knowledge was A. G. Baumgarten’s in his Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus, Frankfurt, 1735 (reprinted with an English translation by K. Aschenbrenner and W. B. Holcher, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1954). A few years later (1750) Baumgarten published two volumes under the title Aesthetica (reprinted 1961).


of the harmonious articulation of a whole are sought, the general objective marks of recognition of its formal integrity. The modes or types of aesthetic expression corresponding to the emotions they elicit are noted and analyzed: the tragic, the comic, the romantic, the grandiose, the evocative, the charming (elegant), the humorous/ironic, and so forth. The relationship of the logos of nature with the logos of art is investigated, as also are the rule of artistic creation, the ways of imitating or transcending nature by art, and the abstract reduction of the natural to pure aesthetic enjoyment. But the determination of the form of knowledge that is offered to us by the contemplation and experience of beauty is equally an object of aesthetics: By what presuppositions can the esthetic arousal of the emotions constitute cognitive certainty? How far does a subjective aesthetic assessment belong to the a priori "overviews" that permit us cognitive access to reality? And to what extent can the inference from sensory beholding to mental idea and from aesthetic emotion to cognitive certainty be ordered objectively as a possibility of approaching any meta-physical truth?

Finally, it would not be an exaggeration to maintain that by establishing aesthetics as a branch of epistemology, European man attempted to capture the last bastions of resistance to the leveling sovereignty of reason (ratio/raison/Vernunft) over every aspect of what can be known to science. The challenge of beauty and the response of the logos of art to this challenge was always an experience that could not be subjected to the conventional logic of an understanding in which everything had its rational place. Artistic creativity, together with the way we approach a work of art, certainly preserves the manifestation and experience of the logos of an existential oth-


The Cosmic Dimension of the Existent

erness, the revelation of a knowledge that is not exhausted in the semantics of the way it is formulated but maintains the unbounded dynamic of direct relation and participation. And aesthetics, in the majority of its most typical expressions, seeks to organize this unbounded dynamic and refractory otherness objectively and analyze it rationally, to make it subject to predetermined laws and principles of a "positive" science. Thus, even on the level of the way beauty and art are understood, the Western world—at least in the most representative expressions of its spiritual identity—delineates an attitude that lies at the opposite pole to the ideas of the Greeks. That is why ascribing the origins or roots of modern aesthetics to Greek antiquity, and specifically to Aristotle's Poetics, is a characteristic example of the misinterpretation of the Hellenic spirit.

Certainly, the reservations created by the positivist character of Western aesthetics are not able to exclude a philosophical approach to the truth of beauty or a philosophical commentary on the logos of art—so long as we refer beauty to our ontological problematic, to the mode or the how of the existence of sensible objects. And I have attempted to demonstrate above, in a very rapid fashion, the way the differences between ontological theories are "reflected" both in the way we understand beauty and in the artist's approach to beauty, that is, in artistic creation itself.

Nevertheless, the differences of artistic expression, even though reflecting an experiential assimilation (and not an a priori intellectual appropriation) of the different ontological viewpoints or attitudes to life, do not cease also to be the artist's approach, an approach that is always personal, to the objective presence of beings. A work of art always remains the logos of a person, a logos that pre-

131. Aristotle's Poetics does not present a "theory of aesthetics," as we would call it today, but rather a "theory of art." Aristotle did not develop systematically any purely aesthetic ideas (K. D. Georgoulis, History of Greek Philosophy [in Greek], vol. 1 [Athens: Papadimas, 1975], 328). The reader may find an authentically Hellenic approach to Aristotle's Poetics, free from the self-evident assumptions of modern aesthetics, in Zissimos Lourentzatos's Ancient Critics [in Greek] (Athen: Ikaro, 1978), a study of unique hermeneutic value. Another study written in the perspective of this detachment from established Western hermeneutics is Stelios Ramfou's The Banishment of the Poet: A Platonic Paradox [in Greek] (Athens: Kedros, 1978), which discusses Plato's "aesthetic" approach.
serves the otherness of a personal vision/theory of beings. At the
same time, however, this logos of personal otherness is also a "sign"
or manifestation of the personal coordination of the artist with the
logos (whatever logos the artist discerns, even alogia, or irrational-
y) of the object that the artist undertakes to represent. The artistic
act defines the things by the logos of the artist's personal approach
to them, revealing their truth with regard to the artist—the work
of art proposes a manner of viewing it, that is, an interpretation of
the existent. The interpretation of the existent by the work of art
is inevitably a personal logos: a unique, dissimilar, and unrepe-a-
able witness to the personal discovery of whatever is the logos of
the things, the witness and manifestation of a person and of a per-
sonal relationship with the existent. A painting by van Gogh that
represents a pair of worn-out peasant shoes defines these shoes in
an unrepeatable manner, revealing their truth/rising up in the artist's
existential experience, and their presentation becomes a per-
sonal logos, a manifestation of the otherness of the person itself of
van Gogh; on encountering the painting we say: this is van Gogh. 132

We could add that the artistic estimation of a creative work
(its designation as a work of art) seems to refer to how fully the
creator's logos renders the uniqueness of his or her approach to
the object, that is, to the degree in which the creative expression
transcends an impersonal and conventional version of the object
(its version as a chréma, a neutral object of use). The manifestation
of the artist's personal relationship with the object of the work of
art "draws up" that object from its impersonal neutrality, provok-
ing in each beholder (or reader, or listener) of the work a similarly
personal participation in the otherness of the logos that the artist
has "revealed" in the object. In this light a work of art is always a
symbol in the etymological sense of the word, putting together, co-
ordinating the partial experiences of participation in the personally
proposed otherness of the object. The work reconnects the presence
of the existent with the only "horizon" of its truth, which is the hu-
man person. It demonstrates the dynamic universality of the one
personal relationship (that of the artist with the object of his or her
work), broadening an individual approach into an interpretation of
the logos of existents that can be shared in common.

And being a symbol, a work of art is also an allegory, again in the
eytymological sense of the word: it says (agoreuei) something else
(allo); it refers to a reality that is other than the conventional mean-
ing of the word. 133 The logos of art is all the more universal (broader
and more directly participable) the more allegorical it is, the more
it manages to transcend simple assertion or conventional expression
and refers back to the logos or the how of the existent. As symbolic
and allegorical, the logos of art interprets the universal through the
specific, and refers to the mode of being through the otherness of
the encounter of the personal logos of man with the logos of the
world. Even when it seems to be refraining from any proposition
of universality and shuts itself up in the expression of individual
needs and desires—subjective emotions or aesthetic pleasures—the logos
of art does not cease to be allegorical, that is, dynamically personal,
to suggest a relationship that subjects the world to the autonomy
of the subject, an ontology of the monism of the subject. Whether
as an achievement of erotic self-transcendence and rational rela-
tionship with the world, or whether as enclosure within a sealed-
off subjectivity that excludes any logos or meaning of the existent,
artistic expression is always revelatory of the existential adventure
of humanity within the bounds of freedom and necessity, of other-
ness and of natural "predetermination," revelatory of the inevitably
ekstatic mode of its existence, that is, of the truth of the human
person. Paraphrasing Heidegger, we could say that in the degree in
which the human person is nearest and furthest, the human person
is simultaneously also the ineffable. 134 Art, however, is the logos
of this sense of the ineffable.

One final observation in our brief exploration of the experience
of beauty: in the course of a long and unbroken history from Di-
otima's words in Plato's Symposium to modern psychology/psy-
choanalysis and in almost every aspect of the logos of art, beauty

132. I owe this example to Heidegger, Holzwege (Frankfurt: Klostermann,
1963), 25.

133. I owe this again to Heidegger, Holzwege, 9.

134. "Das Sein ist das Nächste. Doch die Nähe bleibt dem Menschen am
weitesten" (Über den Humanismus, 20).
has always been the starting point of the erotic quest, and erotic love the supreme experience of the universal human drive toward, or thirst for, a fullness of beauty that is an ever-unattainable fullness of life.

I say that erotic love is the existential human drive toward an ever-unattainable fullness of life because in the erotic quest we do not seem in reality to have a desire simply for physical pleasure and a psychological relationship. We seem to have a transposition of the very end or purpose of existence to the desired fact of the relationship. The realization of life seems to depend upon this relationship, and consequently failure in a real experience of erotic love robs survival of any meaning. Erotic love tends to realize life as relation, a direct and universal relation experienced by both soul and body. And the result of the erotic relationship is surely the realization of life, but only the physical perpetuation of life, not the personal duration of life. Erotic love perpetuates nature by the succession of transient mortal individuals. It does not perpetuate the person; it does not ultimately free the person from space, time, decay, and death.

And yet human existence invests erotic love with its most universal quest and drive, the very drive it has toward its existential end: the fullness of the otherness and freedom of the subject, the personal realization of life. Every real erotic experience is also an assurance that it is only possible for this fullness to be lived as relation and communion. And the more real the love is, the more liberated it is from the instinctive need for physical self-perpetuation, from the subjection of the other to the impersonal need and desire of the individual, and also the more it longs for the universal experiential relationship with, and participation in, the beauty of the form, which is live-giving communion with the hypostatic manifestation of personal otherness. The beauty of the beloved becomes an invitation to life, the supreme challenge of life—but this challenge proves ultimately to be subject to natural necessity. Precisely because erotic love is not simply a subjective feeling but a natural energy constitutive of the existent, it also proves to be subject to the existential autonomy of nature. Nature’s necessity for self-perpetuation nullifies and destroys the person’s erotic drive to be freed from nature, to realize life as duration of otherness and freedom. There is no question that Freud’s linking of love to death is neither fanciful nor simply a poetic metaphor.

Psychology/psychoanalysis helps us to see the first experience of the erotic quest in the relationship of the infant to its mother’s body. The touch of its mother’s body is for the infant its first experience of awareness of objective reality, and also the experience of a relationship that is lived as the power of having life or as losing life—a dialectic of life and death, of everything or nothing. The crying of a hungry infant is a cry of despair from an existence that feels it is vanishing, that it will no longer be. By contrast, when it receives nourishment from its mother, the infant has everything; it has life; it is. The relationship with the mother is erotic because it is a relationship of life, a relationship that constitutes the power of life and desires the perpetuation of life—and it is toward this power that ultimately all erotic love is directed.

The touch of the mother’s body is the first erotic experience, but the taking of nourishment alone does not exhaust the infant’s erotic relationship with its mother. If the taking of nourishment is not tied to the more general sense of a presence—the mother’s word, gesture, her every act of care—the infant will not enter into the world of human beings, the world of language and symbols, of existential identity and names. The primary erotic reference has as its object not only the nourishment that is the power of life but also the relationship that satisfies this power, the mother’s presence that constitutes the relationship. And because the mother’s presence is not self-evident and constant for the infant but an alternation of presence and absence, of finding and losing, even the initial experience of love is tied to this tragic dialectic. The infant’s natural and instinctive need is for it to make the presence of its mother permanent, to ensure the power of life, the source of nourishment, permanently and definitively. It wants to possess its mother, and the way of possessing her is to devour her in the imagination. But this experiential universality of the maternal presence and the dialectic of finding and losing gradually transforms the demand for

possession into a search for relationship; it transforms need into desire, the impersonal object of nourishment into a subject of reference. Thus erotic love, even though it remains a natural demand for life and self-perpetuation, finds the way organically toward the personal realization of life, suggesting the only possibility of life as duration, which is personal communion and relation.

Thereafter, every erotic quest in human life repeats the same initial need of life transformed into a Desire for, and drive toward, relation. The intervention of the person of the father in the infant's early experiences plays a decisive role for the expansion of the child's subjectivity, the warding off of the eventuality of an imaginary identification with the mother's body and consequently the preserving of the relationship—it reveals and confirms the separate existential identities that presuppose the desired fact of relation. The persons of the father and the mother impress on the infant's soul the models of the existential otherness that constitutes the relationship/power of life; they form the "archetypes" of animus and anima, the "signs" of the distinction between the sexes—a distinction that gives physical hypostasis to the otherness of the subjects. Embodied in the persons of father and mother, the distinction between the sexes and starting point of the child's distinguishing of its subjective otherness will direct its own erotic quest during the course of its life toward the restoration of the same image of relations that as an infant it identified with the power of its subjective otherness, the power of life. The form of the father and the form of the mother will be the archetypal models of that life—giving beauty that invites us to erotic plenitude—and perhaps even before the experience of the form, the tangible sense of the objects associated with the mother's or father's presence. Thus the criteria of aesthetic estimation, the erotic attraction that beauty exerts and the drive toward participation in beauty, cannot become autonomous as intellectual principles and axioms of an objective judgment. The quest for beauty and the approach to beauty will remain functions of the initial experiences of the existential otherness of the subject, experiences that show Man to be the only being with an existential end or purpose in life as duration.

To be sure, the proposition interpreting the experience of beauty that can be drawn from the domain of psychology/psychoanalysis is neither one-dimensional, nor does it aim at a self-contained schema of axiomatic statements. The significance of such an interpretation for the philosophical issue we have been discussing, but also more generally what philosophy can draw from psychology/psychoanalysis, is chiefly the clarification of a language that restores to concepts the character of the real, the direct, and the universally empirical. Beauty, erotic love, existential otherness, subjective identity, life, and Being are all freed from the abstract character of simply being intellectual concepts and refer to the immediacy and reality of the most specific aspects of everyday human experience, to the lived certainties that this experience generates. Like the language of modern physics, the language of psychology/psychoanalysis seems to lead the ontological debate in particular beyond the pleasing schematizations of intellectualism or the voids of phenomenology, to marking out the fact of relation as a reality and at the same time inceptive presupposition of any cognitive experience of the existent, of any approach to the truth of Being.

BIBLIOGRAPHY III


138. Bibliographies I and II are presupposed. Here too I list only a few fundamental aids to study that together with the bibliographical references in the footnotes may be useful to the reader as a first step toward building on the introductory material presented here.
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