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The Being, or Non-Being, of the Self: The Two Moments of French Antihumanism

Cordova, Chad Augustine

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THE BEING, OR NON-BEING, OF THE SELF:

THE TWO MOMENTS OF FRENCH ANTIHUMANISM

Chad Augustine Córdova

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OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the tensions between humanism and antihumanism that characterize the main trajectory of 20th-century French philosophy should be reconsidered in light of what I describe as the formative instance of this conflict: namely, in 17th-century French thought. I try to reveal, that is, the early modern philosophical, literary, and theological prehistory of modern French antihumanism. Combining philosophical, political, and religious history, literary analysis, and media studies, I uncover affinities in the philosophical, ethical, and political dissonances of what can be called *the two moments of French antihumanism*. The major protagonists in this account are Descartes, La Rochefoucauld, and Pascal – for the 17th century – Sartre and Althusser – for the 20th century. But numerous other figures are discussed along the way.

Theological questions are central to the early modern moment of my story, in distinction to the 20th-century one, which involved varieties of philosophy or theory that are largely secular. But this difference, instead of discouraging a comparative approach, is rather an invitation to consider the metaphysics – even the quasi-theological or mystical frameworks – of *manifestly* secular, post-metaphysical antihumanist theories. The long history of the conflict between humanism and antihumanism exposes what seems like a perennial logic of opposition between: (1) philosophies of consciousness or of *immanence*, which hold fast to the putative certainties of consciousness and to a perspective on the this-worldly, human sphere; and (2) theories that refuse the immediacy of spontaneous consciousness and discard anthropocentrism in favor of frameworks that critique and *transcend* – ontologically, temporally, and epistemically – the scope and capacities of any individual consciousness, self, subject, or ego. My argument is that the 20th-century moment of the humanism-antihumanism conflict might not escape this recurrent logic. Seeing this opposition in a comparative *history* is one way of underlining the ultimately

metaphysical status of both humanism and antihumanism. This perspective encourages us, then, to reflect on the ideologies that underpin the waves of popularity of these positions (especially in Academia) and their chronic tension, or dialectic, over time. This account demands us to ask, further, whether alternatives to or syntheses of these positions have been or are possible.

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Acknowledgments

In a manuscript addition to Book II, Chapter 18 of his *Essays*, in a line penned up and down the right edge of the page, Montaigne famously wrote that his book was "consubstantial with its author." While my text is no book, and while it is only in embarrassed reverence that I here invoke Montaigne in this way, his words do help to describe something about theses in general, and in particular about my thesis – something even more evident to me now as I look back over it, and the years of study it entailed. What I have in mind are the intellectual struggles that have defined my own literary and philosophical bio-graphy, as well as the many seminars and countless discussions with mentors and friends, both *intra*- and *extramuros* of the Academy, that have supplied matter and form to my thinking in a variety of ways. Don't worry: I'll leave biography out of it. But the latter influence – the indispensable "consubstantiality" provided by mentors, family, and friends – must be acknowledged here.

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.

"Mais précisément le sociologue ne saurait s'intégrer à la sociologie: il reste celui qui la fait. Il n'y peut entrer, pas plus que Hegel dans l'hégélianisme, que Spinoza dans le spinozisme. Vainement M. Bataille tentera-t-il de s'intégrer à la machinerie qu'il a montée : il reste dehors, avec Durkheim, avec Hegel, avec Dieu le Père."

— Sartre, "Un nouveau mystique" (1943)

Introduction

Humanism Now? (Anti)humanism and Our Historical Index

On the Dignity of Man – what do these words sound like today? Like uplifting exhortation? Like cheap ideology? Perhaps like an advertisement for Subaru Cars or the Olympics aired on NBC? Maybe something related to human rights, at best?[1]

Since Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's manifesto-like *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (1486),[2] Descartes's *Discours de la méthode* (1637), the Lumières and the "Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen" (1789), and even since Sartre's famous talk *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (1945), much, clearly, has changed. As much as in any rational argument or historical narrative, the extent of this mutation can be demonstrated by the peculiar *feeling* that many scholars likely have when faced with what once were exciting, even urgent, words: "the dignity" (or "perfection") of man, not to mention "man," "freedom," and even "immortality," among many others.

When we hear of the "dignity" of "man" today, academics in the humanities likely feel embarrassed. Perhaps we draw back in silent agreement; perhaps we turn around and walk away; likely we get out our critical weapons: our postcolonial, feminist, sociologizing, historicizing, contextualizing, pluralist, identity-political, racial, or multicultural critiques, among others. Embarrassment, or anger, is resolved through sacrifice, or violence. We must shatter the image,

[1] Cf. United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York, NY: United Nations, 1964 [1948]), preamble, art. 1, 22, 23.

[2] The words "De hominis dignitate" were added in Renaissance editions of what was at first called simply the *Oratio*. But this fact merely confirms the timeliness and ideological value of Pico's speech to the period and to humanism.

and many people now are watching as we do the deed. *Humanism* and *Enlightenment*, these concepts are suspect: isn't our critical recoil by now almost compulsive? That wouldn't necessarily imply it's wrong, but that it might be little understood. The necessity of speaking about humanism in the Academy today is evident from the stakes, and malaise, of doing so. For antihumanism, even when it is not an explicit theoretical commitment, even when it takes the form of a mysterious discomfort, is a dominant academic ideology.

Let's turn to a contemporary manifesto of "humanism" to see, very briefly, how this works: Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, published only a couple months ago.[3] Most academics of my and recent generations are more than able to make the critical gestures required to undermine Pinker's admittedly rather naïve positions. I'll cite a couple representative examples, taken from the chapters on "Reason" and "Humanism" from his best-selling hefty tome. Much of Pinker's writing moves by simple binary logic, uplifting ideological jingles, and undefined terms – traits that must make him seriously appealing to people who already agree with him. I wager that many academics in the humanities would be irritated by this style and barefaced optimism. The opening lines of the chapter on "Reason" read:

> Opposing reason is, by definition, unreasonable. But that hasn't stopped a slew of irrationalists from favoring the heart over the head, the limbic system over the cortex, blinking over thinking… There was the Romantic movement of the counter-Enlightenment…There's the common veneration of faith…There's the postmodernist credo that reason is a pretext to exert power, reality is socially constructed, and all statements are trapped in a web of self-reference and collapse into paradox. Even members of my own tribe of cognitive psychologists often claim to have refuted what they take to be the Enlightenment belief that humans are rational agents, and hence to have undermined the centrality of reason itself. […] But all these positions have a fatal flaw: they refute themselves.[4]

[3] Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (New York: Viking, 2018).
[4] Ibid., p. 351.

Pinker's comfortable prose sets him just a bit higher than the rhetoric of journalism. Note how the first line, through its formalist recourse to what seems like binding definition, establishes an apparently indisputable dichotomy, which Pinker then fleshes out in broad strokes. On this logic, favoring "the heart over the head" is the same as being a "postmodernist" or a religious conservative, two of Pinker's major enemies, along with politically minded folk of all sorts (especially politically minded academics). There is reason or its enemies, "the limbic system" or "the cortex": choose your side.

But this view of things, besides secretly peddling its own version of mind-body dualism, simply fails to imagine sorts of thinking that resist the binary of reason-unreason, not by a movement of reactionary, "irrational," sentimentality (for which Pinker here castigates Herder), but by means of thinking itself. Reason – or, thinking – taken to its extreme, used over and against itself, in endless movement of critique: this is what we find in Montaigne, Spinoza, Pascal, Nietzsche, and Adorno, to name a few thinkers who come to mind, some of whom will play a major role in this thesis. "Reason" vs. "unreason" is quite simply an ideological dichotomy.

"Reason" is quite vague, and that is clearly part of its appeal for Pinker and followers. He makes an implicit attempt to appeal to Descartes's *cogito* on this theme: the line about self-refutation at the end of the passage cited above prepares for a laudatory citation of Thomas Nagel's "Cartesian" argument regarding the self-refutation of extreme relativism. Pinker uses this to confirm the view that arguments against "reason," insofar as they offer reasons for their positions, defeat themselves.[5] Reason" thus becomes related to persuasive speech per se: those opponents of reason "have lost the argument" as soon as they "open their mouths to begin their

[5] Ibid., pp. 351-2. I deal with the actual lesson to be drawn from the Cartesian argument concerning self-refutation below.

defense."[6] But Pinker's position here relies on a failure to wonder whether "reason" is a historically-inflected concept, with a history, a trajectory, and an always shifting content. If "reason" is equated with argumentative language, or with language *per se*, then every proficient language user is a rationalist: a pretty sterile conclusion. The very means of making a distinction – reason vs. unreason – is hollowed out to the point that it leaves no distinction any more. Perhaps, abandoning the transcendental claim, Pinker might reply that by "reason" he actually means the capacity to think and talk about "reality," predict outcomes and, ultimately, to master nature, as he writes in a passage that again recalls Descartes (or Francis Bacon): "the application of reason to the world validates itself by granting us the ability to bend the world to our will."[7] Now we see: "reason" is our instrument of survival, manipulation, and self-preservation. Reason allows life to win out over death or nature.

And that does seem to be ultimately what the book is about: a hymn to mastery of nature and to the survival of human "life." Staying alive longer and healthier relies on the trinity: "science" is the force that makes this happen; "reason" allows it to function; and "humanism" is its guiding spirit.[8] But, luckily for us, this is all working out already, both under our noses and before our very eyes, and has been for centuries. Pinker characteristically fills his prose with studies offering incontrovertible proof that everything has been going just great: less violent crime, longer lives, less disease, less scarcity, less religion, and so on. Humanism is what acknowledges human greatness in achieving these feats, and provides the necessary enthusiasm to keep them going, ideally on a global scale. But humanism isn't very sexy, as Pinker admits, without wondering why, or how this might complicate his narrative of the triumph of reason. In any case, even if it's not hip or beautiful now, humanism could be, Pinker thinks. In one of his

[6] Ibid., p. 351.
[7] Ibid., p. 352.
[8] Ibid., p. 410.

most zany, mythologizing moments, at the end of the chapter "Humanism," he drafts "the story of progress" in what he hopes will be moving terms:

> The case for Enlightenment Now…may be cast as a stirring narrative… The story of human progress is *truly* heroic.[9] It is glorious. It is uplifting. It is even, I daresay, spiritual. It goes something like this.
>
> We are born into a pitiless universe, facing deep odds against life-enabling order and in constant jeopardy of falling apart. We were shaped by a force that is ruthlessly competitive. We are made from crooked timber, vulnerable to illusions, self-centeredness, and at times astounding stupidity.
>
> Yet human nature has also been blessed with resources that open a space for a kind of redemption. We are endowed with the power to combine ideas recursively, to have thoughts about our thoughts. We have an instinct for language, allowing us to share the fruits of our experience and ingenuity. […]
>
> As the spiral of recursive improvement gathers momentum, we eke out victories against the forces that grind us down, not least the darker parts of our own nature. We penetrate the mysteries of the cosmos, including life and mind. We live longer, suffer less, learn more, get smarter, and enjoy more small pleasures and rich experiences. […]
>
> […] But there is no limit to the betterments we can attain if we continue to apply knowledge to enhance human flourishing.
>
> This heroic story is not just another myth. Myths are fictions, but this one is true […][10]

I will mention only one aspect of this "uplifting" story of humanity, that is, of "the species that *outsmarts* antelopes,"[11] as Pinker writes in another passage, apparently with a straight face, perhaps even with a tear of joy. The recourse to the heroic register and the primal scene of *anthropogenesis*[12] – the scene where Man separates himself out from Nature – is particularly egregious and troubling. Pinker and his readers exult in a mythical image of primitive adversity, while countless non-readers are actually born today into conditions that it would be barbaric to gloss with rhetoric and fetishizing. Under the sheen of an archaic situation, the inhuman competition of capitalist, neoliberal society is re-imagined as a brute natural force: the very stuff of bourgeois ideology. The idealization of language and reason as that by which anything can be

[9] I.e., as opposed to the Nietzschean, Romantic, versions of heroism Pinker attacks.
[10] Ibid., p.. 452-3.
[11] Ibid., p. 353.
[12] See Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Attell, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

overcome does violence to real conditions by which humans have lost the battle in advance. And so on: this sort of critique can proceed in a socio-economic or Marxist framework as much as on a more broadly theoretical basis.

Pinker wants us to believe and enjoy his story, and to cherish the long lives we have earned throughout our labors. Reason is triumph over nature, violence, and death. The versions of humanism studied in this thesis – Renaissance humanism and, especially, the humanisms of Descartes and Sartre – do not use Pinker's exact terms. And Sartre, for example, is no proponent of scientism, for reasons I will explore in chapter 4. But the humanisms I study do share a commitment to fundamental (and even ontological) binary distinctions, often made in heroic terms, between the human and the non-human, the rational and the irrational ("darker parts"), something that Pinker here displays with unreflected clarity. Humanism and heroism often go hand in hand, along with vague, ideological dichotomies intended to confirm what readers already believe about their selves, and produce "uplifting" sentiments.

Rather than continuing to look at specific examples – I will spare my reader any more of Pinker's prose –, I want now to address something more general about his book. Despite – or perhaps as one might suspect, given the zeal of – Pinker's optimism, a fundamental tension haunts his book. This tension is latent, even, in the equivocal *Now* of Pinker's title, which can read either as a description or as part of an imperative. What I have in mind is "the paradox" whereby "the world seems to be getting less rational in an age of unprecedented knowledge and tools for sharing it."[13] To be sure, Pinker immediately dispels this appearance as *mere* illusion: "in most arenas, the world has *not* been getting less rational," he assures us, and points to his usual cannon of proof: advances in technology, science, medicine, fact-checking, longevity, and

[13] Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, p. 380.

so forth.[14] Where the illusion is no illusion at all, the grand exception for Pinker, is in the political realm:[15] when people's judgments reflect their identities – their political, group-based identities, their belonging to one or many *tribes*, Pinker might say –, knowledge becomes partial and judgment deeply skewed. The ubiquitous and unsavory link he observes between what we (think we) know and who we (think we) are – "identity-protective cognition," is the jargon – is an illness that Pinker is confident will *some day* be cured.

Notwithstanding its *potential* reversal, the actual predominance of this illness partakes of the hex that seems to possess, and call forth, Pinker's monotonously cheery book: despite the fact that "in area after area, the world has been getting more rational,"[16] "the appeal of regressive ideas is perennial, and the case for reason, science, humanism, and progress always has to be made."[17] Thus, the seemingly demonstrable mantra – Reason is triumphant in the *world* despite what people (especially trendy academics and conservatives) think and say – is doubled by a less straightforward one: Reason is winning despite how people *actually* act, understand themselves, make decisions, and judge others. In other words, there is an uncomfortable dissonance in Pinker's book. We hear him loudly trumpeting the good news – the world *is* rational, moderately liberal ideas are spreading, people are living longer, Capitalism and technology are saving rich and poor – and just as loudly making the urgent "case" for reason, humanism, science against the chronic "appeal" of regressive thinking, irrationality, tribalism, and so forth.

This tension, or curse, is reflected in the formalism of Pinker's idiom, a degree of generality that allows him to write what he does in the first place. The two sides of this abstraction are (1) the use of broad, quantitative data to show the good things that are happening

[14] Ibid., pp. 380-1.
[15] Ibid., p. 381.
[16] Id.
[17] Ibid., p. 452.

in the "world," and (2) the use of lofty signifiers by which he glosses terms like "humanism." As a result, the contents of "humanism," for example, are impossible to disagree with: even Pinker's two sorts of antihumanist boogiemen – the theistic (especially Islamic) moralists and the reactionary-Nietzschean–postmodernist–academic types – would likely ascribe to "the goal of maximizing human flourishing – life, health, happiness, freedom, knowledge, love, richness of experience."[18] If this is "humanism," then, at least in spirit, everyone is in some sense a humanist. Perhaps that is Pinker's point: only monsters or sociopaths would disagree with a jingle as attractive as "human flourishing."

But that point is rather empty: with his glosses of "humanism," so evocative of the hypocritical soliloquies of American presidential candidates from across the political spectrum, Pinker again puts us in front of a binary that is utter nonsense. Conflict does not arise between people who promote *flourishing* and those who promote *not flourishing*, say, but in the shape of (1) tensions between conflicting, in part subliminal, and ideological interpretations of what this "flourishing" might mean; (2) tensions with alterity, whereby my (or *our*) "flourishing" conflicts with yours (or *theirs*); and (3) in conflicts that arise within subjectivity itself. I may have everything at my disposal to "flourish," yet wallow in depression or even commit suicide. I guess I must have misunderstood what "flourishing" meant, *even to myself*. Today, average American white men are using narcotics and violently killing themselves and others with absolutely staggering frequency. I guess we must not know what "flourishing" means to them – to ourselves.

Pinker would probably diagnose all this as irrational and regressive nonsense; he would unwittingly find himself in uncomfortable company with Donald Trump and others who, faced with harm and self-harm, invoke "mental illness" as if it were an ultimate cause, not a normative

[18] Ibid., p. 410.

concept in need of discussion and explanation. Further, Pinker's own bedrock of certainty – evolutionary psychology and a notion of human "life" as inherently valuable – is of no avail here. While most people would choose "life" and "health" over "death" and "illness" for their bumper stickers and Instagram hashtags, when applied to human beings, "life" is an inherently vacuous and equivocal non-concept. Longevity does not prove "happiness" (whatever that means), even for the most privileged of populations. "Meaning," in whatever form, is what most people are usually after, not bare "life." Pinker is a pro-choice man; his obsession with "life" is unreflected and quasi-religious, like his eschatological vision of capitalism and technology.

But to say so does not make one a harbinger of death, misery, violence, medievalism, and nihilism. On the contrary, the formalist concepts of Pinker's rationalism, and his rampant dualisms, risk inflicting the violence his "humanism" seeks to condemn: particular historical circumstances and psyches, actual class differences and macro- and micro-inequality in means and opportunities, the way in which egos are formed in dynamics of alterity, authority, aggression, and sadness, the planet that suffers as the wheels of progress makes their furrows – all this is liquidated by his concepts and his blindness towards their own ideological status. But it's not me who has to point this out: Adorno and Horkheimer did it a long time ago. Their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/47) offers a readymade critique of Pinker's encomium of reason and humanism.

Keeping their text in mind, one might suggest that humanism isn't wrong, it's just been so tied up in capitalism and Western, bourgeois ideology that, as Enlightenment progresses, we are left with a debased, monotonous, and normative form of "flourishing" and "life." The paradoxical mixture of freedom and conformity, "flourishing" and decline, longevity and mutilation, liberation and repression, which the *Dialectic* reveals, is something that, had they

lived to see the iPhone, Adorno and Horkheimer would have found emphatically embodied in social media and its serial production of neo-liberal subjects all over the globe today. Mental illness, a necessary category underpinning actual compassionate and humanitarian efforts, becomes a slur for those who don't or can't conform to such "flourishing."

On the model of the *Dialectic*, actual enlightenment, and humanism, would not allow itself Pinker's brand of barefaced assertions and hymn-like celebrations of itself; it would have to be a thinking able to oppose its enemies *and itself*, a movement of double negation without end, which refuses the immature celebration of what has never been achieved. This is often implicit in critiques of humanism, we will see: they point to sources of recalcitrance (material, psychological, conceptual, social, historical, linguistic, economic, and so on) whereby concepts belonging to the core of rationalism and humanism – freedom, humanism, (hu)man, self, reason, subject, progress, mastery – are undermined, evacuated, or reversed into their contraries. *This* critical work has already been done: it characterized much of influential and fashionable work in philosophy and theory in the second half of the 20th century. The popularity of Pinker's books, which spread the same evangel as *Enlightenment Now*, points to an enduring *public*, non-academic enthusiasm for humanist ideals. When they are as vague as they are in Pinker's prose, who could say no to the feel-good message? Academics in the humanities have long been more skeptical, and fatigued.

Thus a book like Pinker's is met with a shrug. Even when the terms are applied to *other* people, to populations historically persecuted by the West,[19] we think we've had enough of

[19] Cf. Robert Spencer's text, "Postcolonialism is a Humanism," in Alderson and Spencer, eds., *For Humanism: Explorations in Theory and Politics* (London: Pluto, 2017), pp. 120-162. Lamenting the dominance of antihumanism, Spencer sees in Sartre – whose famous 1945 lecture is echoed in Spencer's title – a model for a renewal of Marxist humanist scholarship in postcolonial studies. His view of the recent and current "antihumanist" quasi-consensus in the Academy, especially in postcolonial studies, is forthright: it has led to scholarship that is increasingly de facto (i.e., not explicitly) ambiguous, politically

"humanism" and "the dignity of man." The ideology backing such concepts and their circulation no longer dominates, at least, that is, in the Academy, *the very bastion of the Humanities*. This is an intriguing situation, indeed, an uncomfortable position for the University. Humanism is largely considered moot, but the Humanities must survive. Why?, some might and do ask. The university presidents, the deans, and the scientists – and not just them – want to know. In response, many academics wouldn't dare make the argument that, we will see, has implicitly subtended the "humanities" since Antiquity, an argument revived in the Renaissance: that the "humanities" cultivate a truly *human* human being, that the *humanity* of the human per se is best revealed and developed in and through the study of great works of philosophy and literature (this concept itself, that of the "cannon," is also largely under attack, of course).

The recent popularity of fields like digital humanities and the history of science – likely the most promising paths of interdisciplinarity for PhD students in the "humanities" today –, is arguably in part related to the embarrassment of humanities scholars. The humanities sadly do not possess the apparently timeless objectivity of the sciences, so they might hitch their wagon to the history of science and partake, by participation, of something of science's claims to truth and its sex appeal in our society. The humanities are unfortunately based on the old technologies of writing and the book, and so we are excited to get with it and "read" with digital technologies and machine "learning," and thereby appeal to more contemporary mindsets and concepts of relevance.

These are not of course purely ideological developments; commitments to the book and the "humanities" can really make one feel like an ancient living among the moderns today.

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speaking: "I contend that the rejection of humanism is part of this tacit abandonment by postcolonial studies of the goal of liberation, humanism having been an essential and ubiquitous part of the arsenal of anticolonial movements in the 1950s and 1960s" (127). See also p. 126: "We have, in my view, delayed for far too long a rigorous and open discussion of what I see as the very considerable disadvantages of the antihumanist theory that so many of us seem almost automatically to deploy."

Western scholars, heirs to those who brought "humanism" into being in the period known as the Renaissance, simply do live in a different period, one more attracted by positions that articulate the finitude, the contingency, the imperfection and shortcomings, the radically-restricted worldviews, the self-opaque subjectivity, the ineluctable materiality and corporeality, of human beings. Whether they know it or not, many of the trendiest theories in the humanities have repeatedly carried out the critique of the philosophy or ideology that once subtended the *studia humanitatis*. Whether this belongs to the group of causes now leading to the demise of the humanities per se is anyone's guess.

The ideological shift in question is also clear from the relish many still find in repeated attacks on the so-called "Cartesian subject." Despite the possibility that these battles are waged against a specter created by professional philosophers themselves,[20] the gesture can still be found implicitly driving theoretical fashions.[21] We academics will somehow never be done with the "Cartesian subject." In the future, this attack on an in part illusiory Descartes (or Sartre, for that matter) might become known as a definitive symbolic gesture, a community-building sacrificial rite, of the intellectual ideology that has been so prevalent during much of the last handful of decades. But it is not, and likely never was, a merely intellectual ideology – a conviction of intellectuals alone, a rather restricted elite group. While the success of Pinker – or, in their time, of Sartre and of the *Nouveaux Philosophes* – displays humanism's enduring popular appeal, some of the most iconoclastic and antihumanist postwar French theorists have, from some perspectives, an odd affinity with good-faith neoliberalism, pluralism, and relativism. While their

[20] See Slavoj Žižek: *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999); Balibar, "Réponse à la question de Jean-Luc Nancy: 'qui vient après le sujet?,'" in *Citoyen sujet, et autres essais d'anthropologie philosophique* (Paris: PUF, 2011), pp. 35-66; Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics—Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 1999).

[21] To name two examples: the relatively recent fad of Spinozism and the whole field of "Affect Theory."

theoretical positions surely had and might still have an urgent political and intellectual role to play, they implicitly undermine some of the very conditions that rendered such theorizing, and its enemies, possible in the first place, like the Academy. This, again, is an awkward position for Humanities – even for the University per se.

What is the meaning of antihumanism's somewhat self-destructive gesture? How might we step back and conceive of it? What sort of anxieties – ones that are manifestly of a more or less collective nature – are put on display in this stubborn and oddly ritualistic deconstruction of the so-called "subject"? in the repeated attempts to reduce to material contingency, epiphenomena of matter in motion (and by extension, submitted to the movements of class, culture, society, language, etc.) those entities or forms of being that resisted such reductionism, whether they be called *subject*, *self*, *mind*, *freedom*, and so on? This thesis attempts to begin to formulate this question, or its necessity. But the question itself might not have any weight or force, let alone find itself within an appropriate horizon of comprehensibility, without our first learning about humanism itself, and the old, even archaic, attitudes about thought and the mind that subtended it.

I. Sources and Temporalities of "Humanism" and "Antihumanism"

Origins

In *The Life of The Mind*, Hannah Arendt distinguishes between mind, soul, and body, the second term denoting the seat of affectivity (or the "emotional apparatus").[22] For confirmation of this distinction, one that runs parallel to that between *reason* and *intellect*, which is also central to her book, Arendt turns to Aristotle's *De anima* and to his account of language in the text we call *De interpretatione*.[23] In her rather inventive reading of the latter,[24] Arendt sees Aristotle as

[22] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1978), I, pp. 30-7, 98.
[23] The relevant passage is *De interpretation*, 16a3-18.

distinguishing between speech as "'symbols of affects of the soul'" – with these affects defined as identical across all people – and speech as, Arendt writes, "the use of verbs and nouns, and these are not products or 'symbols' of the soul, but of the mind" – a use, we surmise, that is not collective, but individual.[25] Further, the possibility of speech that is not apophantic (i.e., that does not make a potentially true or false judgment regarding a state of affairs in the world, soul, or body) points, for Arendt, to the autonomy of thoughts and thinking from the obtaining world. Non-apophantic language is irreducible to what *is* or *exists*, thus indicating the mind's autonomy from body and soul.[26] Together, the two distinctions – between the quasi-animal or -natural expressions of a monotonous, collective emotional and sensory life, and the individuated speech of the life of the mind; and between denotative and non-referential uses of language – ground a view of thinking as autonomous, individual, and irreducible to this-worldly constraints. Hence, whereas "psychic phenomena" are closely related to the body, there is, Arendt writes, a "non-relation between body and mind."[27]

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[24] *Inventive*, since Arendt chooses to omit the question of combination (*synthesis*) and separation (*diairesis*) of words, in particular by means of some conjugation of the verb "to be" (either affirmatively or in negation), which for Aristotle is what properly opens the question of the truth and falsity of language (*De interpretation*, 16a39-18). In other words, what Arendt simply glosses as "the use of verbs and nouns" (as distinct, apparently, from the "symbols" of affections of the soul) is in fact for Aristotle simply a question of nouns or verbs *without combination via "to be"*: words, that is, such that they are not, or not yet, part of apophantic discourse. Arendt thus turns the distinction between isolated words (lexicon) and proposition (syntagm, statement) into a distinction between speech representing the thoughts of the mind, and speech as symbols of the affections of the soul – in other words, into proof of a distinction between mind and soul (compare this to Descartes in chapter 1, below). Arendt's reading, if questionable, does nonetheless seize upon the presence of the term "thoughts" (νοήματα), which appears along with "affections" (παθήματα τῆς ψυχῆς) in Aristotle's text. Further, her interpretation has the merit of trying to find in Aristotle's theory of language traces of the status accorded to thinking that Arendt detects in *De anima* (where it is a question of the mind as a distinct *type* of soul: 413b). Interestingly enough, the same Aristotelian distinction that Arendt uses to discuss the autonomy and immateriality of the individual's thinking was, we shall see, used by Averroists to theorize the collective Intellect of mankind, of which individual minds are but ephemeral points of actualization.

[25] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 34.

[26] Ibid., pp. 98-9.

[27] Ibid., p. 33.

For Arendt, the separation of the mind from both body and soul – a distinction, ultimately, between the mental and the worldly or corporeal – is enclosed within the very "experience of the activity of thought" itself. Philosophy is the proper domain of thinking, as distinct from intellection or knowing, which, for Arendt, is the sphere of science and everyday understanding, the realm, that is, of *accepted* concepts and truths, of what is correct and what is wrong, true and false, a sphere where criteria of understanding are grounded in the natural, institutional, and social world—in the *given*. As the domain of thinking, philosophy has repeatedly thematized this "experience," even if often only implicitly. Philosophy thus implies a degree of more or less implicit self-referentiality, which is at stake in any thinking, speaking, or writing, especially about thinking (or speaking or writing). Philosophy both *reflects* and *reflects on* thinking, even when it is not manifestly doing so, even when it thinks about the corporeal or social world, even, we might say, when it is reflecting on the self or psychological ego.[28] This would be something like philosophy's inescapable grounding in its own a priori, the practice of thinking itself, where the mind or "thinking ego" reflects (on) itself and its distinction from the world.

A look at Arendt's commentary on Kant's *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (1766) helps to clarify these ideas, and how they secretly pave the way for a very different understanding of thinking. Arendt evokes a section of Kant's text in which he draws an imperfect analogy between thinking and dreaming – *imperfect* because, whereas thinking makes a radical rupture with the sensible world, dreaming holds together the mental and the sensory, acts of the mind and impressions of the body (as in waking life). The pure state of the thinking ego is not like this. Arendt comments:

[28] E.g., in the Sartrean distinction between non-thetic, or pure, and thetic or reflexive self-consciousness. On this, see chapter 4.

> These notions of Kant's, if understood as constituting a dream theory, are patently absurd. But they are interesting as a rather awkward attempt to account for the mind's experiences of withdrawal from the real world. Because an account does have to be given of an activity that, unlike any other activity or action, never meets the resistance of matter. It is not even hindered or slowed down by sounding out in words, which are formed by sense organs. The experience of the activity of thought is probably the aboriginal source of our notion of spirituality in itself, regardless of the forms it has assumed. Psychologically speaking, one of the outstanding characteristics of thought is its incomparable *swiftness* […]. Thought is swift, clearly, because it is immaterial, and this in turn goes a long way toward explaining the hostility of so many of the great metaphysicians to their own bodies. From the viewpoint of the thinking ego, the body is nothing but an obstacle.[29]

Since thought is "immaterial" and finds no "material" recalcitrance even from the side of language (from which, we infer, thought is distinct), the "experience" of thinking discloses an immaterial thinking thing, the ego, which, when thinking, is withdrawn from the "real world." Thinking would be, then, not only the source of all "spirituality," perhaps even of all religion, of the otherworldly as such. Thinking is also the "aboriginal source" of what is, as we shall soon see, a central tenet of humanism: the effective reality, autonomy, freedom, and self-determination of the individual self or mind, and its irreducibility to what it seemingly is not, whether this be "matter" or society, biology or history, impulse or language, affect or culture. But thinking, the root of this truth, is also the root of an evil: the "metaphysical fallacy" of hypostatizing the activity of thinking, and the world-detachment it entails, into another world, a sphere of ideas or things in themselves. Idealism is not just a particular philosophy or tradition: it is thinking's most intimate temptation. Arendt continues:

> To conclude from this experience [of the activity of thought] that there exist 'things in themselves' which, in their own intelligible sphere, *are* as we 'are' in a world of appearances belongs among the metaphysical fallacies, or, rather, semblances of reason, whose very existence Kant was the first to discover, to clarify, and dispel. It seems only proper that this fallacy, like most of the others that have afflicted the tradition of philosophy, should have its source in the experiences of the thinking ego […] the paradoxical condition of a living being that, though itself part of the world of

[29] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 44.

> appearances, is in possession of a faculty, the ability to think, that permits the mind to withdrawal from the world without ever being able to leave it or transcend it.[30]

Arendt thus takes a critical stand toward idealism and other "metaphysical fallacies," an attitude with which modern readers can be expected to sympathize – one that they can be expected, also, to expect. But why would critique stop there? Why allow some disclosures of the experience of thinking to be fallacious, while others stand as unquestionable? Arendt's critique is partial, in other words: it assumes a radical division between, on the one hand, the aberrant "fallacy" of concluding, from the experience of thinking, to the reality of "things in themselves," and, on the other, the almost irrepressible derivation of the immateriality or autonomy of thought from the same "experiences of the thinking ego." Might not the ego and thinking itself need to be subjected to this same confident, modern suspicion?

One can imagine a response, possibly even Arendt's own. Perhaps she would point to the self-implication involved in any critique that would claim to go further, and doubt the autonomy or existence of the thinking ego itself: such a doubt, the response would say, would be the product of that whose existence or autonomy it seeks to put into doubt; and the very capacity to effectuate such a doubt would seem to prove the radical autonomy of thinking itself, here capable of doubting itself even though in so doing it manifestly acts and exists. Thought shows its immateriality, that is, its independence, even or *precisely in* critique and self-critique.[31] If this seems to prefigure Pinker or echo Descartes and a major aspect of Cartesian humanism, this is no accident: as long as we are on the level of thinking *tout court*, we remain in the loop and dimensions of self-reflexivity and self-implication: the movement of the *cogito*. Even the antihumanists discussed in this thesis do not escape it.

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[30] Ibid., pp. 44-5.

[31] Compare this to what Arendt herself says on p. 88: thinking, as opposed to knowing or intellection, is inherently "somehow self-destructive," never satisfied with the fixed or established, always moving and always willing to undermine ideas that have taken on a form or life of their own.

But this account of thinking, which Arendt found reflected in Kant and which informs our understanding of Descartes and of humanism per se, is in tension with another aspect of thought that Arendt mentions without considering its possible implications. This is thinking's relation to language. In the passage on Kant cited above, thinking is described as "not even hindered or slowed down by sounding out in words." Thinking maintains, then, a certain autonomy from language: language, constituting the "matter" to which thinking is most intimately related, is but a delicate, transparent vessel. Does this distinction not mirror that between mind and body, even between mind and affectivity? Language is a "sounding out" of thought with only an infinitesimal degree of materiality, so little, even null, that it does not weigh down the immaterial "swiftness" of thinking. Language is no problem – no matter – for thinking.[32]

But this view of language and of the mind (or self), a view that, this thesis will show, recurs more or less consistently in versions of philosophical humanism, is belied by some of Arendt's more explicit comments on language. As we saw, the distinction between mind, soul, and body was confirmed by Arendt's reading of Aristotle's *theory of language*; and she admits that thought and language are inseparable.[33] Yet inseparability, which might still lend itself to a humanist or idealist perspective on thinking, is taken slightly further in a passage *from earlier on* in Arendt's book:

> Descartes's *Cogito me cogitare ergo sum* is a non sequitur for the simple reason that this *res cogitans* never appears at all unless its *cogitationes* are made manifest in sounding-out or written-down speech, which is already meant for and presupposes auditors and readers as its recipients.[34]

[32] Cf. Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: PUF, 1967).
[33] See, e.g., Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 98-102.
[34] Ibid, p. 20. See also Ibid., p. 102. But compare this to ibid., p. 98.

Only insofar as a linguistic, material form of thinking exists can there be a *res cogitans*, both for others ("recipients") *and* for the agent of the thinking, the most proximate recipient of his or her own language. Thus "*cogito…ergo sum*" is a non sequitur because mere (self-)consciousness, without language, would be insufficient to establish existence.[35] Actual thoughts qua speech or writing are necessary, and these suppose recipients, others, alterity. So *cogito*, (self-)consciousness, is not enough for existence: "a non sequitur," Arendt says. But this reading itself, a version of Arendt's, forgets that the *cogito* that we encounter in Descartes *is* an enunciation. In other words, if *cogito* is too little in Arendt's sense, as spoken or written *cogito* is already far too much. The mere fact of language use (e.g., "*cogito*"), even in the mind, directs reflection from a solitary ego towards codes of meaning, to the "external" or transcendent materiality and pre-existent totality of language, and to subjectivity, then, that is socially- and linguistically-imbedded. Descartes (and arguably Arendt even here) was thinking about thinking, not about language. But he was writing – and writing his "cogito" – all along.[36]

Language, rather than the minimal "matter" that con-forms to thought, becomes, as it were, the matter for thinking – its problem and its materiality (and the problem *of* its materiality). Further, as Arendt points out, even the most abstract terms of philosophy are derived by metaphoric transference from words that once referred to "the world as given to our five bodily senses," a fact she states without unpacking its ramifications.[37] In light of this inescapable centrality and worldliness of language, the apparent autonomy of the mind (of thinking) might become less self-evident: might it be an illusion hiding a deep dependence on speech and

[35] Ibid., p. 19.
[36] For an excellent reading of Descartes from a similar perspective, see Hassan Melehy, *Writing Cogito: Montaigne, Descartes, and the Institution of the Modern Subject* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).
[37] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 31. See also pp. 102-3. "No language has a ready-made vocabulary for the needs of mental activity; they all borrow their vocabulary from words originally meant to correspond either to sense experience or to other experiences of ordinary life" (102).

writing? Language appears to be thought's vessel: should the relation be inverted? Is the ego or mind an illusion of language, a naïve hypostatization of grammar, as Nietzsche would say?

At one, central point of their opposition, as I understand them, humanism and antihumanism turn on distinct attitudes towards these often only implicit, and perhaps insoluble questions: towards, that is, the relation between language (speech and writing) and the ego, mind, or self in the "experience" of thinking. Arendt's own position is one of mitigated humanism, as it were. She describes speech as the *means* by which the mind makes the invisible (thinking) visible, and yet also insists on the inseparability of thinking and language, a position that threatens to undermine the purported qualities of the thinking mind. This latter aspect of her view is *logocentric* (Derrida) in its notion of speech and alphabetic writing (the latter is "written-down speech"[38]). But Arendt, who pleads incompetence regarding the different sorts of scripts and their unique consequences for thinking, nonetheless concludes a short section on "the written sign" with the following statement: "philosophy, as we know it, would hardly have come into existence without the Greeks' early reception and adaptation of the alphabet from Phoenician sources."[39]

While Arendt might here be thinking only of idealism and of a notion of truth based on vision, her claim dovetails with the perspective of the classicist and influential early media theorist Eric Havelock. In his *Preface to Plato*, Havelock suggests that alphabetic writing had something essential, even constitutive, to do with Plato's idealism, and the notion of the thinking "soul" to which Plato gave paradigmatic expression – in other words, with major sources of

[38] Ibid., pp. 20, 33-4. For Arendt's naïve understanding of writing, which accepts Western misunderstandings of Chinese script as purely ideographic, as opposed to Western phonetic, alphabetic scripts, see ibid., p. 100.
[39] Ibid., p. 102.

Western philosophy and views of subjectivity in general.[40] Writing allows the fixing of the fleeting and ephemeral, whether this be things, thoughts, or words. In its very form it entails their transformation into *objects* for new types of thinking, analysis, and investigation on the part of a *subject* — a process Havelock termed "the separation of the knower from the known."[41]

In this way, writing intensifies the conditions for the thinking agent to reflect on him or herself, and to become aware of the mind behind or above all acts of verbalized intellection, just as the form or idea of "dog" lies somehow behind all uses of the word "dog" and all empirical canines to which the word refers. According to the views of Havelock and other media theorists with similar theories (Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan), with the invention (or adaptation) and dissemination of the Greek alphabet, a pre-literate (primary oral) culture slowly transitions into a culture based upon phonetic literacy. Writing allows the individual to be detribalized,[42] and the mind as *subject* of intellection to emerge from its absorption in the natural world and social community.[43] What Arendt calls *thinking* might thus need qualification: thinking in, with, as, or after *writing*.

Whether one holds that the individual subject or ego is an *invention* of writing, or that writing simply allowed this ego to be perceived, discovered, or developed in an unprecedented (or exaggerated) way, depends on whether one is a humanist or antihumanist, an idealist or materialist, a philosopher or a media theorist, or both. Whatever the case may be, Arendt's and Havelock's views provide us with a crucial lesson: that speech and the practice of writing are indissoluble from the experience of thinking and from the problem of the mind, ego, self, or self-

[40] Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard/Belknap Press, 1962).
[41] Ibid., chapter 11: "Psyche or the Separation of the Knower from the Known," pp. 197-214.
[42] This is a recurrent motif in McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011 [1962]), and of Innis's first two chapters in *The Bias of Communication* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2009 [1951]), pp. 3-60.
[43] Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, pp. 197-233.

reflexivity that accompanies, is produced by, or produces all manifestations of language and thinking (of thinking as language).

In a nontrivial way, that is, this "experience" and its various interpretations lie at the heart of the different philosophical positions described in this thesis, here read in terms of their commitments to positions broadly termed humanism and antihumanism. The understanding of the speaking or writing self will be everywhere at stake, as will the question of the book and of writing in general, the linguistic media that communicate or modulate, express, form, or inform, this self. Such a thesis – a product of thinking and writing – cannot but be self-referential; even at a merely implicit level, it reflects on its and our own practices of analysis, history, and theory. It reflects on the practice of the humanities per se, and the philosophical and ethical commitments that we academics hold, if only in embarrassment, silence, or denial.

Thesis and Antithesis – Temporalities of (Anti)Humanism

This project emerged through my own "experiences" of thinking (of reading and writing) between the two corpuses here concerned, early modern French thought and 20th-century French philosophy. In schematic terms, I argue that the tensions between humanism and antihumanism that characterize the trajectory of 20th-century French thought – a trajectory whose effects are still palpable in and outside the Academy today–, should be reconsidered in light of what can be described, and needs to be theorized, as a similar conflict in 16th- and 17th-century French thought. To be sure, theological questions are central to the early modern moment of this story, in distinction to the 20th-century one, which implicated varieties of philosophy or theory that are largely secular. But this difference, rather than discouraging a comparative approach, is in my mind an invitation to consider the metaphysics, even the quasi-theological or mystical frameworks, of manifestly secular and post-metaphysical antihumanist theories. The long history

of the conflict between humanism and antihumanism exposes what seems like a recurrent logic of opposition between (1) philosophies of consciousness or of immanence, which hold fast to certain evidences of consciousness and to a perspective on the purely this-worldly, human sphere; and (2) theories that refuse the immediacy of spontaneous consciousness and discard anthropocentrism in favor of frameworks that transcend, ontologically and epistemically, the scope and capacities of any individual consciousness, self, or ego. My argument is that the 20th-century moment of the humanism-antihumanism conflict does not escape this recurrent logic. This is one way of underlining the ultimately *metaphysical* (philosophical) status of humanism and antihumanism, despite the ways their proponents have understood or depicted these positions. Though at times formulated in challenging, elegant theories of the sort I study here, each position corresponds to an ideological, reified version or core: the humanism of Pinker and other bourgeois loudspeakers, the antihumanism that latently guides scholarship in some humanities departments, or the anti-intellectualism of much hip postmodern or neoliberal culture today.

In the writing and work towards drafting this argument, I was guided by my own non-scholarly intuitions regarding parallelisms and analogies as much as by a question concerning the term "antihumanism" itself. The term, which dates from the 1930s,[44] is often associated with

[44] According to the *Trésor de la langue française*, the substantive ("anti-humanisme") and the adjective ("anti-humaniste") are first attested, though not exactly in the sense that has become customary, in Jacques Maritain's *Humanisme intégral* (Paris: Aubier, 1936), a text based on lectures from 1934. I return to it below. Another early attestation of the adjective is in Sartre's *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938): while Roquentin opposes the naive love for all things "human" of his interlocutor, the Autodidacte, he refuses to be called an "anti-humaniste" by him. The term would associate or integrate him, with that to which he is opposed. He thus insists: "Je *ne suis pas humaniste*, voilà tout" (152). Though Sartre would later loudly fly the banner of humanism, even become one of its major figures of 20th-century philosophy, his quip here forebodes something crucial to my thesis: the odd dialectics of humanism and antihumanism, what they share even in their opposition, their imbrication. For my purposes, a more relevant usage of the concept ("anti-humanisme") occurs in Althusser's 1963 text, where it refers to Marx's theoretical position: Althusser, "Marxisme et Humanisme," in *Pour Marx* (Paris: La Découverte, 1996 [1965]), p. 236. More research is needed on the way in which the term *antihumanism* arrived at its

those sorts of theories that first emerged in the French postwar period, theories that we also sometimes call *structuralist* and *post-structuralist,* and that arose after and more or less against Sartre's humanist existentialism and the bourgeois ideology to which it was considered related. Never mind the applicability of all these terms here, which is not my focus. What I am trying to get at is the mere fact that the term "antihumanism," as we use it, has rather odd qualities.

How does the term function? As I've just suggested, it is predicated of theories from the second half of the 20th century, and their more contemporary theoretical offshoots, setting these all *over against* ("anti-") something else ("humanism"), something presumably to be referred to some 20th-century philosophy or ideology (e.g., Sartrean existentialism, bourgeois ideology, socialist humanism, etc.). But this something ("humanism") *per se* also connotes something else: a cultural program and philosophical position that emerged hundreds of years before, itself subsumed under a general concept as such ("humanism") only in the 19th century, though its adjectival form ("humanist") emerged concurrently with the phenomenon in question. But this Late Medieval and Renaissance phenomenon itself had ancient roots…

This is a complicated story indeed! But it is also a productive mystery, productive of questions: Why do we tend to think of 20th-century antihumanism as something utterly *sui generis*, when the term we often use for it sends us back centuries before? Why not think about humanism and antihumanism, as they defined the most influential conflicts of 20th-century French thought, in terms of early modern counterparts: early modern humanism and… early modern "antihumanism"? What does this early modern antihumanism look like, and what might it teach us about its 20th-century homologue? Finally, what might the latter, understood as a homologue, teach us about the former?

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current academic usage, one associated, in English, with the term *posthumanism* (see OED entry "post-humanist").

The only examples of scholarship into this territory that I discovered – admittedly well into writing this thesis – were unable to answer these questions. The most important of these, Henri Gouhier's largely overlooked *L'anti-humanisme au XVIIe siècle* (1987), confirmed my views regarding the importance of religious currents, like Jansenism and Augustinianism more broadly, to early modern critiques of Neo-Stoic humanism.[45] But Gouhier's study suffers from the limited perspective it brings to both the early modern and 20th-century fronts: for example, it neglects humanism as a historical and philosophical phenomenon with roots going back well before the 17th century; it does not explore the importance of Cartesian humanism in the early modern period, and as a major factor in 20th-century French humanism; and, despite its awareness of applying a 20th-century concept ("anti-humanisme") to the early modern period, it offers only meager discussion of 20th-century French philosophy, and no sense of how studying the two periods together might inform our view of both, or of French thought in general.[46]

The other relevant study I encountered is Michael Moriarty's impressive two-volume *Early Modern French Thought* (2003, 2006).[47] Moriarty, who sees certain 17th-century French thinkers as foreshadowing some of the "demystifying" theories of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, shares a few of the crucial intuitions guiding my thesis. But his perspective, restricted to the 17th

[45] Henri Gouhier, *L'anti-humanisme au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 1987); Gouhier, "L' 'anti-humanisme' de Pascal," *Revue des travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques et comptes rendus de ses séances*, vol. 115, nº1 (1962): 16-33; Gouhier, "L'anti-humanisme de Pascal" (1954), in *Congresso Internacional de Filosofia* (São Paulo, 1958), vol. II, pp. 389-95; Madeleine Madaule, "Genèse et développment de l'anti-humanisme pascalien," *Les cahiers de Fontenay*, nº 39-40 (Sept., 1985), pp. 121-31 (see also the other works of Gouhier's she cites there). A recent study that takes up some of Gouhier's analysis is Hall Bjørnstad, *Créature sans créateur: Pour une anthropologie baroque dans les "Pensées" de Pascal* (Laval, Québec: Presses de l'Université de Laval, 2010). For a critique of this sort of perspective, and implicitly of mine, see Emmanuel Bury, "Humanisme et anti-humanisme dans les morales du Grand Siècle," in *La morale des moralistes*, J. Dagen, ed. (Paris: Champion, 1999), pp. 47-59.
[46] Gouhier (pp. 131-4) also defines 20th-century antihumanism as atheistic, 17th-century antihumanism as Christian, without wondering if the structure of a theological metaphysics might be common to both.
[47] Moriarty, *Early Modern French Thought: The Age of Suspicion* (Oxford: Oxford Unievrsity Press, 2003); Moriarty, *Fallen Nature, Fallen Selves: Early Modern French Thought II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

century, offers no real discussion of humanism or antihumanism themselves, no sustained engagement with 20th-century French thought, and traces a trajectory of 17th-century thinkers that, if similar to what I propose, is crucially distinct insofar as it places Descartes alongside, not in conflict with, more radically Augustinian thinkers like Pascal.

For me, Gouhier's and Moriarty's work paled in comparison to the grandeur and philosophical tenor of Paul Bénichou's classic *Morales du grand siècle* (1948), which depicts 17th-century intellectual conflicts in captivating and, for me, influential terms.[48] But Bénichou's book was written right after World War II. While his work was clearly informed by the philosophical concerns of Sartre and the topical question of humanism, Bénichou could at the time not foresee how the conflicts he described would recur in the remaining half of the 20th century. In turn, scholarship on this latter period – which I discuss below – seems to have neglected the early modern side of things.

Thus, the very rare scholarship that has addressed the question of French antihumanism[49] in the early modern period has, to a limited degree, perceived similarities – or their possibility – between 17th- and 20th-century antihumanisms.[50] But they fall short of a comparative perspective

[48] Paul Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948). Another work from around the same time, and that has had a similar influence of me, although it is not centered on France, is Hiram Haydn, *The Counter Renaissance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950).

[49] Outside the realm of French studies, I know of two somewhat relevant studies, though neither of them contain considerable discussions of antihumanism: Stanley Fish, *Versions of Antihumanism: Milton and Others* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Despite his title, Fish explicitly discusses antihumanism in one passage only, on Milton (whom Fish sees as ultimately "more a humanist than an antihumanist"): "antihumanism is the logical extension of the requirement that man renounce all his powers and acknowledge total dependence" (9). The second study is Rhodri Lewis, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[50] In his late text, "'Être juste avec Freud': L'histoire de la folie à l'âge de la psychanalyse" (1991), Derrida displayed a similar intuition, though not in these terms. Derrida there refers to Montaigne and Pascal's notion of "le fondement mystique" of the authority of laws (see my chapter 3), which figures in Derrida's book *Force de loi* (1994). He then proceeds to critique Foucault's notion of the "âge classique": the era, more or less, of rationalism in philosophy, politics, science, and culture more generally (ca. 1650-1800, for Foucault). Derrida suggests that, contrary to what Foucault and his concept would have us believe, this "age" was already the site — in figures like Pascal, and before him, Montaigne "et quelques

that would be able to analyze these resonances in detail, flesh out their implications for how we view both modern and early modern French thought, and use this all to inflect our understanding of the meaning and recurrent nature of debates around humanism, antihumanism, and theory. These are some of the guiding questions and ambitions of my project. If they have not been fulfilled, I hope that I will have at least allowed these questions to emerge in an engaging form, and made clear the meaning and interest of addressing them.

Though this thesis is comparative, my perspective is more dialectical: there is no question here of saying that one moment of antihumanism in French thought *is* the other, that they are *the same*. On the contrary, the two are read in proximate distance or distant proximity. The task is, *first*, to understand early modern antihumanism and its critical and theoretical force, how it speaks *inter alia* to concerns that we associate with some of the most exciting, thrilling, or damning thinkers of postwar France; and, *second*, to situate postwar French thought in this new trajectory or genealogy. Rather than seeing 20th-century French antihumanism only as anti-Enlightenment, along the lines of figures like Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, I read it back into the intellectual currents that opposed humanism – Cartesian humanism in particular – already in Descartes's time—that is, well before the critiques of the so-called "Cartesian Subject" that became a fixture of modern philosophy and fashionable "theory." This is intended

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autres" — of what he calls "une problematisation active, vigilante, hypercritique," for example, around concepts like "pouvoir, autorité, savoir et non-savoir, loi, jugement, fiction, crédit, transfert": "'Être juste avec Freud,'" in *Résistances: de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 120, n. 1. Derrida continues: "Il est difficile d'assurer que l'« âge classique » n'a pas thématisé, réfléchi et à la fois déployé les concepts de ses symptômes: les concepts qu'on tournera plus tard vers les symptômes qu'on croira pouvoir lui assigner un jour" (ibid.). In other words, Derrida suggests we address the *critical* discourses that, already in the so-called "âge classique," undermined its rationalism, *classicisme*, and, I might add, humanism. In my view, what Foucault discussed under the term "l'âge classique" did exist, but his panoptic vision of the period obscured the antihumanist oppositions that Cartesian rationalism and humanism faced already in early modernity, long before Foucault's trio of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud—not to mention before Foucault, Derrida, et al. themselves.

to change our views of both "moments of antihumanism," and to delineate a recurrent conflict in French thought.

The choice of Descartes, who here figures as a major French early modern "humanist," is motivated not only by his importance or notoriety as a "modern philosopher" of the early modern period, as we tend to see him (not without paradox): as the "father" of modern philosophy and target of modern critical theory and antihumanism, a Descartes we know all too well. More crucially, Descartes here plays the role he does because of the specific nature of his "humanism." As we will see, he occupies a unique position following the heyday of Renaissance humanism, the explosive moment of the Reformation, and the Wars of Religion. His humanism is one evacuated of classical erudition, though it too is grounded in material practices involving reading and writing. It partakes of the self-assurance and anti-pedantic ideology of 17th-century *honnêteté*,[51] all the while promoting, implicitly and explicitly, its own educational and pedagogical program. Descartes does not turn to Cicero or the Stoics for his voluntarism and heroic image of the human mind and self, at least not explicitly; implicitly the debt to Cicero, the Stoics, and the Neo-Stoics is obvious. While *actually* rekindling ancient and Renaissance ideas of self-mastery and freedom, he *tells us* that the ancients are of no use.

One cannot overstate the importance and perennial attraction of this appearance of spontaneity, anti-bookish self-certainty, and appeal to what Descartes called "le bon sens" – "la chose au monde la mieux partagée," as he described it.[52] Cartesian humanism was and is so

[51] See Emmanuel Bury, "À la recherche d'une synthèse française de la civilité: L'honnêteté et ses sources," in A. Montandon, ed., *Pour une histoire des traités de savoir-vivre* (Clermont-Ferrand: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines de Clermont-Ferrand, 1994), pp. 179–214.

[52] This is the first line of Part I of the *Discours de la méthode* (1637): "Le bon sens est la chose du monde la mieux partagée […] [L]a puissance de bien juger, et distinguer le vrai d'avec le faux, qui est proprement ce qu'on nomme le bon sens ou la raison, est naturellement égale en tous les hommes": in

potent because it is grounded in the apparently basic or "natural" movements of self-reflection, available to anyone at any time in consciousness and apperception. This, incidentally, is what helps to make Descartes so "modern" and enduring; recourse to the form rather than the content of mind or consciousness, as one might put it, is what makes the *cogito* a sort of foundational moment of modern subjectivity, arguably still today.[53] While thinkers like Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Justus Lispius cited and imitated ancient models for their celebrations of human "dignity" and "freedom," and for their exhortations to self-discipline and mastery over nature, Descartes grounded humanism in something he simply called "reason."

This does not mean that Descartes was not versed in the traditions available to his time. He was, and for those who wanted to quibble about philosophical details Descartes was eager to oblige, at least to a certain extent (and scholars are still quibbling about these details today). But the point was elsewhere: it consisted in aligning the evacuation of all that Renaissance erudition, Scholastic technical detail, and prickly concerns of theology, with another evacuation: the emptying of the ego of its earthly and bodily attachments and content. This hyperbolic doubt or "reduction," as Husserl would call it, left behind a mind unhinged from time and space, tradition and body, a mind left marveling at its own power to bring this separation about, and at the freedom with which it could will and think, *despite* the real events and conditions of the real world. This basic *intuition* of freedom, self-certainty, and self-mastery went hand in hand, in Descartes, with a heroic notion of humanity in the world: capable of discovering truth,

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Descartes, *Œuvres*, Adam and Tannery, eds (Paris: Vrin, 1996), VI, pp. 1-2. Descartes's works from this edition will hereafter be cited as AT, followed by volume and page numbers: e.g., AT VI, pp. 1-2.

[53] Even antihumanists, like Nietzsche or Althusser, would not dispute this fact, but would say that the spontaneous certainties of self-consciousness are illusions. Indeed, the ego's function as such, some might say, is to solidify and produce this imaginary (Lacan) unity, individuality, sovereignty, etc., of the self.

possessing knowledge, and of mastering nature, albeit over a period of progress.[54] The human was not reducible to its corporeal animality; Nature would not lord over humanity. This double-sided *philosophical humanism*, a position regarding both individual selfhood and the relationship between human selves and the natural world, is what early modern antihumanists attacked.

Despite his differences vis-à-vis Renaissance humanism, that is, despite his explicit nonchalance for the Ancients, Descartes thus operates as a paradigmatic figure for a sort of philosophy that would endure and inform all major instances of humanism, from the Enlightenment to Sartrean existentialism and on dominant forms today. Further, it is precisely this more formal, "evacuated," or philosophical humanism that brings out, by contrast and opposition, the theological aspects of early modern antihumanism that opposed Cartesian and Neo-Stoic ideas. Petrarch had been a Ciceronian *and* Augustinian. Descartes's own apparent recourse to Augustine (for the *cogito*) needs to be understood in its radical departure from the Augustinian project. Augustine encouraged self-reflection so as to find God within; Descartes's self-reflection finds the *res cogitans*.[55] God is brought in *ex machina* to silence any skeptics and naysayers to the contrary. Descartes's own, *personal* faith is of no import here; what is crucial is the procedure of his thought, what it actually does. The *cogito*, while it reminded some, like Pascal, of Augustine, found a different god within: the individual mind. This non- (even anti)theological aspect of Cartesian humanism, which we find radicalized in Sartre,[56] not only

[54] Another famous line from the *Discours*: "à nous rendre comme maîtres et possesseurs de la Nature" (62).
[55] Cf. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 127-58.
[56] Andrew Copson notes that the English nominal form ("humanism"), which entered the language in the 19th century to translate the German coinage *Humanismus*, referred, broadly: (1) to the Renaissance revival of ancient learning and the tradition stemming from this renaissance (that is, the specialized meaning that one can still find in academic studies); and (2) to "generically a range of attitudes to life that were non-religious, non-theistic, or non-Christian" (p. 2). This is the meaning of "humanism" and the adjectival "humanist" that "prevailed" in non-academic contexts through the 20th century. "By the start of the [20th] century, the words were being used primarily to denote approaches to life – and the takers of

puts into relief the fascinating theological underpinnings of the styles of early modern antihumanism studied in this thesis. It also asks us to be on the lookout for how early modern theological debates and images tacitly haunt the conflict of humanism and antihumanism in the 20th century. Descartes's opponents often made theologically inflected critiques. What about postwar antihumanists?

II. Humanism

In order to understand Cartesian humanism, and the antihumanism that opposed it – and, arguably, in order to understand the 20th-century homologues of these movements –, it will be crucial to look at the emergence of humanism in Europe. For humanism itself was caught up in antagonisms from the start. And its proclaimed enemies help us to understand the recurrent tensions that will be continually at stake in what follows, in the early modern and modern periods. (Readers eager for a quicker route to the substance of the thesis may turn to the "chapter summaries" in section V below.)

History – A Pedagogical Program with Philosophical Aspirations

Perhaps because of the purchase that the notion of (philosophical) "humanism" gained in the first half of the 20th century, not to mention the influence of Sartre's existentialism, some influential Renaissance scholars have tried to emphasize that, in its origins, humanism was not directly a philosophical position. It was first and foremost a cultural program, educational practice, and ideal of self-cultivation; only secondarily was it philosophical. "Humanism" was about art, these scholars seem to say, not about concepts: all that philosophical and political stuff came later,

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those approaches – that were distinguished by the valuing of human beings and human culture *in contrast with* valuing gods and religion, and by affirming the effectiveness of human reason applied to evidence *in contrast with* theism, theological speculation, and revelation" (ibid.): Andrew Copson, "What is Humanism," in Copson and Grayling, eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Humanism* (Chichester: Wiley, 2015), pp. 1-33. In this sense, as opposed for example to Petrarch or even Ficino, the Cartesian project, for its sidelining of theological questions, is *humanist* in a more potent and modern sense.

after the original, belletrist impulse of the movement. But the very concept of *humanism* belies them, as we find from the words used to make their claims. Here I will cite at some length Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Herman Randall, Jr.'s introduction to the influential volume they put together with Ernst Cassirer: *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, from 1948, that is, only a few years after Sartre's famous lecture, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1945).[57] Kristeller and Randall, Jr., write:

> To understand the Humanistic movement, it would be well to remember that during the Italian Renaissance the term 'Humanism' [a term not coined until the 19th century, as we will learn in a second…] denoted primarily a specific intellectual program and only incidentally suggested the more general set of values which have in recent times come to be called 'humanistic.' Humanism appeared in Italy toward the end of the thirteenth century. […] The major concern of the Humanists was an educational and cultural program based on the study of the classical Greek and Latin authors. […] Yet the interest of the Humanists in the classics was not merely scholarly but also served a practical purpose. They emphasized the ideal of literary elegance and considered the imitation of the Roman authors the best way of learning to speak and to write well. […] The interests of the Humanists ranged from rhetoric and poetry to history and moral philosophy. Work in each of these fields comprised both the study of the appropriate classical authors and the composition of original writings patterned on their model. For this group of disciplines the scholars of the time, following certain ancient precedents, coined the comprehensive term, *Studia Humanitatis*, or 'the Humanities,' and hence called themselves 'Humanists,' It is from this designation that nineteenth-century historians derived the term 'Humanism.' Although 'the Humanities' is merely another name for these particular studies, the choice of the term implies a claim very characteristic of the cultural and educational ideal of the Humanists: the cultivation of the classics or 'the Humanities' is justified because it serves to educate and to develop a desirable type of human being. For the classics represent the highest level of human achievement and should hence be of primary concern for every man.[58]

Note the intriguing shifts in this passage from (1) the notion of "a specific intellectual program" that "only incidentally" was linked to the philosophical aspects of "humanism," to (2) the "practical purpose" of the Humanists to, finally, (3) the full-blown assertion that the term

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[57] Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Nagel, 1946).

[58] Kristeller and Randall, Jr., "General Introduction," in Cassirer, Kristeller, and Randall, Jr., eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 2-4. Cassirer died during the preparation of the volume, and hence was unable to write the introduction. See also Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanistic Strains* (New York: Harper, 1961), "The Humanist Moment," pp. 3-23.

"humanities" – and, by extension, "humanist" and the more recent "humanism" – "implies" certain "claim[s]" that were *essential* to the very "cultural and educational ideal" of this cultural phenomenon. In other words, even scholars like Kristeller and Randall, Jr., would be hard-pressed to deny that *humanism* was at once a cultural or educational program, linked to the study, imitation, and dissemination of a certain corpus of texts, *and* a philosophical position on the sort of human – the most and truly *human* human – that is supposed to be cultivated, and revealed, through these texts and through the literate practices of reading and writing in which they are embedded.

And how could it be otherwise, given that the humanists' corpus was not the product of random nostalgia for ancient times, but featured authors like Cicero, himself in part responsible for the very notion – at once pedagogical and philosophical – of the *studia humanitatis*, and for the focus on moral philosophy revived in the Renaissance?[59] In other words, the ideals of moral and ethical perfection associated with the "humanities" and "humanism" were intimately related not only to the *form* of humanistic study – the reading and imitation of the ancients –, but also, of course, to the contents and motivations of that study, to the pedagogical and moral philosophies of those authors, like Cicero, in which the humanists found their ideal combination of writing well, living well, and a related exaltation of the ethical and rational capacities of the individual.

In this respect, what Kristeller and Randall, Jr. call, somewhat oddly, the "practical purpose" of the humanists (that is, "the ideal of literary elegance" and of "learning to speak and to write well") is not distinct from, but absolutely crucial to, the ethical goals and convictions, i.e., the *philosophy*, underlying humanism.[60] What Kristeller and Randall, Jr. would like us to

[59] See Kristeller, "The Humanist Moment," pp. 9-10, 18.

[60] In the tripartite project of self-cultivation proposed by Pico in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, this becomes quasi explicit: the first step combines "moral philosophy" and "the art of discourse or reasoning" (*per artem sermocinalem sive rationariam*) or "dialectic" as a means of ethical and mental purification in

keep separate, that is, the educational, literary, and philosophical aspects of humanism, are interrelated. Speaking, writing, and reasoning well are defined within and aim towards an ideal of human perfection attainable through these "practical" means. The humanist educational program is not incidentally, but perhaps constitutively, linked to a concept like "the dignity of man."[61]

The challenge, then, is to think the emphasis on a certain type of literacy – on certain practices of reading and writing – *together with* the moral philosophies and more heroic or optimistic notions of the human being associated with and mediated through these practices; to think together "the dignity of man" and the humanistic pedagogical program. This, or an aspect of this, is a recurrent concern of what follows: to understand the articulation between humanist and idealist notions of selfhood and practices of literacy relying on and deriving from certain types of texts, especially, texts of moral philosophy rooted, ultimately, in Antiquity. Recalling the views of Havelock and Arendt, we might lead humanism back, ultimately, to the alphabetic writing system in which the philosophy of Plato was written and which afforded if not the condition of possibility, at least the circumstance, for that explicit, reflective self-consciousness of the mind that is repeatedly presupposed, celebrated, or derided across the history of Western thought.[62]

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preparation for (2) the study of natural science ("natural philosophy") and, ultimately, for (3) theology: Pico, *Oratio*, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, in Cassirer, Kristeller, and Randall, Jr., eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, pp. 224-230, and, in general, pp. 229ff.

[61] See Kristeller's introduction to Pico's *Oration*, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, p. 221.

[62] To uncover this story, incidentally, would imply a perspective distinct from and related to the Derridean history of Western thought's *logocentrism*, as formulated in *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967). The perspective indicated here – one focused on *scriptism* – would involve a (no doubt difficult) synthesis between the Derridean framework, the views of the media theorists Marshall McLuhan, Eric Havelock, and Harold Innis, and the German media theoretical perspectives of Friedrich Kittler and others. For the concept of "scriptism" and some relevant literature, see the theoretical articles by Olson ("The Literacy Episteme: From Innis to Derrida") and Harris ("Speech and Writing") in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literacy*, ed. by D. R. Olson and N. Torrance (New York: Cambridge U. Press, 2009).

Enemies (1) – Scholasticism and Latin Averroism

As intimated above, humanism came on the scene in an antagonistic relationship to certain preexisting systems of thought and their associated ideologies. One major enemy of humanism was, of course, institutionalized Scholasticism.[63] This the humanists attacked for its apparently formalist and abstract focus on logic and natural science – to the detriment, that is, of moral philosophy. This critique of Scholasticism, a recurrent topos of humanism, is provocative: it displays in a schematic fashion a crucial and monumental dualism between Science and Ethics, which recurs again and again throughout the conflicts studied in this thesis. Humanism was largely suspicious of the theoretical elegance and complexity of Scholasticism. The flipside of this is that humanism, of whatever stripe, is hardly able to claim rigorous philosophical precision at all. But its down-to-earth spontaneity is part of its appeal. It is also a source of serious vulnerability to critique.

The nature of this massive opposition (Science and Ethics), and its enduring consequences, will become less abstract when we learn that a major foe of humanism was not simply Scholasticism but, more precisely, an Aristotelian naturalism of the more radical, Averroist sort, named after the great Commentator of Aristotle, Averroes (ibn Rushd, d. 1198). This philosophy – *Latin Averroism*, it was called – flourished in Italy especially, thanks to the particular institutional circumstances of the Italian universities: unlike their French counterparts, they had no Theological Faculty. While, in Paris, Aristotelians were either theologians or natural

[63] This is of course not the case of the Platonist and Aristotelian brands of Renaissance thought, as found for example in Cusa, Ficino, Pico, and Pomponazzi. These thinkers often had serious philosophical training and so drew more readily on the Scholastic and Aristotelian traditions (among others). Hence Kristeller and Randall, Jr. divide early Italian Renaissance thought into three distinct yet intersecting categories, Humanism (e.g., Petrarch), Platonism (e.g., Ficino), and Aristotelianism (e.g., Pomponazzi): "General Introduction," pp. 2, 5-14. Nonetheless, "humanist" aspects imbue all three, as we shall see regarding the topics of the mind and human "dignity." Moreover, Erasmus, the figure largely responsible for the "first Renaissance" in France, shared the humanist or Petrarchan distaste for Scholasticism, as would Rabelais, Montaigne, and Descartes.

philosophers and logicians practicing under the watchful gaze of the powerful Theological Faculty (the Sorbonne), in Italy, Aristotelianism was not the road to the elitist realm of theological theory but to medicine and natural science.[64] Latin Averroism was the name for this *scientific*, Averroist version of Aristotle, which had no need to worry about departures from accepted Christian dogma. It had been largely pushed out of Paris, in part by the might of Aquinas's refutations, in the 1270s; it found respite and fertile ground in the universities of Italy, Padua especially.[65]

This radical Aristotelianism featured several ideas that were unpalatable to the religiously minded and to humanists alike: for example, that creation is eternal and proceeds through emanations; that God's power is not infinite, that He does not have knowledge of the particulars, and so on.[66] But the most notorious of its notions, and that which distinguished the Averroists in the West, was the idea of monopsychism, a theory that arguably forebodes aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics, and which, rather than being a medieval relic, attained its most influential status in the 15th and even 16th centuries.[67] The idea was that, as matter is eternal, so is the one Intellect, a collective mind of which individual minds are just temporary individuations, particular actualizations, through which the intelligible forms, existing in the one, immaterial, eternal Intellect, are grasped by means of the *phantasmata* of imagination.[68] "These human intellects

[64] Kristeller and Randall, Jr., "General Introduction," pp. 8-11, here p. 9.
[65] Ibid., pp.9-10.
[66] Ibid, p. 10; Dag Nikolaus Hasse, "Arabic philosophy and Averroism," in J. Hankins, ed. *The Cambridge Handbook to Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 117; Hasse, *Success and Suppression: Arabic Sciences and Philosophy in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[67] Hasse, "Arabic philosophy and Averroism," pp. 114, 117. "In Renaissance Italy, Averroism for several reasons attained an intensity and dynamism unparalleled in the Middle Ages" (117).
[68] Ibid., pp. 115-6.

live on after death only as moments in the single Intellect of mankind. Hence there is no personal immortality, no heaven or hell, and no last judgment."[69]

Averroism is so crucial to acknowledge because aspects of this view will continue to haunt humanism throughout its history. On a general level, this is a theory pitting the Collective against the Individual, the System or Totality against the Self, the impersonal One against the Individual, and so on. The notion of a collective Intellect reduced the personal mind to just a node or mode of some transcendent structure, threatening individuality in this world before ensuring an absolute dissolution of selfhood in the next. Antihumanism, when it appears, tends to operate these sorts of reductions or dissolutions of the self, referring selfhood to external or transcendent structures or systems or frameworks over which the ego has little control. In turn, the humanist reaction to these sorts of theories reveals a (perhaps Western) fear of the dissolution of boundaries between self and Other, of being swallowed up by the world of matter and by the collective, by the demotic ocean in which selfhood comes apart.[70]

That this imposing doctrine was rooted in the Arabic Commentator of a Pagan philosopher made matters worse. The comments of the "Father of Humanism," Petrarch, in a letter to a friend from 1370 – "I hate the whole lot of [the Arabs]. […] I will not be persuaded that any good can come from Arabia"[71] – point to the associations of this sort of antihumanism (*avant la lettre*) with alterity: Averroist Aristotelianism was rooted in an Arabic philosophy that, imported into and institutionalized in the West, now threatened the nascent modern Western self

[69] Kristeller and Randall, Jr., "General Introduction," p. 10.
[70] It is thus rather revealing that Aquinas's refutation (the 1270 *Treatise on the Unicity of the Intellect against the Averroists*) turned on the argument: "that Averroes could not explain the fact that a single person thinks (*hic homo simgularis intelligit*)": Hasse, "Arabic philosophy and Averroism," p. 116.
[71] Letter to Giovanni de'Dondi dell'Orologia, Nov. 1370, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, p. 142.

with otherness.[72] Though the pejorative usage of *arabesque* dates only from the 19th century – when it is used precisely to degrade the Arabic influence on Aristotelianism[73] – Petrarch surely would have found this term fitting to characterize Averroist naturalist, scientific philosophy, with its technicality, its complexity, and its apparent distance from the grand moral and spiritual strivings of the individual.

The editors of *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* put the opposition in clear, if perhaps hyperbolic and partial terms:

> This [Italian/Averroist Aristotelianism] was a naturalistic and scientific rather than a Humanistic philosophy; its conception of human nature emphasized man's dependence on the world rather than his freedom and glory. And the unity of the Intellect is a collective and impersonal conception, with little scope for the more individualistic and personal values the Humanists prized. It is small wonder that from Petrarca down the Humanists felt in strong opposition to this professional philosophy of the universities and that their own intellectual defenses and rationalizations were developed in contrast to it. As against its Aristotle, they turned to Plato; as against its prevailing anticlericalism, they turned to a free and modernizing religious gospel; as against its scientific interest, they turned to human nature; and, above all, as against its collectivism, they turned to the dignity and worth of the human individual. The personal immortality of the soul became the banner under which men fought for more individualistic and personal values. […] But it was not against medieval asceticism and otherworldliness that their philosophy was

[72] On the humanists' anti-Averroist polemics, which have continued to obscure the question of points of contact between certain humanists and Arabic philosophy even into modern scholarship, see Hasse, "Arabic philosophy and Averroism," pp. 118-19, 129-30.

[73] That is, in what seems to be the earliest attestation of this sense of *arabesque* in French, from Victor Cousin's *Fragments philosophiques* (Paris: Ladrange, 1838), I, p. 230. There, Cousin pejoratively describes Scholasticism – an import of Arabian origin, he points out ("les Arabes…les Maures," he says) – for its tending towards *petty* sophistries as opposed to the *grand* questions of, especially, Plato and Bacon. For Cousin, Bacon arrives as the savior of modern thought. Referring the world back to "experience," Bacon happily put an end to the prattle and technicalities of Scholasticism (this disregard for linguistic subtlety – a disregard, even, of language in general – is also, we will see, a recurrent aspect of humanism): "Aristote reparaît et refleurit sous les Arabes, et donne naissance à la scholastique […] mal étudié et mal compris, il [Aristote] n'engendre que la scholastique. […] Les grandes discussions avaient cessé, et, dans ce silence du génie sur les hauts intérêts de la science, on n'entendait que le bruit sourd et confus de la dialectique péripatéticienne, dégradée par toutes les petites inventions du bel esprit arabesque et de la subtilité monastique" (230). The passage later figured in Cousin's *Cours d'histoire de la philosophie morale* (1841) and *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne* (1846). In English, the pejorative use of the term also seems to date from the early 19th century (see Oxford English Dictionary, entry "arabesque").

> aimed; it was against a scientific rationalism in the name of a more personal interpretation of the world.[74]

Dependence on the world vs. freedom, independence, and glory; collective Intellect vs. individual mind (meaning, that the individual is not reducible to matter, society, history, ideology, language, etc.); impersonal eternity vs. personal immortality (we now see why the latter was such a crucial point to establish: it concerned the very unity and selfhood of the self); a scientific rationalism threatening the human being from without vs. a subjective, spiritual viewpoint on world, self, and faith; and so on. Here, in schematic terms, are more of the binary oppositions that recur in the conflicts studied in this thesis. This is why Aristotelianism, especially in its radical, Latin Averroist form, deserves consideration in a long history of humanism and antihumanism. In its "exotic," obscure, and theoretical sinews, and with its imposing idea of the collective Intellect, it represents, as it were, the terrifying Dionysian night from which the Apollonian self must shine forth and rend itself free.

Hence we might begin, not to adopt, but to understand Jacob Burckhardt's famous and no doubt mythologizing words from his *Civilization of the Renaissance* (1860): before the advent of the Renaissance self-conscious individual, "man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation."[75] This is a gross overstatement, one that scholars across many decades have critiqued. But accuracy is not the point here; what is essential is that this narrative, and all of the fears, feelings, and ideological binaries that went with it, became a sort of imago of our culture. It is a tale of the ego, of the emergence of the one, of form, from

[74] Kristeller and Randall, Jr., "General Introduction," p. 11. Ficino and Pico were more open to Aristotelianism, as long as it was integrated into their syncretic programs.

[75] Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* I (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 143. As Murchland writes: "Many scholars think today that Burckhardt exaggerated the individuality of Renaissance man as he did the autonomy of the period with respect to the Middle Ages. But he seems incontestably right in pointing out the special problem of self-consciousness, the problem of man's search for a suitable image of himself, that dominated so much of Renaissance writing": "Introduction," in *Two Views of Man*, Murchland, ed. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966), xvi.

disarticulation in the *mass* of natural matter and the social collective (if these can be distinguished at all).

Examples – Innocent III, Manetti, Pico, and the Dignity of Man

We might further understand the terms of this dynamic by examining a sort of gigantomachy between early representatives of two discernable currents: one, if necessarily still Christian and somewhat indebted to medieval thought,[76] is humanist, drawing its authority from Cicero; the other is committed to a more exclusively Christian postlapsarian theology. Again, what is essential here is to extract the forms, associations, qualities, and affects attached to humanism and its Other(s). The humanist opposition to the theological theme of the "misery of man" is one place to start.

Cardinal Lotario dei Conti di Segni, future Innocent III (1198-1216), a pope known for his forceful efforts to assert power over Europe's secular rulers, composed his contemptuous and satirical critique of human life while still Cardinal, around 1196. *De miseria humanae conditionis* knew great popularity for centuries, surviving in some 700 manuscripts and printed around 50 times by the mid-17th century.[77] Weaving together biblical citations, Lotario paints an image of postlapsarian human life riddled with misery, vice, and pain: from the precarity of the mortal body and its labors, to the shortcomings and pathetic vices of moral life, to the inevitability of death amid all this wretchedness, and the pride in which, nonetheless, people

[76] See Emmanuel Faye, *Philosophie et perfection de l'homme: De la Renaissance à Descartes* (Paris: Vrin, 1983), p. 32, who mentions the influence of Bernard de Clairvaux, Richard de Saint Victor, and Greek patristics on the humanist concept of the "dignity of man." While it thus had roots in early Christianity and ultimately in Antiquity, the theme of *dignitas* was "repeated with new emphasis during the Renaissance" (Kriseller on Pico, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, p. 219). Indeed, it was linked by Pico to a more modern view of human freedom beyond or outside a perspective on human creatureliness and sin.

[77] See John C. Moore, "De Miseria Humanae Conditionis: A Speculum Curiae?" *The Catholic Historical Review* 67 (1981), 553–64.

indulge themselves—pride, origin and end of all sin, which sets people against God and brings them to set themselves in His place.[78]

Men are made from earth; they are as low as earthbound creatures and even lower than other things, animate and inanimate, made from less base and more vivacious materials, like air or fire: "All other elements are superior to the earth in dignity."[79] Because of sin, then, humans are debased: they are reduced to their corporeal, creaturely existence. As an element, earth is passive, inert, it has no inner force, no principle of autonomy; it is formed from without into what it is, and only pride could allow it to believe itself to be its own maker. Once molded by God, it now is molded by passion and vice. Body among bodies, armed with deifying pride, capable, perhaps, of abstaining to some extent from an otherwise blind pursuit of satisfaction culminating in death—such, in broad contours, is the image of the fallen self. We see how it relies on a certain metaphorical or qualitative core, a *mythology* of inert matter, of earthliness and its material properties. Pride is the paradox of the earthbound: the pretention of the lowest to be highest.

Some 250 years after Innocent's death, an early Italian humanist, Giannozzo Manetti (1396-1459) took exception to this acclaimed and dismal portrayal of human life.[80] In his popular treatise *On the Dignity of Man*, composed in the early 1450s, Manetti sought to refute Innocent III (often in no uncertain words) and, along with him, anyone, including ancient authors, who ever extolled such pessimist tunes as the misery of life, the advantages of death, the

[78] Pope Innocent III, *On the Misery of Man*, in *Two Views of Man*, Murchland, ed., pp. 3-60 (on ambition and pride, 48-58).
[79] Ibid., p. 4.
[80] Admittedly, Lotario had in mind to compose a treatise on the dignity of man to compliment his dark text. The project was not undertaken; and some have argued that his *De miseria* is consonant with his views of human life, both as cardinal and, later, as pope. See Moore, "De Miseria," p. 555.

horrors of the body, the baseness or materiality of the soul, and so forth.[81] At one point, Manetti appeals to common "sense," by which he seems to mean that of the ancients and the Catholics alike. This appeal to a timeless "sense" is important since, here, without expressly contradicting the doctrine of the Fall – a doctrine obviously unknown to the ancient "Pagan" philosophers and a major bone of contention between their views and those of Augustine (and his followers) –, Manetti advances a hasty argument that seems to omit it on principle:

> no one, especially of sound sense (*nemo…sane mentis*[82]) has ever at any time doubted that, as holy scripture bears out, all things were created very good by God. If this is so then we certainly cannot with any justification dispute the fact that man, for whose sake all things were clearly created good and even excellent, is not only something excellent but, one might say, better than excellent. Therefore human life by which man is said to live cannot be or become totally corrupt, otherwise it would follow that that which is excellent would be living in a kind of continuous and perpetual wretchedness. Because it is clear that this is false it follows that the alleged opinions, whether of poets or orators or of philosophers who have spoken or written of the misery of human life, must be false, frivolous and inane.[83]

Human life is here untangled from wretchedness and from earthy worldliness (they are one and the same), through an appeal to mind or "sense" (i.e., *sane mentis*: a sound mind or reason; the soul as mind or reason). It is *sense* that allows one, even compels one, to see and admit *sense*; that is, to know human life as not purely corporal. Rather than having its natural "fruits" in the filth of the body, as Innocent claimed, "our human fruits are to be deemed the many operations of intelligence and will" (or, of knowing and acting[84]). As Manetti writes at another point, in a dismissal of those, like Aristotle's pupil Dicaearchus (fl. ca. 320 BCE), who held that the soul

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[81] Manetti, *On the Dignity of Man*, in *Two Views of Man*, pp. 63-103.
[82] Manetti, *On the Dignity of Man*, p. 84. Manetti, *De dignitate ex excellentia hominis*, E. Leonard, ed. (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1975), p. 123: "nemo vel sane mentis ullo unquam tempore dubitavit."
[83] Manetti turns first to Augustine's *City of God* to support this claim, in other words, to the very Father of the doctrine of original sin (ibid., p.84-5). He could do so because the radical Augustinianism that would surface with the religious reformers, on both sides of the Protestant-Catholic divide, was generations away.
[84] Ibid., p. 93; Manetti, *De dignitate ex excellentia hominis*, p. 132: "multiplices intelligendi et agendi operationes."

was nothing at all, and hence that words like "soul" "animal" and "living" were vacuous noises: "This is a very mindless position indeed since they could not have thought up such a doctrine unless they had a soul."[85] The soul or mind knows itself in its thoughts and actions: it cannot deny its own existence since that very denial supposes what it denies. A *mindless* position is a contradiction, not only in terms, but ontologically. *Cogito ergo sum*: we are already there.

Cicero, Manetti's favorite author, to judge from his citational practice,[86] had dismissed Dicaearchus's radical position on similar terms in the *Tusculan Disputations*, a text that knew enormous currency among Renaissance humanists: "We will pass over Dicæarchus…[who] seems never even to have been affected with grief, as he could not perceive that he had a soul."[87] Cicero's argument, if it can thus be called, is both normative and grounded in his own experience: he began the *Tusculan Disputations* in grief following the death of his daughter. Since, for him, "a soul is instrumental for feeling emotions…having experienced grief means one has a soul."[88] Against Dicaearchus's denial of the soul, and the host of those who argued for its materiality and corporeality (and hence mortality), Manetti has strong words. Against "these stupid, and I venture to say, corpulent and oily philosophers," he cites Cicero at length:

> There is no material origin of souls for there is nothing [*nihil*] mixed and concrete in them or of such a nature as would appear to be born and made from the earth; indeed, there is nothing [*nihil*] in them either earthy or airy or fiery. In such natures there is nothing [*nihil*] which has the power of memory, mind or thought; nothing which recalls

[85] Ibid., pp. 66, 81. The Latin, with its repetition of privatives, stresses the insanity – that is, mindlessness as mad thought or a crazy forgetting of thought itself – entailed in such a position: "quoniam ea de humana mente excogitaverunt ut prorsus amentes et omnino inanimati ac prorsus insensati propterea fuisse videantur, quoniam se se ipsam habere non cernerent" (Manetti, *De dignitate*, 119).

[86] E. Leonard, in the "Introduction" to *De dignitate ex excellentia hominis*, xxxiii. After Cicero, Aristotle is most cited in the text.

[87] This is Yonge's translation (New York: Harper, 1877, 27), which, though it adds the logical connector "as" absent from Cicero's text, is nonetheless closer to the intended sense than that of King from the Loeb edition (volume 360): *Tusculan Disputations* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1966 [1927]), I.18.41: "Dicaearchum…omittamus, quorum alter ne condoluisse quidem umquam videtur, qui animum se habere non sentiat."

[88] Han Baltussen, *The Peripatetics: Aristotle's Heirs 322 BCE-200 CE* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 45.

> the past, foresees the future and grasps the present: for all of these faculties are purely divine, nor do we see how they came to man except from God. Every nature and power of soul is therefore singular and separated from common and known natures. Thus whatever that thing is which feels, which tastes, lives and grows, it is of necessity heavenly and divine and on that account eternal.[89]

Here the ontological division is patent, signaled in part by the repeated negations (*nihil…nihil…nihil*) through which the foundational distinction is made. The soul or mind is rent from the earth and "from common and known natures" (*ab his usitatis notisque naturis*). Instead of being base, terrestrial matter, it is the other, the negation, of all knowable objects and things. One can intuit its existence however; one is even compelled to do so.

Manetti's citation of Cicero, while bold, excluded the last lines of the passage from the *Tusculan Disputations*. The motivation is unclear; but perhaps Manetti avoided the remainder of Cicero's words because of the striking parallel the spiritual father of humanism had drawn to describe the "divine" nature of the mind. Cicero continued: "'And indeed God Himself, who is comprehended by us in no other way save as a mind unfettered [*soluta*] and free [*libera*], severed from all perishable matter, conscious of all and moving all and self-endowed with perpetual motion.' Of such a sort and of the same nature is the human mind [*Hoc e genere atque eadem e natura est humana mens*]."[90]

These words go beyond analogy, a resemblance between types of the same "sort" (*genus*), and posit an identity of "nature" (*natura*) between the mind and God. While Manetti, perhaps, did not want to go this far, Cicero's emphatic position was latent in humanist positions on "the dignity of man," and was shared by those humanists, like Descartes and Sartre, who did not need always to argue the point to display their implicit affinity for such ideas. As will be discussed in chapter four, Sartre would make the bold statement that whatever Descartes

[89] Manetti, On the Dignity of Man, p. 81; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, I.27.66. Cicero is in fact here citing his own now-lost *Consolatio.*
[90] *Tusculan Disputations*, I.27.66, King translation. The first line is Cicero's quotation of his *Consolatio*.

predicated of God should be predicated of consciousness. Humanism moved away from theocentrism; but it put divinity at the center of the human.

Manetti's *De dignitate* is part of a tradition of texts on the humanist theme of the "dignity of man," one ultimately stretching through Christianity back to antiquity.[91] In the most famous, and definitive Renaissance statement on the topic – some have considered it "The Manifesto of the Renaissance"[92] – Pico della Mirandola went so far as to put words in God's mouth. The prosopopoeia arrives amid Pico's version of Genesis. Emphasis is placed on the fact that "man" is created only after "everything was done" (*iam rebus omnibus… absolutis*); man, created only after the world is already produced as coherent totality, is a product of God's *post factum* thought. And this excessive conception – "when the work was finished" (*opere consumato*), "when everything was done" – engenders a creature itself of excess: on the inside of the world, but not *absorbed* inside or by it, like other creatures. "Man" *is* only what his choice, desire, and will freely *decide*. God's words confer on "man" the status of this-worldly deity:

> [The best of artisans] took man as a creature of indeterminate nature and, assigning him a place in the middle of the world (*in mundi positum meditullio*), addressed him thus: 'Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment (*pro voto, pro tua sententia*) thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us (*intra praescriptas a nobis leges cohercetur*). Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will (*pro tuo arbitrio*), in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. We have set thee at the world's center (*Medium te mundi posui*) that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though (*quasi*) the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of

[91] Even the substance of Manetti's treatise, as Leonard points out, "is almost wholly borrowed," for example, from Cicero. See also Kriseller on Pico, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, p. 219.
[92] See the Bologna University and Brown University collaborative site, "The Pico Project," at: http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/pico/index.html.

> life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.'[93]

The place at "the middle of the world" is no fixed station; *middle* here also means something like "medium" or "mediation," a ceaseless, self-moving movement through everything that simply *is*.[94] The middle or medium designates a form that takes the content it chooses. Only a small "quasi" here separates "man," "the maker and molder of [himself]," from being an utter *natura naturans* or *causa sui*. The non-position and non-nature of the self accords it a degree of absolute sovereignty, a transcendence of laws and limits, enjoyed by no other creature.

Pico's version of "the dignity of man" was innovative precisely due to the emphasis placed on freedom of this formal, radical sort. In exalting, quasi-divinizing terms, Ficino had stressed the universality of the human being and its place at the center of the universe.[95] Pico avoided the notion of the human as microcosm. He rooted human nature in nothing but itself qua pure potentiality and freedom. In other words, the human is uprooted from the world of nature and other creatures. What distinguishes Pico's view is that, for him, the human being ("man") "is the only creature whose life is determined not by nature but by [its] own free choice; and thus man no longer occupies a fixed though distinguished place in the hierarchy of being but exists outside this hierarchy as a kind of separate world."[96]

This sort of philosophy, which, we will see in chapter one, is close to that of Descartes and to the sort of ontological dualism at play in his ethics, was precisely the sort of thing that Spinoza later found so unpalatable.[97] Sartre's famous adage that "existence precedes essence," and his own dualism (*pour-soi* and *en-soi*), which will be the topic of chapter four, are

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[93] Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, pp. 224-5.
[94] Ficino stressed this "medium" status as well: see the selections from his *Platonic Theology*, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Apr., 1944), pp. 227-242.
[95] See Ficino, ibid.
[96] Kristeller on Pico's *Oration*, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, p. 219.
[97] See chapter one, *infra*.

recognizable as new versions of this doctrine of freedom and of the absoluteness, sovereignty, or autonomy of the human self. Indeed, the idea of the self's quasi-aesthetic and -divine self-formation, its un-rootedness – as against the idea of the self as formed from without and having deep, even unconscious roots in what is other than and transcendent to consciousness –, is recurrent across the history of humanism.

Enemies (2) – Augustinian Antihumanism and the Question of Original Sin

Sartre's Pico-esque heroic idiom of self-shaping existence thus found its model in some of the great humanist voices of the early modern period. Timothy Hampton has described their heroic idiom: "Steeped in the study of rhetoric and history, obsessed with classical antiquity, humanist culture is devoted to ideals of heroism: military, moral, and intellectual."[98] While no doubt true, Hampton's comment is more applicable to later, 16th-century Neo-Stoic humanism, the sort that Montaigne, we will see, found attractive yet ultimately unable to offer serious ethical guidance let alone a satisfactory account of human experience in the world. Hampton's words are less applicable to someone like Petrarch who, at least in some of his major writings, saw no problem in combining humanistic studies and commitments with a more pessimist Christian notion of the finitude of the mind and will.

What appears as Petrarch's *hybridity*, at least when measured against the heroic and more secular 16th-century humanism Hampton has in mind, points to something crucial: how early humanism was Christian in conviction while emulating and celebrating the "Pagan" philosophers who, as it was said, lived in ignorance of Christ and of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin. Petrarch was an admirer of Augustine *and* Cicero; for him, ancient philosophy was in some sense

[98] Timothy Hampton, "Montaigne: Philosophy before Philosophy," in C. Prendergast, ed., *A History of Modern French Literature* (Princeton: 2017), p. 156.

mediated *through* Augustine.[99] Indeed, for many early humanists, Augustine's avowed taste for Cicero and Platonic philosophy justified, or excused, their literary interests, and the emphasis laid on moral philosophy as against natural philosophy, the "science" associated with Aristotelianism.

In his late work *On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others* (1370), Petrarch was thus able to mock his detractors – four Venetian armchair Aristotelians – in an Augustinian postlapsarian vein: he stresses the vanity of philosophy in general and of natural philosophy in particular, the limitations of the human mind and will, and the necessity of grace.[100] True wisdom is irreducible to learning and letters, he remarks, pointing to "the long line of illiterate saints of both sexes."[101] Petrarch, the most famous scholar of his age, thus renounces the title of "man of letters": the true end of philosophy is to put philosophy to an end, a conclusion somewhat Socratic and mostly Augustinian.[102] In all this, *On His Own Ignorance* foreshadows aspects of Pascal's *Pensées*, subject of chapter three below.

On the other hand, some 80 years after Petrarch's *Ignorance*, Manetti's *De dignitate* seemed to omit the doctrine of the Fall on principle; indeed, it was precisely against the dismal postlapsarian view that he decided to write his text. And Pico's *Oratio* went in a similar direction: the Fall is mentioned but quickly allayed by philosophical optimism. "Moral philosophy" and "the art of discourse and reasoning" (also called "dialectic") – in other words, some of the major components of the humanistic pedagogical program – promise to "set us free"

[99] Hans Nachod, introduction to Pico's writings in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, p. 27. See more generally the study by Alexander Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine: Classical Scholarship, Christian Theology and the Origins of the Renaissance in Italy* (Brill: Leiden, 2012).
[100] Petrarch, *On His Own Ignorance*, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, pp. 47-133.
[101] Ibid., p. 127.
[102] In the modern period, one might here think of Karl Marx.

and heal the wounds of the Fall "as though by wholesome drugs."[103] This remedial aspect of philosophy is a more or less explicit rekindling of the ancient and especially Hellenistic notion of philosophy as therapy for the soul.[104]

As used in Pico's text, this notion appears to solve the very problem that otherwise condemned humans to never arrive at unshakeable truths about the world and to remaining at a state of moral weakness and epistemic impoverishment, where the highest stage of wisdom was to be able to measure one's infinite ignorance compared to God.[105] Moral philosophy and "the art of discourse and reasoning" are purifying tools that cleanse the postlapsarian mind of its confusion and fortify the soul against "the impulses of our passions" (*affectuum impetus*).[106] In dispelling the dark "fog" of the mind and ensuring that reason no longer follows the "random" (*temere*) reveling of emotion, philosophy heals the postlapsarian wound, straightens out the mind, and prepares it for natural science ("natural philosophy"), the next step in Pico's program, which then leads stepwise and seamlessly to "knowledge of things divine."[107] Philosophy can effectively restore the mind to its native purity, before the Fall.

This double efficacy – purification of error and confusion, and fortitude against passions as the figure of randomness and reason's submersion in the irrational – was central to Pico's humanist, optimist vision of philosophy, one later shared by Descartes. While humanism tended to privilege moral philosophy over natural science, for Pico, moral philosophy and "the art of discourse and reasoning" were adequate preparations and preconditions for science, and this,

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[103] Pico, *Oration*, pp. 230, 237. Compare this to p. 252.
[104] See Pico, *Oration*, p. 231. On this notion, see André-Jean Voelke, *La philosophie comme thérapie de l'âme: Etudes de philosophie hellénistique* (Paris: Cerf, 1993); Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002); Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité III: Le souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). See also *infra*, chapter one, on Descartes's ethics.
[105] See for example Petrarch, *On His Own Ignorance*, pp. 123-4.
[106] Pico, *Oration*, p. 229.
[107] Id.

later on, for theology. To be sure, we find a serious shuffling up of this program in Descartes, such that metaphysics and epistemology, rather than an explicitly moral philosophy, precede the undertaking of natural science. Further, the figure of original sin is hardly evoked by Descartes at all.[108] Nonetheless, metaphysical mediation – unfurled in the most famous works, the *Discours* (1637) and the *Meditationes* (1641) – occupies a place in Descartes's program similar to that held by moral philosophy and "dialectic" in Pico's spiritual and mental preparation for natural science. Indeed, after the well-known texts on doubt and the purification of error and prejudice, Descartes's late work, *Les Passions de l'âme* (1649), the topic of chapter one, explicitly related the practice of philosophy to the mastery of affectivity.[109]

But what further links Pico to Descartes is something that we might term their shared *pathos*: their youthful, even adolescent optimism, foregrounded in Pico's *Oration*, a work intended to introduce a public defense of 900 theses. Because of Papal intervention, Pico's virtuosic display sadly never took place. In it, the 23-year-old[110] had proposed not only to reveal his synthesis of all apparently divergent views into one universal philosophy. He also wanted to expound "seventy-two new physical and metaphysical theses by means of which whoever holds them will be able to answer any question whatever proposed in natural philosophy or divinity, by

[108] It is intriguing that the only instance of the term "pécher" in the *Discours* refers to an infraction of moral rather than divine law. Descartes writes that it would have been a sin to keep hidden his works of philosophy, given their potential to serve the good of mankind (AT VI, p. 61). As for the *Meditations*: in light of the fourth set of *Objections* (by Arnauld), Descartes added an explicit statement in the summary that he is not at all dealing with sin (AT VII, p. 15). See AT III, pp. 334-40. While this seems to suspend the question, the very fact of undertaking an epistemology *without* taking original sin into account is already deeply revealing of Descartes's philosophical commitments.

[109] And this despite Descartes's no doubt strategic wish to have his book seen as the work of a natural rather than a moral philosopher: Descartes, *Les passions de l'âme*, Pascal D'Arcy, ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), p. 98. The *Discours* had already depicted the absence of "passions" as a precondition for philosophical reflection per: AT VI, p. 11: "…et n'ayant d'ailleurs, par bonheur, aucuns soins ni passions qui me troublassent, je demeurais tout le jour enfermé seul dans un poêle, où j'avais tout loisir de m'entretenir de mes pensées."

[110] Pico published his 900 theses in December 1486 and proposed to defend them in January 1487, a month before his 24th birthday. Pope Innocent VIII annulled the event and had the theses investigated (some of them were deemed heretical), marking the beginning of Pico's troubles with the Papacy.

a system far other than we are taught in that philosophy which is studied in the schools and practiced by the doctors of this age."[111] These two ambitions – to reduce the multiple to the one, and to construct a system with infinite explanatory power, to replace Scholasticism – were central to Descartes's own youthful dreams of a universal science or method[112] and to his attempts to make his new philosophy into the textbook for a post-Scholastic, systematic education to come. Both ambitions presupposed and encouraged a mitigated view of original sin, even its utter marginalization.

This short, provisional account of the shifting presence of Augustine and the Fall within two major humanist projects adumbrates a crucial dynamic, one in some sense rooted in humanism itself. Because Augustine was at times a portal and justification for humanistic interest in ancient philosophy, and because the philological concerns and commitments that defined humanism also led to renewed interest in and dissemination of patristic texts, especially those of Augustine, the latter's shadow seems to fall upon humanism, to haunt it even as it moves – from Petrarch to Manetti, to Pico to Descartes – away from any real concern with the Fall of Man and its repercussions for the moral and epistemic progress of the individual and humanity in general. Augustinianism, an aspect of Petrarch's moral and philosophical education, would be repressed by later humanism. This is another way of saying that the latter would never escape it entirely. The same was arguably true of humanism's relationship to Aristotelianism.

Recently, Raymond Geuss has pointed to "a basic tension inherent in 'humanism'…as it presented itself to Christians in the early modern period." Geuss here has in mind how humanism was typically anthropocentric, whereas "Christianity requires a view that is not anthropocentric,

[111] Ibid., p. 245.
[112] See, for example, the *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* (ca. 1628): AT X, pp. 349-488.

but theocentric." [113] In my view, the latent presence of Augustine in the humanist unconscious is another component of this tension. With the Reformation and with the Augustinianism that characterized certain religious developments in France after the Wars of Religion, discussed in chapters two and three, Augustinianism emerged as a major foe of Neo-Stoic and Cartesian humanisms.

In other words, either as a radical naturalist Aristotelianism (e.g., Latin Averroism) or as a pessimist Augustinianism, antihumanism arises with and against humanism; it haunts it and even in some senses predates or preempts it.[114] Both of these enemies of antihumanism will loom large – if at times only implicitly – in the two versions of anti-Cartesian, Augustinian antihumanism studied in the chapters devoted to La Rochefoucauld and Pascal. The perhaps more surprising claim is that these old and often theological foes of humanism tacitly imbue the French antihumanist theories of the 20th century as well. This would be fully understandable in terms of the secret intimacy of opposite notions or contraries, which borrow from one another, albeit or precisely via negation, in order to be what they are themselves. But to fully understand the opposition, perhaps even the dialectic, of humanism and *anti*-humanism is not the pretention of this project. My work is only a beginning: I have only begun to identify, not fully theorize, this dynamic. In its roots it likely has something to do with the "tension" Geuss mentions – a tension between a framework of immanence and one of transcendence, we might say –, which was particularly palpable in early modern France.

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[113] Geuss, "Rabelais and the Low Road to Modernity," in Prendergast, ed., *A History of Modern French Literature* 79-80. Geuss also mentions the tension between the high, pure Latin of Cicero and the "semi-literate Koiné" Greek of the Christian scriptures, an uncomfortable fact for the highly literate Renaissance humanists (80).

[114] Cf. Hiram Haydn, *The Counter Renaissance*.

III. Humanism and Antihumanism in 16th-century France

If the relationship between these two frameworks is important for understanding French humanism, it is in part because of the role played by Erasmus (1466-1536) and his Christian humanism in what is often called the "first Renaissance" in France.[115] Erasmus's prolific scholarship returned to biblical and patristic originals as much as to Greco-Roman sources, and this "lent a decidedly religious cast to the French Renaissance from the beginning."[116] Erasmian humanism and "evangelism" was denounced by the Sorbonne theologians; and it itself imbued divergent developments during the "first Renaissance": one current was more optimistic and humanist, with Rabelais (1494-1553), the other more sternly religious and corrosive, in Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1559).[117]

Rabelais's first two first books, *Pantagruel* (1532) and *Gargantua* (1534/5), contain famous, manifesto-like moments of humanism:[118] for example, Gargantua's "Ciceronian" letter to his son outlining a thoroughly humanist, Renaissance education ("Somme, que je voy un abysme de science").[119] In this extensive, anti-Scholastic pedagogical program – designed in emphatic, hyperbolic terms befitting the gigantesque protagonists[120] –, knowledge of scripture in

[115] See Edwin Duval, "Erasmus and the 'First Renaissance' in France," in Prendergast, ed., *A History of Modern French Literature*, pp. 47-70. Kristeller and Randall, Jr. see the "culmination" of the religious tendency of humanists like Petrarch and Valla in Erasmus: *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, pp. 4-5.
[116] Duval, "Erasmus," p. 49.
[117] This comparison draws from Duval, "Erasmus," passim, and Terrence Cave, "The Early Modern Period," in Kay, Cave, and Bowie, eds., *A Short History of French Literature* (New York: Oxford, 2003), pp. 121-2.
[118] The *Tiers Livre* (1546) and the *Quart Livre* (1552), on the other hand, are typically read as darker and less optimistic texts. As Cave writes of the former: "We are now in the fallen world outside Thélème" (123). Further, as Geuss has noted ("Rabelais and the Low Road to Modernity"), while "Rabelais was in many ways a full-blown and enthusiastic member of the humanist movement" (78), several typically Rabelaisian aspects counterbalance this humanism: his rootedness in the Gothic, medieval tradition; his polyphony and taste for excess, play and uncertainty; his refusal to settle and impose; and so forth.
[119] Duval, "Erasmus," p. 56; Geuss, ("Rabelais and the Low Road to Modernity," p. 79.
[120] Cave, "The Early Modern Period," p. 117: "Education becomes a major issue: the giants are exposed to suitably hyperbolic versions of the new humanist pedagogy, and in *Gargantua* this programme is used

the original arrives only after the study of ancient languages, history, cosmography, mathematics, the study of nature, the study of "man," and so on.[121] Another similar moment occurs in *Gargantua*, when the young Eudemon demonstrates that, with only two years of humanistic studies, he is of sounder mind and eloquence than Gargantua, who received a seemingly endless Scholastic education, which Rabelais describes in demeaning (and, again, hyperbolic) terms.[122] Eudemon's grace and mastery of Latin oratory skills gives the impression "que [il] mieulx resembloit un Gracchus, un Ciceron ou un Emilius du temps passé qu'un iouvenceau de ce siecle."[123] Eudemon is the *homo humanus* come to life, the realization of humanist desires to incarnate Cicero's ideals of ethical and rhetorical mastery in youthful, renewed flesh.

Over against this fantasy of the ancient book or Roman hero made into new life – the fantasy, that is, of humanist education producing or revealing *nature* after and underneath all the supposed artifice of Scholastic education and theological pedantry – the *dévote* Marguerite was critical of humanism and book learning in general. Like Rabelais, she was inspired by Erasmus and evangelism, albeit to a lesser extent. But she "snubbed" the great Christian humanist himself when he reached out to her in letters from 1525 and 1527. Marguerite "was deeply hostile to everything Erasmus came to represent."[124] As opposed to the tour de force of Renaissance

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to rescue the young giant-prince from an interminable and stultifying education by caricatural Sorbonne theologians."

[121] Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Jourda, ed. (Paris: Garnier, 2014), vol. I, chapter 8, pp. 256-62. Duval comments on Gargantua's letter: "One detail that makes this vision of the Renaissance recognizably Erasmian is the fact that in a review of 'all disciplines,' theology is replaced by daily reading of the Bible in its original languages" ("Erasmus," 56).

[122] Rabelais, *Gargantua*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Jourda, ed. (Paris: Garnier, 2014), vol. I, pp. 59-65: chapter 14 (Gargantua's education) and chapter 15 (Eudemon's speech). One might also mention the famous Abbaye de Thélème from the final chapters of *Gargantua* (pp.), which Cave sees as full of an optimism "drawing on Erasmian evangelism which places faith in human capacity and allows a full harmonization of ethical values with aesthetic ones" (Cave, "The Early Modern Period," 122).

[123] Rabelais, *Gargantua*, chapter 15, p. 64.

[124] Duval, "Erasmus," pp. 52-4; here, p. 52 and 54 ("snubbed").

learning that characterizes Erasmus's *Adages* and Rabelais's episodic books, Marguerite preferred "popular genres and a plain style…consistent with her mystic-Lutheran ideology":

> If salvation depends not on one's own efforts but on recognizing the worthlessness of everything one is and can do, then pretentiousness – including literary pretentiousness – can only be an obstacle to salvation. Small children, ignorant simple folk, servants, and (in Marguerite's strongly held antifeminist view) women, are always much closer to salvation than are mature adults, learned scholars, nobles, and males, precisely because they are by nature less capable and less self-sufficient, and because they know it. Having fewer illusions of self-worth, they have fewer obstacles to overcome in recognizing their own intrinsic depravity, powerlessness, and dependency on grace. For Marguerite the princess and author, farces, popular songs, and simple, unadorned speech are signs and effects of self-abnegation and self-annihilation – efforts to achieve a kind of *degré zero de l'écriture* and a self-inflicted *mort de l'auteur* – which are necessary preconditions for an ecstatic union with Christ.[125]

This commentary by Edwin Duval is useful not only for its concise description of Marguerite's Lutheran – and ultimately Augustinian and Pauline – mindset: that is, as will be true for Pascal, consciousness of finitude – of lowly "mysère" – is high knowledge, from which humanism and learning distract.[126] Duval's words are also intriguing because of the way in which, without his drawing attention to the fact, perhaps without being entirely conscious of what he is doing at all, they seem to assimilate Marguerite's mysticism to a famous concept from the heyday of 20th-century French antihumanism, Roland Barthes's notion of "la mort de l'auteur." Along with Foucault's "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" (1969), Barthes's "La mort de l'auteur" (1968) was "le

[125] Ibid., p. 62. See also Duval's comments on Marguerite's *Le miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (ibid., 60-1): "this blend of female mysticism and hard-nosed Lutheranism is a defining feature of virtually all Marguerite's writing. […] Rabelais's [evangelism] is Erasmian and humanistic, Marguerite's is anti-Erasmian and mystical" (62).

[126] "For Marguerite, learning is not only unnecessary but actually harmful, constituting one of the most insidious temptations of a sinful world. It encourages the sinful illusion that by one's own efforts one can attain a higher good, thus feeding the ego and thereby cutting oneself off permanently from grace and communion with God. […] In her later works she comes close to suggesting that even reading the Bible, even in translation, is unnecessary because everything it teaches can be apprehended directly from the ultimate source, so to speak, by means of an ecstatic, mystical marriage with Christ" (ibid., p. 63).

credo de la théorie littéraire des années 1970."[127] The final chapter of this thesis will try to think through what is only implicit in a comment like Duval's: the peculiar affinity between mysticism and theoretical antihumanism. For now, it suffices simply to emphasize how Marguerite's mysticism was opposed to a humanistic educational and philosophical project, one associated with book learning.

Her views are especially intriguing given that she had received "the same humanist education as her brother," future king and major patron of humanism François Ier: she was proficient in numerous languages and "widely read in philosophy, natural sciences, and theology."[128] But, like Calvin, Marguerite's polemical protégé and correspondent, "who began his career as a *humanista* but was drawn towards the more radical end of the evangelical spectrum,"[129] she did not share the taste for humanism that characterized this period and her brother's patronage, both in terms of learning and in terms of religion. Sympathetic to the reformers whose ideas began to change Europe in her century, and who were equally critical of Aristotelianism and humanism, her writing displays a certain distrust of the learned and lettered.[130] A clear example is her book of tales, the *Heptaméron* (1520s-49). The unfinished work was a self-conscious *détournement* of two Italian sources, Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1350s; Fr. trans. 1545) and Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528; Fr. trans. 1537), both popular at the court of Marguerite's day.

In the "prologue," Marguerite depicts the *Heptaméron* as the product of an idea to emulate Boccaccio's collection of novellas, but this time with a strict proviso: "de n'escripre

[127] Antoine Compagnon, "Introduction: Mort et résurrection de l'auteur," first session of a course at the Sorbonne, available online at http://www.fabula.org/compagnon/auteur.php.
[128] Wes Williams, "Marguertie de Navarre: Renaissance Woman," in Prendergast, ed., *A History of Modern French Literature*, p. 97.
[129] Cave, "The Early Modern Period," p. 119.
[130] See Duval, "Erasmus," pp. 63-5 for a discussion of two other examples of Marguerite's attitude: *Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan* and, especially, *Les prisons.*

nulle nouvelle qui ne soit veritable histoire."[131] The Italian humanist narrators would thus be replaced by a group of noblemen and women, the veracity of whose tales is ensured precisely by the exclusion of the scholarly, humanist types. The plan was to:

> assembler jusques à dix personnes de ceulx et celles qu'ilz pensoient plus dignes de recompter quelque chose, sauf ceulx qui avoient estudié et estoient gens de lectres: car Monsieur le Dauphin ne vouloit que leur art y fust meslé, et aussi de peur qua la beaulté de la rhetoricque fist tort en quelque partie à la verité de l'histoire.[132]

Here, "letters" are responsible for a dual departure from truth: "art" (as opposed to nature), and the alluring garb "rhetoric" as opposed to the naked immediacy of normal speech. Marguerite's is an oralist or logocentric project, putting truth on the side of what is personally experienced or heard from some possessor of this experience (this presence): the storytellers "dira chacun quelque histoire qu'il aura veue ou bien ouy dire à quelque homme digne de foy."[133] Writing should intervene only to note down these truthful, oral tales, these truthful *because* oral tales. The *Heptaméron* aims at the sober, logocentric power of the Gospel. The prologue thus prepares for the way in which Marguerite critiques neo-Platonic views of "the perfectibility of human nature," which had been revived by Florentine humanists like Ficino and Pico and disseminated by books and manuals like Castigione's *Cortegiano*. She subjects them to "a pessimistic evangelical theology of human fallibility."[134]

The flurry of humanistic poetic production around mid-century – represented especially by Ronsard's poetry and Du Bellay's *Défense et illustration* (1549) – testified to the mounting force of a less religiously-inflected humanism in the arts and educational institutions, which had

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[131] Marguerite de Navarre, *Heptaméron*, critical edition by Renja Salminen (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1992), pp. 7-8. Williams ("Marguerite de Navarre: Renaissance Woman") provides a useful overview of the entire text.
[132] Ibid., p. 8.
[133] Id.
[134] Cave, "The Early Modern Period," p. 121. Perhaps it is not too surprising that the Sorbonne condemned one of Marguerite's poems for its seemingly Lutheran views (ibid., 119).

been supported through official royal initiatives since François I. But the intense religiosity that underlay Marguerite's suspicion of the lettered, and that explained the Calvinist critiques that denounced the sensuality of Pléiade poetry, would reemerge with new fervor following the heyday of the "second" French Renaissance. "The cultural and political optimism of the early Pléiade years was indeed ill-founded," writes Terrence Cave of the turmoil that, especially with the eruption of the Wars of Religion, quickly ensued upon the humanist poetic activity of the mid-16th century.[135]

Montaigne (1533-92), who wrote in this fraught climate and whose thought performs and traces the major moral and epistemological fractures of the time, deserves more attention than I accord him in what follows. He is both the specter of skepticism that Descartes will struggle to exorcize, and a major if not always explicit influence on the antihumanism that opposed Neo-Stoic and Cartesian humanism in the 17th century. More than this, Montaigne himself had already in some sense lived through the conflict traced in the chapters that follow. As Hampton writes: "[Montaigne] works from inside the heroic culture of humanism while exposing its limitations. […] Montaigne is steeped in the ideals of humanism, even as his own exploration of his limitations casts an ironic glance on the heroic figures and forms that shape him. His work gives the first voice to the common experience of a world in which classical heroes and values have lost their unimpeachable authority."[136]

Like Calvin and Marguerite, Montaigne was a child of humanism. But his was an extreme and, in every sense, *literal* case. Immersed in Latin as a young boy, Montaigne was plunged with unusual intensity into the literate, educational program subtending the individualist

[135] Ibid., p. 133.
[136] Hampton, "Montaigne: Philosophy before Philosophy," p. 157. Montaigne was a staunch critic of Cicero, humanism's spiritual founding father.

and positive visions of human potential typical of humanism.[137] As reflected in the first book of *Essais* (1580), he admired Stoicism and "the Stoic attitude of a pure morality of will, calmness, and freedom from passion."[138] But Montaigne's attitude was notoriously volatile – an image of the uncertainty and mutability he found, famously, in himself. Suspicion of humanism came from within, as Montaigne uncovered, in writing, a tension between the images of heroism flaunted by humanism and Stoicism, and the fallibility and weakness of his own "nature."

This *creaturely* perspective was, one might say, Montaigne's *personal* version of the Fall of Man: an ultimately 'Pagan' philosophy appears like so many puffed up words when measured against one's true, lowly, and decisively individual nature. But such an apparently personal dynamic, which belongs almost mythically to our story of the "modern individual," reflected the fraught historical circumstances: the extreme skepticism for which Montaigne is known was understandably attractive given just how vain rationalist philosophy must have seemed in a kingdom devolving into violence.[139] Still, Montaigne's skepticism was not universal: while Montaigne was deconstructing Stoic idealism, in the 1580s, "Humanists," like Justus Lispius and Guillaume Du Vair, "began to prescribe stoicism—combined in greater or lesser degree with general Christian precepts—as an antidote to contemporary woes."[140] Descartes would later continue their project, albeit under a more scientific garb.

According to a received narrative of literary and philosophical history, Montaigne's intellectual career bears witness to a shift from Stoicism to Skepticism and ultimately to

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[137] On Montaigne, humanism, and education, see John O'Brien, "The Humanist Tradition and Montaigne," in Philippe Desan, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne* (Oxford: Oxford, 2016), pp. 58-77.

[138] Reto Luzius Fetz, "Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592): Philosophy as the Search for Self-Identity," in *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, Paul Richard Blum, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic U. of America Press, 2010), p. 195.

[139] See Hampton, "Montaigne: Philosophy before Philosophy," p. 157.

[140] Rebecca M. Wilkin, *Women, Philosophy and The Search for Truth in Early Modern France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 103.

Naturalism or Epicureanism. Though obviously unwieldy when applied to such a complex thinker as Montaigne's with his unique writing process and form,[141] this account does capture an important aspect of his position, which distinguishes his critiques of humanism from those of the antihumanism at stake in chapters 2 and 3 below. The more or less Epicurean acceptance of the creaturely, individual self, and the tender attention accorded to the banal life of the body and its desires, which make Montaigne so sympathetic to today's readers, are replaced by more implacably critical Augustinian perspectives on *amour-propre* and the vitiation of human nature. Thus, while Pascal, for example, borrowed jealously from Montaigne's skepticism and relativism, he lambasted Montaigne's comfortable egoism.

Despite this crucial difference – which amounts, in a word, to the mounting importance of Augustinianism in 17th-century France –, it is worth bearing in mind that Montaigne had already achieved, to a certain degree, some of the major insights that underlie 17th-century antihumanism. To name two of the most significant: Montaigne showed an awareness (1) of how the self is constituted by writing (and language), not simply expressed or represented by it;[142] and (2) of the truth-value of contrariety and contradiction, the fact that what looks like it *should* be logically excluded *is* possibly just a more realist, worldly, and perspicacious view of the world and human experience. As Montaigne famously wrote: "Le monde n'est qu'une branloire perenne. […] La constance mesme n'est autre chose qu'un branle plus languissant. […] Je ne

[141] On the traditional notion of Montaigne's stages (Stoicism, Skepticism, Naturalism/Epicureanism), and its problems, see Zahi Zalloua, "Introduction: What is Theory?" in Zalloua, ed., *Montaigne after Theory, Theory after Montaigne* (U. Washington Press, 2009), pp. 8-9. Zalloua argues *inter alia* that skepticism could not be overcome given that it is inseparable from the essay form itself.
[142] See Montaigne, *Essais*, Villey-Saulnier, ed. (Paris: PUF, 2004), II.xviii, p.665. See chapter 3, *infra*.

peints pas l'estre, Je peints le passage. […] Tant y a que je me contredits bien à l'adventure, mais la verité…je ne la contredy point."[143]

This provocative separation between the concepts of *contradiction* and *falsity*, here derived from an insight into the instability of the self over time, reaches a paroxysm in La Rochefoucauld, topic of chapter two. His *Maximes* deploy contrariety on a remarkable variety of levels against traditional logic as formalized by Aristotle and passed down into modernity. For the image of the fixity or "constance" of "being" went hand in hand with a view of truth as non-contradiction; and both of these notions imbued the idealist and heroic images of selfhood mediated by the philosophical texts disseminated and written by humanists. In multiple ways Montaigne thus set the tone for a critique of the heroic humanist *imaginary* grounded in material practices involving books, reading, and writing. When Hampton says that Montaigne's critique came "from inside the heroic culture of humanism," it is crucial to understand that this means, in more theoretical terms, that he used his own practice of writing to undermine a humanist book culture and its "consubstantial"[144] ideologies. This gesture – a book written against books –, and its paradoxes, repeats itself across the antihumanist thinkers in this thesis.

After the Wars of Religion, as the copious style and verbose authority of humanist erudition continued to fall from fashion, new rules began to govern the production of literary and philosophical texts. As one commentator puts it, using terms that usefully stress the at once literary, epistemic, and ethical aspects of these rules: "The linguistic and stylistic norm moves from richness of texture and prolixity towards lucidity, accessibility, and control."[145] Malherbe (1555-1628) in poetry and Descartes (1596-1650) in philosophy reflect this shift, which seems to

[143] *Essais*, III.ii, p. 805. See also I.xlix, p. 297; II.i, p. 335; III.xiii, pp. 1089-90. On the concept of "contrariety," see chapter 2, *infra*.
[144] Here I am invoking Montaigne's famous description of his book: "livre consubstantiel à son autheur" (II.xviii, p. 665), to suggest a similar inseparability of humanism as a book culture and as a philosophy.
[145] Cave, "The Early Modern Period," p. 107.

denote *inter alia* the political developments in France, as national order was eventually reestablished and centralized under a series of powerful Bourbon monarchs and their ministers. The lush eclecticism of the Renaissance is uprooted; Descartes and many of his contemporaries find bookish erudition distasteful, irrational, and unruly. As stated before, this is key to the new and ultimately more enduring form of Cartesian *humanism*, one apparently divorced from the bulky educational program of its earlier counterparts.

To again summarize remarks from the outset of this introduction, Descartes represents a new sort of humanism after the Renaissance and its copia, and after the Wars of Religion and the baroque violence they wrought on France both politically and philosophically. He shares humanist distaste for Scholasticism, yet, like Pico, he has serious ambitions for science.

One might say, then, that Descartes is *one* product of the dialectic between humanism and Aristotelianism or Scholasticism. Augustinian antihumanism is another. Cartesian philosophy shares humanist ethical commitments,[146] but embeds them into an epistemological and scientific philosophy,[147] which avoids and criticizes the scholarly erudition that characterized the moral philosophy of the earlier humanists. Though Descartes famously grounds the *cogito* in the idea of God, Cartesian philosophy is not theocentric. Still, its understanding of the autonomous mind is, like Cicero's, a site at which the divine carries out a this-worldly existence in the form of an immaterial, thinking thing.

On the other hand, the antihumanism that opposes Cartesianism and Neo-Stoicism shares the early humanism's preference of morals over science and its explicit anti-Scholasticism. Indeed, it adopts the pessimist theme of the vanity of knowledge or science. But this

[146] See Emmanuel Faye, *Philosophie et perfection de l'homme*; Faye, ed., *Descartes et la Renaissance* (Paris: Champion, 1999).
[147] See Matthew Jones, *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution: Descartes, Pascal, Leibniz and the Cultivation of Virtue* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 15-86.

antihumanism also redeploys a transcendent, quasi-Averroist and pessimist Augustinian framework that greatly limits the moral and epistemic capacities of the individual self. This sort of naturalism or theocentrism thus put the autonomy, even the existence, of the mind into question. Still, because of the circularity or reflexivity of thinking touched on above in relation to Arendt, the epistemic and status of antihumanist discourse, like the question of what to make of the authors of this discourse, is problematic.

Arguably, a similar or parallel dialectic informs the opposition of humanism and antihumanism in the 20th century, though now the location of "science" (or "theory") and "ethics" is switched: the former finding itself on the antihumanism side, as it were, and the later on the side of Sartrean humanism. Understanding these sorts of philosophical positions as products of *oppositions* that might be dialectical indicates the potential for continuing contemporary tensions and for possible syntheses, a question that my conclusion begins to address.[148]

[148] Though it is the ambition of my chapters to display the complex interrelations that obtain across the two periods, and conflicts, I discuss (*to display*, not always to fully render explicit), it will be useful here to outline my claim regarding the dialectics that might be said to have *produced* the antagonistic positions in the 17th and 20th centuries (as distinct from, though informing, the dialectic these positions themselves might describe). In the following highly schematic, heuristic description, one can track fascinating shifts in the location and value of certain key concepts or signifiers, like *science*, *ethics*, *transcendence*, and *language*. [**I**] For humanism and antihumanism in 17th-century French thought, one might describe the dialectic from which they emerged as between (A) Aristotelianism and Scholasticism (Science) and (B) Renaissance Humanism (Ethics). (1) Cartesian humanism and (2) 17th-century antihumanism would represent, then, two products of this dialectic. (1) The first is, schematically, a predominantly scientific philosophy that, like Renaissance humanism, is anti-Aristotelian. Though focused on epistemology, it takes up voluntarist notions from humanism (e.g., Neo-Stoicism and heroic aspects of Platonism) in terms of *cogitation* and the *will*. It is not theocentric, but nominally Christian: the first truth is that *I am* (God is needed to assure what consciousness *already* holds certain). It offers a heroic, optimistic image of the individual mind and self: the human self shapes itself at will, and language is a mere tool and vessel of the mind. (2) The second is an anti-scientific, mainly moral position. It is explicitly anti-Aristotelian, but it opposes the voluntarism of humanism and Cartesianism in terms of theology or a theologically inflected naturalism. That is, it is a sort of Aristotelian-style naturalism mediated by theology, especially by a severe Augustinianism. It is pessimistic concerning the individual mind and self, and posits the transcendence of an absent God. Fallen man is shaped from without, and language is transcendent and recalcitrant to the self. [**II**] For humanism and antihumanism in 20th-century French thought, now, one

Recently, scholars have tried to explain Montaigne's contemporary appeal in terms of his relation to Cartesian or "modern" philosophy: Montaigne's *pre*-Cartesian positions might be seen, that is, as *post*-Cartesian and hence as in harmony with postmodern culture, an idea that might recall Bruno Latour's famous thesis: *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (1991).[149] Montaigne never was modern, as it were; his *Essais* seem to pre-figure some of the representative claims of the sorts of post-war thinking we often call "theory," and which feature recurrent if not always well-founded anti-Cartesian rhetoric. Lawrence D. Kritzman begins his book on Montaigne with an introduction whose title makes the point rather succinctly: "Montaigne is Theory."[150] While I do not wish to make the same assertion, let alone with such an affirmative copula, what follows does lend credence to the idea that, like the pre-Cartesian Montaigne, the early modern anti-Cartesians have something of the post-Cartesian allure about them. Like Montaigne, then, figures like Elisabeth of Bohemia, La Rochefoucauld, and Pascal might be reread with excitement by theoretically minded scholars today. This reading would impact our understanding of the nature, allure (or repulsion), and underlying cultural dynamics

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might view the originary dialectic as between (A) Positivism and the Human or Social Sciences (Science) and (B) French Spiritualism (Philosophy). Two products are (1) existential humanism and (1) postwar antihumanism. (1) The former is, briefly, an anti-scientific, phenomenological and ethical philosophy. It radicalizes voluntarist and heroic aspects of Cartesian humanism in terms of *consciousness*. It is atheist, but it deifies "l'homme": "man" *is* God (this, for Sartre, is the ultimate meaning of Cartesian humanism). Like Cartesianism, its ancestor, it offers a heroism and optimism of the individual mind or self. "Man" shapes himself, and language is a mere tool. (2) The latter is a scientific or theoretical philosophy that avoids ethics and, mostly, politics. Though officially anti-positivistic, it can tend towards a sort of neo-Aristotelianism or naturalism, which radically questions the epistemic and moral capacities of the individual self or subject. While manifestly secular or atheist (and even critical philosophies of consciousness for being "spiritualist"), it sublates or radicalizes aspects of the Augustinian, postlapsarian theological framework. It radicalizes in particular the theological, even mystical subjection of the self to that which transcends it (termed *system*, *structure*, *episteme*, *ideology*) and shapes subjects from without. It has, correspondingly, an intense focus on the primacy of language (in the broadest sense).

[149] See Hampton, "Montaigne: Philosophy before Philosophy," p. 156; Zachary Sayre Schiffman, "Montaigne: Early Modern, Modern, Postmodern" in Desan, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, pp. 269-83; Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991).

[150] Kritzman, *The Fabulous Imagination: On Montaigne's Essais* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 1-26. See also Zalloua, "Introduction: What is Theory?" (and more generally all the texts), in Zalloua, ed., *Montaigne after Theory, Theory after Montaigne*, 3-18, and passim.

of "theory" itself. The purchase of pre- and anti-Cartesians on post-modern mindsets is a symptom of the tensions, or dialectic, my thesis has begun to reveal.

IV. Humanism and Antihumanism in 20th-century French Thought

While the idea of a constitutive opposition between humanism and antihumanism has been neglected by customary accounts of early modern French thought, in one form or another – e.g., as a split between phenomenology and currents of structuralism and poststructuralism –, this notion does already belong to the historiography of 20th-century French philosophy (if not always explicitly or in these terms).[151] Indeed, in this case, this dichotomy is not a product of our retrospective gaze: the concepts were in part theorized by the thinkers in question themselves (if not by all of them, or adequately): Sartre, for "humanism"; Althusser, for "antihumanism," and so forth. As a result, it will here suffice to recall major turning points of the conflict in question before addressing how the comparative perspective I propose – a dialogue between what should be seen as the *two* major moments of French antihumanism – can stake a claim to originality with respect to existing accounts of 20th-century French thought. To begin, it is important to highlight that, as it emerged in the 20th century, antihumanism was not only philosophical. It had political meanings that it would be imprudent to forget.

Philosophical (Anti)Humanism

Although by a great irony of intellectual history it was Sartre's adolescent, aesthete alias, Antoine Roquentin from *La Nausée* (1938), who was among the very first to use the term "anti-humaniste"[152] – a fact that seems to have been quickly forgotten –, a very different Sartre, the existentialist philosopher of the 1940s and 50s, came to incarnate "humanism" in French philosophy. But the spectacular success of Sartre's works was not exactly overshadowed, but

[151] For a recent and influential perspective, see Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism that Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).
[152] *La Nausée*, p. 152. As mentioned in a note above, Maritain coined the term.

certainly impugned, by a dramatic 'foreign' intervention into French intellectual life: a letter signed Martin Heidegger.

Heidegger's gesture was not entirely new: Husserl, another German "master" of French 20th-century thought, had come to the Sorbonne in 1929 to pronounce his "Cartesian Meditations"; and, although of course not in person, Hegel made his presence felt through Kojève's famous lectures in the 30s, attended by a whole cast of major French intellectuals. Freud, to mention another German influence, would be reread and revitalized by Lacan. But Heidegger's letter *Über den 'Humanismus'* (1946/7)[153] was striking for its ad hominem attack on Sartre, its critique of humanism in general, and for its way of setting its French readers before a fateful decision, a moment of choice and rupture. Heidegger drew a massive line between (1) "humanism" and traditional metaphysics, and (2) a thinking to come that would have to direct itself away from and *against* this lineage; readers would have to take sides. For several reasons, the *Letter* must have been alluring for young French intellectuals at the time: for its exciting, gnomic gesturing towards a new sort of philosophy, its critique of the French *pater philosophia* Sartre, and also because this text would long be the main path of initiation into Heidegger's thought for the majority of French thinkers unable to read German.[154]

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[153] The letter was written in 1946, then reworked for publication in 1947 in *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* as *Ueber den 'Humanismus' Brief an Jean Beaufret, Paris*. The quotation marks were dropped in the separate edition of the text: *Ueber den Humanismus* in 1949 (they are sometimes dropped in English translations too). The French translation was based on this 1949 edition and first appeared in two issues of the *Cahiers du Sud* (nº319-20) in 1953. Heidegger reviewed and approved the translation himself. These editorial details can be found in Robert Meunier's edition: Martin Heidegger, *Lettre sur l'humanisme.* Bilingual ed. by Munier (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1964), a re-edition and correction of a 1957 first edition.

[154] The first translations of Heidegger (of "Was ist Metaphysik?" and "Vom Wesen des Grundes") appeared in the early 1930s. As for *Sein und Zeit* (1927), a fragment appeared in a volume edited and translated by the future scholar of Arabic and Islamic thought Henri Corbin in 1938: *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938). A translation of the first part of *Sein und Zeit* appeared only in 1964; the whole thing in unofficial translation in 1985, and definitive translation in 1986. The *Letter* thus represented the major influx of Heidegger in France, and many French intellectuals tended to read the

In a passage from his history of 20th-century French philosophy, which draws a curious analogy between poststructuralists, like Derrida, and earlier French thinkers, like Sartre, whose philosophies the former rejected, Gary Gutting comments on the *Letter* thus:

> One way in which the poststructuralists still resembled their immediate philosophical ancestors was in their demand for the concrete. As much as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Beauvoir they sought a connection to directly lived experience. But they rejected phenomenology's version of such experience because, they maintained, it was based on an untenable centrality of the individual subject that came to be called 'humanism.' Here 'humanism' referred to the family of modern philosophical conceptions, from Descartes's cogito through Kant's transcendental ego to Sartre's being-for-itself [*pour-soi*], that made individual subjects the ultimate sources of meaning and truth. The term had become current when Sartre, in his famous lecture in 1946 [actually, 1945], proclaimed against Catholic and Marxist critics that 'existentialism is a humanism' and Heidegger, in his 'Letter on Humanism' to a French disciple, Jean Beauffret, argued that this was precisely its failing, since humanism presupposed the very sort of traditional metaphysics that Heidegger's fundamental ontology had overcome.[155]

Setting aside the question of the accuracy of the prior part of this claim,[156] these words usefully foreground the philosophical ancestry most immediately associated with Sartre's humanism. This will helps us to grasp some of the dimensions of antihumanism as it emerged in France, in major part due to Heidegger's *Letter*.

The lineage of philosophical "humanism" led back from Sartre and phenomenology, to Kant, and ultimately to a philosophy of the "subject" that Descartes, according to Heidegger's still influential reading, laid down in fateful and foundational way.[157] "Humanism" was identified, that is, with the *two* father figures of French thought: Descartes and Sartre (Descartes

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earlier works through this one. See Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism, and Being* (New York: Routledege, 1995), pp. 71, 95.

[155] Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 252.

[156] Gutting leaps over the whole structuralist question and fails, therefore, to see that his claim implicitly posits a sort of dialectical resolution, in (3) poststructuralism, of the opposition between (1) humanism and phenomenology and (2) structuralism.

[157] See *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967 [1927]), §19-21; *Nietzsche*, vol. II (Pfullingen: Neske**,** 1961), pp.148-192; and "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" (1938), in *Holzwege*. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1950), pp. 75-114. On the "myth" of the Cartesian subject, see Balibar, "Réponse à la question de Jean-Luc Nancy: 'qui vient après le sujet?,'"*passim.* See also my chapter 1, *infra*.

as Sartre; Sartre *as* Descartes); *antihumanism* would target both (the one *in* or *as* the other). But Gutting's gloss of the term "humanism," if useful for understanding Sartre's 1945 lecture and the sort of philosophies "of the subject" with which Sartre's thought was and still is associated in the minds of friends and foes (and historians), cannot do justice to Heidegger's text. For the *Letter* set the question of humanism, and implicitly that of antihumanism, in a long historico-philosophical trajectory, one similar to that espoused in this thesis.

If *Sein und Zeit* (1927) could conceivably (if not correctly) be read in Sartre's humanist-existentialist manner, the *Letter* was unequivocal in its critique of humanism. This text was "the first and last discussion of this problem [humanism] in [Heidegger's] own thought."[158] Heidegger used the occasion not only to distance himself from Sartre but also from "humanism" per se. And the latter was irreducible to Sartre or his immediate ancestors. Heidegger was far too knowledgeable of the history of philosophy to be taking aim only at a few modern thinkers, be they of the stature of Sartre, Kant, and Descartes.

Addressing the historical manifestations of humanism, the *Letter* leads us back to the Roman Republic where the question of "humanitas" – the humanity of the truly human being, of the *homo humanus* – is first explicitly posed, and related to the *paideia* of the Greeks (the *late* or Hellenistic Greeks, Heidegger says, the Greeks whose philosophy had already become institutionalized and taught in the philosophical schools). Heidegger thus leads the question of "humanism" back to the philosophical, pedagogical, and anthropological aspirations and presuppositions discussed above. Though they were revived in the Renaissance, they ultimately emerged in ancient Rome (e.g., in Cicero). As it arises, humanism for Heidegger is thus marked by a double decline. It is a Roman cultural and philosophical program referring back to *late* Hellenistic Greek philosophy:

[158] Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy*, p. 95.

> In Rom begegnen wir dem ersten Humanismus. Er bleibt daher im Wesen eine spezifisch römische Erscheinung, die aus der Begegnung des Römertums mi der Bildung des späten Griechentums entspringt. Die sogenannte Renaissance des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts in Italien ist eine renascentia romanitatis. Weil es auf die romanitas ankommt, geht es um die humanitas und deshalb um die griechische παιδεία. Das Griechentum wird aber stets in seiner späten Gestalt und diese selbst römisch gesehen. Auch der homo romanus der Renaissance steht in einem Gegensatz zum homo barbarus. Aber das In-humane ist jetzt die vermeintliche Barbarei der gotischen Scholastik des Mittelalters. Zum historisch verstandenen Humanismus gehört deshalb stets ein studium humanitatis, das in einer bestimmten Weise auf das Altertum zurückgreift und so jeweils auch zu einer Wiederbelebung des Griechentums.[159]

Because of this origin-as-decline, every historical renewal of *humanism* exacerbates an originary estrangement from true thinking. Humanism in its more distinctly philosophical forms is no different.

Taken in this more general, philosophical sense, humanism denotes "die Bemühung darum, dass der Mensch frei werde für seine Menschlichkeit und darin seine Würde finde," with forms of humanism varying "je nach der Auffassung der 'Freiheit' und der 'Natur' Des Menschen."[160] Of no matter what sort – whether existentialist, Marxist, or Christian –, for Heidegger, all humanisms agree in their metaphysics. Indeed, metaphysics and humanism become almost inseparable, as Heidegger says in a passage that I will here cite at length. If only implicitly, these words seems to inform much of later French antihumanism. All forms of humanism, Heidegger writes,

> kommen doch darin überein, dass die humanitas des homo humanus aus dem Hinblick auf eine schon feststehende Auslegung der Natur, der Geschichte, der Welt, des Weltgrundes, das heisst des Seienden im Ganzen bestimmt wird. Jeder Humanismus gründet entweder in einer Metaphysik oder er macht sich selbst zum Grund einer solchen. Jede Bestimmung des Wesens des Menschen, die schon die Auslegung des Seiende ohne die Frage nach der Wahrheit des Seins voraussetzt, sei es mit Wissen, sei es ohne Wissen, ist metaphysisch. Darum zeigt sich, und zwar im Hinblick auf die Art, wie das Wesen des Menschen bestimmt wird, das Eigentümlichkeit aller Metaphysik darin, dass sie ‚humanistisch' ist. Demgemäss bleibt jeder Humanismus metaphysisch. Der Humanismus fragt bei der Bestimmung der Menschlichkeit des Menschen nicht nur nicht

[159] Heidegger, *Lettre sur l'humanisme.*, Munier, ed. pp., 46-8.
[160] Ibid., p. 48.

> nach dem Bezug des Seins zum Menschenwesen. Der Humanismus verhindert sogar diese Frage, da er sie auf Grund seiner Herkunft aus der Metaphysik weder kennt noch versteht. Umgekehrt kann die Notwendigkeit und die eigene Art der in der Metaphysik und durch sie vergessene Frage nach der Wahrheit des Seins nur so ans Licht kommen, dass inmitten der Herrschaft der Metaphysik die Frage gestellt wird ‚Was ist Metaphysik?'[161]

If the term "humanism" has lost its meaning, Heidegger believes, it is because all humanism entails this sort of unreflected metaphysics, which blocks the problem of Being, reducing the question to an ontology of entities. This naïve metaphysics is complicit with all sorts of binaries, including that of subject and object, which reductively construe the nature of the human being and of Being itself. This is a metaphysics that Heidegger associated both with the history of Western philosophy per se, and with modernity and modern science especially.[162]

If one is to give new sense to the old term ("humanism"), then, this would require a thinking that tries to more *essentially* understand the essence of the human. For Heidegger, this means to grasp the human being as essentially *Ek-sistence*, as being-there towards, for, and determined by, Being.[163] This thinking would be a *counter*-humanism, then: a "'Humanismus,' der gegen allen bisherigen Humanismus spricht."[164] But Heidegger (unlike Jacques Maritain, as we will see) does not espouse any such label.[165] He avoids etiquettes like "humanism" and "antihumanism" to denote his thinking, using instead the preposition "gegen" to mark his nonetheless clear opposition. Rather than remaining "im metaphysischen Subjektivismus ersticken und in der Seinsvergessenheit versunken" like other dominant philosophical currents

[161] Ibid., p. 50.
[162] See, for example, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," cited above, and Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1989).
[163] Heidegger, *Lettre sur l'huanisme*, p. 119.
[164] Ibid., p. 118.
[165] Ibid.

labeled with "isms," Heidegger writes,[166] he imagines a thinking "gegen allen bisherigen Humanismus." The latter would engage in "open" conflict with Humanism so as to renew, in terms of Being, the questions that humanism has all too hastily answered:

> Oder soll das Denken versuchen, durch einen offenen Widerstand gegen den ‚Humanismus' einen Anstoss zu wagen, der veranlassen könnte, erst einmal über die Humanitas des homo humanus und ihre Begründung stutzig zu werden? So könnte doch, wenn nicht der weltgeschichtliche Augenblick schon selbst dahin drängt, eine Besinnung erwachen, die nicht nur auf den Menschen, sondern auf die ‚Natur' des Menschen, nicht nur auf die Natur, sondern anfänglicher noch auf die Dimension denkt, in der das Wesen des Menschen, vom Sein selbst her bestimmt, heimisch ist.[167]

Heidegger here joins a call to arms – a sort of muted manifesto, for a thinking to rise up *against* all forms of humanism and the metaphysics they entail – to an observation concerning the *timeliness* of what this thinking would disclose, namely, the character of human being as *Ek-sistenz*, as determined by Being. For Sartre, the times called for a radical, atheistic humanism, one that stressed the utter autonomy and irreducible freedom of consciousness, and hence placed responsibility on the shoulders of each individual. For Heidegger, this sort of perspective exacerbated the metaphysics that had always gone hand in hand with humanism, and which led to reductive views of human nature and the being of beings. For him, the times demanded a different sort of reflection, one that could not think the question of the "essence" of the human separate from that which "determines" this essence as *Ek-sistenz*, namely, Being. From this perspective, the distinctly *humanist* ontological hierarchy would be inverted:

> So kommt es denn bei der Besinnung der Menschlichkeit des Menschen als der Ek-sistenz darauf an, dass nicht der Mensch das Wesentlich ist, sondern das Sein als die Dimension des Ekstatischen der Ek-sistenz.[168]

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[166] This thinking "against" humanism must resist the sort of hypostatization performed by terms such as those that end in "isms." For Heidegger, such terms respond to a desire of public opinion and mark the decline of authentic thinking in whatever domain they appear (ibid., 34, 38).
[167] Ibid.. p. 120.
[168] Ibid., p. 84. See also p. 138.

Though under a variety of names – *language*, *structure*, *episteme*, *ideology*, and so forth –, and not always in direct emulation of Heidegger, French antihumanists of the postwar period carried on his project of a critique of humanism that would decenter the human self or subject in terms of that which radically transcends and "determines" it.

But one further aspect of Heidegger's *Letter* needs to be mentioned before concluding this section, as it will be essential to my claim that we should be attentive to the formally *theological* aspects of French 20th-century antihumanism, despite its manifest atheism. As discussed above, humanism was at times historically and often philosophically in tension with theology and more theocentric perspectives. Early modern antihumanism was theologically inflected, in particular, by Augustinian postlapsarian anthropology. What about Heidegger's thought "gegen den Humanismus"? What about the French thinkers who took up his call to arms?

Always looking to undermine the binary thinking complicit with "metaphysics," Heidegger avoids calling his thinking either atheist or theist.[169] Instead, he says that this thinking lies beyond, or before, the opposition of the two.[170] But Heidegger also says something slightly different in the *Letter*: namely, that it is – or rather, it will be – only on the basis of a thinking that addresses *Ek-sistenz* and the truth of Being – that it is only in its opening, the arena or space this thinking opens – that one will be able to determine the dimension of "the sacred" (*das Heilige*) and what the relationship between man and God might or should be.[171] Only by the human's belonging to Being in its truth might we receive authentic laws and norms as opposed to

[169] Ibid, pp. 122, 132-6. Arguably, Heidegger is able to throw off unproblematically only the label of *atheism* (rejected perhaps with Sartre's embrace of atheism in mind (132-4). Thus, a close reading of the crucial notion of "the sacred" in the *Letter* would perhaps have to inflect Gouhier's (*L'anti-humansime au XVIIe siècle*) and Geroulanos's (*An Atheism that is not Humanist*) readings of the atheism of 20th-century antihumanism.
[170] Ibid., p. 132.
[171] Ibid., p. 134.

mere creations of "human reason," Heidegger also says.[172] In other words, the question of the existence of God – as the highest entity[173] – is suspended, not repealed, in the *Letter*, in light of the question of Being. The proximity of Being indicated by man's *Ek-sistenz* is set on the horizon: this is an abode for man, but *today* humans are still not up to experiencing or bearing this abode upon themselves. Only then might the sacred dimensions be open for a return of the divine.[174]

In other words, and according to the typical movement of his thought, Heidegger refuses the binary of atheism and theism in order to delineate a deeper, *ontological* shape of the sacred. Thus we might not be surprised to find that Heidegger's very notion of the human being as *Ek-sistenz* sets *Da-sein* and Being in a relation that reads as theological, even theocentric, at least in form if not exactly in content (God and Being are distinct for Heidegger). This is confirmed in a passage where Heidegger describes how the thinking of *Ek-sistenz* lowers the human being, making it *less* than the "rational animal" or "subjectivity" as which, according to humanism, the human being should see itself:

> der Mensch ist in der Geworfenheit. Das sagt: der Mensch ist als der ek-sistierende Gegenwurf des Seins insofern mehr denn als animal rationale, als er gerade weniger ist im Verhältnis zum Menschen, der sich aus der Subjektivität begreift. Der Mensch ist nicht der Herr des Seienden. Der Mensch ist der Hirt des Seins. In diesem 'weniger' büsst der Mensch nichts ein, sondern er gewinnt, indem er in die Wahrheit des Seins gelangt. Er gewinnt die wesenhafte Armut des Hirten, dessen Würde darin beruht, vom Sein selbst in die Wahrnis seiner Wahrheit gerufen zu sein.[175]

The critique of "man" leveled by a thinking "against humanism," which exposes the human in its *thrownness* – and in its *fallenness*, as Heidegger wrote in *Sein und Zeit* –serves to *elevate* human essence by seeing it in its relation to Being.

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[172] Ibid., p. 162.
[173] Ibid., p. 130.
[174] Ibid., p. 98.
[175] 108.

The resonances, vocabulary, and dialectics of low and high at play here cannot but sound theological, even Augustinian or Pauline.[176] The existence of God is undecided, to be sure; the divine is set at a distance. God is absent and Being is forgotten. But the ontological interpretation of the human in terms of Being, as undertaken and delineated by Heidegger, does not reject but radicalizes the ontological finitude of the human being that characterizes a theology of fallenness. On this view, the highest achievement of thinking would be a sort of mystical dissolution whereby thought breaks apart on the "hardness" of Being. This sort of failure would be true success, the success of what Heidegger calls a falling or of a failing thinking to which only the best could attain: "vom einem scheiternden Denken. Wenn dieses einem Menschen glücken dürfte, geschähe kein Unglück. Ihm würde das einzige Geschenk, das dem Denken aus dem Sein zukommen könnte."[177]

If Heidegger's *Letter* prepares the ground for the French antihumanism to come, it does so along with all these echoes of the sort of Augustinian antihumanism one sees in Pascal, for whom "[la raison] est toujours active et toujours grande, à condition d'aboutir à sa propre disqualification."[178] Is not failure the achievement of thinking? Is it not in the shattering of thought that Being resonates even in or as its withdrawal? We will find resonances of this *mystical* striving of antihumanism in Derrida, Foucault, and Althusser.

Political and Christian (Anti)Humanism

Notwithstanding the importance of Sartre's 1945 lecture, and Heidegger's *Letter*, the philosophical meaning of "humanism" was not the concept's only connotation in the mid-20th century. The term also evoked "Socialist" and "Marxist humanism." These notions were most

[176] On Paul and Augustine in Heidegger, see Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions: The Remains of Saint Augustine in* Being and Time *and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
[177] Heidegger, *Lettre sur l'huanisme*, p. 112.
[178] Paul Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle*, p. 150.

prominently developed in the 1950s and early 60s; and the first, "socialist humanism," was given emphatic expression in a book edited by Erich Fromm from 1965, containing essays by prominent figures such as Ernst Bloch, Lucien Goldmann, Bertrand Russell, Herbert Marcuse, Galvano della Volpe, and many others.[179] Alongside an often critical attitude towards the specter of Stalinism, the major impulse behind these "humanisms" went back to the publication of Marx's early writings, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, which were published in the original German only in 1932, and in 1958-9 in English.[180] An incomplete translation appeared in French in 1937; full French translations appeared in 1962 and 1968.[181]

As read by these "humanists," the "young Marx" of the *Manuscripts* was concerned with "alienation" and the "dehumanization" wrought by capitalism.[182] With this Marx in mind, these humanists opposed the purportedly "scientific" versions of Marxism, which emphasized "objective social forces," "leaving human consciousness, decision-making, and action as a residual category with little role in social change."[183] Their "humanism" sought a more mitigated view, which would take account of both impersonal factors and individual consciousness as motors of historical transformation. Sometimes on the basis of a notion of "human nature," it envisioned social developments that would lead to the "flourishing" and development of human beings, and held that individuals, "capable of empathy, rational thought and effective planning," could play an active role in bringing about these developments.[184] In France, some figures who

[179] Fromm, *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965).
[180] See Barbara Epstein, "On the Disappearance of Socialist Humanism" (2014), *The International Marxist-Humanist*: ww.internationalmarxisthumanist.org, n.p; Epstein "The Rise, Decline, and Possible Revival of Socialist Humanism," in Alderson and Spencer, eds., *For Humanism*, pp. 17-67.
[181] Marx, *Critique de l'économie politique: Manuscrits de 1844*, tr. Papaioannou (Paris: Allia, 2007), p. 6.
[182] Fromm, "Introduction," in Fromm, ed., *Socialist Humanism*: "In this concern for man and opposition to dehumanization we feel a deep sense of solidarity with all Humanists, many of whom do not share all of our views, but all of whom share our concern for the full development of man" (p. xii).
[183] Epstein, "On the Disappearance of Socialist Humanism," n.p.
[184] Epstein, "The Rise, Decline, and Possible Revival of Socialist Humanism," p. 18.

would come to represent this perspective, although in clearly divergent ways, include Merleau-Ponty,[185] Goldmann, the Marxist Sartre of the 1950s and of the *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960), and Roger Garaudy, a prominent voice in the PCF and one of Althusser's major foes, whose *Humanisme marxiste* appeared in 1957.[186]

While these references all point to the postwar period, already in lectures given in 1934, and later published in an expanded version in 1936, Jacques Maritain offered a critique of "socialist" and "Marxist humanism" from the perspective of a Christian (Catholic) "integral" humanism to come.[187] This little-known book is worth mentioning not only because it contains the first uses of the French terms "anti-humaniste" and "anti-humanisme." Maritain's text is also crucial insofar as its ideological perspective, at once theological, partisan, and hyperbolic, throws into light some of the less evident aspects of postwar antihumanism, which I will be at pains to reveal in the second half of this thesis. That Maritain's was a theological perspective is here decisive; it allowed him to see "humanism" in a deep-time perspective, and to not neglect the theological and metaphysical profile it traced from the beginning, as it emerged out of a complex medieval conjuncture that apologies of the "Renaissance" tend to disfigure.[188]

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[185] Merleau-Ponty, *Humanisme et terreur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); Merleau-Ponty, *Les aventures de la dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955). See Pierre Macherey, "« Humanisme et terreur » de Merleau-Ponty : pour une politique de l'ambiguïté ?" (2016): https://philolarge.hypotheses.org/1795

[186] Garaudy, *Humanisme marxiste* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1957).

[187] The lectures were delivered (in French) in summer of 1934 at Universidad Internacional in Santander, Spain, then published in translation the next year: J. Maritain, *Problemas Epirituales y Temporales de Una Nueva Christianidad* (Madrid: Signo, 1935). Since the term "antihmanismo" appears in the Spanish publication (p. 57, corresponding to what will be p. 76 in the French), the term was coined in summer 1934.

[188] Indeed, some of the most interesting – if partially distorted – claims of Maritain's *Humanisme intégral* concern the "Christian" or medieval roots of some of the most signature aspects of philosophical humanism (e.g., the exaltation of the human person) and, even, of Marxism. While this view neglects the classicizing interests and passions of Renaissance humanism, it does point us towards a more subtle view of the sorts of discourses on the human being available in the Middle Ages, especially Thomism (Maritain's philosophy-theology of choice). Cf. Emmanuel Faye, *Philosophie et perfection de l'homme*, p. 32.

Maritain at first uses "humanisme" as a term for a metaphysical position concerning human existence that is restricted to natural, empirical, and anthropological facts – to the exclusion, that is, of any sort of transcendent, spiritual, or divine principles or aspects. This, which he also calls "bourgeois" or "anthropological" humanism, is the post-medieval view, whose "forme la plus hautement representative" is communism or "l'athéisme russe contemporain."[189] Maritain sees "humanism" thus understood in a dialectical perspective, so that the most apparently humane – modern humanism, from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment and into Marxism – turns over into its other: an impersonal, bureaucratic, technicist, collectivist view, one that exalts "man," but only as collectivity, not as individual or "person." Only the collective, not the individual subject, will achieve happiness at the Marxists' eschatological end of history, Maritain observes.

Though the two are often used interchangeably in his book, Maritain at one point divides "Marxist humanism" from "Socialist humanism."[190] The latter is a broader term, and subsumes some essential humanist values, albeit often applied in a contradictory fashion across different social classes[191] and without the "theocentric" view that is necessary, according to Maritain, to achieve the transformations of society sought by socialism. On the other hand, "Marxist humanism" seems to represent the more "troubling" (*inquiétant*) version of Marxism. This view is radically atheist and dissolves the individual into an entirely "socialized" perspective. In other words, if it is focused on "man," it does so within a materialist framework that replaces the "person" with the collective and with objective social conditions, personal aspirations and

[189] Maritain, *Humanisme intégral*, p. 42.
[190] Ibid., p. 97.
[191] Ibid., pp. 77-8, n.1

spirituality with the good of the social whole, and so forth. This atheistic, impersonal Marxism Maritain calls "anti-humanisme,"[192] thereby coining the word.

Strikingly, the other intellectual current to receive this polemical title is placed at the other end of the theological spectrum: as opposed to "l'athéisme pur" of Marxist "anti-humansime," it a sort of "position chrétienne pure": "une certaine école protestante contemporaine," represented by Karl Barth, and which finds its sources in Kierkegaard, Luther, and Calvin. This "school" is "marquée par le retour au calvinisme primitif. C'est une position d'anti-humanisme primordiale et…d'annihilation de l'homme devant Dieu."[193] In the earlier part of the book, Maritain had associated this theological "pessimism" with Jansenism.[194] A true "humanisme intégral" would oppose both forms of "anti-humanisme": it would have to be Christian; it would have to accord great importance to the individual "person," not the social, collective "man"; and it would have to be more optimistic, turning to Aquinas rather than the darker sides of Augustine and Paul that imbue theological antihumanism. Thomism is the other "position chrétienne pure" and, in Maritain's dialectics, it is the only framework that might give rise to a pure or "integral" humanism.

There are several lessons to take away from this brief discussion of Maritain's book. First, there is the simple fact that, already in the 1930s and into the 60s, the notion of "humanism" was timely, shifting, and contentious. Especially with the publication of the *Manuscripts of 1844*, socialists and Marxists made a claim for the mantel of "humanism"; so did the Christian or Thomist Maritain; and so did Sartre in the 1940s. Further, Sartre's existential humanism, although atheist, shares some crucial concerns with Maritain's Christian humanism. Like Maritain, Sartre puts emphasis on the individual, on consciousness, which is radically

[192] Ibid., p. 76.
[193] Ibid., pp. 79-80.
[194] See, ibid., e.g., pp. 13, 24, 32.

irreducible to material conditions or social, collective ideology. Indeed, Maritain and Sartre were explicitly or implicitly at odds with the more "scientific" frameworks of historical materialism, the sort that Althusser would later refine and champion precisely under the term "antihumanism." The sorts of "socialist humanism" (also known as "Marxist humanism") developed in the 50s and 60s were likewise developed as a form of more anthropocentric, individual-focused Marxism.

In other words, and in striking resemblance to what we saw in the early modern period, "humanism" – whether existential, socialist, or Christian – emerged in opposition to perspectives, either philosophical or theological, which were seen as "impersonal," "scientific," and as "annihilating" the individual human being or person (or "consciousness") in the face of some imposing, transcendent something: the social collective, the impersonal Intellect, the historical-economic conditions and relations of production, a distant, all-powerful God, the materialities and irrationalities of a purely fallen, creaturely existence, and so forth. Even Maritain's "theocentric" humanism was intended to rehabilitate the human individual; it stands in symmetrical relation to the humanism of Sartre, which is theocentric, so to speak, in an atheistic way: Sartre gives God's traits to human consciousness itself.

Second, Maritain suggests that a secret dialectic undermines secular varieties of humanism from the beginning: as they focus more and more exclusively on the human and the individual, they become more impersonal and "antihumanist." This is a logic strikingly similar to that of the more manifestly secular *Dialectic of Enlightenment* proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1944/47, which focused on how reason and enlightenment, in their war against myth and violence, produce *from within themselves* irrationalism and barbarism. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Maritain thus asks us to attend to the secret complicities between humanism

and antihumanism, which undermine any simplistic view of opposition. The two might be caught in a dialectic, as I have suggested, and the question of possible "resolutions" then poses itself with great urgency.

Finally, Maritain posits, without exploring, a provocative association between two sorts of "anti-humanisme": one "purely" atheist, the other "purely" religious. Marx and Freud (and Darwin[195]) went too far, Maritain thinks: from usefully dismantling the egoistic, liberal, bourgeois consciousness, they went on to demolish "l'Homme dans sa notion même, et dans sa dignité essentielle, en tant qu'image de Dieu."[196] Within Maritain's text, this Marxist-Freudian materialist critique appears as the secular version of a radical religious pessimism or "anti-humanisme." Maritain's text asks us to consider, in other words, the dialectics between humanism and antihumanism, and between antihumanist theoretical frameworks and a radical pessimist theology that, in the early modern period, was formulated by Jansenism and Calvinism. Somewhat like Heidegger's *Letter*, Maritain's book implies that our notions of humanism and antihumanism exist in dialogue between the 20th century and the early modern period. The theological questions of the latter, if seemingly precluded by the atheistic aspects of the former, are like a repressed memory that returns where it is least expected.

Historiography on French 20th-century Thought

So far, the question of 20th-century antihumanism (again, not always in these terms) has not been posed in terms of early modern developments in French thought, or in terms of "humanism" in the historical sense. The dominant narratives not only exclude such a multi-century, comparative perspective; they arguably preempt it.

[195] Ibid., pp. 36-7.
[196] Ibid., p. 89.

One narrative, which was given paradigmatic expression by Vincent Descombes in his seminal 1979 text, is that of the German master thinkers: on this view, 20th-century French thought changes as a response to the influence of the philosophies of Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx.[197] This perspective, which confirmed Paul Ricœur's famous statement from 1965 that Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx are the three "maîtres du soupçon" ruling over French thought,[198] and is related to André Glucksmann's polemical *Les maîtres penseurs*,[199] finds a more scholarly echo, for example, in Tom Rockmore's *Heidegger and French Philosophy*.[200] This view somewhat belittles the originality of the French thinkers themselves, and dynamics that would be more internal to French thought.

Other scholars have pushed back against the Germanic narrative, and offered others. For example, over against a notion of ruptures between generations of thinkers (a view I share), Robert Wicks has tried to argue for more continuity across 20th-century French thought, stressing a constant focus on the question of freedom.[201] Gutting, who is similar to Wicks in his more humanist and pro-Sartrean readings of the period's thinkers, is likewise keen to point out these sorts of continuities (as we saw, for example, in the long citation above).[202] Eric Matthews similarly offers a more Franco-centric view of 20th-century French thought, and stresses the enduring importance of Descartes across this tradition, albeit with unsatisfactory results.[203] To mention one further example, Alan D. Schrift's more recent work has also stressed the

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[197] *Le même et l'autre: Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933-1978)* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).
[198] Ricœur, *De l'interprétation, Essai sur Freud* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), p. 44.
[199] Glucksmann, *Les maîtres penseurs* (Paris: Grasset, 1977).
[200] Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy* (cited above).
[201] Wicks, *Modern French Philosophy: From Existentialism to Postmodernism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).
[202] Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (cited above); see also Joseph Chiari, *Twentieth-Century French Thought: From Bergson to Lévi-Strauss* (London: Elek, 1975).
[203] Matthews, *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy* (New York: Oxford, 1996). While Matthews aims to think the 20th century in dialogue with Descartes, he seems to utterly neglect the question of anti-Cartesians (or "antihumanists") in the early modern period.

indigenous aspects of French 20th-century philosophy by paying attention to the highly institutionalized nature of the learning, teaching, and production of philosophy in France.[204]

For my purposes, these latter narratives are useful insofar as they point us towards the interior dynamics of French philosophy, and away from perspectives that tend to limit our scope to only as far back as Marx or Hegel. Still, despite the recognition that Descartes's thought is important to this story, a more complex historical perspective, which would look not only at Descartes but the conflicts in which his philosophy was already embedded, is lacking.

Knox Peden's recent book on 20th-century French Spinozism is an exception.[205] In his book, Schrift had observed that the historiography has relatively neglected certain currents of 20th-century French thought, which have been overshadowed by the Anglo-American emphasis on French Heidegerrianism (in a word, on Derrida). These understudied currents include "the French epistemological tradition" (comprising figures such as Bachelard, Canguilhem, Cavaillès, and Serres) and also a body of "work that brings a Spinozist approach to Marxian theory."[206] Peden's book closes both these gaps. Indeed, one of the merits of his account is how it shows that the question of the French epistemological tradition is in some ways inextricable from that of French Spinozism (for example, in the figure of Cavaillès); and how some of those identified as Spinozists – or Spinozist Marxists – were indebted to the epistemological tradition (for example, Althusser). More generally, and more pertinent to this thesis, Peden's account presents an account of 20th-century French philosophy that does not really begin in the 20th century at all.

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[204] Schrift, *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006). Gutting had offered a less extensive institutional approach.

[205] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology. French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze* (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 2014).

[206] Schrift, *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy*, p. 78. "This work reflects the long tradition of Spinoza scholarship in France in the twentieth century, beginning with Alain, Lagneau, Delbos, and Brunschvicq, and continuing in more recent years with the teaching and writing of Ferdinand Alquié, Martial Guéroult, Gilles Deleuze, and Louis Althusser" (78). Schrift later mentions Badiou, Rancière, Macherey, Moreau, Matheron, and Balibar as those who have been attracted by Spinoza's political philosophy (79).

Rather, it suggests that one way of understanding major developments in 20th-century French thought is to see certain French thinkers marshaling Spinozism against a phenomenology understood to be indebted to Cartesianism. This sort of extemporal temporality – wherein an early modern philosopher is somehow effective, alive, in the 20th century – is what seems suggested by Peden's title: *Spinoza contra Phenomenology*.

Like my approach, Peden's account implicitly poses the tricky question of the history and historicity of philosophy: that is, to what extent it makes sense either to restrict our view historically, as we are professionally required and inclined to do, or to wonder whether for philosophy – if not for certain textual practices in general – we might need to recognize more complex temporalities defined by repetition, dialogue, rupture, and discontinuity. This latter perspective would not be willfully ignorant of historicity or context, to be sure. But it would allow for a more serious engagement with the fact – manifest in philosophical practice per se and having nothing *explicitly* to do with notions of the universality of truth or argument across time – that philosophers both dialogue and do deals with the dead. Descartes, for Sartre, was more alive than many of contemporary developments in philosophy and the human sciences; Spinoza, for Althusser, was, alongside Marx, the only truly contemporary thinker, and so on. This awareness of resonance, affinity, or analogy across time can be explicit, implicit, or both.

The issues these analogies and complex intellectual temporalities raise are methodological (e.g., the issue of "contextualism") and philosophical. They pose the same questions, in my mind, as the famous Foucault-Derrida debate on Descartes's *Meditations*.[207] There, Foucault plays the role of astute intellectual historian, locating unique events within a singular historical moment, and Derrida that of sage-philosopher, who recalls, in observance of

[207] For recent perspectives, see Custer, Deutscher, and Haddad, eds. *Foucault/Derrida Fifty Years Later: The Futures of Genealogy, Deconstruction, and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

the dead, the recurrent, constitutive nature of the divide between madness (or "negativity") and reason. For Derrida, this binary is no punctual historical event, but is ultimately an aspect of language itself.[208] Some might find this view reductive – similar in this respect to the views of Arendt and Havelock mentioned above. Still, there seems to be no reason why we might not aim to combine sensitivity towards the material conditions of possibility of a recurrent philosophical position (a focus, for example, on language itself, the book as a medium, and writing), with a Foucauldian eye to the various ways this position is articulated over time. This approach productively confuses our very notions of the *historical* and the *philosophical*: the historical framework adopts a multi-century view (it must be philosophical), and the philosophical analysis takes into account material conditions and practices (it must be historical).

In arguing for Spinoza's importance in 20th-century post- and anti-phenomenological thought, Peden's account returns in some sense to a view of "external" influence that was crucial to the Germano-centric narrative.[209] Rather than just Heidegger or Marx, that is, Spinoza is now taken as the master thinker of philosophies that attacked Cartesian-inspired phenomenological thought of the 20th-century. While this is no doubt an essential revision of our view of the period, Peden's use of Spinoza as the paradigmatic anti-Descartes distracts away from those French thinkers that already opposed humanism and Cartesian philosophy in the 17th century, and obstructs our view of the theological perspectives related to these critiques. Indeed, the dynamic Peden explores – Spinoza versus Descartes (and phenomenology) – pits a hyper-rationalist against a more moderate rationalist; a man of strict, geometric deduction and science against a man whose philosophy was committed to reason and science, but not to the extent that it might

[208] Derrida, "Cogito et histoire de la folie," in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 51-97.
[209] Not that this is per se wrong; on the contrary, as Schrift points out (*Twentieth-Century French Philosophy*), Spinoza was – after figures like Plato, Kant, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, and Hume – the most conspicuous philosopher on the *agrégation* (78). The question of "native" in "foreign" is decisively problematized by this institutional perspective.

impinge upon the autonomy and freedom of the individual; in other words, an antihumanist rationalism against a humanist one. The non-rational, theological aspects of French early modern antihumanism are thus precluded in advance; and so are, then, the theological resonances at stake in 20th-century theoretical antihumanism.

My account tries to correct these oversights. Not that the *explicitly* theological versions of 20th-century French thought will play a crucial role: I have omitted more manifestly religious figures (Maritian, Levinas, Ricœur, de Certeau, Marion), since my focus is on secular *theory*, where the theological aspects of early modern antihumanism are least expected to be found.[210] Also, contrary to many of the historians of philosophy mentioned above, I am not attempting an intellectual history so much as a literary history. That is, I try my best to actually read, not gloss, texts; I do not take philosophers or theorists to be in control of the meanings, resonances, and genealogies of their words and concepts; I read out of their theories traces or repetitions of what they likely would not have ever claimed as their own, and so on.

Finally, in part as a result of the early modern perspective espoused here, I try to be sensitive to the *ethical* dimensions of philosophy and theory. Humanism, as we saw, was inseparable from ethics in the early modern period; and so were the positions that opposed it. What about 20th-century humanism and antihumanism? The seeming neglect of ethics that characterizes much French postwar theory is, for me, not a sign that this is an inappropriate concern in our analysis, but that we need to think harder about the ways in which the very practice of writing and theory – especially when this practice deals with such complex notions as *self*, *subject*, *consciousness*, *freedom*, etc. – are inextricably bound up with ethics. This concerns not only attitudes towards the ways in which human beings act, think, and are, but implicates

[210] This restriction is also due to the fact that, within the broad concept of "theology," my focus in the early modern period is on the more negative theologies of Augustinianism and Jansenism, not on Judaism, Thomism, or Jesuitism.

also theorizing or philosophizing itself as what Foucault would call *techniques de soi*. What I call the "mystical" aspirations of Althusser and the late Foucault will throw this into striking relief. But it should inform our reading of other postwar thinkers as well, as we shall see in the next section, on Derrida.

Theory and (A)theology: The Early Derrida and the Question of "Mysticism"

In the introduction to his *Negative Theology and Modern French Philosophy*, Arthur Bradley phrases the "argument" of his book in these terms: "Derrida neither simply attacks nor defends negative theology but attempts…to repeat it differently…outside its apparently original theological context."[211] This concept or method, we might say – repetition with a difference – is of course a mark of *deconstruction* as Derrida both theorized and practiced it in early texts like *De la grammatologie* and the essays published in *L'écriture et la différence*. I will focus on one of these, the essay on Bataille, "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale: un hégélianisme sans réserve" (1967).[212]

This text is, among other things, a sort of discourse on the method for the project of deconstruction. Derrida sketches a theory of what he calls "sovereign" or "general writing." Rather than attempt to subsume, the latter would at best *indicate*, sovereignty. That is, it would *gesture to* what Derrida calls the "sovereign operation," which is "tout autre" and beyond, the "neither-nor" in excess of the system of dichotomies from which philosophy and discourse are built. Normal or "servile writing" *makes sense*: it is invested in the production, the work, of meaning in and as discourse. In servile writing the unknown – in whatever form: the purely negative, death, the excessive, incomprehensible, and unthinkable – is thus read back into the

[211] Bradley, *Negative Theology and Modern French Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 2.
[212] "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale: un hégélianisme sans réserve," in *L'écriture et la différence*, pp. 369-407.

system. It is reduced, synthesized, and sublated, as in the Hegelian dialectic that, in Derrida's essay, names the very paradigm of Western philosophy, thought, and language as such.

Sovereign writing, on the other hand, would read that which apparently has or makes sense back into the meaningless field or "game" that surrounds and grounds it. Here, the method, so to speak, is one of simulation and displacement. It consists in the inscription of concepts that, while seemingly identical to those that are central to a given text (e.g., here, Hegel's *Phenomenology*), in fact displace their relations and radicalize their meanings and operations. The targeted concepts are thus led past themselves, opening a rupture within what otherwise seemed to be a coherent totality or whole. The function of this procedure is to discover the limit of discourse and even its "beyond," as Derrida writes: "non simplement par une interruption, une césure ou une blessure à l'intérieur du discours (une négativité abstraite), mais, à travers une telle ouverture, par une interruption découvrant soudain la limite du discours et l'au-delà du savoir absolu."[213]

"Sovereignty" and "sovereign operation" *refer*, then, to that which is "tout autre": beyond, non-identical to itself, excessive by definition, *neither* this *nor* that. A sovereign writing would avoid the impossible and violent act of trying to capture, grasp, or comprehend this "tout autre": it doesn't know, but un-knowingly acknowledges, that which transgresses the limit and stands *outside*. Instead of understanding it, it lets it stand. And this accomplishment or event – the non-presentative "experience" of the unexperienceable that lies at or is "the beyond of absolute knowledge" – pops "absolute knowledge" like a balloon. From being the totality, the unity of being and absolute knowing, and the highest form of mind and life, "absolute knowledge" becomes just one *form* of knowledge. "Absolute knowledge" is shown to be

[213] Ibid., p. 383.

ideology: the cherished view of a restricted, naive consciousness.[214] From being all there was and is to know, it becomes *known* as a vain element encompassed by something larger, which forms its field without forming a totality on its own: nonsense, meaninglessness, the "tout autre."

Derrida, writing against Sartre, claims that sovereign writing, which indicates this beyond, other, or neither-nor, is not "mysticism."[215] But this is only a moment in Derrida's text – a polemical and, in some sense, naïve moment. For what Derrida actually means, when we *read* his text and judge from his other comments on mysticism, is that Bataille is not a "new mystic"[216] if one understands "mysticism" in the old, Christian sense. *This* mysticism sought the experience of the *presence* of God, and that's why it won't do. Just as Bataille's sovereignty is a radicalized version of the negativity of Hegel's master with his disdain for life, Bataille's "atheist" and "conscious mysticism" is a radicalized, excessive, hyperbolic version of what Bataille calls "classical mysticism."[217] Recalling Heidegger's perspective on "the sacred" from the *Letter on 'Humanism'*, Bataille's "conscious" mysticism stands "beyond the opposition of the mystic and the rational."[218] In this binary logic, Derrida might say, mysticism was just an

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[214] Cf. ibid., p 406.

[215] Ibid., pp. 394, 399-400. The text that Derrida has in mind is Sartre's "Un nouveau mystique," in *Situations* I (Paris, Gallimard, 2010 [1947]), pp 172-213. In light of my argument concerning the latent and explicit affinities between 17th- and 20th-century antihumanism, it is striking to note how, in this text, Sartre sees Bataille as a descendent of Pascal (in terms of style and philosophy, for example, in their both privileging "history" over "metaphysics," as Sartre writes with respect to Pascal's postlapsarian perspective). Further, it is precisely in allegiance to Descartes and the *cogito* – i.e., to Pascal's enemy – that Sartre critiques what he calls Bataille's "scientism" (the unwitting importation of scientific, i.e. "external" perspectives into a purportedly pure introspective project: Bataille's *L'expérience intérieure*). For Sartre's critique of the French "moralistes" and how it informed his understanding of his own philosophical project and renewal of Cartesian humanism, see my chapter 4. Sartre's essay on Bataille is also intriguing for the way in which (in Sartre's own philosophical idiom, of course) it prefigures some of the more elaborate and implicitly anti-Sartrean arguments Derrida will make concerning Bataille (see especially pp. 206-7).

[216] Ibid., p 400.

[217] See ibid., n. 1, pp. 399-400.

[218] Ibid., p 399. Cf. p. 394.

inverted image of rationalism.[219] But "atheist" mysticism refuses to transform utter negativity into pure Being à la Hegel.[220] Rather than attaining to the highest entity or Being beyond beings in some ecstatic communion with God, conscious "mysticism" (and deconstruction, perhaps) gestures to irreducible negativity, a *neither-nor* beyond the divide of the negative and the positive.

This subtler attitude towards mysticism is confirmed by Derrida's ambiguous remarks concerning the relationship between sovereign writing and negative theology. Crucially, these comments are located *between* the first, polemical mention of mysticism – where, against Sartre, Derrida says Bataille can be equated neither with "scientism" nor with "mysticism" – and the second, more ambiguous one I just mentioned, where Derrida cites Bataille's notion of "conscious mysticism."[221] In the passage now in question, Derrida seems to suspend his judgment as to whether Bataille's writing can be considered a kind of negative theology, suggesting that the same sort of relationship of radicalization as between "classical" and "conscious" mysticism might apply to this case as well. When Derrida says that Bataille is not "un nouveau mystique," then perhaps we can read: not a "new" exemplar of *mysticism*, for he is indeed a new "mystic," using the term to rupture the traditional category. And what about negative theology? When he addresses the question, Derrida deploys a crucial "peut-être":

> …cette athéologie ne procède pourtant pas selon les voies de la théologie négative; voies qui ne pouvaient manquer de fasciner Bataille mais qui réservaient peut-être encore, au-delà de tous les prédicats refusés, et même 'au-delà de l'être', une 'super-essentialité'; au-delà des catégories de l'étant, un étant suprême et un sens indestructible. Peut-être: car nous touchons ici à des limites et aux plus grandes audaces du discours dans la pensée occidentale. Nous pourrions montrer que les distances et les proximités ne diffèrent pas entre elles.[222]

[219] For mysticism would entail some full experience or disclosure of the absolute Being, one attained through intuition rather than through rationalism's lattice-work of concepts.
[220] See Bataille's remarks, cited in the note pp. 399-400.
[221] I.e., ibid., pp. 394, 399-400.
[222] Ibid., pp. 398-99.

Derrida is unwilling to *affirm* that negative theology was untrue to the project that Bataille, and a fortiori Derrida himself, renders explicit. "Peut-être": *perhaps* negative theology breaks with being in order to come back together with it as utter Being. In ultimately directing itself toward God, *perhaps* it was unable to do justice to the indefinite, neither-nor of a negativity beyond the binary of positive and negative. But only "perhaps": and, if not, if negative theology *was* consistent with its name, Bataille, and Derrida, might be doing something similar, if only more "conscious," negative, and extreme.[223] In negative theology, then, Derrida finds the most radical style of thought or non-thought, *perhaps* even a sort of deconstruction *avant la lettre*, here acknowledged in striking praise: "[les] plus grandes audaces du discours dans la pensée occidentale." This homage seems confirmed by the gnomic phrase that closes the excursus: "les distances et les proximités ne diffèrent pas entre elles."[224]

We might say, then, that Bataille and Derrida are not "new" negative theologians (or new mystics) – new examples, that is, of the old, known forms, and part of the binary logic they imply. But they are perhaps new "negative theologians" and "mystics" – new *forms* of the old forms, as it were. My suggestion is that, in our reading of 20th-century French antihumanism, we

[223] According, in other words, to the same movement of repetition and difference as we find leading from Hegel's "master" to Bataille's "sovereign," and from "classical mysticism" to "conscious," "atheist mysticism."

[224] In a note signaled just after the term "'super-essentialité'" in the passage cited above, Derrida names the examples of negative theology he has in mind: Meister Eckhart and Pseudo-Dionysus (p. 398, n.1). These canonical figures of mysticism and negative theology belonged, along with Cusa and Plotinus, to the main figures studied by Derrida's thesis advisor, Maurice de Gandillac. As Schrift notes (*Twentieth-Century French* Philosophy, p. 120), Gandillac was co-advisor with Jean Hyppolite on Derrida's DES (diplome d'études supérieures) and was sole advisor for *De la grammatoligie*, which had for title *De la grammatologie: Essai sur la permanence des concepts platonicien, aristotélicien et scolastique du signe écrit*. A reading of Gandillac's works from before 1967 would be necessary to determine to what extent Derrida's positions borrow from or are in tension with his advisor's. In any case, Derrida's note makes precisely the same critique of negative theology that Bataille leveled at classical mysticism: namely, that it was a sort of ruse that only appeared to espouse utter negativity beyond language and being, but rather subsumed both into a higher Being. The negative intent and motion of negative theological language was simply a "détour" by which "positive onto-theology" realized itself in a higher form.

should keep in mind *this type* of resonance and homology between *a certain sort* of theological discourse and *a certain sort* of theoretical practice. This would be fully in line with what we found in Heidegger's *Letter*, where the atheism-religious binary is avoided in favor of a radical, ontological thinking of the sacred.

What Derrida articulates in his remarks – while nevertheless displacing onto Bataille and unwilling to apply it to himself –, is the *proximity in difference* between negative theology and mysticism, on the one hand, and, on the other, certain sorts of critical writing practices that seek to undermine the coherence, totality, and concepts of traditional, philosophical discourse, and the notions of selfhood and consciousness that went along with them. But this proximity, which will reveal itself in the chapters to follow, was not exactly a methodical choice. As this introduction has tried to show, the theological form of antihumanist theory – mystical and negative, perhaps even Jansenist or Augustinian – is in part the result of a tension that accompanied the emergence of humanism itself. With all this in mind, we may now turn to a summary of the argument and of the chapters that follow, then to the chapters themselves.

V. Argument Summary and Chapter Abstracts

This thesis argues that the tensions between humanism and antihumanism that characterize the major trajectory of 20th-century French thought should be reconsidered in light of what can be understood as the first iteration of this conflict in 16th- and 17th-century France. Theological questions are central to the early modern moment of the conflict, in distinction to the 20th-century one, which implicated secular varieties of philosophy and theory. But this difference, rather than contradicting my approach, is an invitation to reconsider the metaphysics, even the quasi-theological or -mystical frameworks, of manifestly secular and post-metaphysical antihumanist theories. Grasping the recurrent nature of the conflict between humanism and

antihumanism allows us to see the *metaphysical* status of both positions, despite the ways they have usually been understood. This perspective forces us to reflect on the ideologies that underpin the chronic tension, or dialectic, between humanism and antihumanism, and to ask whether alternatives to or syntheses of these positions are and have been possible.

1. Chapter One is devoted to Descartes's *Les passions de l'âme* (1649), a self-help manual, as it were, for Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. Descartes described her chronic maladies as symptoms of rebellious passions, theorized via a cutting-edge natural science: Descartes's own. Employing a Foucauldian framework, I ask how the science of the passions grounds Descartes's prescriptions for training oneself towards attaining virtuous mastery over them, a goal he thought anyone could and should achieve. This optimism triumphs despite technical obstacles raised in the *Passions*, for example in the anatomical account of the affects' influence on the nominally *sovereign* will, and in the quasi-materiality of the soul in the practices that make up what I call the Cartesian care of the self. Descartes, that is, faced a topical problem: is freedom reconcilable with science? Despite his mechanist theories, Descartes's metaphysical and ultimately ethical positions on the soul as the self's unified immaterial core – a monarch with an undivided will, echoing 17th-century political treatises –, kept the passions from challenging the self's unity or freedom. For some of his contemporaries, however, the passions entailed the self's undoing.

2. For Descartes, all morals and law presuppose self-unity. Chapter Two turns to an Augustinian, anti-philosophical text synonymous with heterogeneity and fragmentation: La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* (1665-78). My chapter is the first sustained treatment of the text's opposition to Cartesian ethics. In the *Maximes*, I isolate a concept whose significance for Augustinianism has been neglected, contrariety, and trace its origins in Aristotelian logic and in

Augustine's account of the Fall. Contrariety underlies the *Maximes*' critique of 17th-century Neo-Stoic ethics, portraying the self as a monstrosity in which contraries (love/hate, active/passive, vice/virtue) are simultaneous, not mutually exclusive, flouting laws of nature and logic. Are illogical truths a signature of antihumanist reason, past and present? I test this hypothesis by surveying contrariety in Freud. The *Maximes* de-substantialize the self, putting basic suppositions of its knowledge and mastery into question. Actions and thoughts become products, not of one's will, but of autonomous passions, unconscious desires, and tacit laws of language.

3. A Jansenist and fellow Augustinian, Pascal went even further in his critique of Cartesian humanism. Chapter Three, on the *Pensées* (1670), studies the concept of "the force of custom," whereby truths, values, and laws are relative to the customs of those who hold or obey them. I set this theory into dialogue with Benjamin's work on law and violence, and explore how Pascal's conclusions inform his analyses of language and belief. Breaking with the linguistic conventionalism of his time, for Pascal the materiality of the sign helps to shape, not simply mediate, meaning. The same function is granted to the practices by which belief is subtended, not merely expressed. I describe how this strikingly modern materialism hinged in fact on early modern Augustinian anthropology and epistemology, whereby truth, meaning, and God are only mediately available to the postlapsarian mind. This Augustinianism might be seen, then, as a forerunner of 20th-centry antihumanist positions on, for example, truth as a function of historically contingent practices. Pascal thus speaks to our current fascination with anthropotechnics (Sloterdijk) and with philosophy as an ethical practice or "way of life" (Hadot; Foucault).

4. In uncanny ways, the early modern conflict described in chapters 1-3 prefigures one fought out across 20th-century French thought. Chapter Four shows how 17th-century

philosophical and ethical problematics resurfaced in Sartre's early mature period (that is, in texts including and related to *L'être et le néant* [1943]). Sartre cast himself as a new Descartes and saw his enemies – psychologism, Marxism, psychoanalysis – in the guise of Descartes's own. But Sartre is not an isolated case: I discuss other projects that posited the same striking affinity between the 17th century and the first half of the 20th: Husserl's return to Descartes's *Meditations*, in response to what he saw as a contemporary disarray of the sciences reminiscent of the chaos faced by the young Descartes; and the turn to the 17th century by influential French authors associated with the *Nouvelle Revue Française* – like Parain, Gide, and Schlumberger – in search of literary ancestors and eternal models of ethical comportment. For some, the latter were incarnated in the gigantomachy between Racinian and Cornelian theater, a debate in which Sartre also took part.

5. In the 1960s, a new generation took up the banner of antihumanism, in letter and in spirit. Focusing on the case of Althusser, Chapter Five examines a fashionable style of pessimism in which the individual self was shattered, its pieces dispersed across autonomous "systems" or "structures" of instincts, signifiers, or historical and material conditions. I attempt to cast this gesture as both new and old, by intimating the unrecognized theological paradigms at work in what we often still read as quasi-scientific theories. Through readings of *Lire le capital* (1965), *Sur la reproduction* (1969), and numerous unpublished archival documents, I reveal the role played by 17th-century thinkers, such as Malebranche, Spinoza, and Pascal, in Althusser's antihumanist philosophy and its signature concepts (like "ideology"). Sartre's humanism saw itself in the guise of Descartes; antihumanist thinkers like Althusser found their reflection in the mirror of the great 17th-century anti-Cartesians. I theorize the "mystical" nature of the relationship between "subject" and "structure" as found in Althusser and other prominent

thinkers of the 60s. My suggestion is that anti-subjectivist, mystical antihumanism can be seen as the expression of precisely what it seeks to attack, undermine, or deconstruct: a subjectively-centered experience of the world, even a personal yearning for a vague *other* or *otherness*—be it as violence, revolution, unknowing, historicity, or transcendence.

I conclude by considering the dialectical nature of the humanism-antihumanism conflict, and the sorts of resolutions, or alternatives, that have been possible.

"[N]e trouvant aucune conversation qui me divertît, et n'ayant d'ailleurs, par bonheur, aucuns soins ni passions qui me troublassent, je demeurais tout le jour enfermé seule dans un poêle, où j'avais tout loisir de m'entretenir de mes pensées." — Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, II, 41.

"*Aristokratismus:* Descartes, Herrschaft der *Vernunft*, Zeugnis von der Souveränität des Willens. Das 17. Jahrhundert ist *aristokratisch*, ordnend, hochmütig gegen das Animalische, streng gegen das Herz… Viel Raubtier au fond, viel asketische Gewöhnung, um Herr zu bleiben. Das *willensstarke* Jahrhundert; auch das der starken Leidenschaft." — Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, §95.

Ch. 1: Techniques of Self-Governance for Impassioned Souls: Cartesian Humanism and the Problem of Self-Sovereignty in *Les passions de l'âme*

Heidegger's Descartes, or, the Suppression of the *Passions*

To most non-specialists, *Les passions de l'âme* (1649)[1]—hereafter: *Passions*—is not a text, or topic, evoked by the name René Descartes. Whether from ignorance or dismissal, this is so much the case that, in the opening passage of his introduction to the book, Klaus Hammacher feels the need to "justify" the text's appearing under Meiner Verlag's *Philosophische Bibliotek* label, "in a series," that is, "which contains the principle works of our philosophical tradition."[2] The book, he stresses, demands our consideration as regards both our understanding of Descartes and the history of philosophy.

For one thing, the *Passions* is Descartes's last published work and a systematic treatise exemplary of his famous "method." Without it, we cannot hope to have an informed image of the entire scope of Cartesian thought. Further — and this perhaps comes down to the same thing —, the *Passions* should be studied so as to challenge Heidegger's "interpretation" of Descartes, which has been so powerful and influential, especially in Germany, but thereafter in major

[1] References are to the following edition: Descartes, *Les passions de l'âme*, Pascal D'Arcy, ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 1996). I cite article numbers, according to the format: *Passions*, art. 1, e.g.

[2] "Eine Neuausgabe von Descartes' letzter Schrift *Les passions de l'Ame* (1649) in einer Reihe vorzunehmen, welche die grundlegenden Werke unserer philosophischen Tradition enthält, erscheint aus mehrfachen Grund gerechtfertigt." Klaus Hammacher, "Einleitung," in Descartes, *Die Leidenschaften der Seele*, Hammacher ed. and trans. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1996), p. xv.

strands of European and American philosophy and theory.[3] Not polemically, but in a whisper, Hammacher suggests we set about demolishing our reified, restricted, icon of Descartes. The tool and point of departure is not an external viewpoint, but one immanent to Descartes's philosophical *œuvre* itself: the *Passions*.

In *Sein und Zeit* and then, in greater detail, in *Nietzsche*,[4] Heidegger sketched his portrait of Descartes as the foundational thinker of modern science (the, for Heidegger, much lamented representation-making of the world: the world's becoming-image[5]) and the "subject" (a detached spectator over against "objects," the body among them, merely *present-at-hand* and, hence, meaning- and Being-less, without significance for the subject *qua* observer). Exemplifying a robust tradition of evaluating Descartes in the history of thought, Heidegger reduced him to his role in modern Science, construed, perhaps following a well-known passage in the *Discours de la méthode*, as "Instrument der Weltbeherrschung."[6] Indebted to Kant and Hegel, Heidegger's Descartes[7]—this dualist, world-mastering, world-alienated, solipsist—is paradigmatic of the

[3] Ibid., p. xv.
[4] *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967), §19-21; *Nietzsche*, vol. II (Pfullingen: Neske**,** 1961), pp.148-192.
[5] I am here gesturing to Heidegger's lecture, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" (1938), in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1950), pp. 75-114.
[6] Hammacher, p. xv; the mastery of nature passage is in *Discours de la méthode*, part 6 = *Œuvres*, AT VI, p. 62. While it doesn't discredit typical readings of this passage, it is intriguing to note that, in it, Descartes is narrating, not asserting, a thought. That is, he is recounting what, once he had acquired some experience in his studies in *la physique*, he imagined as the potential of the thereby disclosed physical *principles* so different from those grounding Scholastic "speculative philosophy." The potential, he thought to himself, was to form, on the basis of this new natural science, a "practical [philosophy]," "par laquelle, connaissant la force et les actions…de tous les corps qui nous environnent…nous les pourrions employer…à tous les usages auxquels ils sont propres, et ainsi nous rendre comme maîtres et possesseurs de la Nature" (orthography modernized). Note also the "comme"… To be sure, this past tense becomes a present in the next lines: "Ce qui n'est pas seulement à désirer pour…" (AT VI, pp. 62 ff). In what follows, citations from the Adam/Tannery reference edition will be made, as is customary, in the format: AT + volume + page.
[7] Cf. Foucault, *L'Herméneutique du sujet. Cours au collège de France (1981-1982)* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2001), where Descartes, or rather his "moment," constitutes a rupture with the older, spiritualist paradigm of the link between subjectivity and truth. I return to Foucault's lecture below (see note 124, *infra*).

version of Cartesian philosophy we know best.[8]

Many are those who have perpetuated this "mythe du 'sujet cartésien,'" as Balibar terms it.[9] Drawing out what I think is Hammacher's implication, one might suggest that the possibility of this "myth"'s formation, constitution, and eventual naturalization, so to speak, has something to do with a perennial dismissal or oversight of the *Passions*. *Not* heeding the *Passions* was necessary for Descartes to take on his canonical, structure-forming position in the history of modern philosophy.

Sein und Zeit (1927) betrays the presence, and effects, of this essential exclusion. A few sections following the discussion of Descartes's ontology (his take on *world* as *res extensa*), we find Heidegger's own *Affektenlehre*, that is, the elucidation of what he calls *Stimmungen* or "moods," and *Gestimmtheit* or "attunement."[10] Here, a primed ear detects significant resonances

[8] Hence Žižek was able to poke fun at the still vigorous fashion, at the turn of the millennium, of waging war on the "Cartesian subject," the "spectre" he writes, still "haunting western academia," the arch enemy of 20th- and, arguably, 21st-century fashionable thought. "[A]ll academic powers have entered into a holy alliance to exorcize" this ghost, writes Žižek: *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), p.1. This version of Descartes—and this reified procedure of positing a vague "Cartesian subject" in order to denounce it in the name of a more "holistic approach" (Žižek)—is what explains why one common invocation of Cartesian philosophy is combative. As Žižek has observed, it is a fashionable, even requisite ritual of any nascent theory today to name *and* attack the "Cartesian subject" as a hyper-rationalist dualist aberrancy, an old wives' tale of immaterial minds and insensitive souls, which excluded, or *repressed*, what has come to count most for us: bodies, sensations, affects, matter… We are always trying to get beyond Descartes's "subject," as if it were, somehow, the mirror in which we find what concerns us most, but only in reverse. Leo Bersani's recent treatment of Descartes in *Thoughts and Things* (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 2015) bears witness to the enduring, fixed image of Cartesianism. Throughout the book, Descartes's thought is paradigmatic of all those idealistic ways in which the continuity of "being" has been broken and the self misunderstood itself as being over against others, the world, etc. Descartes's onomastic writing, to paraphrase Bersani, instituted an insuperable gulf—an "ontological gap" (ix); "an irreducible gap of being" (xi)—between mind and body, self and world.

[9] Balibar, "Réponse à la question de Jean-Luc Nancy: 'qui vient après le sujet?,'" in *Citoyen sujet, et autres essais d'anthropologie philosophique* (Paris: PUF, 2011), pp. 35-66. Balibar also names Heidegger as, with Kant, *the* consolidator of an historical-philosophical paradigm in which Descartes assumed the role described here. Hereafter, this text is cited as "Réponse…".

[10] *Sein und Zeit*, § 29 ff.

of Descartes's doctrine of the passions.[11] That is, Heidegger's reading of Descartes, and his constructing a philosophy of affect on supposedly opposite ontological and existential grounds, required he not take heed of, not know, or simply exclude the *Passions*. The most likely unconscious proximity between *Stummung* and, on the sort of reading I attempt below, *passion*, depended upon it.

For what we find on such a reading is that the *Passions* had already done some of the work that Heidegger and others undertook in reaction to Cartesian philosophy and its "subject." Descartes, that is, already pitted his thought against itself, albeit not necessarily in knowledge of

[11] This is of course not to say that Heidegger's discussion is reminiscent exclusively of Descartes's book. What I mean is that Heidegger shares positions with the Descartes of the *Passions*, and in such a way that these must be overlooked in order for *Sein und Zeit*, with its notion of *Gestimmtheit* as an *existentiale* of *Dasein*, to understand itself as, to a significant extent, written *contra* Descartes. Of the principle commonalities between Heidegger's attunement and Descartes's passions, four are, for my purposes, worth mentioning here: (1) Both display the beings that we are, so to speak, as not just sometimes, but always set in a situation, into a relationship with others, things, and even with ourselves. Mood or passion names this state, in which we find ourselves always already affected by something, a state that is not super-additive, but integral to our experience of (the) world. As Heidegger writes, "in every case Dasein always has some mood [*gestimmt ist*]," *Being and Time*, § 29, Macquarrie and Robinson trans. (New York: Harper, 2005), p. 173. For Descartes, we are affected even by our own affects and cogitations. We are moved, passively, simply by the activity of our own soul or mind, a self-affection that is both a way in which self-identity is questioned, and that is essential for grounding Descartes's notion of how certain mental attitudes or techniques can lead us to take pleasure or joy even in passions that are negative in quality, like sadness. (2) Both concepts, attunement and passion, are related to an ethics of the emotions. Their authors take for granted the imperatives of self-mastery and – since this mastery is not given but is the *telos* of a sort of work – of self-transformation. In this, Heidegger like Descartes harkens back to ancient and in particular Platonic or Stoic models. For Descartes, as I will explore at some length, we are to become sovereign over ourselves or our passions—meaning, over the passions qua the irreducible natural and corporeal element of our embodied selves. Heidegger agrees. While holding attunement to be an existential condition of *Dasein*, something always already in place before any explicit thinking and willing, he is still committed to an ethics of self-control: "Factically, Dasein can, should, and must, through knowledge and will, become master of its moods [*der Stimmung Herr werden kann, soll und muß*]; in certain possible ways of existing, this may signify a priority of volition and cognition" (ibid.). (3) As we find in most traditional philosophical ethics, Heidegger and Descartes both make recourse to political language and models (sovereignty, master, *Herr*) in order to conceive of the relation of power to be instituted and maintained between ourselves as rulers and ourselves as subjects. (4) Finally, like Descartes (whom Spinoza follows to some extent in this respect), Heidegger describes mastery of mood not as its elimination—in apathy or *ataraxia*—but as the playing of contrary moods against one another: "[W]hen we master a mood, we do so by way of a counter-mood; we are never free of moods" (id.). For Descartes, as we will see, this is one, albeit mediocre, method of combatting and giving rule to (*régler*) the passions.

the fact. Provocatively, he did so with what, following Thomist tradition, he called the *passions*, whose role, within what appears as the kingdom of the self, is precisely to challenge the soul in its rational, solitary dominion.[12] In other words, like the passions themselves, Descartes's thinking on them already challenged the ontological dualism and world-detachment of the scientific "subject," the main achievements of the earlier, and for us canonical, epistemological works (the *Meditations* and the *Discours*)—the main achievements of Descartes *tout court* for many thinkers before and after Heidegger. The *Passions* did a lot of critical work already for the history of philosophy, without the latter's having taken much notice. Damasio's famous *Descartes's Error* is a neuroscientific inquiry into a domain whose door Descartes himself opened.[13]

The proximity between Heidegger and Descartes on emotion is suggestive, I've been arguing, of why and how Heidegger couldn't have faced the *Passions*, Descartes's late foray into emotions and ethics—into the ethics of emotion. Heidegger's *moods* came close to Descartes's *passions* in their displaying a fundamental vulnerability at the heart of human nature (Descartes) or *Dasein* (Heidegger). Both name an essential susceptibility, receptivity, relatedness: a sort of constitutive passivity. *Attunement* and *passion* are concepts for thinking *that* and *how* we are, want, and act, always in relation to an alterity. The latter inhabits us to such an extent that the boundaries imagined around the self become porous and its self-identity precarious. Finally, both concepts are best thought in terms of those sense modalities that have been less privileged, even repressed, by the history of philosophy's great theories of knowledge, which tend to privilege sight. The sphere of *Stimmungen* is that explored by much affect theory today, and from which

[12] On Descartes's *Passions* vis-à-vis Aquinas, and other predecessors, see Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, "Introduction," in Descartes, *Les passions de l'âme* (Paris: Vrin, 1988), pp. 22-24.
[13] Arthur Damasio, *Descartes's Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (Avon Books, New York, 1994).

the latter borrows many of its images: the acoustic. Descartes's affective dimension—in which the main entities are passion, emotion, and ultimately, bodies and motion—is a world of touching and being touched, in which even the soul can be moved. While visual language is omnipresent in his metaphysics and epistemology, the comfortable distance sight presupposes, and on which the subject-object model is based, is annulled in affective experience. We are always too close for comfort to what moves us. In the *Passions*, the tactile is primordial. If the passions pertain to the life of the human being as the union of the two distinct, finite substances of soul and body, human life means being touched.

As a constitutive element of existence or life as such, this affective dimension of experience can hardly be thought or doubted away, save in solitary, suspended time, that no-man's land of theoretical writing, as a medium and as a practice. This non-place, the solitary scene of the *Discours* and the *Meditations*, is where we tend to situate Descartes *tout court*. But the passions are precisely that whereby the epistemological *ego* – the "subject of science" (Althusser) that Heidegger's *Dasein* sought to destroy and, along with *World*, replace – is pointed up as an ideal, a figment of the mind. The epistemological self—soul without a body—is an effect of language, a creature of the pen. The factual, embodied self, as an impassioned self, is always open and exposed to the world, to things, to others, even to itself.

But this all is what we glean from *reading* the *Passions*—a close reading that I will attempt to develop in the pages that follow. Descartes himself, against what his book implicitly shows us, is emphatically sure we can become masters over ourselves. There are no forces, either conscious or unconscious, that could ever undermine the monarchic triumph of the soul. He exemplifies an optimist, humanist, and, given his scientific grounding of ethics, Enlightenment position: namely, that with knowledge (produced according to certain rules so as to be counted as

such) and certain self-directed techniques, we can come to be absolute sovereigns over that part of (human) Nature called the passions. We can, we must become sovereign over ourselves. But this explicit position, I will argue, is problematized by Descartes's own understanding of how the passions work on and against (*contre*) the soul, and by his description of the sorts of techniques we can turn towards ourselves in order to bring about a self-transformation, and maintain a certain psychological self-control, in view of an ideal self-mastery. Humanism is a philosophical commitment, one grounded in part in a certain attitude toward consciousness, towards its autonomy and authority. Deep problems arise when humanist philosophy attempts to provide a *scientific* explanation of itself, and in its desire to move, in actual existential implementation, from the clear and distinct realm of written ideas into the confused domain of experience and affect.

This chapter, then, is about Descartes's humanist position and its vulnerability to critique. It is about the construction and, ultimately, the untenability of his humanist ethics and their optimism, an untenability that, I will suggest, reveals a point where humanism and antihumanism both stand opposed *and* converge. As seen, for example, in Pico della Mirandola and Descartes, a heroic, humanist ethics supposes the auto-plasticity of the self, its capacity to mold itself at will. But this quasi-divine plasticity implies a certain materiality of the self, and hence the possibility of its being formed involuntarily, from without: a perspective radicalized by antihumanism, both early modern and modern.

Hence the importance and ambiguity of concepts like *practice*, *technique*, and *exercise*. These are equivocal terms subsuming those self-transformational activities involving soul and (or: *as*) body, corporeality and (or: *as*) mind. As such, they occupy or point to a sphere of indetermination. Here, where Descartes's ethics sets itself and its goal of self-mastery, his

dualism is menaced with collapse, and the humanist ethics of self-care and self-work risks a certain proximity to its antihumanist, pessimist opponents. As Hammacher writes, Descartes's ethics is an ethics of practice, an *Einübungsethik* (xxi), similar to those ancient ethical schools studied by Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot. My goal, then, is to explore Descartes's last book as a humanist manual of self-knowledge, -practice, and -training. But I also want to see in his ethics, and the doctrine of the passions upon which it is based, the snag on which the Cartesian self risks coming apart, the perpetual revolt in which the dominion of the soul, and the laws of free will, risk abrogation.

Taking Descartes "not at his word, but at his work" (Althusser),[14] we can break open his thought. We recognize a deeply humanist project, committed to the autonomy, freedom, and self-mastery of the individual self; *and*, implicitly, an anticipation of the sort of thinking of affectivity, will, and power that will be in many respects opposed to the Cartesian, humanist view. Not explicitly but in its internal tensions, Descartes's humanist ethics is a precocious inquiry into an irreducible affectivity or *sensibilité*, which the latter half of the 17th century, and then the 18th and 19th centuries, will begin to value and elevate to a constitutive, even dominant, part of the human being.[15] Heidegger's influential reading of Descartes was not wrong, then; it

[14] This is how Althusser describes his own method of reading, one he considers "the duty of every historian," in his book on Montesquieu (1959): "Let us do him the duty, which is the duty of every historian, of taking him not at his word, but at his work": Althusser, *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2007), p. 15.

[15] Descartes does not participate in the 17th-century paradigm of moving past "une perspective *technique* visant à agir sur les passions" that characterized "la connaissance antique et médiévale de la nature des passions," write Lucie Desjardins and Daniel Dumouchel, in "L'aventure des passions au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. Apogée et déclin d'une notion théorique cardinale," in *Penser les passions à l'âge classique*, ed. Desjardins and Dumouchel (Paris: Hermann, 2012), p. 3. But he does show indications of the passions' rise in status. That is, to some extent despite himself, Descartes displays one trait of the new, more modern thinking on the passions that arose in *l'âge classique* and was destined for a long life: "les passions connaîtront une revalorisation positive, parallèlement à la revalorisation de la dimension sensible de l'être humain en général." In Descartes, Reason has not yet been exposed as the façade of passion, as will happen in Pascal, Rousseau, Hume, etc. (ibid., p.4). In the 18th century, thinking on the passions, at the heart of a "nouvelle anthropologie philosophique," becomes identical with conceptions of

simply did not recognize how the humanism of the late Descartes stands in striking tension with itself. In other words, the canonical view of Descartes ignored how his study of affect tended to complicate the dualist, metaphysical view of selfhood that would *post factum* come to be known as Cartesian "subjectivity."

This reading of Descartes's struggle, as I will describe it, to assure the sovereignty of the soul over the passions, will thus both throw light on Cartesian humanism and intimate important aspects of the positions of the pessimist thinkers studied in the next two chapters, La Rochefoucauld and Pascal. For them, the division or rending of the self, which I have read out of Descartes's *Passions*, was taken for granted. The humanist or optimistic views of Stoicism and Neo-Stoicism concerning man as master of himself and as self-transparent, attitudes to which Descartes gave new expression, were mocked. Such cheery rationalist views of human nature were a stumbling block on the path to grace and salvation, and, for a Machiavellian like La Rochefoucauld, an obstacle to success in a world of *duperie* and *libido dominandi*, in which, as Hobbes wrote, "Man is a wolf to Man."[16]

As I will suggest, it is not a coincidence that these pessimist, Augustinian positions were written down at the moment that, under Louis XIV, absolute monarchy was pursuing its consolidation, in a centralizing crackdown following the dissipative disorder of international and civil wars. The absolute sovereign steps in to be an artificial head, and la raison d'État a more superior, im-personal adjudicative faculty of Reason, when men have shown again and again

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subjectivity per se, the "genealogy" of one superposing itself on that of the other: "La généalogie radicale des passions que conduisent de façon exemplaire Hume, Helvétius ou Rousseau équivaut, en dernier ressort, à la généalogie de la subjectivité humaine" (id.). With all this in mind, we might see Descartes at the *tournant*, as it were, between ancient and modern, pathology and anthropology, reason and sensibility. The task, then, is to investigate how this pivoting is at work already in the *Passions*, how, in other words, the simultaneous presence of both terms in each binary assures the text's constitutive tension.

[16] Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. and trans. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), p. 3.

their vulnerability to a taste for cruelty, lust for power, irrationality, and the pursuit of self-interest instead of the interests of the State. Rule yourself or be ruled. The real Sovereign embodies the Law of the body politic, and, as subjects of the One, individuals find themselves submitted to a uniform instance of power that prescribes their behavior and assigns their societal role, relieving them of the burden—and possibility—of ruling themselves. Louis XIV rose to power as La Rochefoucauld and Pascal were meditating our incapacity to have absolute power over ourselves. Rule yourself or be ruled. For Descartes, self-sovereignty still seemed possible. The kingdom to be fought for was inside: the State of the self.

Sovereign, Subject: Passion, Soul

"C'est Dieu," Descartes wrote to Mersenne on April 15, 1630, "qui a établi ces lois en la nature, ainsi qu'un roi établit des lois en son royaume."[17] The apparently banal analogy, which collapses together two modes of sovereignty, is worth a closer look. While God should be superior in all senses of the word—ontological, causal, epistemological, ground and guarantor of existence and knowledge—, He is epistemically secondary here. In the analogy, the divine is not the paradigm of the sovereign who decrees and embodies the laws that subjects of his domain are compelled to observe. On the contrary, the political-theological image hews to a logic of analogy that might be chronic in the history of Western thought: political reality offers the heuristic model by which power and rulership, subjection and submission, order and legality, are conceived, in realms other than politics. In Descartes's analogy, God's jurisdiction in Nature—via the "eternal truths"

[17] 15 April 1630 = AT I, p.145 (modernized). This is only one line from an extended analogy between God and "un Roy," in which it is a question of the Sovereign's relation to the law and to his subjects ("sujets"). Another line is just as intriguing (notice that it is a question not of the laws, but of the Sovereign's laws: "ses lois"): "et elles [lois] sont toutes *mentibus nostris ingenitae* [inborn in our minds], ainsi qu'un Roi imprimerait ses lois dans le cœur de tous ses sujets, s'il en avait aussi bien le pouvoir. […] On vous dira que si Dieu avait établi ces vérités, il les pourrait changer comme un Roi fait ses lois ; à quoi il faut répondre que oui, si sa volonté peut changer. […]" (pp. 145-6).

discussed in the letter, or the "laws of Nature" defined in *Le Monde* (1629-33) and the *Principia philosophiae* (1644)—, is thought and expressed in words designating concrete, human, all too human, realities. It is through these that we view God, trying to intuit the otherworldly through the worldly, to the best of our capacities. In European political thought and actual politics, God may have come to be the foundation of sovereign power before and in Descartes's time. It is on the basis of real juridico-political governance of human subjects that God's mode of governance over His kingdom becomes thinkable. A metaphor whose concrete origin, though worn, can be recovered with an effort of attention: in God on high we find the king here below. Like the passions, whose rhetorical core I will describe below, and like the material reference of the equivocal terms by which they are described as *moving* the soul, the concrete term of the political theological analogy can hardly be thought away.[18]

[18] This contamination, so to speak, of the immaterial Being *par excellence*, by its material *analogon*, is only a particularly striking instantiation of a general principle of the epistemology and use of analogy and models, something that medieval negative theology perceived as a problem pertaining to linguistic predication itself. The concrete term or model, supposed to be merely a crutch, takes a certain precedence over that to which it is supposed to be subject, as vessel to contents. Below, I will suggest that the same sort of process as what we find at play in Descartes's analogy from his letter to Mersenne is at work in the *Passions*, when the incorporeal soul is described as acted upon by the passions, which are grounded in and maintained by bodily movements. In Descartes's language, but not just there, the soul comes to have a body, a corporeality, of its own—meaning, it risks losing itself entirely, becoming what Descartes says it is not. In both cases, the materiality of a rhetorical figure—to say nothing of the materiality of language or its various media—cannot be abstracted or, as I write, thought away. Respecting this rule in a context not too distant from Descartes and the subject of the passions, Christian Biet has studied the notion and status of "the person" in early law and politics in 17th-century France. As a juridical title and entity, *la personne* was supposed to abstract away from the concrete *corps*. But traces of the latter are left behind in discourse, in which the former alone has a reality. "Si une métaphore est capable d'abstraire," writes Biet in a line that holds for the becoming-body of Descartes's emotive soul, "elle consigne aussi la chose et n'éradique pas totalement l'aspect corporel": in "Le corps dans le droit: enquête sur la personne et le personnage au XVIIe siècle," in *Le corps au XVIIe siècle*, Tobin ed. (Tübingen: PFSCL, 1995), p. 350. Focus on the materiality and primacy of the signifier, which characterized much of postwar 20th-century French thought (e.g., Derrida and Lacan), flies in the face of a long metaphysical tradition, which Hegel, in his *Aesthetics*, encapsulated in his doctrine of symbolic art or, more precisely, of "Conscious Symbolism of the Comparative Art Form": Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, trans. Knox (New York: Oxford, 1975). See page 379, e.g.: "From naive and *unconscious* symbolism this kind of connection is thus distinguished at once by the fact that now the subject kens both the inner essence of the meanings he has adopted as the content of his work and also the nature of the external phenomena which he uses in a comparative way for their better illustration, and he puts the two together *consciously* and

The rule of political analogy holds true in those domains in which the mind cannot draw upon empirical realities in order to represent to itself and understand power and rules, governance and constraint, whether in human experience or Nature. Ethics—which, following the late work of Foucault, can provisionally be defined as the domain of *the self's self-relation*, one constituted by certain self-directed material-discursive *practices*—, and theology, whose task is in part to think the juridical office of God as ruler of Nature and men, are exemplary here. Actual political domination—palpable everywhere, its structures and effects omnipresent—is the heuristic by which self- and divine government are thought. Hence the equivocal use of terms: *law*, *sovereign*, *rules*, *dominion*, *war*, *empire*, *discipline*, *power*, *subject*, are, among others, transferred from the here and now into the divine and into the self. In this chapter, the latter sort of transference is of particular importance. As I will try to show, there is a political structuration

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intentionally on account of their discovered similarity." Notice the distinction between meaning and its "external" form. The material term is supposed to be merely a passive vessel for the idea; we have the idea and then seek an "image" in which to represent it, a body in which to embody it. Conventionalist thought on language, which we will find in the *Passions* as a basic model by which, I argue, the passions themselves are conceived, supposes the same thing about words: in the beginning there was the meaning—the concept, the idea—and then, by God or God only knows by whom, meaning became flesh, sound, and letter. That one can exist without the other, pure meaning and pure material thing that is not yet a sign, is the basic conceptual position of this tradition. Descartes is of course an important, even, for modern times, a foundational member of it. But his words have a mind of their own. His analogy points to the all-too easy reversal of that tradition's basic position. Following Nietzsche, the last century enjoyed this sort of reversal with abandon. The material object or structure is that by which the other, reputedly immaterial or intangible term is conceived: the image is the model of what it is supposed to represent; the latter takes on aspects of the former. God is created in the image of the King, the universe takes on properties of the mechanism. The world, society, and the human psyche, for McLuhan and for the followers of Saussure, became a linguistic system or structure, an instantiation, in the real, of their conceptual *dispositif*. It is thus clear why 20th-century epistemologists and philosophers had a heyday when they began to crawl down the rabbit hole of figures and figural language in scientific and philosophical discourses. See *Metaphor and Analogy in the Sciences*, ed. by Fernand Hallyn (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000); Hallyn, *Les structures rhétoriques de la science: De Kepler à Maxwell* (Paris: Seuil, 2004); Hallyn, *La structure poétique du monde: Copernic, Kepler* (Paris: Seuil, 1987); Colin M. Turbayne, *The Myth of Metaphor* (Columbia SC: U. of South Carolina Press, 1972 [1962]); Ricœur, *La métaphore vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); Max Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962); Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942); Jacques Derrida, "La mythologie blanche," in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), pp. 247-324; Paul de Man, "The Epistemology of Metaphor," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Special Issue on Metaphor (Autumn, 1978), pp. 13-30.

in Descartes's conception of the relation between the soul and its passions. For Descartes's ethics, what I'll consider a sort of *Cartesian care of the self*[19] concerns the training of the soul for proper governance, its self-fortification and self-development in view of increasing its power over those forces, within the human being, which threaten its unity, cohesion, self-identity, and supremacy: the passions. Descartes's ethics is an eudemonic "ethics of practice."

The model of sovereignty effective in Descartes is one that, in his time, had already become a pressing and increasingly common topic for philosophy and political theory. France especially was the home of early modern concepts of sovereignty. In the mid-16th century, Jean Bodin set the precedent for philosophical reflection on the nature of sovereign power.[20] Sovereignty meant unification and centralization, the indivisibility of power and its exercise. It

[19] I here borrow a concept ("care of the self") from the ancient regimes of ethical self-practice and aesthetics of existence studied by Foucault, esp. in *Histoire de la sexualité III: Le souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

[20] Dan Philpott concisely situates the historical significance of Bodin's concept of sovereignty. It was conceived as a unifying principle in a time of divisive war, a way of integrating the nation, and of submitting all potential powers to a central, totalizing institution: "French philosopher Jean Bodin was the first European philosopher to treat the concept extensively. His concept of *souveraineté* featured as a central concept in his work, *De la république*, which he wrote in 1576, during a time when France was sundered by civil war between Calvinist Huguenots and the Catholic monarchy. He viewed the problem of order as central and did not think that it could be solved through outdated medieval notions of a segmented society, but only through a concept in which rulers and ruled were integrated into a single, unitary body politic that was above any other human law, and was in fact the source of human law. This concept was sovereignty. Only a supreme authority within a territory could strengthen a fractured community," Philpott, "Sovereignty," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) URL= http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/sovereignty/ (accessed May 8, 2015). Descartes's ethics seeks to do for the self what Bodin did for the State: to conceive of the possibility of the consolidation of the soul's power as unifying, central, self-identical, and integrative. Just as Bodin opposed medieval views of segmentation and multiple centers of power, in the *Passions*, Descartes rejects all views whereby the soul is internally divided and, hence, capable of being set against itself (see *Passions*, art. 47). Closer to Descartes's era than Jean Bodin, during the bellicose reign of Louis XIII, Cardin Le Bret published his *Traité de la souverainetee du Roi* (1632), which theorized an utterly unified state and defended the total consolidation of power. This cut short the sort of dreams for a constitutional monarchy expressed some years earlier in the *Traité des ordres et simples dignités* (1610) by Charles Loyseau, another of the main political theorists of the 17th century, along with Le Bret and Philppe de Béthune. See Jacques Marseille, *Nouvelle histoire de la france: I. De la Préhistoire à la fin de l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Perrin, 2002), p. 516. "La souveraineté est non plus divisible que le point en géométrie," wrote Le Bret in his *Traité* (cited by Marseille, ibid., who qualifies Le Bret's text as "un véritable manifeste d'un État qui se veut désormais absolu"). Descartes theorized the same thing of the soul as center and ideal sovereign of the state of the self.

entailed the suppression of division, difference, and multiplicity, in favor of the rule of the one.[21] Like the sovereign of this theory and of the monarchies that were gaining in temporal autonomy in the Early Modern period, God prescribes the limits—or "rules," as Descartes also calls the laws of Nature—, observed by the subjects of His kingdom, that is, Nature. In Descartes's *Passions*, the real sovereign (King) and its theological sublimation (God) are reflected in the soul, and their qualities—unity, power, self-legality, and self-determination—are presupposed in it as potentials to be developed.

First published in Latin in 1644, the *Principles of Philosophy* contained the mature formulation of Descartes's "laws", or "rules," of Nature.[22] The first is that of the conservation of movement and figure, that is, of state (*status*). Nothing in Nature moves or is changed through itself alone. Of themselves, things at rest remain at rest, things in motion, in motion, things that are square, square, and so on. Change comes from without:

> La première [loi] est que chaque chose en particulier continue d'être en même état autant qu'il se peut, et que jamais elle ne le change que par la rencontre des autres [*nisi a causis externis*: "except by external causes"]. Ainsi nous voyons tous les jours…que, si [quelque partie de la matière] est en repos, elle ne commence point à se mouvoir de soi-même. […][23]

[21] Hobbes's *Leviathan*, published only two years after Descartes's *Passions*, combines the traditional theory of sovereignty with a discourse on the passions by means of the famous (and traditional) analogy of the human and the political or social body. Both sorts of discourses—the political, on sovereignty and subjects; the moral-ethical, on the soul and the passions—turn on what Hardt and Negri highlight as the essential "principle" of "the entire tradition of political theory": "only 'the one' can rule": *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2005), p. 28.

[22] Descartes had delineated them before in the unpublished *Monde* from some ten years earlier. The *Principles* added new laws to those from the *Monde.*

[23] *Principes de la philosophie*, trans. Picot, II, art.37 = AT IX, p.62.

The consistency of the laws or rules is a reflection of the immutable constancy of the action of God ("Dieu n'est point sujet à changer"), who, using what Kant called symbolic hypotyposis,[24] *embodies* the laws he decrees.[25]

Ordered by God's rules, this mechanist universe is formed, maintained, and changed by *action* and *passion*, as Descartes, following Aristotle, conceives these in the first article of the *Passions.* The first law, the first article – the heart of his discourse on the passions *qua* (e)motions is the conceptual and causal binary that is also a power relation: giving or receiving, doing or being done to, moving or being moved, activity or passivity:

> tout ce qui se fait ou qui arrive de nouveau est généralement appelé par les philosophes une passion au regard du sujet auquel il arrive, et une action au regard de celui qui fait qu'il arrive. En sorte que, bien que l'agent et le patient soient souvent fort différents, l'action et la passion ne laissent pas d'être toujours une même chose, qui a ces deux noms à raison des deux divers sujet auxquels on la peut rapporter.[26]

We would do well to keep this primary notion of "passion" (and "action") in mind. It pertains, we just saw, to each and every event. Before, and as the necessary condition that, humans can be subject to passions, being impassioned is a possible state of being for anything whatsoever, save

[24] See *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg, 2006), §59, p. 255. Kant understood the implication of his concept of hypotyposis: all we can know about that of which we cannot have any direct experience, for example, and primarily, God, is only symbolic: "Wenn man ein bloße Vorstellungsart schon Erkenntnis nennen darf…: so ist alle unsere Erkenntnis von Gott bloß symbolisch" (§59).

[25] "De cela aussi que Dieu n'est point sujet à changer, et qu'il agit toujours de la même sorte, nous pouvons parvenir à la connaissance de certaines règles, que je nomme les lois de la nature, et qui sont les causes secondes des divers mouvements que nous remarquons en tous les corps" (*Principes*, II, 37 - AT IX, p. 62).

[26] *Passions*, art. 1. For Descartes's use of Aristotle in this basic conceptual core, see Hammacher, "Einleitung," il-l. Notice here the Scholastic sense of the term "sujet." i.e., as *subjectum*, the Latin term itself translating Aristotle's *hypokeimenon* (lit: "underlying thing"). Cf. *Meditationes* AT, VII, 41, 9 "nec potest calor in subjectum quod prius non calebat induci" = Méditations, AT, IX-1, p. 32: "et la chaleur ne peut être produite dans un sujet qui en était auparavant privé…" See also the letter to Hyperaspites from August 1641, where what the word "subject" names is designated by the word "term" = AT III, p. 428. The passage also has the merit of clearly stating the basic principle at play in the first law and in the first article of the *Passions*: that, at no moment, can there be a passion without an action, since these are merely names for one and the same thing (ibid.). See also the letter to Elisabeth from 6 October 1645: "tout ce qui n'est point action est passion" (AT IV, p.310).

for God. The absolute sovereign is pressed upon by no-thing, but simply exerts power. *Absolus*, in-dependent, God is moved by no passion.[27]

All happenings in Descartes's universe are encounters, comings-together, of agents and patients. Events are con-tacts in which things are moving against or being moved by others, touching and being touched. *Moving* (and *touching*) is equivocal, referring as it does to mechanist occurrences between bodies, and yet transferred, in the *Passions*, into the domain of the soul. To be moved (to be touched), we know, is a name for: feeling emotions, being subject to passions. God, though, is pure activity. Constantly active, His action is eternal, consistent. He exemplifies the virtue of Cartesian ethical supremacy, *générosité*, theorized in the *Passions*.[28] But down below, nothing in His kingdom occurs but as an effect of something, which acts directly upon it, affecting it.

Yet Descartes allowed for a major infraction of the rules: the soul's free will, *la volonté*. The *Principles* described free will as something of an unmoved mover, a God within Nature, capable of acting against and outside the Law.[29] If not a first or ultimate cause of things' existence—it cannot bring things into being, like the Creator—, the soul is a first cause of movement, like God.[30] Spinoza will critique Descartes precisely for this: for constituting man as

[27] See *Principes,* I, art. 23. There, Descartes spells out for us that all sensation is a sort of passion and that all being-impassioned (*pati*, in Latin; pâtir, in French) is to depend on something, to be attached to it if only by its affecting us: "*quia tamen in omni sensu passio est, et pati est ab aliquo pendere*." God, having no body and hence not perceiving by the senses, is not affected in this way, and depends on nothing. Purely, he understands and wills: "*sed tantummodo intelligere et velle*," and not as we do, but in a unified and constant manner, Descartes assures us. Pure understanding and will, whose independence is marred by corporeality, is tantamount to pure activity. In this, God delineates the figure of an ethical ideal by which we can orient ourselves, though, having bodies—hence sensations, perceptions, passions; hence depending on all sorts of things, caught in a web of relationality —, we will always fall short.

[28] The "mouvements" of the passions that animate the *généreux* display the qualities that are then transferred to the virtuous person herself, who is moved by these passions: "[ils] sont fermes, constants et toujours fort semblables à eux-mêmes" (art. 160).

[29] *Principes* I, art. 37.

[30] The divinity he ascribed to free will is not something Descartes tried to hide; on the contrary. To cite an example of particular importance to this chapter due to the rare use to which Descartes there puts the term

"a dominion within a dominion," submitted to God's laws but somehow capable of abrogating them, a sovereign subject: an absurdity.[31] Embedded in Nature, the impassioned self should be as submitted to Her laws as a rock or a celestial body. Descartes's rejoinder: free will is the *sine que non* of morality and ethics *per se*.[32]

Impassioned, the soul finds itself not only in, but intimately united with, a body. In its essence, the soul is immaterial, free; *de jure*, it is godly. *De facto*, it is lodged in the facticity of

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"subject," in late 1647 Descartes wrote to Queen Christina of the soul's *volonté* as follows: "Elle nous rend en quelque façon pareils à Dieu et semble nous exempter de lui être sujets" (20 November, 1647). Like Schmitt's sovereign, the soul allows us to suspend the laws' jurisdiction; to step outside them, perhaps even to prescribe new laws to ourselves.

[31] *Ethics*, trans. Curley (New York: Penguin, 1996) III, pref., p. 69. Arguably, the entire project of the *Ethics* is written against the aberrant, sovereign subject (*subjectus*) Spinoza found in *Les passions de l'âme*, and in particular article 50, in which Descartes asserts the soul's capacity to have sovereignty over its passions ("pouvoir absolu"). Spinoza glosses the article without quotation marks, and later cites it explicitly, all in order to take Descartes to task on precisely this point (*Ethics*, III, Pref., p.69; V, Pref. pp.161-2). Spinoza charges Descartes with making of man a sovereign within Nature—*sive* God—, deifying and giving a particular status to what was just another type of individual in Nature. Pascal, we'll see in chapter 3, attacked Descartes and the Stoics for doing precisely this: making man a god, or rather: God *tout court*, sovereign under no one, absolute. For the moment, not their critiques, but only their observations are important: Spinoza and Pascal saw Descartes's *Passions* as a venture into the realm of ethics, where issues of subjection and sovereignty concern the self's relation to itself. The latter could be a relation of power, control, and mastery, or of slavery, subjection, and passivity.

[32] *Principes* I, art. 37. Only if someone is, as Descartes writes in a fascinating analogy, "author of his actions" (*author suarum actionum*) can we celebrate or blame him for them. The theme returns in the *Passions*, art. 152: "Car il n'y a que les seules actions qui dépendent de ce libre arbitre pour lesquelles nous puissions avec raison être loués ou blâmés." The immensity of this problem—free will and morals—commands prudent brevity in addressing it here. I will merely point to how the question of authorship—of texts, of actions—is intertwined with that of the self—its unity or heteronomy—and its free will. Thus, on this basis, we can read out the ethical and philosophical importance of a position like La Bruyère's vis-à-vis his *Caractères* ("Tout est dit, et l'on vient trop tard depuis plus de sept mille ans qu'il y a des hommes qui pensent"). This, a self-condemnation to redundancy, is the very first of his *remarques*: "Des ouvrages de l'esprit"; *Les Caractères* (Paris: LGF, 1999), p.127. Compare Pascal's attitude towards his *Pensées* ("Qu'on ne dise pas que je n'ai rien dit de nouveau: la disposition des matières est nouvelle" [Br. #22]). Over against these positions is the attitude towards intellectual production of a *Moderne* like Descartes, always eager to claim a rupture with the past, and enjoining us to constant revolt against any tradition whose authority we might uncritically accept. Descartes's position regarding the unicity of the author, and of himself as author (cf. *Passions*, art. 1), then, corresponds precisely to his concept of free will and of action as a sort of writing: *author suarum actionum*. Closer to our moment, Barthes's "La mort de l'auteur" (1968) and Foucault's "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" (1969) take on new importance when seen against this background. (Post)structuralism's evisceration of the self or subject could not but go hand in hand with that of the author. In fact, they were one and the same thing. I return to these two texts in chapter two.

the world, that is, in the body, by means of which it is exposed to being affected by other things. The soul is a lord dispossessed of his throne. If it can move the body, it is at the same time moved by it. And the body, in passions, has wills of its own.

The doctrine of the passions is that realm of knowledge or "science"[33] dealing with how our souls are de facto *moved*. Out of all Cartesian domains, passion most forcefully expresses a constitutive paradox of Cartesian dualism: the immaterial soul, by essence not a body or material in any way, is acted on by the body, and by bodies in the world. After introducing the passion-action binary cited above, Descartes writes:

> je considère que nous ne remarquons point qu'il y ait aucun sujet qui agisse plus immédiatement contre notre âme que le corps auquel elle est jointe… Par conséquent

[33] See *Passions*, art. 1: where Descartes makes his famous anti-*Anciens* gesture of telling his reader he is casting aside all that has been written before on the "science" of passions: he will proceed as if nothing had ever been said about them. While he was overstating his independence from others (Aristotelian, Thomist or Scholastic, on the one hand, and Stoic or Neostoic, on the other), commentators have underlined the novelty of a scientific approach to the passions, and the pretension of constructing a morals or ethics on this scientific ground. See Ernst Cassirer, *Descartes: Lehre — Persönlichkeit — Wirkung* (1939), in *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2005), p. 174; and Rodis-Lewis, "Introduction," p. 32: "[…] Le premier, il établit la morale sur un fondement scientifique […]." Rodis-Lewis perceives how the scientific and ethical or prescriptive are interrelated, the former founding the possibility of the latter: "La science des passions conduit donc à une technique pour 'les dresser, et… les conduire'" (p.17), she writes, citing article 50. Although I do not have room to fully explore the problem of the genre of Descartes's *Passions* and the way in which he categorizes the sort of knowledge contained in it, one or two observations might be made. Descartes wanted his study of the passions to be understood as a fragment of his natural science or *physique*, which was laid out systematically, though without completion, in the *Principia*. This is how the *Passions* is framed by the letters figuring as preface to the text. In the last of Descartes's two responses to his perhaps fictitious correspondent, he sets himself against older traditional discourse on his topic: "mon dessein n'a pas été d'expliquer les Passions en orateur, ni même en philosophe moral, mais seulement en physicien" (*Passions*, p. 98). The prescriptive, that is practical, ethical aspects of the book, though to some extent dependent on the natural-scientific, descriptive sections, demand we don't take Descartes too seriously when it comes to this self-description. Indeed, "la morale" appears in the text itself (e.g., art. 144). Hence, we should speculate about the rhetorical, even political or strategic function of excluding himself from the realm of morals here. Further, we would need to think about how Descartes in some ways had to classify the book on the passions as part of la *physique*, in order for it to enter into his systematic picture of knowledge at all. According to the famous tree of philosophy or wisdom from the prefatory letter to the French version of the *Principles* (1647), morals and ethics ("la Morale") was the last and highest part of knowledge, based on all the others: metaphysics (roots) and natural philosophy or physics (trunk), a fruit even higher than the other practical sciences derived from physics: mechanics and medicine. I return to this metaphor below.

> nous devons penser que ce qui est en elle une passion est communément en lui une action.[34]

"Against" (*contre*), is equivocal, as I've suggested of "movement" (or touch): spatializing *and* agonistic or relational. Laying somehow "against" the soul, which is "joined" to it, the body acts "against" it. The body contra-dicts the soul's commands, as we'll see below, undermining its power and introducing an equivocity—two or more commanding voices—into what is supposed to be univocal power.

In a word: *the immortal soul is vulnerable*. The unmoved mover is moved by emotion. The god inside is gripped by anger, obsessed by love, agitated by sadness, warmed by joy, and led along by desire—desire, "[qui] agite le cœur plus violemment qu'aucune des autres passions"—toward "jouissance."[35] The immaterial core of our being, which we know to be untouched by matter, is just as indubitably shaken and agitated, lifted and lowered, tugged this way and that—*affected*, in a word, by things in the world, by others, by words, by itself. I will be at pains to explore this contradiction below. Dualism lives or dies on the spike of what Descartes calls "affections of things," *confused ideas* by which the union of the soul with the body is experienced and proved in its indubitable reality: sensations, appetites, and passions, the latter being peculiar for the effects they have on the will.[36] We feel the lack of external determination of the will. At the same time, we experience passions as movements of the will despite itself.

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[34] *Passions*, art.2.
[35] Art. 101; art. 90.
[36] *Principles*, I, art. 48. In this article, we learn that the mind perceives: (1) things, (2) affections of things (*rerumve affectiones*), or (3) eternal truths having no existence outside of our thought. (1) is divided into those things that are related to or predicated of either the thinking substance (all the modes of perception and willing) or the corporeal substance (extension, magnitude, length, width, figure, movement, situation, divisibility, etc.). (3) we find inside our minds, placed there by God or Nature alone. (2) subsumes what is distinguished insofar as it pertains simultaneously to the mind *and* to the body, and for being involuntary, lying outside the control of the soul's free will. Confused ideas, "affections of things" are that large group of what forces itself upon the soul from without due to its unity with the body: sensations, both external and internal (the latter are "appetites," like hunger, thirst, etc.), and "emotions or passions of the soul"

The State of the self, domain of the soul, is in constant civil war when we encounter it in the *Passions*. Like Charles IX's kingdom in Madame de Lafayette's wonderful extended allegory of the political "disorders" of the passions, *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662), the Cartesian self risks being "torn asunder" by an unbridled "guerre civile."[37] Not only are passions a fact of human nature; they often have the upper hand over the soul, at least before it sets itself to philosophizing and working on itself. The soul's power can be imagined as God-given, but its successful realization is not.

In stressing the corporeal—the embodied soul as submitted to Nature, the equivocity of the soul's (e)motions—and the political—Cartesian ethics as the rulership of the self as a state—, I hope to render legible something easily overlooked in Descartes's *Passions*, something one would more readily assume to find in other thinkers, like Plato, Epictetus, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Lispius, and Sénault.[38]But in Descartes, too, the passions are about power: the struggle

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(*commotiones, sive animi pathemata*). It is thus, as a type of "affection of things" that, before the *Passions*, the *Principles* depicted the passions. Their thus being subsumed along with sensations under the same concept points to their essential, core connotation: involuntary passivity, what the soul endures from without.

[37] *La Princess de Montpensier*, in De Lafayette, *Romans et nouvelles* (Paris: Garnier, 1958), p. 5: "Pendant que la guerre civile déchirait la France sous le règne de Charles IX, l'Amour ne laissait pas de trouver sa place parmi tant de désordres et d'en causer beaucoup dans son empire." As set in place already in these opening lines, the novella moves according to a logic of constant interpenetration of political and affective conditions, such that one is always the other: the civil war in France *being*, quite simply, the conflicts of interest between various contenders for the beautiful Princess and the "combats," as the author calls them, internal to the protagonists themselves—and vice versa: their affective states *being* the State itself. See for example the description of the martial victory of Love over the comte de Chabanes: "Il devint passionnément amoureux de cette princesse ; et, quelque honte qu'il trouvât à se laisser surmonter, il fallut céder et l'aimer de la plus violente et de la plus sincère passion qui fût jamais" (p.7). Just so, in this world one is not sad: being sorrowful means to give or *abandon* oneself to the rule of Sadness: "s'abandonner entièrement à sa douleur" (p.32). In the novella, the sovereign order of the (unified) State is the sworn opponent of the passions, as each vie for control, pitting the raison d'État against the (dé)raison of emotion.

[38] Significant are the effects this reading of the passions of the soul might have for problematizing, and ideally galvanizing, Descartes's neat dualism, what we refer to as Cartesian "subjectivity," and, I think, anthropological "humanism" itself. I hope to show how foregrounding the ethical in Descartes in a certain manner—not as idle metaphysical moral ideology ("be good!", "be yourself!", "the body is bad!" etc.), but as the construal, via certain discourses, and transformation, via determinate practices, of ourselves and

for power in a divided human being. Their root lies in the soul's not *eo ipso* having absolute sovereignty over the whole human being person, despite its freedom *de droit*. The soul has to work for its power.

Self-sovereignty is a problem, struggle, and goal. By nature, we are roiled by the power of the passions. By self-cultivation—habituation or training, *dressage*, in Descartes—, we strive to become and remain "maîtres de nous-mêmes."[39] Providing a scientific description for what the passions are is necessary in order to know how best we can rule over them, rather than be subjected by them. This science was the primary but not sole task of the *Passions*, and it constitutes the major novelty of Descartes's study of them. Scientific knowledge is of ethical efficacy for Descartes. Ethics, for him, is the problem of the soul's locus in a world of action and passion. It asks how we can work to make human experience different from that of mere bodies—animals as much as rocks—for which life is (apparently) a random sequence of passively endured actions brought about by external causes. God sets the model of the active mind. Souls aim to consolidate their rule by strengthening and keeping active the divine core that constitutes their essence.

Cartesian ethics addresses, that is, how we can deliver ourselves from a certain natural self-subjection, which derives from our submission, via the body, to Nature and her laws. By seeing the political model of sovereignty in the kingdom of Nature (ruled by God), whose theoretical discourse is natural philosophy (*la physique*), and what I am describing as the

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certain power relations within ourselves—, suggests we challenge certain prejudices regarding Cartesian philosophy. In particular, focusing on the ethical, political, and therapeutic project of the philosophy of the passions encourages us to avoid the self-fulfillment of overdetermined reading, whereby we project the *cogito* everywhere, and all we find in Descartes is the exemplar of "Western metaphysics" as construed by Heidegger (and Derrida). For the *Passions* challenge the image of the Cartesian self presented in those texts most read and cited, the *Discours* and the *Meditations*. To repeat, the "subject" of the rule of the passions is not the sovereign "subject" of philosophy.

[39] *Passions*, art. 50; art. 152.

isomorphic kingdom of the human being (ruled by the Soul), whose political "science," so to speak, is ethics (*la Morale*[40]), we can ask after the sort of self that is at stake in the discourse on

[40] This (as ethics: *Ethik*) is how Hammacher ("Einleitung," p.xviii) translates "la Morale," as it appears as the highest achievement of knowledge in the prefatory letter of the 1647 French "version" of the *Principia*. Both Hammacher and Cassirer (*Descartes…*) find no problem in referring to Descartes's *Passions* as a work of ethics. Neither do I. As a text that prescribes not rules so much as techniques of conduct—practices of self–control and modes of self-relation—, the *Passions* is obviously a "texte pratique," in the double sense Foucault gave to this predicate, when he used it as a convenient desciptor for the sorts of texts he wanted to study in *L'histoire de la sexualité*. See volume 2, *L'usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 20-2. *Practical* (i.e., referring to the concrete, to life or existence, in the sense of *practical* concerns or matters), such texts are meant *to be practiced*, that is actualized, exercised, embodied. The *Passions* is a sort of form-of-life manual, a book as a *technique de soi*. But Descartes didn't want to label it as such. Perhaps out of the sort of caution he described in a letter to Chanut (Nov. 20, 1647), Descartes told his readers that he was not taking on the passions as a "moral philosopher" (see note 33, *supra*). He must have wanted to avoid calumny. Openly discoursing on morals was risky business. It meant putting one's neck out for censors keen on calling foul. And it was especially dangerous when religious questions were totally bracketed out, which is precisely the effect, if not the explicit ambition, of Descartes's systematic or scientific approach to the passions. On this point, it stands at loggerheads with the Augustinianism of Pascal and La Rochefoucauld. As Part One of his text makes clear, Descartes takes the passions as natural phenomena, occurrences reducible to the functioning of the human body and mind, a fact of human, biological life. The scientific approach has the effect of exculpating the passions—"elles sont toutes bonnes de leur nature" (art. 211)—while at the same time providing clues, and a vocabulary, for how to take the upper hand over them, even though the *how-to* of therapy or ethics in the book is not remainderlessly reducible to the *what* of diagnosis (on this, see Hammacher, "Einleitung," p. xvii). If he avoided the label in the final prefatory letter, in an article from the *Passions* Descartes has no problem with depicting his discourse as, at least to some extent, subsumable under "la morale": he speaks of learning how to regulate desire, the motor force of passions by which they move our will to commit certain actions, as "la principale utilité de la morale" (art.144). In the final article of the treatise, Descartes suggests that he is offering elements of "la sagesse," wisdom, which he uses, at least here, in a traditional sense, harkening back to ancient ethics: a body of knowledge for teaching us ways to live, to give rule to our lives, which are ways in which to relate to ourselves, either to rule ourselves or, through a certain mental technique to which I will return below, to relieve ourselves of some inherent self-subjection (see art. 212). Finally, we have the rather transparent statement Descartes made concerning his treatise on the passions in a letter to Chanut (June 15, 1646). At the time, he had just completed the text in its first version, written, as I will describe in more detail below, for Princess Elisabeth: "Je m'arreste aussi quelquefois a penser aux questions particulières de la Morale. Ainsi j'ay tracé cet hyver un petit Traité de la Nature des Passions de l'Ame, sans avoir néantmoins le dessein de le mettre au jour" (cited by Rodis-Lewis, "Introduction," p. 9). While the *Passions* is indubitably a work of ethics, as we would say today, and was to some extent a discourse of "la morale," as Descartes says in the book and the letter, still, to fully justify translating "la Morale" as "ethics" would require a lengthy exposition. In particular, we would have to consider both Descartes's use of the term "la morale" in his texts, and secondary sources, like dictionaries (Furetière, Académie, Richelet, etc.). At least in its ambition, for Descartes "la Morale" would be less a system of values than a discourse on how to live well, to be happy, and to understand, relate to, and govern ourselves correctly, something that is included in the Cartesian ur-virtue, which is also a passion: *générosité* (art.152; art.153). In this, it is indeed close to ethics, in the ancient sense. But in its pretention to have a scientific basis Descartes's discourse set itself apart. According to his systematic concept of knowledge ("connaissance"), for

the passions. The space opened by this question should not be delineated by our presuppositions, but by Descartes's own framing of the passions as a question of power relations of activity and passivity.

This is a more fruitful route to take, I think, than that of simply assuming the *Passions* to be about something like "the subject," whatever this may mean according to the rather vague ways in which this term is often used, for example, when speaking of the so-called "Cartesian subject." For the subject of or *under* the passions is not the *ego* or philosophical subject (*subjectum*) at all. Descartes's impassioned self is modeled as the political subject (*subjectus*). This is what "sujet," when applied to a human being, meant in Descartes's time.[41] "Sujet," *subjectus*, names a politico-ontological state of being, before anything else. Unlike the later philosophical "subject," the *subjectus* is not autonomous. A subject is always *of*, *under*, or, *to* something else, without which it cannot be thought and on which it depends for its very being.

Descartes "la Morale" would be based on the entirety of human knowledge, and in particular in natural philosophy, the trunk of the tree of which it is the last and most perfect fruit. As such, it would be rooted in an understanding of the human body. The descriptive would ground the prescriptive. How to live would be based on what life is, and—this is essential—not according to received dogma, but only knowledge derived from prior known truths, these dependent on yet deeper, more primary bits of knowledge, and so on, until the foundational, indubitable truths, the base of all that follows. My reading will be that the lofty, ambitious version of a truly Cartesian ethics—a sort of absolute knowledge as described in the first of the *Regulae*, a science so all-encompassing that, at every moment, we would know what do to, and hence could rule ourselves with absolute sovereignty—somewhat recedes behind a more modest, Stoic ethics of moderation and detachment, a mindfulness by which we learn to distance ourselves from what is not entirely within our control, in order to best cope with, instead of rule over, necessity, that is, what happens to us incontrovertibly and unforeseeably. Ruling over the passions recedes behind our learning to detach ourselves from them in such a way that, like when we are spectators at tragedies, we take pleasure even in the violent, negative passions we feel.

[41] "Qui est sous la domination d'un Prince souverain" Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*. Vol. III, n.p. This primary meaning of the term "subject" in Furetière can be taken as testimony to the dominant meaning of the term in and well after Descartes's time. Another source, from Descartes's lifetime, is the entry "Soubject" in Jean Nicot's *Thresor de la langue françoyse* (Paris: Douceur, 1606), p. 602. Fascinating is one example of usage, which equates being subject with suffering (*pati*) government or control (*imperium*), i.e., the rule of power: "*Estre soubjet*, pati imperium." See also the first entry for "Sujet" in Pierre Richelet, *Dictionnaire françois* (Geneva: Widerhold, 1680), p. 407: "Vassal. Qui dépend de quelque Souverain."

The being upon which the subject depends is what is *over*, *above*, and what exerts power *on* the subject: the *sovereign*.[42] The two terms are points in a field of relationality.

Following Balibar, who has tried to account for and debunk what he calls "le mythe du 'sujet cartésien,'" we can thus problematize Descartes's role in the typical, teleological account of the advent of the modern subject of philosophy, whose point of origin became synonymous with Cartesian philosophy *tout court*.[43] We might reread pre-Kantian philosophy, philosophy before the "Subjekt," in order to recover the political subject, who has been "forgotten and covered over" by the former, condemned to continue an only spectral existence.[44] The political subject is like the body of metaphor worn away by use, hidden, but not entirely, by a new meaning.

Along these lines, Balibar compellingly suggests we can find, not subjectivity, but political subjecthood in Descartes's notion of causality. In particular, the subject-sovereign relation inheres in the depiction of the ontological dependence of the finite substances, thinking and extension (which make up "l'individu humain") on the infinite substance, God, as "eminent

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[42] The quasi-deictic "sub-" of "subject" finds its reversed image in the "super" of the "superanus," the Vulgar Latin from which the Old French "soverain," and modern French "souverain," descend. But sovereignty, like subject-hood (subjection), is a relation. Subjection and sovereignty are only possible as and in a type of relationality. As Hardt and Negri have stressed, the sovereign is unthinkable without a plurality of ruled subjects: "sovereign power is not autonomous," they write, "sovereignty is a relationship (*Multitude*, p. 334). We see this clearly in the first meaning provided for "sujet" in Furetière's *Dictionnaire*, cited above. And we'll find the same thing nearly one century later in Jaucourt's article "SUJET," from the Enlightenment's signature enterprise, the *Encyclopédie*, vol. 15 (1765), pp. 643-44.

[43] Balibar, "Réponse…".(as in note 9).

[44] "…oubliée et recouverte par une projection rétrospective de la question du *Subjekt* comme *subjectum*" (p.43). Balibar should, I think, be seen as riffing on Heidegger here, who wrote the same of Being in *Sein und Zeit*. On Balibar's view, the "Cartesian subject" is the result of a retrospective projection first performed by Kant in his first *Critique*, and that became an article of dogma thereafter. Balibar claims that there is no way of conflating Descartes's *ego* or thinking substance with *subjectum* or Kant's *Subjekt* at all. While one doesn't have to fully agree with his argument, he does offer a compelling reading of Kant's "invention" of the subject by a retrospective projection of the transcendental quality onto Descartes's *ego*. Hegel and Heidegger are named as the other two main perpetrators of the "myth" of Descartes's "subject."

cause" of both their existence and their causal interrelations (that they can act on each other despite their ontological distinction). "[C]ausalité et souveraineté se convertissent l'une dans l'autre" in Descartes, Balibar writes.[45] This could have been read, already, in the analogy with which this chapter began. Creator of Nature, God lords over her, prescribing and assuring the application of her laws.

According to the clue that causality and sovereignty are interchangeable in Descartes, we can re-read the first law of Nature and the passion-action binary at the core of the *Passions*. What acts is sovereign over what is acted upon, the cause over the effect. Agency is power; causal relations are relations of power. Becoming less subject to our passions means our acting on them, causing or changing them, instead of existing as the effect of passions. It is this possibility—that we might cease to be mere subjects of what we out of convenience call "our" passions but which, as in Descartes, deserve the determinate article "the";[46] that we might appropriate *the* passions as *our own*—that thinkers like La Rochefoucauld and Pascal will contest with great vehemence.

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[45] Balibar, "Réponse," p. 38. "L'individu humain…est par excellence le 'sujet' ou *l'assujetti* (*subjectus*) d'une *souveraineté divine*" (ibid.). Balibar suggests we take heed of how the image of sovereignty is "impliquée" in the notion of *eminent* causality, that is, in the principle whereby created, i.e. finite substances (mind, body) find "l'éminence de leur cause, en Dieu" (p. 37). Just so, Antonio Negri writes of "the *implicit political dispositif* within [Descartes's] ontology": "Preface to the English Edition," in Negri, *The Political Descartes*, trans. Toscano and Mandarini (London: Verso, 2006), p. 318. Indeed, "every metaphysics is in some way a political ontology," Negri writes (p. 317), and, in turn, "political philosophy articulated ontology" (p. 329). On more recent attempts, those of Žižek and Badiou in particular, to think "the link between Cartesianism and the political subject," see the translator's introduction to Negri's *The Political Descartes*, pp. 21-25. See also note 132, *infra*.

[46] It's intriguing to note how, perhaps following Deleuze, today's affect theory has revived this rather pre-modern view of affectivity. On this view, passions or affects have a certain *autonomy*. They happen to or actualize themselves in us, but not without escaping what it is we are conscious of as ours: our emotions, which we imagine to be the innermost, most ineffable part of our experience. The passions don't belong to us, and hence are well represented, as in French, with definite articles—*la* peur, *le* désir, *la* joie, etc. These tend to personify or allegorize emotive forces, capturing the involuntary character of their experience. Hence, in art. 48, Descartes writes of the battle of Fear (la peur) and Ambition (l'ambition) in such a way that the self becomes the site of a clash of two alien forces, each vying to have the upper hand. The soul appears as a passive onlooker to this combat of contraries. On the autonomy of affect, and related concepts of affect theory, see the glossary at the end of Brian Massumi's *The Power at the End of the Autonomy* (Durham and London: Duke U. Press, 2015), pp. 105-106.

Rather than equivalent, the *ego* of knowledge and the subject of passion are set in dynamic relation to one another.[47] The latter is, more or less, the factual, embodied self, embedded in the world; the former is an ideal self or ego that is not utterly purged of, but at least dominant over, all psychological forces: a self we can imagine and perhaps desire to be—and that Descartes thinks we should and can become in effect. The ideal self is a soul that remains sovereign over all the ways in which its will can be affected from without, which is what passions are.[48] The Cartesian care of the self considers our natural subjection to the passions, and the ways in which we can temper, even overcome, their power, in order, as our guiding norm, to gain "empire très absolu" over them. And possessing "un pouvoir absolu," that is, sovereignty, over one's passions, means having "l'empire absolu sur soi-même."[49]

Sovereignty, understood as a relation, illuminates how Descartes, like some of his contemporaries, set himself apart from Stoic and Neostoic ethics, whereby the passions are

[47] Here I find myself in dialogue with Althusser's "Psychanalyse et psychologie," in Althusser, *Psychanalyse et sciences humaines: Deux conférences (1963-1964)* (Paris: LGF, 1996), pp. 106ff. Althusser sees an autobiographical relation between the "sujet d'objectivité" (or "de science") and its, for him, pathological reversed image ("envers"), the "sujet d'erreur," that is, "sujet psychologique": "Le sujet psychologique qui apparaît ici comme le préalable du sujet d'objectivité, c'est le sujet de l'erreur; c'est en même temps le sujet de l'erreur pouvant se convertir en sujet d'objectivité" (p. 112). The notion of *conversion* is important: it names the processual nature of ethics as self-transformation, for which Foucault will provide the concepts of "travail éthique" and "acétique," to which I return below. In a remark to which he accords no elucidation Althusser construes the psychological subject in terms similar to the way in which I would like to see the subject of the passions: as the *locus* of tension between two ideal poles, total self-subjection to the passions, on the one hand—which would be animality in Descartes—and total self-sovereignty, on the other, which would not be so much the total purgation of the passions, as Althusser's excessively Manichean (Spinozist) view seems to suggest, but, as I've been arguing, the soul's rule over them. "[L]e sujet psychologique devient le lieu où se joue le rapport entre le sujet de vérité et le sujet d'erreur," he writes (pp. 112-113). The "subject of truth" is indeed sovereign over passions. But it is not incapable of passion. Rather, in the acts of thinking and willing, it is not misled by them.

[48] *Passions*, art. 52. I will return to this—the passions' paradoxical status as involuntary acts of the will—in detail below.

[49] Art. 50; art. 203.

pathologies that could and should be utterly purged from our souls.[50] Rather, like subjects in a kingdom, passions are to be wisely ruled, governed, that is, submitted to the ordered power of the soul, not crushed. "Wisdom" is the political science of the passions, an art of governance: "[L]a sagesse est principalement utile en ce point qu'elle enseigne à s'en rendre tellement maître et à les ménager avec tant d'adresse," reads the *Passion*s' final article.[51] Philosophy is deliverance from a certain involuntary slavery of oneself to a part of oneself. Deliverance from involuntary subjection comes at the price of a willed subjection to oneself, mediated by science and philosophy, and the practices they entail.

Ethics as *assujetissement*: Foucauldian Concepts for the Cartesian Care of the Self

Balibar's suggestion, namely, that we reread Descartes, and perhaps philosophy in general, with a mind to the political *subjectus* and relations of power, might be seen as a compliment to the efforts of Foucault in his late studies of ancient and Christian ethics.[52] One contribution of this

[50] See Geneviève Rodis-Lewis's introduction to her edition of the *Passions* for Neostoic attitudes towards the passions. As would the Cartesian position, the Neostoics tempered the ideal Sage's insensitivity. Their stance can be situated between the two extremes of Aristotle and Stoicism: "between Peripatetic moderation and the apathy of Zeno's sage," writes Rodis-Lewis (p. 30). Like Nietzsche or Descartes, they perceived that passions were essential to virtue and self-mastery, insofar as they provided the occasions in which these could be tested, trained, and developed. Nevertheless the tendency of the Neostoics to accord a role to the passions was not quite the same as Descartes's position. The passions still occupied a negative pole: they were what disturbed the soul and needed to be ruled and dominated, even if this disturbance was recognized as good, in the sense of it being the material upon which the mettle of a person could be tested. The position of a Lispius or a Du Vair was still close to that of their Stoic forbears, with pity, for example, being a vice "'car c'est une maladie'" (Lispius, *De la constance*), and with the total exorcising of the passions being elevated to an ideal, as in Du Vair's *La philosophie morale des stoïques*. "Il n'y a personne de si mal advisé," writes Du Vair, "qui ne confesse qu'il vaut mieux… estre exempt de passion que d'en estre troublé" (cited by Rodis-Lewis, p.30).

[51] Art. 212.

[52] It is essential to see that Foucault's research into ethics stood at the intersection of his previous work: on knowledge—in the impersonal *epistemes* that govern discourse at a certain time within "domaines de savoir" (*Les mots et les choses* [1966])—and on power—in institutionalized disciplinary regimes and "types de normativité" (*Surveiller et punir* [1975]) (see *L'usage des plaisirs*, pp. 10-11). Ethics is where these come together and are embodied, as it were; where they act on subjects in their self-relation, altering

work was to have shown and interrogated a constant linking together of political and ethical governmentality: *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, as the title of one late lecture course reads. That is, Foucault showed how ethical regimes, for example, the late antique "care of the self," can stand in a porous proximity to political power, its structures and discourse, its techniques of governance, its models of statehood, and its ideals of rulership. "La vertu individuelle a à se structurer comme une cité," he observes of the well-known self-state analogy in Plato's *Republic*.[53]

In courses and books from Foucault's *History of Sexuality* project, ethics names the domain of "techniques de soi." These are practices by which persons participate in their own subject-ion or subject-ivation (*assujettissement*), in the two senses of this term that Foucault sees in intimate relation: that is, their constitution as selves—as subjects, in modern terms—and as certain types of subjects—subjects under certain discourses and in certain power relations.[54] Knowledge (science) and power (politics, discipline) are marshaled in these self-forming and -transforming practices.

In light of Foucault's guiding concepts, Descartes's care of the (Cartesian) self, whose manual is the *Passions*, can be more accurately grasped. Foucault's concepts are required so as to see something for which the history of philosophy, as an actual history and a discipline, usually has no eyes. If, as I argue, there is a certain un-Cartesian *materiality* both (1) *of the soul* insofar as it is or becomes impassioned, and (2) of the self-directed ethical practices prescribed to the soul in its quest to gain power over the passions, then it will be crucial to learn to describe

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their self-conceptions and the power they take over themselves. As such, Foucault's late works stand at the complex intersection of humanist and antihumanist perspectives.

[53] *L'usage des plaisirs*, p. 97; Althusser offered related insights on the correspondence between the structures of the soul and of the state in the *Republic*: "Psychanalyse et psychologie," pp. 108-111.

[54] *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 81: "…l'assujettissement des hommes; je veux dire leur constitution comme 'sujets', aux deux sens du mot" (p. 81). Cf. *L'usage des plaisirs*, p. 38.

these matters with some clarity.[55] Foucault provides us with a vocabulary. We will then have to register the effect of bringing an ostensibly posthumanist position into contact with what is taken as an exemplar of metaphysical humanism.

In "Morale et pratique de soi," the methodological section of *L'usage des plaisirs* (1984), Foucault presents his guiding conceptual categories for thinking about "la morale." This term, he writes, can mean moral codes, or mores (how people really act). But it can also be understood as "l'éthique" that is, how people relate to and *subject themselves* to goals, and carry out work, practice, or labor, in order to do and remain thus *subject*-ed.[56] Certain norms and fields of knowledge mediate between the self and itself, acting like the molds into which we are to pour our own being. "La morale" as "ethics" is describable as an "ascétique," a study of trainings, practices, exercises (41).

The "how" of subjectivation (*assujettissement*) is differenentiated according to an "ascetics," i.e., practices of the self. Foucault names four "modes de subjectivation" or "manières de 'se conduire'" vis-à-vis the goal or norm to which one submits oneself (45). For Descartes's *Passions*, this goal consists in maintaining and developing the soul's sovereignty over the passions. This, I'll show, comes down to assuring the soul's unity, self-identity, and immateriality. The four "modes" would then be the angles by which persons approach becoming

[55] Indeed, equating ethics with self-directed practice(s)—"pratique de soi"—already pushes for an image of philosophy as a doing, action, or "exercise" (to use Hadot's term, used by Foucault as well in his lectures) in and of life—a doing that is mental *and* bodily. On philosophy as "exercise" and as a way or form of life, see Pierre Hadot, *Exercises spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002); Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*: *Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson* (Paris: Albin Michel/LGF, 2001); Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995); on "aesthetics of existence," sexuality and truth, and "techniques de soi," see Foucault, Ch. 2 "La culture de soi" in *Le souci de soi*, pp. 55-94; Foucault, *L'usage des plaisirs*, p. 18; Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet*; Foucault, *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi* (Paris: Vrin, 2013); Foucault and Richard Senett, "Sexuality and Solitude," *LRB*, vol.3, no. 9 (21 May 1981), pp. 3-7.

[56] Hence, "une histoire de 'éthique' et de l''ascétique,'" a section of which Foucault is undertaking to write in his book, should be: "entendue comme histoire des formes de subjectivation morale et des pratiques de soi qui sont destinées à l'assurer" (*L'usage des plaisirs*, p. 41).

Cartesian subjects under this goal, including the discourses—of science or philosophy—, and their materiality—in particular, writing and books—that bring this goal, and the self itself, into view.

(1) The first mode is, Foucault writes, the "détermination de la substance éthique," "c'est-à-dire la façon dont l'individu doit constituer telle ou telle part de lui-même comme matière principale de sa conduite morale" (37-8). In Plato, *desires* constitute the "ethical substance." In Descartes, the passions in general, of which desire is one, are the "material" of self-shaping practices.[57] He constitutes them as an object of natural science—of *la physique*—and of ethics—as *substance éthique*.

Since, for Descartes, errors in grasping the passions arise from not precisely distinguishing the soul from the body,[58] in whose union they consist, the first forty or so articles of Part One of the *Passions* offer a remarkable condensation of Cartesian physiology in order to prepare a definition of the passions. This is not just for scientific accuracy. Dividing soul from body, hence from the movements of passions, assures the possibility of ethics as the soul's quest for sovereignty. Put corporeality in the soul, and the whole edifice comes tumbling down.[59]

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[57] See art. 80: "…je n'entends pas ici parler du désir, qui est une passion à part…" But cf. art. 144, where it becomes clear that desire inheres within the other passions, insofar as they work on our will and make us want—desire—to do certain things. Desire has hence a peculiar status in Descartes, who comes close to the Platonic conception of ethical substance when he writes that "la principale utilité de la morale" consists in regulating (réguler) our desires (art. 144). Indeed, only insofar as they incite us to action via desire, do love, joy, hate, and sadness, the primary passions (in addition to *l'admiration*), "regulate our mores": "elles excitent en nous le désir, par l'entremise duquel elles règlent nos mœurs" (art. 143). Desire is the will of the passions, as it were. It is their core, just as our will is the core of ourselves.

[58] *Passions*, art. 47 and art. 2.

[59] That is, the correct division between what, in the passions, pertains to the body and what to the soul, was precisely the route by which the unity of the soul, and hence the possibility of its power over the passions, could be guaranteed. Only if we know what mind and body are, can we know the passions correctly, and hence avoid falling into the error, committed by the ancients, of thinking that they arise from, and hence betray, some inner division of the soul itself (art. 47), something to which I will return below. "[I]l n'y a en nous qu'une seule âme, et cette âme n'a en soi aucune diversité de parties," Descartes assures us (art. 47). As I hope to show, the sovereignty of the soul, a telos of Descartes's

The definition comes in article 27. Passions are: "des perceptions, ou des sentiments, ou des émotions de l'âme, qu'on rapporte particulièrement à elle et qui sont causées, entretenues et fortifiés par quelque mouvement des esprits [animaux]." We feel passions "*comme* en l'âme même"—"elles sont si intérieures à notre âme"[60]—although, *in fact*, they are caused by bodily, *animal* movements: animal spirits. *Confused ideas*, then, the passions pertain to both soul *and* body.[61] Part of strengthening the soul—for Descartes, the locus of the *self* proper[62]—is to understand, to be convinced, that passions are not *in* the soul at all, but in the body. Yet this neat, analytic self-circumscription will be put under considerable pressure by the force that passions exert on the soul's (reputedly free) will, which Descartes will soon describe.

As the interaction between body and mind, a passion's arousal must be thought in terms of that famous Cartesian oddity, the pineal gland, primary locus of interaction between the material body—nerves, conducting rarefied blood called animal spirits—and the immaterial mind or soul.[63] It is via this gland that "l'âme et le corps agissent l'un contre l'autre."[64] By the stroke of "a hypothesis more occult than any occult quality," in Spinoza's words, not only the

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ethics—the goal of the practices or ethical labor he prescribes—is predicated on this, the unity and self-identity of the soul as seat of the one true, and free, will of the self.

[60] Art. 25, my italics; art. 26. See also the letter to Elisabeth from 6 October 1645: "que les pensées qui viennent de quelque particulière agitation des esprits, et dont on sent les effets *comme en l'âme même*, qui soient proprement nommées des passions" (AT IV, p. 311; my italics).

[61] *Principles*, I, art. 48; see note 36, *supra.* See also: *Passions*, art. 24-29.

[62] See *Principles*, I, art. 12. There, Descartes suggests that the reason why not everyone has been able to grasp the soul as he does is that, not adequately distinguishing between thought and corporeality, they took themselves to mean what falls under immediate sense perception: "Et bien qu'ils se soient estimés plus certains d'exister eux-mêmes que de toute autre chose, ils n'ont pourtant pas aperçu que par *eux-mêmes* [*per se ipsos*], il fallait ici entendre les seuls esprits [mentes solas]; mais au contraire ils ont plutôt entendu par là leur seuls corps." This is the new Moreau translation: *Principes de la philosophie*, trans D. Moreau (Paris: Vrin bilingue, 2009), p. 83 = the Latin AT VIII p. 9). To be sure, the *locus classicus* for the Cartesian project of self-(re)definition is not in the *Principles*, but in the *cogito* passages of the *Discours* and the *Meditations*. I prefer the *Principles* here, for the book is more proximate—both temporally and in terms of its simplified, manual style, appealing to non-specialists from the *monde*—, to the *Passions*. Intriguingly, it was the *Principles* that Heidegger read in his elucidation of Descartes's concept of world in *Sein und Zeit*, not the *Meditations* or *Discours*.

[63] *Passions,* art. 32.

[64] Art. 34.

extended, corporeal, but also the thinking, incorporeal, substance is capable of moving the gland in different ways, the soul actively by free will, the body passively in a blind, machine-like, pneumatic mechanics of matter in motion.[65] In turn, movements of the gland direct the blood and animals spirits around, causing motor motion, imagination, representation and perception of things, memory, etc.

Compared to these more bodily occurrences, the passions, pertaining to our dual nature, are what one might call a second-order perception. While sensory perception results when the nerves, affected by some thing, conduct the animal spirits up into the brain to the gland and act on it in such a way as to cause the mind to perceive the thing causing the sensory affection, the passions are an additional "perception" or "thought", equivalent to a sort of "feeling," on top of this. Thus their complex, compound, character.

This *extra* is what separates humans from animals. In the latter, the "passions," so to speak, are not perceived, but simply *are* the corporeal movements of blood and animals spirits that, in humans, subtend the passions. In animals, these movements immediately bring about the action to which they dispose the body, in a fluid reaction (perception)-action (movement) circuit.[66] But in us, our souls produce, or simply are, a little gap of consciousness, the time lag of

[65] Spinoza, *Ethics*, V. Preface, p. 162. The exact reference of Spinoza's words is not clear, though they do refer to some aspect of the pineal gland theory: maybe to Descartes's recourse to the pineal gland as the material medium between immaterial soul and material body, or to the freedom he accords the will to manipulate—that is, to move—this gland as it wills. Either way, Spinoza saw in this gland an aberrant exception to Descartes's rationalism: in the mind of that very philosopher "who had so often censured the Scholastics for wishing to explain obscure things by occult qualities—[it was] a hypothesis more occult than any occult quality" (id.). The immaterial directly causing and determining the material is indeed rather spooky stuff. Or simply absurd: "And of course since there is no common measure between the will and motion, there is also no comparison between the power, or forces, of the mind and those of the body" (Id.). If Descartes's hypothesis seems archaic, it is an attempt to explain *scientifically* the same sort of metaphysical freedom of the mind that Sartre's will later accord, without any recourse to material explanation, to the "pour-soi." On this, see chapter 4.

[66] *Passions*, art. 50: "encore qu'elles [les bêtes] n'aient point de raison, ni peut-être aussi aucune pensée, tous les mouvements des esprits et de la glande, qui excitent en nous les passions, ne laissent pas d'être en elles, et d'y servir à entretenir et à fortifier non pas comme en nous les passions, mais les mouvements des

apperception that allows a bit of negativity in otherwise seamless, animal circuitry. Aware of what its passions command it to do, the soul is capable, to a certain degree, of intervening in their existence, resisting them, even, for Descartes, of mastering them.

The movements of the body subtending the passions are *felt* by the soul, as a certain movement of the—that is, its own—will (*la volonté*).[67] The particular movement of the will is the affective force or quality of the passion. The passion of fear, for example, is partly the will to flee. The impassioned disposition of the will pervades the perception of the cause of fear, tainting it, lending it its particular hue.[68] We cannot see clearly when gripped by passions. This does not mean they are per se *erroneous*: fear might save our lives (I discuss the *natural* function of the passions below). But this qualitative charge does obviate any detached grasp on the cause of passion, for better or for worse. As a *Stimmung*, an attunement towards something, each

nerfs et des muscles qui ont coutume de les accompagner." On passions as a trait we have in common with animals, see also the letter to Newcastle from 23 November 1646 = AT IV, pp. 573-574.

[67] See art. 40, 47.

[68] This is one way of understanding why passions are feelings and perceptions, emotions and ideas, all at once: see art. 27-29.

passion makes its cause appear to us in a particular way, demanding a particular action.[69] The passions, then, have a rhetorical function, both as perceptual color and volitional force.[70]

[69] To be sure, there is a certain circularity in the passions, which pertains to their dual nature, being in part mind and body. That is, in order for me to feel fear, for example, in the face of a terrible onslaught in battle, I have to first perceive the thing as bad or dangerous—that is, as fearful. But it is the passion of fear that makes the onslaught appear as a great woe in the first place, and my perception of it is identical to the passion aroused. It must be fearful for me to be afraid; I must be afraid for it to appear fearful. The problem might in part be solved with Descartes's view of contingency as the source of variations, across people, in causes of the same passions. What this would mean, then, is that we must first have to experience something as harmful or as good in order for us to, then, have an impassioned perception of it. In our affective responses to things we would read the story of our experiences. Like Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, a passion would contain the seed of an auto-biography. For a related take on affect as comporting a certain imperative dimension, which marshals past experiences ("custom" here) and thrusts us on in order, ultimately, to push life forward, see Massumi, *What Animals Can Teach Us About Politics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 28. Emotion, which Massumi renames "categorical affect," "registers the imperative to live the event in the dominant experiential key in which the situation *customarily* unfolds. In a nonplay situation of fear, we feel the imperative to fight or flee. Every fiber of our existence is interpellated" (my italics).

[70] See art. 48, 148. In particular, the passions are both evaluative and hyperbolic, painting things not only as good or bad, but with intensities of goodness and badness. Just as they are felt "*comme* en l'âme" (art. 25), they represent things "comme," that is, flush with a certain value: "la peur," for example, "représente la mort comme un mal extrême" (art. 48). Desire exaggerates the beauty of a beautiful body, and it divinizes physical "jouissance." In a remarkable description of the force of desire for physical, especially sexual pleasure, Descartes writes: "l'agrément est particulièrement institué de la nature pour représenter la jouissance de ce qui agrée comme le plus grand de tous les biens qui appartiennent à l'homme: ce qui fait qu'on désire très ardemment cette jouissance" (art. 90). But the passions can also substitute one value for the other, good for bad, and *vice versa*. As Descartes writes in art. 138— *De leurs défauts et des moyens de les corriger*—, the passions err first of all in that some things that are hurtful for the body "ne causent au commencement aucune tristesse, ou même donnent de la joie, et d'autres… lui sont utiles, bien que d'abord elles soient incommodes." The corrective to the rhetorical force of the passions with respect to the body is simple. It consists in the use of "experience and reason," Descartes writes, in order to remedy both "defects" of the passions: the tendency for substitution—"pour distinguer le bien d'avec le mal"—and for hyperbole—"et connaître leur juste valeur, afin…de ne nous porter à rien avec excès." Descartes sounds rather ancient here in his dietetics and, perhaps, *ars erotica*: in bodily things, excesses are always to be avoided. For an illuminating discussion of the ties between Descartes's epistemological criteria and the rhetorical theories and pedagogies of the Catholic Reformation, such as were employed in the Jesuit institution, La Flèche, which the young Descartes attended, see Matthew Jones, *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution: Descartes, Pascal, Leibniz and the Cultivation of Virtue* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), ch.2, "A rhetorical history of truth," pp. 55-86. As Jones notes (n. 43, p. 283), treatises on the soul (e.g., Aristotle's *De anima*) had long been associated with the discipline of rhetoric, necessitating as it did a psychology on which to base its techniques for moving the soul of the listener, which was conceived as inducing in the public the same sentiment that, ideally, inspired the speaker. The ideal speaker or writer was to rouse himself to these affects through an art of mental *intuition*, an act of the imagination, not unlike the sort of techniques of imagining Descartes prescribes as one, albeit imperfect, method for combatting the passions in article 45. If the passions have a rhetorical function or status in Descartes's treatise, it is also, as in article 45, via rhetoric—understood in its link to trainable techniques of mental intuition such as those required by a good orator and theorized by prominent Jesuit

As Descartes explains, each passion is a particular conjoining of a movement of the pineal gland due to a perception of something or state of affairs—including mental representations of these—, on the one hand, and a particular feeling in the soul, on the other, i.e., a particular movement of the will. That is, to each movement of the gland is *conjoined* a particular disposition of the will, caused and maintained by the movements of the animal spirits *against* the gland—the body's movements pressing *against* the soul. But affective colors are not randomly linked with the movements aroused by perceptions or ideas. In each case, "[les] esprits excitent un mouvement particulier de cette glande, lequel est institué de la nature pour faire sentir en l'âme cette passion."[71]

Throughout the history of one's life and especially before the full maturation, let alone the active philosophical wakefulness, of the mind, "Nature" is at work. She has been doing our thinking and wanting for us. She is responsible for having joined together perceptions, hence movements of the gland, and movements (im-pulses) of the will.[72] This doctrine of natural "liaison" Descartes will often repeat.[73] He calls it the foundation of his study of the passions.[74] The *liaison* assures the natural functionality of the passions, and permits their exoneration.

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thinkers of Descartes's day—that we can control them. On this reading, rhetoric is indispensable to self-cultivation and techniques of self-sovereignty. That is, it is crucial to ethics as practices of self-cultivation and self-mastery. Like music for the young Descartes, rhetoric is an art of the passions. For another take on important early modern discourses of rhetoric and Descartes's treatise, see also Nancy Struever, "Rhetoric and Medicine in Descartes's *Passions de l'âme*: The Issue of Intervention," in *Renaissance-Rhetorik*, ed. H. F. Plett (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter), pp. 196-212.

[71] Art. 36.

[72] Contingencies of personal experience, ranging from the "mouvements de la mère" shared by the "enfant qui est en son ventre," to random occurrences—"l'odeur des roses peut avoir causé un grand mal de tête à un enfant"—can account for the wide variety of affective responses to the same stimuli (art. 136). But experience is not, in Descartes, the unique sum of our love and grief, of our yearnings, disappointments, and losses, and the lessons thereby learned. Rather, it is the history of the body that accounts for one's passions, and the history of the organism that explains the particular corporeal movements that subtend and accompany them (art. 107-111). In other words, for Descartes, it is the "good" or "bad" for the life of the human being, as the survival of the body, which explains the affective quality of the passions (see art. 85).

[73] Art. 44, 50, 107, 211.

[74] He calls it: "le principe sur lequel tout ce que j'en ai écrit est appuyé" (art. 136).

Instituted by Nature, "elles sont toutes bonnes de leur nature."[75] Article 52 defines their function or purposivity ("usage"):

> l'usage de toutes les passions consiste en cela seule qu'elles disposent l'âme à vouloir les choses que la nature dicte nous être utiles et à persister en cette volonté; comme aussi la même agitation des esprits, qui a coutume de les causer, dispose le corps aux mouvements qui servent à l'exécution de ces choses.[76]

In each case, the passive—that is, impassioned—soul enters the scene only after Nature's work is done. Whether due to what happened in childhood, in which, for Descartes, bodily sensation and imagination dominated our existence,[77] or to something that occurred to us only yesterday, the natural liaison happens of its own accord, before we are consciously subject to it. Like the philosopher who awakens to lucid thought after years of wakeful dreaming in the night of prejudices, in each moment, the soul awakens adrift on an ocean of passions, in a field of affectivity. We can *think* the origin of the "liaisons" between what we experience and what we feel—as Descartes does, in a remarkable history of the soul prefiguring Freud's intuitions on the bodily origins of affirmation and negation.[78] But our passions, like the signs belonging to the language we use, have, in each case, already formed themselves before we feel, think, or resist them.

Building off this comparison with language, which is not created by, but instantiated through, our speech,[79] the passions, one might say, are not so much ours as felt through us. Note the verb "dicter" in the citation above: it is the *voice of Nature*, ultimately, that speaks through *our* passions. Instituted by Nature, though not before the onset of our existence as biological life,

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[75] Art. 211.
[76] And the converse holds, too. The passions incline the soul to avoid, that is, to will ourselves away from what nature tells us is harmful to us. See art. 137.
[77] See *Principles*, I, art. 71-2.
[78] *Passions*, art.107-111. Freud, "Die Verneinung," in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. XIV, ed. Anna Freud et al. (London/Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer-Verlag, 1948), pp. 9-15.
[79] One might here thing of Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grunde = Gestamtausgabe*, vol. 10 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1997), p. 143.

the passions belong to the sphere of our ineluctable passivity. Grounded in a body we cannot think or doubt away, they manifest the soul's vulnerability: its embeddedness in materiality, the *proof* of a window open to the body and, through it, the world.[80] The passionate soul sits in a web of involuntary relationality with alterity, a sphere of force running back and forth along our ties with things and with others. Despite the ontological difference at the core of Cartesian dualism, the fact of the passions suggests a more monist continuity of things and selves, world and souls. The "movements" by which we affect and are affected course across the purported ontological gap within the self.

Seeing the passions as "substance éthique" of Cartesian *souci de soi* means understanding how, in the state of the self, mind and labor—Culture—are set against Nature insofar as Her material (bodies and the body), rules (Her laws) and institutions (the passions) are already established before, in each case, we become conscious of ourselves and of the possibilities of our agency. We work against the dominion of the Mother—our childhood, our bodies, our feelings, even, we'll see, our mother tongue.

While "bonnes de leur nature," the passions can't be left to their own devices. Rather, we are to work on them as a "matière principale," like a block of marble or hunk of wood, which, it just so happens, makes up a constitutive part of ourselves. Optimist, humanist ethics means thinking that we can indeed shape ourselves like a work of art, an ancient idea found in the late Foucault as much as in Sartre.[81] This entails an exorcism of animality, a training or

[80] Indeed, this is how "affections of things," of which the passions are a type, appear in the *Principles*, I, art. 48 that is, as proof of the union of the soul and body, and hence as evidence of the latter's existence. See n. 36, *supra.*

[81] Foucault's concept of "esthétique de l'existence" plays on the equivocity of materiality (art) and character or personality (ethics) in the term aesthetics (cf. *L'usage des plaisirs*, p. 121; *Le souci de soi,* passim). This is why, taking the term literally (too literally, of course) Hadot was able to accuse Foucault of making of ancient ethics a sort of postmodern dandyism. See the chapters on Foucault in *Exercises spirituels*. For Sartre, see *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946), where the aesthetic analogy is,

domestication that, following Derrida, is culture, socialization, political life itself.[82] Here, we acculturate ourselves. Not ruling, but being ruled by, our passions, is akin to being an animal. So we hunt out the animal within, subjecting it to the rule of reason. The animal is what we are and what, in both senses, we follow, says Derrida.[83] On its heels, we ourselves come only after it. We form ourselves out of it as raw material. Cartesian ethical substance is the self's unbridled natural animality.

(2) Foucault's second "mode de subjectivation" is "le mode d'assujettissement," "c'est-à-dire…la façon dont l'individu établit son rapport à [la] règle et se reconnaît comme lié à l'obligation de la mettre en œuvre" (38). This is the "why" of subjectivation: why subject oneself to this norm and the practices required to work towards it? For the Greeks, deliverance from passivity was a principal motive.[84] From article 1, we know the centrality of the action-passion

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fascinatingly, both posed, and structurally operative, but then disowned, disavowed. I return to this in chapter 4.

[82] Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006), p. 134: "La socialisation de la culture humaine va de pair avec cet affaiblissement, avec la domestication de la bête apprivoisée, elle n'est pas autre chose que le devenir bétail de la bête. L'appropriation, le domptage, la domestication du bétail apprivoisé (*das zahme Vieh*) sont la socialisation humaine. En tant qu'individu, l'homme serait aussi prêt, comme la bête sauvage, à entrer en guerre avec ses voisins pour affirmer sa liberté inconditionnelle. Il n'y a donc pas de socialisation, de constitution politique, de politique, sans principe de domestication de l'animal sauvage." The text cited here is Kant's *Anthropology*, to which Derrida turns after, in some twenty pages (pp. 100-122), having found in Descartes the paradigm of a certain "filiation post-cartésienne" Derrida sets out to describe (in Kant, Heidegger, Levinas, and Lacan). He takes this post-Cartesian "tradition-filiation" of thinking the animal "non seulement pour dominante en philosophie et, comme philosophie, dans notre monde, dans les 'temps modernes', mais plus précisément pour le discours de la domination même" (p. 125). "Mon hypothèse," continues Derrida, "c'est donc que cette filiation commande, je veux dire qu'elle est prévalente, hégémonique, dans tous les domaines dans lesquels la question de l'animal, voire l'animal lui-même se voient traités: la zoologie, l'éthologie, l'anthropologie, mais d'abord l'ontologie, la maîtrise par le savoir et par la technique (zoo-bio-génétique), *mais aussi l'éthique, la politique, et le droit*" (ibid; my italics). See also Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht* (Stutgart: Kröner, 1996), § 397.

[83] "In both cases, man is in both senses of the word *after* the animal": Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, trans. Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 28. That I both am and follow (follow in both senses), the animal, is of course the ambiguity at play in the French title of Derrida's text, which the English doesn't capture: *L'animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006).

[84] "[P]our les Grecs, c'est l'opposition entre activité et passivité qui est essentielle et qui marque le domaine des comportements sexuels comme celui des activités morales […] Ce qui constitue, aux yeux des Grecs, la négativité éthique par excellence, ce n'est évidemment pas d'aimer les deux sexes; ce n'est

binary in Descartes's *Passions*: life dominated by passions, by passivity, is the worst life one can live. It means that the soul, instead of strong and sovereign, is "esclave et malheureuse," writes Descartes.[85] To be active, self-directing, self-governing as much as possible is to approach God *qua* pure agency over his subjects.

(3) Mode three is defined as "les formes de l'élaboration, du travail éthique qu'on effectue sur soi-même": "et non pas seulement pour rendre son comportement conforme à une règle donnée mais pour essayer de se transformer soi-même en sujet moral de sa conduite" (38-9). Herein lie the "techniques" or "pratiques de soi," exercises we carry out on ourselves, in view of transforming ourselves according to certain goals. In Descartes's *Passions*, we encounter a variety of these. One in particular—that of self-directed training or *dressage* described in article 50—I will be at pains to delineate and problematize in much of what follows. A whole catalogue of the treatise's "remedies" and techniques for tempering and controlling the passions can be found in art. 211.

(4) Finally, the fourth mode is "la téléologie du sujet moral."[86] This concerns the big picture, the global form one seeks to give to one's life, the stabilization, over time, of "un certain mode d'être, caractéristique du sujet moral": "maîtrise de soi" for example, or "tranquillité parfaite de l'âme."[87] This is rather close to mode 2—the deliverance of the soul from passivity via self-mastery. But there is a Cartesian name for the state of ethical perfection at which we are supposed to always take aim: *générosité*, defined as the coupling together of self-understanding,

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pas non plus de préférer son propre sexe à l'autre; c'est d'être passif à l'égard des plaisirs" (*L'usage des plaisirs*, pp. 115-16).

[85] *Passions*, art. 48.

[86] "[C]ar une action," Foucault writes, "n'est pas morale seulement en elle-même et dans sa singularité; elle l'est aussi par son insertion et par la place qu'elle occupe dans l'ensemble d'une conduite; elle est un élément et un aspect de cette conduite, et elle marque une étape dans sa durée, un progrès éventuel dans sa continuité" (*L'usage des plaisirs*, pp. 39-40).

[87] Ibid.

knowledge, and willing: the recognition of oneself as free (having no illusions about the will's freedom), and the disposition always to will what we think, based on our knowledge, to be good.[88] *Générosité* is self-sovereignty: "[les généreux] sont entièrement maîtres de leurs passions."[89]

In what follows, I return to modes 1 and 2: ethical substance and work in the *Passions*. First, I bring to light how Descartes's conception of the force the passions exert on the will (*la volonté*) puts the basic qualities of the Cartesian *soul*, and hence *self*, into question (freedom, unity, self-identity, incorporeality, sovereignty). We see this tension in the text itself, not just implied in-between the lines. Second, I focus on Descartes's prescriptions for self-transforming practice, exploring how his humanist position comes up against the ambiguous materiality of the soul presupposed and suggested in his notions of self-acculturation and -discipline. Fascinating here is the role ascribed to philosophical knowledge in the techniques of self-governance. Despite our image of Cartesian masturbatory cogitations,[90] knowledge for knowledge's sake might be more of a Cartesian myth than a reality in light of Descartes's ethical teleology of study (and literacy), whose articulation can be already found in the *Regulae* (ca.1623-1628). In the *Passions*, too, we find the ambitious project of equipping the soul with what Descartes calls its "armes propres": "jugements fermes et déterminés touchant la connaissance du bien et du mal."[91] Judgments are weapons in self-direction. Knowledge is ethical power.

Ultimately, however, the positive, active project of domination risks receding behind a more traditional, "negative," Stoic ethics of endurance and detachment. Ambitions concerning self-transformation and the efficacy of knowledge as a weapon stand, that is, in tension with a

[88] *Passions,* art. 153.
[89] Art. 156.
[90] Leo Bersani, "'Ardent Masturbation' (Descartes, Freud, Proust, et al.)," in *Thoughts and Things*, pp. 37-57.
[91] Art. 48.

more modestly optimistic ethics of mental discipline, which teaches inner renunciation, moderation, and abstention. To conclude the chapter, I turn to Descartes's epistolary "spiritual direction"[92] of Princess Elisabeth from which the "treatise" on the passions, as it was called, emerged.[93] Elisabeth is Descartes's ideal reader and paradigmatic critic, I will argue. In her subtle objections, her tender pessimism, and by bringing her own affective experience to bear witness against the theories of the philosopher—pitting *worldliness* against theoretical *writing*—, Elisabeth prefigures antihumanist positions of writers both French and foreign. In the chapter's final section, one of these, Molière, will have the last word.

Dividing the Sovereign Will: The Passions as Civil War

According to Descartes, the corporeal passions move the free, incorporeal soul. They shake it, pushing it this way and that. They cause it to want or to avoid. They make its self-awareness belated. It catches itself tending towards action despite itself. Willing against its will, its will is alienated from itself. Its will is not its own at all.

The aberrancy of the immaterial soul's being capable of exerting a quasi-tactile, haptic force on a material part of the body (the gland) is matched by another: that of necessarily spatializing—that is, materializing—the soul. The passions are a result of the body working physically "contre" the soul, and are something felt "inside" it: "elles sont si proches et si

[92] Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivvre*, p. 98. Hadot considers that Descartes's letters to the Princess "prennent parfois l'allure de lettres de direction spirituelle, dignes de l'Antiquité."

[93] In the correspondence, the work is referred to as a "traité" (*Traité [de la nature] des passions de l'âme*), a title it often retains today (e.g., in Althusser's conference, cited above). It should be kept in mind, however, that the text this title first designated was the original, core version of the book, written for Elisabeth in 1646. The version we now know was greatly expanded, though Geneviève Rodis-Lewis suggests that Part One (that is, articles 1-50) shows such coherence as to suggest that they constitute the original treatise sent to Elisabeth, and eventually Queen Christina, before Descartes then expanded the work to the dimensions in which it was published, in Amsterdam and in Paris, in 1649. On all this, see Rodis-Lewis's introduction, to *Les passions de l'âme* (Paris: Vrin, 1988).

intérieures à notre âme…"[94] But, if indivisible, the soul can't have an "inside" at all.[95] In their ontology and in the linguistic means by which we represent and think them, the passions risk making a body of the soul—in other words, of pointing up the soul as a fiction.[96]

In the use Descartes makes of the concept of the will (*la volonté*) in the text, we witness Cartesian dualism struggling against the threat of the passions. A discursive analysis of the metaphorical representation of the passions would further uncover the implicit, linguistic, and unconscious undermining of the incorporeal soul. But a conceptual analysis of *la volonté* captures a tension closer to the surface of thought. Descartes seems aware of the risks of trying to have his cake and eat it too; that is, in keeping the will free and self-determining—the essence of the soul's agency[97]—, and yet compelled, interpellated to act, by the passions. Articles 40-41 show the battle for the will rather clearly. Before turning to these, it's important to understand the many layers of the conflict. Its root cause is idealism, in its ideas on language, meaning, soul, body.

Turning on a material-immaterial distinction and conflict, the *Passions* is *mise-en-abyme* at every level: language (in the body vs. the meaning of metaphor) and content (in the battle of the soul against the passions), and, here, concepts (in the circumscription of the concept of the will vs. the passions' involuntary movements of the will). Straining to not allow the will to be splintered while defining the force of the passions as their capacity to move it in certain un-

[94] Art. 26.
[95] See art. 47.
[96] That is, (1) these odd movements that move with (e)motion the only self-mover under God, call into question its immateriality, and hence its autonomy and freedom. And (2) the discourse of the passions must resort to bodily metaphors—of movement, effort, agitation, touch—that run the same risk: "de toutes les sortes de pensées qu'elle [l'âme] peut avoir, il n'y en a point d'autres qui l'agitent et l'ébranlent si fort que font ces passions" (art. 28). The material side of these tropes contaminates their ideal "meaning," just as passions "*of* the soul" alienate it from itself, setting it into a universe of bodies in motion. What Spinoza called Descartes's absurd "dominion within a dominion" begins to collapse.
[97] *Passions*, art. 17.

willed ways, the author fights out *on* the conceptual level the battle depicted *in* his account of the onslaught of passion.[98] Caught in civil war, the soul must retain the unity of its power against the forces that take control over the self, undermining the soul's sovereign power.[99] But, on the conceptual plane, the very notion of passions *de l'âme* already put the soul's power on precarious ground.

In Descartes, becoming more ethically perfect means increasing the soul's power over the self, setting forth towards the vanishing point of a centralized, unified, truly godly "empire absolu sur soi-même."[100] What governs this ethics, however, is a normative or teleological logic, which might be endemic to idealism per se: Descartes must posit the soul's self-mastery prior to, and in order to even think the possibility of, the actual realization of this mastery. In other words, the soul must be free, in full control of its will, in order for it to become so.[101] Acts of the will—

[98] It is important not to overlook how, in Descartes, a main scenario, and metaphor, for describing the passions and their impact on the will is battle: *combat*. Indeed, the presence of heroic, aristocratic bellicose ethics in the *Passions* has not received the treatment it merits given its importance in Descartes's text. It is in combat—faced with flight, fight, and death—that we have to combat ourselves with great force. And it is in this scenario, in art. 48, that Descartes offers a description of the self in what seems clearly to be a state of civil war, the lowest state in which a soul can be: divided against itself. There is to be sure a biographical-historical trace here: Descartes was personally embedded in a time of war, inter- and intra-national. As the translators of Negri's *The Political Descartes* write in their introduction, "many readers of Descartes will be completely unaware that he not only wrote many of his most important works in the course of the Thirty Years War but that he fought in many of the bloody battles that scarred the territories of Europe in this period" (p.2). Indeed, the young Descartes was soldier-mathematician, philosopher-fighter, that is, hardly as divorced from the grit and violence of his time as we might tend to imagine.

[99] Like sovereignty for early modern theorists, ethics for Descartes is a work of unification, fortification, and consolidation in the face of divisive wars of contraries at loggerheads: wars of religion, civil wars, political corruption. Healing the wounds that rend and tear apart is therapeutic for body and mind. And therapy at the level of the self is the same as at the level of the state, as Diego Rossello has convincingly shown in Hobbes: "Hobbes and the Wolf-Man: Melancholy and Animality in Modern Sovereignty," *NLH*, vol. 43, n. 2 (Spring, 2012), pp. 255-279.

[100] Art. 203.

[101] This is one way to read the opening articles of Part One, which, I've said, present the mind-body distinction upon which the definition of the passions is then based, and which precede the articles that are of particular interest to a view of ethics as a group of self-constitution practices. An early article like 17, *Quelles sont les fonctions de l'âme*, is a case in point. There, Descartes states that what "belongs to" the soul are two sorts of *pensées* differentiated according to the action-passion, agent-patient, binary, the core conceptual ying and yang with which the treatise begins (art.1): "les unes sont les actions de l'âme, les

"nos volontés"—are first *defined* as directly in the soul's control, *before* we learn how passions affect the will, and how the soul can, as it were, reclaim what is its own—what is *our* own. Without this circularity, the self would be fragmented from the beginning. There would be no hope of assigning, within the human being, a locus of identity or sovereignty. There would be no self-identical self at all. There would be no one—but only many—who could say "I" over against forces that are both it and not it, itself and other. The doctrine of the unified soul and will is (pre)posed to stop short any Nietzschean shattering of the self. Then passions come along and threaten to do just that.

The dogmatic view allows art. 47 to dismiss representations of the soul promulgated by the *Anciens* and their epigones. Since they did not clearly distinguish between thinking and extended substances, for them the soul is interiorly divided. The passions are battles between the soul and itself. A divided soul is the site of constant war: a medieval or ancient segmented plurality of local powers with no hope of centralization. Such as a soul is not just the arena of, but actually torn between, different forces. It could not be self-identical, self-determining, or immaterial.[102] This view thus challenges the results of Cartesian reflexive philosophizing, the "technique de soi" given paradigmatic form in the *Meditations* and *Discours*. These texts compel us to view "ourselves" as thinking substances, self-identical to ourselves, indivisible, unified, self-determining, and free.[103] But if the immaterial soul is the *product* of Cartesian reflection and doubt, its emergence and autonomy (over time) relies on the *assumed* metaphysical distinction (a

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autres sont ses passions" (art. 17). "Pensées" that are "actions" of the soul are the modes of the will: "[elles] sont toutes nos volontés, à cause que nous expérimentons qu'elles viennent directement de notre âme et semblent ne dépendre que d'elle" (art. 17). On this view, the will is subject to the soul alone, without mediation, i.e., *directly*.

[102] For it would be divisible into parts.

[103] Cf. *Méditations*, AT IX, pp. 18, 23, 25-6, 68, etc.; *Principles*, I, art. 12.

priori) between thought and affect. It is this distinction that the question of the impassioned will puts into question.

Like a scientist working on the same "object" but in a new paradigm, Descartes attempts to redescribe "combats" *within* the soul as conflicts *between* the soul and the body: between the (plural) movements of the passions and the (singular) will of the soul. Rather than between the soul and itself,

> ce n'est qu'en la répugnance qui est entre les mouvements que le corps par ses esprits et l'âme par sa volonté tendent à exciter en même temps dans la glande que consistent tous les combats qu'on a coutume d'imaginer…[104]

Répugnance is intriguing in this context. A notion of purchase in the domain of logic, "répugnance" denotes the affection, we might say, of what is contrary to or contradicts rule, reason, law.[105] The experience of inner turmoil is described, then, as one in which we feel this contra-diction inside, a division between (*contra*) what the passions and what our soul tell us to do (*diction*). Like the Ancients, not understanding our duality, we tend to think we are divided against ourselves. The Cartesian soul is never self-contradicted. "Combats" arise between the will and the animal spirits, both striving to move the gland: "il arrive souvent que ces deux impulsions sont contraires, et que la plus forte empêche l'autre."[106] With the idea of "répugnance," contradiction is introduced, but only to be contained, pushed out towards the body, away from the self, the soul, and from the integrity of its will.[107]

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[104] Art. 47.

[105] E.g., *Le monde*, AT XI, pp. 36, 51; *Discours de la méthode*, AT VI, p. 38; *Méditations*, AT IX, pp. 52, 67, 72; and responses to the *Troisièmes objections* (AT IX, p. 148): "…il est dit icy que cela répugne, ou a de la contradiclion, auec ce qui a esté dit auparauant." Here, "ou" is conjunctive.

[106] Art. 47.

[107] Consolidation of the soul's power will also consist, then, in the triumph of the laws of traditional logic: the resolution of contradiction in the triumph of the soul, and the negation of the possibility for the soul itself to be two things, ignited by two passions, at once. The doctrine of the unity of the will is there in place to forbid the contradiction the passions put to reason, from becoming the reason of the soul's impassioned self-contradiction. See also art. 211 and, especially, art. 46, which depicts suspending assent

But articles 47 and 40 will challenge this dogmatism. The passions "font quelque effort [sur la volonté]," reads 47. Clearer still is 40, *Quel est le principal effet des passions*: "elles disposent l'âme à vouloir les choses auxquelles elles préparent le corps: en sorte que le sentiment de la peur l'incite à vouloir fuir." Article 41 might be read as an expression of Descartes's anxious realization that what article 40 describes is in contradiction with the entire preceding exposition of the soul-body distinction. In 41, Descartes simply *asserts*, again, the soul's sovereign (absolute) control over the determinations of the will: "[elles] sont absolument en son pouvoir." But this assurance is weak: the passions have blurred the distinction between the soul's different "pensées," actions and passions. Confused ideas that con-fuse binaries, passions perplex even Descartes.

He falls into his own *mise-en-abyme*: perhaps the battle was lost before it began. For, in its very concept, passion works on the will, giving it a particular inclination. On a close reading of the manner in which the passions' power over the will is described, one might say that they simply *are* determinations or willings (*volontés*) of *la volonté*. They are the passivity in its activity, a plurality contaminating its singularity. The very center core of the Cartesian self is inhabited by what is other, diverse, involuntary, material, irrational. "Dispose[r] l'âme à vouloir" is to move – even *to be* – the will itself. At that point, only dissent remains open to the soul as a possible escape route.[108] The soul's sovereignty is reduced, split up among different parties, the self now defined by civil war. The notion of a singular will or self (soul) loses its meaning, as the

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as the last resort when the soul is assailed by a storm of passion. As chapter 2 will show, against Descartes La Rochefoucauld will subvert traditional logic so as to think human existence and language as defined by the simultaneity of contraries.

[108] Indeed, the power to assent or dissent to the desires for action the passions ignite in our will returns in the text, and it is with it that art. 41 begins, after defining the passions in their power to move the will: "Mais la volonté est tellement libre de sa nature qu'elle ne peut jamais être contrainte" (art. 41). Note the dogmatic or purely apodictic nature of this phrase.

contrariety that Descartes wanted to set between soul and body comes to inhabit the former. Descartes's notion of "love" leads to similar conclusions.

L'amour epitomizes the Cartesian loss of identity and fracturing of the will. In philosophy, love had been a name groping after an ineffable experience of being divided and conjoined, alienated from oneself and absorbed by another, questioned as to the very boundaries, internal as much as external, of one's being. In Plato's *Banquet*, the myth of an originary androgynous unity traced the allegorical contours of the feeling, in love, of shaking free of the limits of our a-pathetic selves, in order to join—or to rejoin—a oneness, in which we used to be. Saint Paul and the great Petrarchan poets described this feeling too, as a death to oneself and rebirth in another. And Montaigne, in his essay on friendship, depicted this feeling as identity across difference, an interpenetration of two souls. I've suggested that Descartes's passions all have this self-alienating structure. Each are wills that the soul finds itself willing, fracturing it into a multiplicity of forces. Love exaggerates this general tendency, rendering it unmistakably legible.

Like its contrary, hate, *l'amour* is a "primary" passion for Descartes, along with *le désir*, *l'admiration*, *la joie*, and *la tristesse*. Article 79 defines it. The use of "volonté" is, again, of particular interest: "L'amour est une émotion de l'âme, causée par le mouvement des esprits, qui l'incite à se joindre de volonté aux objets qui paraissent lui être convenables." "Se joindre de volonté" is particularly hard to interpret. Does it mean, *to join voluntarily to something or someone else*? Or, does it mean, *to join one's will to someone else's*? And what would either of these mean?

Article 80—*Ce que c'est que se joindre ou séparer de volonté*—, seems to be there in anticipation of our confusion:

> Au reste, par le mot de volonté, je n'entends pas ici parler du désir, qui est une passion à part et se rapporte à l'avenir, mais du consentement par lequel on se considère dès à présent comme joint avec ce qu'on aime: en sorte qu'on imagine un tout, duquel on pense être seulement une partie, et que la chose aimée en est une autre.

Does this help us much? True, the presence of the term "consentement" seems to suggest that "de volonté" means: voluntarily. To be in love is to see oneself as a part of a larger whole, and to consent to this loss of autonomy.

To love, then, is to freely concede our free will; it is free subjection. But this, too, is rather problematic, and the depiction of love will bring further complications. Not only do we consider ourselves as a part of a whole of which the beloved is the other part, article 82 suggests we see ourselves as the lesser part. Indeed, we might even lose ourselves, our will, in the beloved—another and better version of ourself—, bringing Descartes's "amour" closer to that passion we moderns know well, a sort of schizophrenia, a pleasurable self-alienation. This loss of the atomic self and dissolution of the autonomous will characterizes the best sort of love, like that a "un bon père" feels for his children:

> les considérant comme d'autres soi-même, il recherche leur bien comme le sien propre, ou même avec plus de soin, pour ce que, se représentant que lui et eux font un tout, dont il n'est pas la meilleure partie, il préfère souvent leurs intérêts aux siens.[109]

This, Descartes tells us, is what all "gens d'honneur" feel for their friends. "Se joindre de volonté" means, then, to yoke the free and absolute, to join will with will, relinquishing the freedom of both. Love betrays that our will, rather than self-determined, is always joined with, moved by, the wills of persons significant to us. "Se joindre de volonté" is superior to its material correlate, "amour de concupiscence,"[110] in which it is not the will but the body of the beloved we seek to join with ours. But the love of souls, rather than the passion of bodies, is far more subversive to the Cartesian doctrine of the self-identical, unified self.

[109] Art. 82
[110] Art. 81.

The passions do not just challenge the soul's rule. Some can attain to such intensity that they threaten the integrity of the human being itself. Even the body can be overwhelmed. Alongside sadness and fear, desire and anger are most potent in this respect. They can arouse such ebullient, rowdy movements that *esprits* rush to the brain in such quantity and with such power that the normal conduit from there to the muscles is compromised: "[les esprits] ne peuvent être réglément conduits [du cerveau] dans les muscles."[111] *Tremblements* are the symptoms of an un-ruly, creaturely materiality.[112]

The chiasmus between body and soul in those terms used for both—"réglément" (according to the rule) and "régler" (to rule or regulate, to submit to a rule[113])—points to something peculiar about the passions, which helps to explain, I think, the ethical program for controlling them. Despite their being naturally instituted, the passions are potentially transgressive of rules, Nature's and the soul's. The soul's ethical task, as we will see in some detail, is not to replace chaos with rule, but rather to strengthen itself to the point that its jurisdiction replaces Nature's own.

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[111] Art. 118. That the body has its own rules is of course not surprising; all things that occur in nature occur "réglément," that is, according to one or more rules. Just as physics is the study of Nature's rules or laws in general, anatomy, as a branch of physics, can be thought of as the study of the rules that the body obeys, the constitutive rules of a body's development and functioning. Descartes studied both with great interest. So the term "réglément" is not surprising here; Nature is a domain under the jurisdiction of God's rules or laws; the body, a sub-domain under Nature's. But the fact that certain passions, themselves caused, intensified, and maintained by the body, can of themselves transgress these rules, is rather striking. Indeed, it is *anomalous*. How could the body, subject to Nature's laws, give rise to what infringes these laws? Aren't we supposed to assume that these rules are sovereign in their own, in God's, dominion, with only the human soul being capable of making departures from this legislation? And isn't the ethical, rather than the natural scientific, problem of the passions not so much merely to delineate the rule-bound mechanism of the passions, but precisely to submit these rules to the rule of the mind or soul?

[112] To be sure, *tremblements* are a minor detail for Descartes; they are merely one more example of the involuntary bodily motions or "exterior signs accompanying" the passions (art. 112). Yet the way that they escape even the natural teleology that is supposed to explain the origin and rules of the passions in general makes them a fascinating natural puncture in Nature's affect system or language. Caused when either "trop" or "trop peu" animal spirits are conducted from the mind through the nerves, *tremblements* are pure excess pursuing its disruptive (dys)function.

[113] For how the passions "réglent nos mœurs" by the desire they incite, and for ethics as a way of "régler" desires, see art. 143-144.

Involuntary trembling can be read as the cipher of the passions' potential to have excessive, chaotic power: over the soul, even over the body, itself shaken to pieces by movements of the blood and spirits that disrupt the fluid, automatic functioning of the *machine*. Trembling is an agitation, a stirring back-and-forth in micro-movements of irregular vibration. A hand that trembles doesn't know whether to go right or left; and whatever it does while stricken with *tremblements*, it does poorly. It doesn't work well.[114]

The soul's agitation in being torn by contrary passions is the psychological analogue of trembling. This state, when movements go in opposite directions, tugging the will both ways, characterizes "the weakest" sort of soul. Wretched are those souls that, not wielding "judgments" against the passions, have recourse to the more bodily technique of imagining things that tend to incite the passion contrary to the one that one seeks to suppress.[115] But weakest are those who are complacently powerless against their feelings. Their will is carried away in the battle of the passions:

> Et les âmes les plus faibles de toutes sont celles dont la volonté ne se détermine point ainsi à suivre certains jugements [fermes et déterminés touchant la connaissance du bien et du mal], mais se laisse continuellement emporter aux passions présentes, lesquelles, étant souvent contraires les unes aux autres, la tirent tour à tour à leur parti, et, l'employant à combattre contre elle-même, mettent l'âme au plus déplorable état qu'elle puisse être. Ainsi lorsque la peur représente la mort comme un mal extrême, et qui ne peut être évité que par la fuite, si l'ambition d'autre côté représente l'infamie de cette fuite comme un mal pire que la mort, ces deux passions agitent diversement la volonté,

[114] As should be clear by now, I have largely avoided a reading of the *Passsions* that would focus on how Descartes's ethics could be the correlate of external, repressive and bourgeois models of statehood, selfhood, and labor. On this reading, self-control or regulation would be our voluntary carrying out of 'external' norms or models of power and control: our becoming good servants of the state by our dealing with "our problems" so as to be able to work better and not complain. Governing our passions would, on this reading, be akin to becoming an indentured servant of (capitalist) society.

[115] I return to these strategies or techniques of battling the passions below. The second way, which passes by the imagination, is more "bodily" because Descartes's "imagination" is corporeal: the "ideas" it allows the mind to perceive are "corporeal ideas" (cf. *Regulae*, Rule XII): deposits of sensations, representing *choses* in the world.

> laquelle, obéissant tantôt à l'une, tantôt à l'autre, s'oppose continuellement à soi-même, et ainsi rend l'âme esclave et malheureuse.[116]

Here, in the degree zero of power, we find the negative limit of Descartes's ethics: self-slavery. The "slave" (or "enslaved") soul is utterly passive and subject (*sujectus*), a mere plaything of the passions. Since the will of the soul is here divided against itself, the weakest soul has properly speaking no will at all. A self with no unity, this soul is a country without a ruler, plunged into that chaos of marauding tribes, whose logical and ethical cipher is contrariety or contradiction.

Split and divided, this "esclave" is not really a Cartesian soul at all: the negative limit of Descartes's ethics is a departure from his philosophy. At the farthest remove from a free, self-determined will, and a unified, self-transparent and -identical self, there pulses an unformed, unregulated mass of conflicting forces, each competing for domination within a self that is nothing more, now, than combats between passions. The excluded other of Descartes's unified soul is a dark, unruly place from which the natural light of reason has not yet divided day from night. It is the Hobbesian state of Nature, which some affect theory would define as our natural state.[117]

From within and against the constant risk of falling back into this dark place, the soul strives to emancipate itself, through work and practice. It must win its power and keep it, against its body and nature—against the nature of its body, which threatens to dissolve the soul into corporeality and the unified, rational will into a disorderly plurality. In other words, Descartes's ethics, his last project, functions precisely to assure that his earlier, descriptive philosophy—his conception of the self and of the soul's relation to the body—is not undermined.[118]

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[116] Art.48.

[117] For an example of a philosophical attempt to form, and master, a vocabulary for describing this state—of not the individual but the *dividual*—, see Massumi, *The Power at The End of the Economy.*

[118] In an important sense, that is, Descartes's ethics and directives for the soul's self-training are not only to develop the independence and power of the will. Coming at the end of his life, after the mature

Some of the main problems he faced, problems inhering in his own understanding of the "substance éthique" of the *Passions*, have been described. I will now turn to the "travail éthique," the sort of practices or techniques of self-transformation Descartes prescribed as "remèdes" against the excessive force of the passions.

Se dresser soi-même: Self-Discipline and Self-Practice

Althusser keenly perceived the *autobiographical* relation between the two "subjects" in the *Passions*, one, of error and affect, the other, of truth and science: "le sujet de l'erreur pouvant se convertir en sujet d'objectivité."[119] But he did not consider how this "conversion"—or "self-converting"—was possible *according to Descartes*, that is, what types of "ethical labor," what exercises, corporeal and mental, assured the movement along the route from passion to power, passivity to action, self-subjection to sovereignty, within the Cartesian care of the self. Nor, then, did Althusser question the role that writing, as medium of theory and idealism, played here, both *in* the "techniques de soi" and *as* the means of conceiving the sovereign self, their *telos*. Althusser assumed what he called "se convertir" to be a mere presupposition in Descartes, an idea with no bodily-material correlate, mediation, or temporality.[120]

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expressions of Cartesian philosophy, his ethics strives to prove the dualism he already described. The legality of the soul, if it can work to gain and maintain power over the passions, will not only exercise but demonstrate the soul's freedom from and power over the body, the lynchpin and perpetual point of contention in Descartes's philosophy. A soul that can voluntarily work towoards sovereignty would prove its in-submission to the passions and to the body. Contrariwise, a failure of this ethical program would imply the contrary, tipping the scales in favor of passion, rather than reason—if this term still has any meaning at all—, as the fundamental and defining power of a self whose identity and unity would be rather problematic to define.

[119] "Psychanalyse et psychologie," p. 112.

[120] And this despite Althusser's own invocation of the autobiographical, which would put us on the route towards the material dimension of self-conversion and towards a problem to which I can only gesture in this chapter: the role of literacy (of writing and reading as material-medial practices) in theorizing and imagining the sovereign self that we set as our guiding norm. In other words, Althusser's observation that there is an autobio-*graphical* relation between the subject of the passions and the sovereign soul, can also be taken as a clue for the role played by writing in the constitution of the sovereign subject. The latter is a

We can imagine why. Rather than reading the *Passions* as situated in a time hungry for how-to knowledge of all sorts, in which spiritual and worldly "practical texts"[121] proliferated,[122] promulgating their subtending assumption of a self that was malleable in both body and mind, Althusser read Descartes off as the pure idealist of historical-philosophical mythology. Just so, Foucault missed the central role, in Cartesian philosophy, of practices of self-critique directed at prejudices and passions.[123] Only thus could he exclude Descartes from the "spiritual" paradigm

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written and writing self: one achieved through literacy—since the practices of science develop the mind and arm the soul with judgments and a penetrating, objective vision—and imagined in writing—in written self-reflection as in the *Meditations*, or in the *Passions*, since the sovereign self has only a scriptural existence.

[121] In Foucault's sense, invoked above: see note 40, *supra*.

[122] On the flourishing of *traités de civilité* in Descartes's time, see Maurice Magendie, *La politesse mondaine et les théories de l'honnêteté, en France, au XVIIe siècle, de 1600 à 1660*, 2 vols. (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1925), vol. 1, pp. 150 ff, pp. 339-385, and the bibliography from volume 1, pp. ix-xv. Magendie writes of the first half of the 17th century as "une génération qui a le désir de se perfectionner," with even literary production taking on something of the practical manual form: "La plupart des grands romans de cette époque sont, en somme, de vastes manuels de savoir-vivre" (p. 165); see also Jacques Revel, "Les usages de la civilité," in *Histoire de la vie privée: 3. De la Renaissance aux Lumières*, ed. R. Chartier (Paris: Seuil, 1999), pp. 167-208. On the widespread drive, in the first half of the 17th century, to hone scientific-mathematical and philosophical practices in view of cultivating mental (spiritual) and ethical nobility—with Descartes being accorded a key, even paradigmatic role in this story—, see Matthew Jones, *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution*: "Early-seventeenth-century western European culture was awash in possibilities, new and old, for simultaneously reforming one's self and one's knowledge" (p. 6).

[123] Mastering passions, which in part consists in the replacement of rhetoric—the way passions color and exaggerate things and their qualities, giving them values and overstating these—with understanding and truth—judgments, at best true ones, grounded in prior truths and ultimately indubitable first principles or causes—, is the ethical progress at stake in Descartes's *Passions*. But this self-directed critique is not unique to the treatise; it is a goal of his philosophy in general. This is what Foucault overlooked, when he set Descartes at the outset of a new paradigm in which truth was no longer conditioned on prior self-transforming work by which the subject changes itself in its very being. But—from the *Discours*, to the *Meditations*, through the *Principles* and the unfinished *Recherche de la vérité*—overcoming deep-seated "préjugés" is the sine qua non of grasping, and remaining under the sign of, the truth. This is clear in the famous exercise of radical doubt, to take an example Foucault himself knew all too well (it was the subject of his famous debate with Derrida). But also in the *Principles*: there, Descartes writes of "reforming" our prejudices, that is, of "freeing ourselves" from ones passively inculcated in us from without, especially as children (I, art. 47). It would not be difficult to argue that the prejudices are, diachronically as it were, what the passions are synchronically. Both have a similar epistemic structure, if different temporal axes. Passions are prejudices that arise at a given moment, and prejudices are long-seated passions, which have become habitually engrained modes of thought through repetition and sedimentation. Saying that the color red is in the apparently red object is just as erroneous, and oddly hard-wired, as holding a beautiful body as a great and desirable good in itself, while it is only the generous pallet of desire that paints it so.

of truth and subjectivity relations, construing "le 'moment Cartésien'" as a rupture: as the emergence of a subject whose access to truth was no longer contingent on ethical work.[124] Despite their emphasis on replacing subjectivism with historical-materialist studies of subject-constitution, Foucault and Althusser perpetuate the *idée reçue* whereby Descartes equals *cogito*, and the *cogito* is given or assumed, not produced.

This oversight is particularly egregious for the *Passions*, which contains obvious descriptions of self-transformational, -constituting practices. Taking Descartes's idealism too seriously overlooks these "remedies" against the passions, and how they already undermine the very difference between a bodily subject of passion and the soul qua subject of knowledge. That is, in the techniques by which we strive to assure the sovereignty of the (one) soul over the (multiple) movements of the passions, we enter a zone of indiscernability between materiality

[124] See Foucault's 1983 interview, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 229-252 (251-2 on Descartes). "[A]sceticism and access to truth are always more or less obscurely linked," says Foucault there. The link is broken in the 17th century, and this breaking point has a name. "Descartes," Foucault continues, "broke with this when he said, 'To accede to truth it suffices that I be *any* subject which can see what is evident.' Evidence is substituted for ascesis… The relationship to the self no longer needs to be ascetic to get into relation to the truth. […] Before Descartes, one could not be impure, immoral, and know the truth. With Descartes, direct evidence is enough. After Descartes we have a nonascetic subject of knowledge" (p. 252). Compare to this unequivocal position on Descartes, what Foucault says about him in *L'Herméneutique du sujet.* There, during the first lecture of the course, Foucault formulated a more complex, more qualified position on Descartes's place in the historical trajectory of the long interrelation, and then modern separation, of askesis and knowledge, of practices of the self and the search for the truth (course January 6, 1982; pp.15-20, 27-8). Foucault seems to be a bit unsure about his position on Descartes, using the term "'moment cartésien'" to name a rupture, while cautioning that it be used "avec tout un tas de guillemets" (p. 15). For other references to Descartes, see course Feb. 3, 1982, pp. 182-4 (On Descartes, Aristotle, and Kant); pp. 281 (on the opposition between "l'exercice spirituel" and the "la méthode intellectuelle" of which Descartes's method is the paradigm); p. 296 (on Descartes, along with Spinoza and Pascal, as exemplary of how "le savoir de connaissance a finalement entièrement recouvert le savoir de spiritualité"); and, especially, compare Foucault's take on the *Meditations*, as it changes between the March 3rd (pp. 339-341) and the March 24th (pp. 441-442) lectures. No more than in Foucault's *Herméneutique du sujet* is Descartes a clearly-defined figure in Hadot's account of the history of philosophy as a battle between (ancient) philosophy as a way of life and (modern philosophy) as systematic, theoretical thought, with no considerable existential ambitions. Cf. "Exercises spirituels," in *Exercises spirituels et philosophie antique*, pp. 71-72 (on modern philosophy as abstract systematics); *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, pp. 98-99; *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, pp. 395-399; "Un dialogue interrompu avec Michel Foucault: Convergences et divergences," in *Exercises spirituels*, p. 311.

and mind, body and soul, humanist idealism and antihumanist materialism. Cartesian variants of self-labor all involve materiality and corporeality. Further, splitting the self into passive matter and active "travail éthique," they construe us as non-identical to ourselves. We are, at our own hands, always becoming who we strive to be. The self is always emergent, rather than given or fixed. This is hardly the sort of self we think of when Descartes comes to mind.

In the *Passions*, the main prescriptions for ethical work appear in the articles that conclude each of the book's three parts. In these articles, having laid out his scientific descriptions of the passions, Descartes returns again and again to an optimist ethics, prescribing "remedies" and asserting their efficacy.[125] For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on article 50, the end of Part One. In the model of training animals—hunting dogs, in particular—, we find a heroic, and wonderfully vague, vision of self-training or *dressage* as a means of self-sovereignty. Such self-habituation, I'll explain, entails undoing Nature's "institution" of the passions, remaking it according to our own ends. Spinoza took article 50—which implicitly contains some of the most un-Cartesian, materialist aspects of the *Passions*, with humans figured as animals and ethics as animal training—as exemplary of Descartes's whimsically idealist ethics, its hubristic ambitions, and its anthropocentrism.[126] This divergence in interpretation

[125] Though I cannot fully explore such considerations here, it is important to grasp one structural aspect of the *Passions*, as concerns the division between the more prescriptive, ethical articles, and the descriptive, scientific ones. The text is divided into three parts. After much time in a descriptive mode—typology and physiology of the passions, the movements of the blood and animal spirits characteristic of each, the origins, in the history of the body, of the link between each passion and each particular type of bodily movements, etc.—, each part concludes with recognizably ethical concerns. On my reading, the culminating articles in Part Two provide new versions of themes instantiated in the articles that, in Part One, describe the power struggle between the soul and the passions, and introduce the possibility of the soul's "absolute empire" over them. The end of Part Three does more or less the same thing, save for the final article of the treatise, which steps outside of the scheme. Descartes's book, we might say, is laid out in layers, each introducing new complexities or variations on the same thing or theme. Or perhaps better: each layer renders explicit what was only implicit in earlier articles, filling in broad contours, adding color and tone. This is at least one way of thinking of how "connaissance" appears explicitly as a factor in self-governance in Part Two, after being only intimated schematically in the heroic end of Part One.

[126] *Ethics*, III Preface and V Preface.

stems from the tensions, in article 50, between content and mode of presentation or style, meaning and figure or example.

The heading of article 50 reads: *Qu'il n'y a point d'âme si faible qu'elle ne puisse, étant bien conduite, acquérir un pouvoir absolu sur ses passions*. Like the Prince, a political role for which pedagogical treatises proliferated in the Early Modern period,[127] the soul needs to be instructed or "conducted" well in order to rule well. *Étant bien conduit(e)*, the soul or Prince's goal —"pouvoir absolu" over ("sur") its subjects— is not out of reach. But good governance is not a given; it must be learned. Ethics is self-directed pedagogy, and, like the science of rulership for the Prince, it is mediated by specialist discourses (by texts) demanding to be both studied and practiced. These might be manuals or handbooks, written by those who know and who mediate certain bodies of knowledge: politics and strategy, physiology and ethics.

To be well instructed or led is to dispose of the right knowledge, first of all, and then to be able to apply it to, or on, oneself qua "ethical substance." The first engages the mind or understanding (*entendement*), the second, the disposition of the will (*volonté*) insofar as it must commit to doing what it knows. In other words, *virtue*, as Descartes defines it in the *Passions*, is required in order to develop in this self-referential sort of way.[128] The princely soul cannot

[127] To cite a few examples: Machiavelli, *Il Principe* (Florence: Blado, 1532); Bodin, *Les six livres de la République* (Paris: Du Puy, 1576); Lispius, *Politicorum sive Civilis doctrinae libri sex* (1589); Jean Héroard, *De l'institution du* prince (Paris: J. Jannon, 1609); Nicolas Faret, *Des vertus nécessaires à un prince pour bien gouverner ses sujets* (Paris: Du Bray, 1623); Philippe de Béthune, *Le conseiller d'état* (Paris: Richer, 1632).

[128] This is an internal or immanent argument, recognizing Descartes's understanding of virtue, the disposition and passion of which is called *générosité*, and seeing how it is implied, necessitated, for ethics as both a discourse and a practice to even be possible. Virtue involves the recognition of one's will and of its freedom, and the constant disposition of one's free will to do what one *judges* best. This is "following" virtue (see art. 153: *générosité* is the habit or disposition, and its corresponding affect, of being virtuous). What this means is that, as in Plato, in Descartes ethics is bound up with knowledge; vices are lacks of knowledge and of good will, that is, of the proper use of one's will, and misrecognition of its freedom (see art. 159, *De l'humilité vicieuse*, which is essentially a theory of Sartre's "bad faith" *avant la lettre*: one acts "comme si on n'avait pas l'usage entier de son libre arbire"). This is why, as we will see, while it

simply have read the literature on being a good ruler. It must body it forth, become the body of the word, the flesh of the letter.

We saw in article 48 that a soul's weakness is measured, negatively, by the distance separating it from sovereignty over the passions. Some show great negative magnitude or magnanimity, in their total servitude. In 50, however, all souls are endowed with positivity as potentiality: *il n'y a point d'âme si faible…* None lack the potential for absolute power, for in none is the lack of power an immutable given. That is, this power is not dependent on Nature, but on culture and self-cultivation.

This is the message of Descartes's pairing a markedly aristocratic label for the Cartesian *ur*-virtue, *générosité*[129]—which, in Corneille, for example, is charged with naming those aristocratic qualities linked to bloodline, glory, and family honor; i.e., to everything that is inborn and transmissible only by heredity[130]—, with the totally anti-aristocratic, modern, and, we might

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suffices to direct one's will according to judgments in order to be virtuous, it is much better to base one's actions on *true* judgments.

[129] It is the ur-virtue because it is that from which the others flow. Pascale D'Arcy glosses the term *générosité* without noting the way in which Descartes is not so much re-defining *it*—it still names the quality or condition of the great soul—but its conditions of possibility, giving them over from nature to culture, from breeding to education. D'Arcy writes: "Le latin *generosus* désigne celui qui, homme ou animal, est de bonne race. Le généreux est donc d'abord celui qui est de race noble et, au sens figuré ou moral, celui qui fait preuve de grandeur d'âme" (*Passions*, p. 195). On the aristocratic virtue of generosity in the *Passions*, see Hammacher, xx.. He insists we understand Descartes's générosité "als aristokratische Variante der Großmut ('magnanimité'), welche die Antike bereits gepriesen hatte."

[130] Comparisons between Corneille's aristocratic tragedies and Descartes *Passions* abound, having become a *lieu commun* of literary history in the 19th century, with even an eminent philosopher like Ernst Cassirer chiming in. To be sure, the heroic, aristocratic element in Descartes's *Passions* in general, and, quite obviously, in *générosité* in particular, is of such importance that comparisons with his contemporary are not totally unfounded. However, I think I'm right in bringing to light a difference that is not superficial but essential, in Descartes's anthropotechnic (Sloterdijk) view of virtue, which is, inherently at least, rather anti-aristocratic. The classic Descartes-Corneille comparison is Gustave Lanson's "Le héros cornélien et le 'généreux' selon Descartes," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, no. 4 (1894), pp. 397-411. See also, Magendie, *La politesse* mondaine, vol. 2, pp. 791-804; Negri, *Political Descartes*, pp. 144-46; Cassirer, "Descartes und Corneille," in *Descartes: Lehre — Persönlichkeit — Wirkung*, pp. 50 ff; ; Charles Taylor, "Descartes's Disengaged Reason," in *Sources of the* Self (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 155. On the history of the Descartes-Corneille comparison, see Dinah Ribard, "Histoire littéraire et histoire: le parallèle Corneille-Descartes (1765-1948)," *Dix-septième siècle*, 2004/4

say, Enlightenment notion that dispositions like *générosité* can be learned or acculturated via education.[131] We'll see later how Molière will poke fun at the (bourgeois) conviction that nobility might be purchased, learned, practiced, or cultivated by anyone at all.[132] Descartes's ethics as an *anthropotechnics*,[133] a sort of sophism (in the ancient sense) of magnanimity, is expressive of his being at the antipodes of a more fatalist, pessimist vision of the irremediable, the fixed, the engrained and immutable, whether vitiated or not. In this, he intersects with *le monde*, in its conviction that domains of sociability or *civilité* were arts, and that the beauty of one's social existence is something one cultivates like draughtsmanship or fencing.

As article 50 shows, ethical work in Descartes consists in self-training in view of sedimenting certain habits (*habitudes*).[134] What he has in mind is precisely what "exercer" meant, according to Furetière:

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n° 225, pp. 577-583. Negri (*Political Descartes*) would be a good place to begin to theoretically and historically characterize the cohabitation of aristocratic and bourgeois elements in Descartes.

[131] See art. 161, *Comment la générosité peut être acquise.*

[132] On the French genealogy of the bourgeois conception—one opposed to the aristocratic concept of bloodline and *naissance*—of the possibility of educating, that is, acculturating, virtue, civility, grandeur, and magnanimity or nobility in the 16th and 17th century, see the section, "Privilèges aristocratiques: l'innée contre l'acquis," from Jacques Revel's chapter, "Les usages de la civilité," in *Histoire de la vie privée*, pp. 192 ff. On Descartes and the modern bourgeois project, see Negri, *The Political Descartes*. The translators concisely gloss one of Negri's main points; it is one that resonates, and yet particularizes, Balibar's claims regarding the "myth of the 'Cartesian subject'" and the inherence of political subjecthood in what will come to be considered philosophical subjectivity: "Negri suggests," the translators write, "that the primary form of political subjectivity at stake [in Descartes] is not that of a formal subject of modernity, *but the political subjectivity of the bourgeoisie*" (p. 21). Like Balibar, it is against Heidegger's Descartes, that is, against the (anti-)hero of "the Heideggerian epic of the metaphysics of modern subjectivity," that Negri's historical-materialist political ontology of Descartes's thought sets itself (pp. 18-19). See note 45, *supra*.

[133] Peter Sloterdijk, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009). Sloterdijk follows Foucault (and, ultimately, Nietzsche) in re-conceiving ethical value-systems, religious beliefs, and concepts of subjectivity in general as, at the most basic level, grounded in sets of different self-forming material-cultural *practices*. Sloterdijk uses the term "anthropotechnic" to refer to such auto-plastic activities. What Foucault called an "ascétique," then, Sloterdijk terms an *anthropotechnics*.

[134] Habits in which consist what one calls the virtues, as Descartes will at one point say: "ce qu'on nomme communément des vertus sont des habitudes en l'âme qui la disposent à certaines pensées, en sorte qu'elles sont différentes de ces pensées, mais qu'elles les peuvent produire, et réciproquement être produites par elles" (art. 161, *En quoi la générosité peut être acquise*). Habits are thought patterns, trained ways of thinking, feeling, and disposing of oneself. The underlying supposition, essential for Descartes's

> Faire prendre à quelqu'un une habitude pour le faire bien réussir à quelque chose. On *exerce* les chevaux à la course; les hommes à l'escrime, à la lutte, à la danse, etc. Il s'*exerce* au travail, à souffrir le froid et le chaud, il s'y endurcit. S'*exercer* à la chasse.[135]

Besides containing the apparently unproblematic slippage from transitivity to reflexivity, which indicates the tendency of "techniques de soi" to split the self in two—the "quelqu'un" on whom I act is none other than myself; I train myself "in hunting" like I train "men in fencing"—, the definition points to something essential to Descartes's depiction of self-directed ethical exercise in article 50: the intersection of animality and humanity in the shared quality of being trainable. Indeed, self-directed training ("s'exercer") appears conceived on the model of the training or disciplining of others, humans or animals. We find this in Descartes's article, too.

In article 50, "habitude" is opposed to nature's institutions—the natural status quo, the given. And the process of habituation, what we might call *culture*, *pedagogy* or—by nominalizing the term Descartes uses in art. 50—*dressage* ("dresser"), or rearing, of oneself, should be set in opposition to the agency of Nature and God.[136] It is godly to be able to remake oneself. But it is not solely in the power of the godly part of the human, the soul, to bring this about. A detour via the body is necessary in order to gain control over what pertains to the soul or, rather, to the soul in its union with the body. Descartes's ethical labor thematizes the essential

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ethics, is that repetition becomes second-nature, the doing of something over and over sedimenting into something like an automatism, like muscle memory or learning to speak a foreign language. No doubt this central notion of *habitude* and *habituation* is why Hammacher likened Descartes's ethics to the Ancients' (in particular to Aristotle's), when he called it an *Einübungsethik* or ethics of practice, with virtues being practiced, inculcated habits or dispositions (Hammacher, xxi). Jones (*The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution*, p. 32) also correctly perceived the essential role that the concept of *habit* plays in the *Passions,* of providing a transition between artifice or repetition and nature or authenticity, a transition that is also supposed to move between exteriority or corporeality and interiority or spirituality: "the scholastic notion of habit offered a model for understanding how repetition of external acts could produce internal dispositions and skills for producing such acts."

[135] First entry for "exercer," in Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*.

[136] It is in disposing of oneself freely, and in view of certain self-set aims that one is in a sense like God; this is no less true here in the case of self-transformation via techniques of the self, than it is on a more mundane level in the case of using the will to make decisions, that is, to determine oneself without being determined by anything.

mediation of materiality, of the body and of bodies, in what should, as "absolute," occupy the opposite, purer pole: thought, meaning, the soul's development, knowledge, freedom. In this he points to the abstract nature of these things, and of the soul in particular. It emerges as an entity of mental and, I will try to suggest, scriptural ontology. The soul is an idea or word. *The soul is a written word*.

Article 50 begins by recalling nature's institution of the passions: "dès le commencement de notre vie," "par la nature," there is joined to each particular movement of the gland (hence of the animal spirits that cause such movements) a *pensée*, for example, a particular passion, or, on the more active side of things, a will to do something. Article 44 offers an example. The soul cannot just will the pupil to dilate; it has to achieve this indirectly, using the body to bring about something else. It is the will to see something distant that directs the eyes there and moves the gland in such a way as to change the size of the pupil to perceive the thing. "[L]a nature n'a pas joint" the alteration of the pupil with the simple will to do so. We have to obey Her laws here.

The technique of "indirect" control over the passions, the strategy of weak, but not the weakest souls,[137] is just the same: fearful, we can counteract this passion not by willing ourselves to be courageous and brave, but by imagining things that usually arouse the contrary passions of courage and bravery. This act of imagined perception will ideally move the animal spirits and gland in such a way as to arouse the passion we seek to awaken in us, so as to quell the one we seek to exorcize.[138] We fight contraries against one another, and we do so only through the body and bodies. We must hallucinate—imagine—an object of perception in order to bring about a corresponding passion. And no matter how we proceed, our passions have a material, corporeal foundation.

[137] Art. 48.
[138] See art. 45, *Quel est le pouvoir de l'âme au regard de ses passions*.

So far, we are just playing within the rules set for us by Nature. It is only because most people remain at this modest, still servile level that Descartes can, without contradiction, explain "la raison qui empêche que l'âme ne puisse entièrement disposer de ses passions" (art. 46), followed, a few pages later, by article 50, which assures us that "un pouvoir absolu" is within reach of all souls. The contradiction resolves itself in a series of associated concepts: training (*dresser*), conduct (*conduire*), regulating (*régler*), and habit (*habitude*), which move between the actual (art. 46) and the potential (art. 50). According to Descartes's comparison with language, to which I return below, the passions make up a natural signifying system—a language—to which we, as the union of soul *and* body, are subject as embodied beings. By nature, *this* (perception and animal movement) means *good* (passion or movement of the will); *that* (movement) signifies *bad* (passion). We can either speak Nature's language (art. 46) or try to institute our own (art. 50).

Self-sovereignty is possible by art and "industrie": we might "acquérir un empire très absolu sur toutes [nos] passions si on employait assez d'industrie à les dresser et à les conduire,"[139] Before addressing Cartesian self-*dressage*, we would do well to distinguish it from the acquisition of the soul's "armes propres," mentioned above: true "jugements fermes et déterminés touchant la connaissance du bien et du mal" by which one can *combattre* the passions.[140] These *armes*, I will argue, become items in the soul's arsenal via philosophical and scientific study, another sort of practice, under which we might subsume the very reading, let alone the writing, of a book like Descartes's *Passions*. Though study and training might

[139] Notice the reappearance of the term "conduire" here, at the end of article 50—in its body—, having appeared in the article's heading. Being well conducted means learning to conduct one's passions as "ethical substance." One relation is assimilated to the other: we are to our passions, directing them wisely, as the pedagogue, the philosopher, was to us. *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*…
[140] Art. 48.

intersect, as Spinoza seemed to think they do,[141] they are distinct, the latter being a topic of the *Passions*, the former, something implied.

"Dresser" in article 50 is taken in the sense of training animals. Descartes must have found the term appropriate here, where it is used with respect to training that part of ourselves that we share with the animals: bodies. *Dresser* as habituation entails the undoing of the natural *liaisons*, in the brain (*cerveau*), between each movement of the animal spirits (of the gland) and movements undergirding each passion. We are to train ourselves into having new connections between the two series: "on les peut toutefois joinder à d'autres par habitude." Habit would be a new, second nature, substituted for the first through the effort of minds and bodies on themselves.

Descartes is not very elaborate as to how exactly we can inculcate those habits meant to replace Nature's institutions. What seems to preoccupy him in article 50 is not the *how*, as it were, but rather the *that*: that what he is talking about exists. His is a (rhetorical) goal: to convince his reader of the mere fact that such institutions of second nature do in fact come about, and *thus*, that they must be possible to bring about willfully. If they *occur* in life, *then* they are possible for us: this is the thinking here, a sort of hypothetical syllogism based on a missing premise that is assumed, not stated: *if x* (*and given y*), *then z.* Not only do re-institutions occur, they do so without—*even* without—our will. According to this logic, which explicitly (in the case of animal training) and implicitly (in that of the rancid meat [see below]) guides article 50, the feasibility of something for humans is established if it occurs in animals or more or less involuntarily in men; if, simply put, it happens *naturally*, without the intervention of a will, hence without any soul, a passive condition in which animality and humanity intersect. If it can be brought about by blind necessity, *then* it must be possible for the perspicacious soul.

[141] *Ethics*, V. Preface. p. 161.

Before that of training dogs, Descartes cites an example of involuntary occurrence in humans. That we can join movements to other movements, and that we can inculcate the habit of this new liaison faster than one might imagine, is proven, he thinks, by sudden disgust.[142] A meat lover enjoys eating steak and desires to eat one he sees. But say lady fortune puts some maggots in the center of a big juicy sirloin: without the person's having done anything at all—save for being the victim of this singular misfortune—in the future, having recovered from the trauma of biting into the nasty center of something thought to be good, even the mere thought of steak will produce the movements of blood and animal spirits typical, not of pleasure, but of horror and aversion. In an instant, the habit of associating steak with horror is acquired. This is meant to substantiate the claim that, in self-directed training, the "habitude" we seek to inculcate "peut être aquise par une seule action et ne requiert point un long usage."

Why Descartes thinks this illuminates the *conscious, willful technique* of associating movements of perception with new and different movements of the passions, is rather mysterious. Given the Aristotelian passion-action scheme on which the whole treatise turns, it is striking that he offers this horrid, unfortunate event as an "action"—is it not *par excellence* something passively endured?—, and, further, that he suggests we can understand the "habitudes" he thinks we can work to instill in ourselves on the model of trauma-induced aversion. Is it not precisely the short-circuiting of the will, the shock, which brings about the change in association with such force and rapidity? The "viande" example is infelicitous: it shows that the natural sign system of the passions can be reworked, but not that re-instituting can be done by human will. On the contrary, we here imagine some sort of lab experiment, with rats

[142] "Ainsi, lorsqu'on rencontre inopinément quelque chose de fort sale en une viande qu'on mange avec appétit, la surprise de cette rencontre peut tellement changer la disposition du cerveau qu'on ne pourra plus voir par après de telle viande qu'avec horreur, au lieu qu'on la mangeait auparavant avec plaisir" (art. 50).

being shocked from they know not where, when they run forward to nibble at a bit of food placed before their noses.

It is no mere coincidence, then, that it is in the direction of conditioning or training of animals—*dressage*—that Descartes turns after the *viande* example. What is different here is that, now, it is not fortune or Nature that is responsible for transformation, but we ourselves. We are to be that force that acts on ourselves to bring about something new and transformed. We are to be both nature and its object; both the forming force and the patient matter; the dog and its master.

To recall, for Descartes animals don't have passions *per se*; they don't have souls or reason.[143] But they have the same *mouvements* of the *animal* spirits subtending the passions. Animals cannot even be said to "act on" their impulses; they *are* their impulses in Descartes's mechanist world. But even here there is the possibility, through training, of disconnecting perception from reaction, as shown in hunting dogs:

> Ainsi, lorsqu'un chien voit une perdrix, il est naturellement porté à courir vers elle et, lorsqu'il oit tirer un fusil, ce bruit l'incite naturellement à s'enfuir; mais néanmoins on dresse ordinairement les chiens couchants en telle sorte que la vue d'une perdrix fait qu'ils s'arrêtent et qui le bruit qu'ils oient après, lorsqu'on tire sur elle, fait qu'ils y accourent. Or, ces choses sont utiles à savoir pour donner le courage à un chacun d'étudier à régler ses passions. Car, puisqu'on peut avec un peu d'industrie changer les mouvements du cerveau dans les animaux dépourvus de raison, il est évident qu'on le peut encore mieux dans les hommes; et que ceux même qui ont les plus faibles âmes pourraient acquérir un empire très absolu sur toutes leurs passions si on employait assez d'industrie à les dresser et à les conduire.

How exactly are we to train ourselves in the manner of beasts? It's not clear. But the fact that it is possible in them should have an *affective* impact on our relation to ourselves, and our striving for self-transformation and -sovereignty. It should promote our *courage* to study (*étudier*) how to regulate (*régler*), to tame and train, our passions like wild dogs. If the idea is clear enough—we

[143] See note 66, *supra*.

can change the brains of animals, can't we change our own?—the ugly specter of physical pain or psychic shock, the unspoken agent of training as culture, cannot be exorcized from Descartes's examples. How is the dog taught to stay if not through giving it a good beating or stern tug on the leash? How do you "learn" to abhor meat, except by chancing upon a disgusting steak? Evidence from the animal world is only entirely effective *for us* if we treat ourselves entirely like "animaux dépourvus de raison," mere bodies to be administered from without, not governed rationally from within. Self-training is more like discipline and punish.

Descartes's materialist, disciplinary understanding of acculturation expresses a deep-seated, traditional anthropological myth concerning the passage from animal to human, nature to culture. The term *culture* (Lat. *cultura*) points to this. The word "agricultural" denotes the cultivating or tilling of land, the transformation of something given, raw, formless, and natural into something rationalized and instilled with mind, now of human import, use, form, function.[144]

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[144] See "Culture" in *Trésor de la langue française* (online: atifl.atifl.fr). Accessed May 28, 2015. The figurative sense of culture, i.e. as applied to humans, is given as: "Fructification des dons naturels permettant à l'homme de s'élever au-dessus de sa condition initiale et d'accéder individuellement ou collectivement à un état supérieur." This sense only dates from the mid-16th century in French vernacular. Note the use of metaphors of culture from agriculture—*fructification*, *dons naturels*—inhering in the very definition by which the term is supposed to move from a literal, agricultural to a more figural, anthropological sense. The equivocity of such terms—*culture*, *exercise*, *training*, *practice*—is precisely what characterizes them, and allows them to be useful in designating something about whose ontological status we are unsure: ourselves, in the particular sort of mutability that pertains to us humans as opposed to plants, on the one hand, and incorporeal spirits, on the other. Foucault never explicitly addressed this equivocity, which, to be sure, perhaps finds its root in the ambiguous notion of human as opposed to what we would consider "mere" or "bare" biological *life*. For a crucial example, and explicit, even pedagogical indication, of the equivocity of the term *exercise*, see the definition Loyola provided for "spiritual exercise" in his immensely popular *Spiritual Exercises* (1548), which I here cite in the French translation: "Par le mot même d'exercices spirituels on comprend toute façon d'examiner sa propre conscience, et aussi de méditer, de contempler, de prier mentalement et vocalement, et enfin de mener toutes autres activités spirituelles, comme on le dira par la suite. De même, en effet, que se promener, marcher et courir sont des exercices corporels, de même préparer et disposer l'âme à supprimer tous les attachements mal ordonnés et, une fois ceux-ci supprimés, à chercher et à trouver la volonté de Dieu sur l'organisation de sa vie et le salut de son âme, sont appelés exercices spirituels": *Exercices spirituels*, trans. J.-C. Guy (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 52. On the connection between Descartes and Loyola, whose exercises were most likely practiced on a quotidian basis by all Jesuits in Descartes's time, see Jones, *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution*, pp. 71-2, and the references there cited.

Like *exercice*, "culture" crosses the divides of animal-human, matter-mind, materiality-immateriality: while of agricultural origin, "culture" is *used* with respect to the civilization and education of *humans*, and culture *is* what these things—institutions—do *to* humans. In this usage, connotations of cultivation remain: the raw *material* is now some aspect of ourselves, associated with nature or the bare earth, and construed as our given, corporeal animality.[145] Self-subjection is servitude to this uncultured animality, both real (the body) and figural (our "animal" submission to the passions). Hence work in the opposite direction can be both figuratively and concretely considered a form of taming or training. And training is subjecting:[146] this is as clear in article 50 as it is in one of Furetière's entries for "sujet," where we find the same myth of the original phylogenetic and continual ontogenetic work of forming man from animal.[147]

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[145] When "culture" is applied to humans, it is hardly lacking in its agricultural connotations—this is what the German term *Bildung* brings closer to the word's surface. Ethical self-culturing is, on this understanding, the individual's repetition or elaboration of the imagined origin of humanity, arising out of animal night through the use of tools, the tilling of the earth, the articulation of roars and grunts into sequences of words. Ethics, understood in a teleological, Aristotelian sense, as the voluntary orientation of oneself to some end or goal—happiness, self-mastery, virtuous action—along a path of self-directed work, training, or practices—, ethics, that is, might be understood as the synchronic or ontogenetic repetition of the diachronic, phylogenetic mythical emergence of humanity from nature. This helps explain the way in which common moral judgments placed on ethical development or regression are expressed. A man who is "prey to" himself, who has lost control over himself and who does not practice self-mastery is "like an animal." He has regressed, ceding culture for animality. His field, untilled and uncultivated, begins to weed and rot. Just so, the Hellenistic philosophers (and Nietzsche) might think of their self-toiling as progress in their elevation over the commoners, the lowly people, the docile vulgar "herd."

[146] Culture (*dressage*) has for its perennial paradigm or model animal domestication, the animal's *subjection to man*, that is, to will, reason, or thought. Once a subject of nature, the animal becomes a subject of man; the dog now heeds not Nature's call but man's voice. Human acculturation works the same way (see Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis*). In Descartes's example, a domesticated animal *is* an ethically perfected human, who has gone against Nature's necessity as it manifests itself in his passions, fashioning a new nature out of another. When humans take themselves as animals to be domesticated, they are both *nature naturans* and *nature naturata*. Descartes, that is, has entered into and taken a position on matters for which he will be criticized, for example, by Spinoza. By showing man as that animal that can train himself and manipulate his own nature, Descartes makes him "a dominion within a dominion," a sovereign subject.

[147] Descartes's *chien* example in article 50, I am suggesting, is an expression of the same sort of anthropological fable we find tacitly at play in a series of example usages in Furetière's dictionary entry

There is another example of how habit can un- or re-work natural "institutions" in article 50. It is the example of the cultural "institution" of language—more precisely, the learning of language—through "habit," and it is the example that comes first in Descartes's text. It is distinct from the others that follow. For one, it pertains not to the passions *per se*, but to perception in general.[148] More importantly, language is, I think, the paradigm of the examples in the series, the one that displays the logic by which the others become intelligible.[149] What follows is the opening passage of article 50, lines immediately preceding the *viande* example discussed above:

> Et il est utile ici de savoir que, comme il a déjà été dit ci-dessus [i.e. art. 44], encore que chaque mouvement de la glande semble avoir été joint par la nature à chacune de nos pensées, dès le commencement de notre vie, on les peut toutefois joindre à d'autres par habitude: ainsi que l'expérience fait voir aux paroles, qui excitent des mouvements en la glande, lesquels, selon l'institution de la nature, ne représentent à l'âme que leur son, lorsqu'elles sont proférées par la voix, ou la figure de leurs lettres, lorsqu'elles sont écrites, et que, néanmoins, par l'habitude qu'on a acquise en pensant à ce qu'elles signifient, lorsqu'on a ouï leur son ou bien qu'on a vu leurs lettres, ont coutume de faire concevoir cette signification, plutôt que la figure de leurs lettres ou bien le son de leurs

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for "SUJET," where the taming and domination of a wild horse by the rider means rendering it "sujet" to the latter's command. "Sujet" is applied to men (e.g., *domestiques*) and horses alike. The term is used on analogy with the subjection of humans, in the political as well as in the domestic sphere (e.g., "une femme est fort sujette auprès de son mari)". In the moral realm in which the term "sujet" finds a figurative usage, according to Furetière (*sujet* "se dit figurément en Morale des passions"), one who is "sujet" to drinking is, we can say, one whose animal side, whose passions, has gotten the best of him. Moral norms hold that he must undertake a certain ethical work to subject his urges and get control over himself: he must *tame* himself, and this is hardly a matter of the pure will or disembodied intellect alone. On the contrary, it involves the soul and the body, repetition, work, and effort, all of which are subsumed in *dressage*. This is what we find in Descartes, but in a more striking and pregnant image, that of the training of hunting dogs.

[148] From how it is introduced in the article—and how it is followed by examples more explicitly related to the passions—, language seems, in other words, to be what we might call a first order interaction between body or senses and mind or thought, rather than being a second order one, like the passions, in which a perception, entailing certain movements of the gland and an associated thought, are associated with a passion, consisting of its own movements linked to yet another mental act or representation.

[149] Article 50 displays a clear structure, with an opening section on the problem at hand (Nature's having institutied *liaisons* between *movements* of the gland and *pensées*), and ending admonition (we should be encouraged to study to govern our passions by what the article contains as proof). In between fall three examples preceded by assertions for which they are meant to provide evidence. Each example is introduced by the syntagme "ainsi (lors)que…": (1) language, insofar as we are naturally wired to perceive acoustic (verbal sounds) and visual phenomena (written letters), but, by habituation or culture, come to perceive the signification, the meaning, of these; (2) the *sale viande* example; (3) the hunting dogs, *chiens*, example.

> syllabes. Il est utile aussi de savoir qu'encore que les mouvements tant de la glande que des esprits et du cerveau, qui représentent à l'âme certains objets, soient naturellement joints avec ceux qui excitent en elle certaines passions, ils peuvent toutefois par habitude en être séparées, et joint à d'autres fort différents; et même, que cette habitude peut être acquise par une seule action, et ne requiert point un long usage.

I've cited more than what concerns language alone so as to justify my suggestion that in this article, which contains the main discussion of Cartesian self-transformation via habit, language plays an essential role. The first and lengthiest of the examples, language provides the *analogon* for integrating and intuiting what follows, *viande* and *chiens*. Language, as depicted in the text, is the privileged heuristic for understanding the passions *per se*.

If we perceive how language sits in a cluster of Cartesian isomorphisms, this claim might not sound so bold. On Descartes's view, language displays a clear split *and* association between a sense perception and the soul's conjoined thought, a *signification*. Linking *and* cleaving between material signifiers and mental signifieds, language is isomorphic in structure to the Cartesian human being, consisting of two contrary yet conjoined substances, extended and thinking. Language is isomorphic to the passions as well, then. First, with respect to their structure: pertaining as they do to body and soul, each passion is a miniature of the Cartesian human being. Second, as regards their phenomenology, that is, their experiential coloring of the world: passions go beyond what *is*, presenting, expressing it *in some way*. Imbuing (abstract) pure perception with "immaterial," observer-dependent[150] significance, the passions are a stylistics of import.

Seeing the model of language in the passions helps us further understand what they are for Descartes, and the mode of their ideal subjection. They constitute a *natural*, motivated

[150] I use this term instead of the more common "subjective" in order to avoid the connotations of "subjectivity" entirely. The passions are not very personal in Descartes; instead, they poke holes in the individual, showing it as always inhabited, even in its most personal (its will) by what is other—the voice of another. See John Searle, "Social ontology: some basic principles," in Searle, *Philosophy in a New Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2008), pp. 26 ff.

signifying system or language, with the evaluative contents of a perception here being like the meaning or signification of a word, written or spoken.[151] So, while rotting *viande* is not an example of *self*-training at all,[152] and while the dog's *dressage* suggests the possibility—at least for administered human animals—, not the method, of "travail éthique," Descartes is more on-target with language. It gives a sense, however vague, of the process by which we change nature. In other words, the passions are the *natural* version of what, in his mind, language shows as *culturally* possible. Language, proper to humans for Descartes,[153] is the medium of humanity, of the political: the medium of our second nature. In this, its heuristic role as exemplum corresponds with its media-material role in the production, acquisition, and application of knowledge, by which acculturation, the constitution of a certain type of self, is possible. It is what *shows*, and *is*, the method.

To be sure, language acquisition can all too easily be rejected as an example of personal and voluntary, rather than societal and involuntary, acculturation.[154] What Descartes paints in the

[151] Fear, for example, is the natural *meaning* of a terrifying battle scene—it is perceived *as bad*, horrible: these *evaluative* hues in which the object or state of affairs is represented being *equivalent* to our feeling of fear—, just as pleasure is the natural signification of the taste of steak in our mouths.

[152] As I argued above, it is nature and necessity, not the soul and the will, that brings about the change in the brain's associative patterns.

[153] See the passages on language in part V of the *Discours de la méthode*. As is known, Descartes's view opposes that held by Montaigne in his "Apologie de Raimond Sebond," *Essais*, II, ch. 12 (Paris: Gallimard/Pléiade, 1950). As Derrida writes, in the *Apologie,* "Montaigne ne se contente pas de réveiller, dans sa richesse foisonnante, une tradition qui accorde beaucoup à l'animal, à commencer par un certain langage. […] Montaigne reconnaît à l'animal plus qu'un droit à la communication, au signe, au langage comme signe (cela, Descartes ne le déniera pas) : *un pouvoir de répondre*" (*L'animal que donc je suis*, n.2, p.21).

[154] While perhaps closer to something willed than the awful experience of chomping into a maggoty filet mignon, language seems more endured than willfully practiced, at least as for our mother tongue. For it is not when we are of robust mind and reason, but in childhood that we learn how to speak. Indeed, one easy route to a critique of Descartes would be to show the similarity of his account of learning language, which is here depicted as voluntary, to his account of the development in childhood of our prejudices in the *Principles*. Ultimately these are nothing more than acquired, involuntary, and erroneous ways of thinking about perceptions.

colors of a free, individual will and conscious intent,[155] might receive a starker, more anti-humanist depiction, a Structuralist or Poststructuralist, for example.[156] But he has no qualms in placing what today we might consider imposed acculturation from without on the same level with self-training from within. Such is the nature and extent of the Cartesian commitment to humanism.

Descartes's depiction of language learning is a case in point. Ideas and material marks or sounds are distinct series, each of which pre-exists, in a pure state, the willed, mental act of their association. In other words, Descartes is a conventionalist:[157] we have access to meanings distinctly, or before we have the words—the material bodies—to signify them. The set of letters or sounds[158] making up the *parole* are perceived and it is *then* an act of the soul to think the signification. Through repetition, the willed act becomes an automatism, so much so that the sensory perception withers under the associated signification. Couldn't we rewrite the dictionary of the passions in the same way? Can't a battle come to *mean* courage, not, as in Nature's tongue, fear?

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[155] Notice the neutral, singular pronoun "on" in the citation. The figure missing from Descartes's scheme is the mediator of the language, the one, or the thing, who knows what words mean and shows how to use them: the mother, the teacher-figure, the dictionary.

[156] For a Structuralist (we might think of Saussure or Lacan), entry into language is precisely that over which we have hardly any control, but rather that which has control over us, that shapes us, even constitutes our subjectivity and traces the horizon of our desires and possibilities. Or we might turn to the early Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*: "Die Grenzen meiner Sprache sind die Grenzen meiner Welt". Descartes would have probably said, rather: words are always limited with respect to me and my world, to my will and my ideas. It is again a question of precedence and sovereignty; it is a question of power. And one of humanism: for Descartes, we have a certain power over language that, to modern eyes, seems rather more usurped than founded.

[157] On one reading, in Descartes's account of learning language it's as if we were equipped with a dictionary and deciphering a foreign tongue. He presupposes, that is, that we do or can know what a word means before it means anything on its own. Words begin to be transparent vessels to their meaning via our learning to think of their meaning when they, as sounds or visible letters, appear. We must think of their meaning for them to mean anything on their own. They mean something because they mean something already, etc.

[158] We notice that there is no *sign* to speak of here.

Que chaque volonté est naturellement jointe à quelque mouvement de la glande, mais que par industrie ou par habitude on peut la joindre à d'autres. As intimated by its heading, article 44 contains a searching formulation of article 50. Like 50, it relies on a comparison with language, reinforcing my argument whereby the physiological and ethical aspects of the treatise turn on a homology between language and passions. With the pupil example, discussed above, 44 first presents the law of Nature's institution. Then, as in 50, language figures as an example of how, "par industrie ou par habitude," acts of the will can be "joined" with bodily movements of the gland:

> Et lorsqu'en parlant nous ne pensons qu'au sens de ce que nous voulons dire, cela fait que nous remuons la langue et les lèvres beaucoup plus promptement et beaucoup mieux que si nous pensions à les remuer en toutes les façons qui sont requises pour proférer les mêmes paroles. D'autant que l'habitude, que nous avons acquise en apprenant à parler, a fait que nous avons joint l'action de l'âme, qui par l'entremise de la glande peut mouvoir la langue et les lèvres, avec la signification des paroles qui suivent de ces mouvements plutôt qu'avec les mouvements mêmes.

This is the end of article 44. Article 45—*Quel est le pouvoir de l'âme au regard des passions*—will begin by describing the indirect rather than direct control the soul has to combat and master its passions. Language is what allows the immediate legibility of the description, only now *meaning* is replaced by an imaginary representation.[159] I intervene in the closed, natural system of my bodily apparatus by the corporeal imagination: imagining things that incite the movements of the passions I wish to instill in myself.

[159] "Nos passions ne peuvent pas [non plus] directement être excitées ni ôtées pas l'action de notre volonté; mais elles peuvent l'être par la représentation des choses qui ont coutume d'être jointes avec les passions que nous voulons avoir, et qui sont contraires à celles que nous voulons rejeter. Ainsi, pour exciter en soi la hardiesse et ôter la peur, il ne suffit pas d'en avoir la volonté, mais il faut s'appliquer à considérer les raisons, les objets ou les exemples qui persuadent que le péril n'est pas grand; qu'il y a toujours plus de sureté en la défense qu'en la fuite; qu'on aura de la gloire et de la joie d'avoir vaincu, au lieu qu'on ne peut attendre que du regret et de la honte d'avoir fui, et choses semblables" (art. 45).

The depictions of language in articles 44 and 50 are pendant pieces. The first describes speaking;[160] the latter depicts language being learned and understood. In 44 we see that it is easier—if not the only way possible—to move the tongue in the manner needed to say a word by intending (in the phenomenological sense) its meaning. Article 50 shows that understanding language comes through attaching linguistic bodies to meanings via practice and mental effort. There seems to be a reciprocity, contingent on the split, between meanings or intentions (*volontés*) and material or bodily acts and processes.

But neither meanings nor passions are practiced themselves; only their corporeal aspects are manipulated. This approaches a materialism Descartes explicitly rejects. He might *show*, but he wouldn't *say*, that mastery of language consists in practicing articulatory movements or manipulating sounds or letters in such a way as to manipulate meaning. Further, the notion of conditioned automatism, in which well-trained, ethically or culturally perfected humans *and* animals intersect, is functional here, but not explicitly so: it is used, not mentioned.[161] Instead,

[160] It is fascinating to note how this depiction of, not the structural conditions (à la Jakobson), but the actual experience of speech, in which we intend, in the phenomenological sense, the "sense" of our language and not its physical-physiological articulation, is one with which, three centuries later, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological description of the experience of speech will have much in common. See his "Sur la phénoménologie du langage," in *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 136-158.

[161] The image of the hunting dogs already suggested this ethical ideal: the dog does precisely not what, naturally, it should do, and this without the intervention of reason: automatically. Animals, for Descartes, are indeed distinguished by the sureness, the precision of their automatism: "souvent les mouvements qu'ils font sont plus réguliers et plus certains que ceux *des hommes les plus sages*" (letter to ***, March 1638 = AT II, p. 40; my italics). In the collection of notes and remarks known as *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche suggests that the goal or model of moral perfection is, ironically, not voluntary action based on rational deliberation but rather acting in each case with the certainty and immediacy of animal instinct (§289; §346). Just so, "absolute power" in Descartes would be when the will has not even to intervene, or hardly at all, so well would we have trained ourselves to have affective reactions *against Nature* that these would take on the fixed regularity and consistence of Nature herself. A fragment from the collection of some of the earliest writings we have from Descartes, the *Cogitationes privatae*, reminds us how it is the absence of free will in animals that is the cause of "the great perfection" we observe in their actions: "Ex animalium quibusdam actionibus valde perfectis, suspicamur ea liberum arbitrium non habere" (in *Pensées de* Descartes, in *Œuvres inédites de Descartes*, ed. Foucher de Careil (Paris: 1859), p. 16). Free will, whose essence lies in suspending or changing natural necessity, gives over, at its ideal vanishing point, into its opposite: the perfection of will-less, animal instinct.

language mastery in Descartes is willful matching of movements or objects to meanings pre-given and self-identical. Only thus can it be a model for the passions and their potential voluntary reworking. We find the same circular logic as before: like the soul's sovereignty, the detachment of the passions from particular bodily movements must be metaphysically presupposed (as a principle) in order to become ethically possible (over time).

This split and hierarchy between significations or meaning and the sounds, written marks, or articulatory movements that can be "joined" to them via habituation, will be crucial when we come to Pascal's pessimist antihumanism in chapter three. Unlike Descartes, for Pascal the material articulation of *discours* is in a certain sense preeminent over its *sens*.[162] Their disagreement on language concerns more than a minor detail. Conflicting linguistic concepts are correlated to divergent positions on the relations of materiality and ideality, bodily practices and mental acts, "the force of custom" (Pascal) and of free will (Descartes). Language is often a primary heuristic for and a subtending homologous structure in philosophy and theory. Grasping how language comes into play is crucial to understanding problems that encompass more than just how it is that we, or words, make meaning. In Descartes, we found, a particular understanding of the structure of language points the way to self-transformation and -mastery.[163]

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[162] *Pensées*, ed. Brunschvicq (Paris: 1897), #50: "Un même sens change selon les paroles qui l'expriment. Les sens reçoivent des paroles leur dignité, au lieu de la leur donner."

[163] In terms of Descartes's understanding of the body, what occurs in the habitual-cultural, rather than natural, institution of language, is that Nature is overwritten via the will as it commands the body in view of acquiring certain habits. Movements in the animal spirits aroused via a sensory perception come to be associated with those aroused by a mental act. Over time, the natural institution, if still present and indeed functional as the sine qua non of the human institution, is exorcized from consciousness. We might think we know this best in Derridean terms: the suppression or repression of the materiality of the signifier. Materiality is present and absent at the same time. The body of the sign is perceived and ignored, heard as a specter haunting meaning, like the pane of a window through which one has to look to outside. Thus the apparent contradiction in the long citation above: Via the habituation of using language, "paroles…ont coutume de faire concevoir cette signification, plutôt que la figure de leurs lettres ou bien le son de leurs syllables." Perceived, words (sounds or letters) are not what we perceive, but rather their significations, their meanings. Though a priori institutions of Nature, the passions are similar. If, once we have mastered a language, we cannot hear a word in it without simultaneously thinking the word's meaning—or even:

Article 50 is hardly lucid as to that with which we could overwrite nature's meanings (passions) by practice or "usage," in the habits that would constitute a new, ethical-cultural, secondary nature. Still, following hints offered here and there in the *Passions*, we can speculate a bit. Since, in article 48 cited above, Descartes recognizes the potency but also belittles the strategy of fighting with imagination described in article 45,[164] and since, although often depicted in the *Passions*, the soul's basic power of negation or dissent[165] is not active—not sovereignly powerful—enough to be what Descartes has in mind in the more heroic, ambitious image of "pouvoir absolu" in article 50, self-training, I think, must be related to acquiring and learning to wield the soul's "armes propres": "des jugements fermes et déterminés touchant la connaissance du bien et du mal, suivant lesquels [l'âme] a résolu de conduire les actions de sa vie."[166] Governing one's actions and passions with the legality of judgments was, in article 48, what divided the weak and weakest souls from the greater, more magnanimous ones. Article 50 might suggest we are to train ourselves to conjure a bit of knowledge, a statement, for example,

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without just thinking the meaning and not the word itself—, by nature, we cannot perceive certain things without corresponding passions being aroused in us. But both these institutions are malleable: this is Descartes's point, the goal he wants to establish and the encouraging truth he wants us to see.

[164] See note 159, *supra*.

[165] The basic power of negation, the soul's last line of defense, stems from Descartes's understanding of the will as distinct from *perception*. In this, Descartes offers us a Stoic depiction of the mind and governing seat in it, what the Stoics called the *hegemonikon*. See Christopher Gill, "Cynicism and Stoicism," in *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Ethic*s, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2013), p. 105. Indeed, Descartes's views could come right out of Epictetus's *Manual* or *Discourses*: the soul is free to assent or dissent to what is presented to it, save for when it is compelled by truth. Hence a passion is only rarely acted upon without a moment, however infinitesimal, in which the will, coaxed by a passion's own will, either accepts or rejects the invitation. "Ordinairement", writes Descartes, even if we cannot perform the mind-control techniques described above—deploying the imagination or conducting ourselves via judgments—, we can still hold our own reins, as it were. This is described in articles 46 and 47. The method of "representation" is like distraction; it only works when what we are trying to exorcize from our minds is of a relatively low intensity. The power to say "no" to the movement of the will the passion provokes, on the other hand, is never lost or overwhelmed.

[166] Art. 48.

when moved by some passion: a statement that prescribes to the will the action to be undertaken, or avoided.[167]

The ideal Cartesian self is, on this view, a thoroughly ruled state. Here, against the basic animality of the passions, there would be, the Stoics would say, a *handy* (*procheiron*) judgment for every situation.[168] Radiating out from the mind of single, unified soul, laws would infuse the human body and existence. Indeed, Cartesian self-governance is coordinated with learning—with study—such that, as the vanishing point of ethical perfection, judgments become indistinguishable from situations under their jurisdiction, rules becoming one with actions that follow them, to the point of becoming *constitutive* of life itself.[169] This would be the ultimate achievement of self-habituation.

While conduct according to judgments of any sort is preferable to other techniques of self-mastery and, of course, to self-servitude, it is best if these judgments are true: *[L]a force de l'âme ne suffit pas sans la connaissance de la vérité*, reads article 49. Not God's grace but truth is the best therapy and weaponry for souls. Wielding truth makes them godly in their in-

[167] Spinoza seems to have come to a similar conclusion. After citing article 50 in the preface to Book V of the *Ethics*, "Of Human Freedom," Spinoza glosses the entirety of Descartes's ethical program in one small paragraph. This is was what he read in Descartes, paraphrasing and interpreting article 50 in light, I think, of what Descartes presents in Part Two: "But since to any will we can join any motion of the gland (and consequently any motion of the spirits), and since the determination of the will depends only on our power, we shall acquire an absolute dominion over our passions, if we determine our will by firm and certain judgments according to which we will to direct the actions of our life, *and if we join to these judgments the motions of the passions we will to have*" (V. Preface, p. 161; my emphasis).

[168] In Stoicism (and in Epicureanism), memorization and meditation of the rule of life (*kanon*) are essential spiritual exercises, on Hadot's account. Their aim is for the "fundamental principles" of the philosophy to be constantly "'sous la main' (*procheiron*)", thereby one can make use of them by "applying them by thought to the diverse circumstances of life" ("Exercises spirituels," pp. 28-9). Hadot uses the term "s'impregner" to describe the effect of the combined spiritual exercises of memorization (*mnemè*) and meditation (*meletè*). For Foucault, these sorts of "techniques", of memory and internalization, not interpretation, characterized the ancient pagan, as opposed to the Christian regime of "techniques de soi": they showed the constitution of a subject supposed to be a sort of concentration of discourse, principles, of the doctrine. It is clear that Descartes's ideal of self-governance resonates with that of his ancient predecessors.

[169] On the becoming indistinguishable of rule and life, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

submission to the natural state and its law. Indeed, the "judgments" in question cannot but recall the fruit whose consumption constituted original sin. Descartes asks we eat of the Tree again. This, at least, is one way of interpreting the famous tree of philosophy in the prefatory letter to the French *Principes* (1647), the tree on which "la Morale" grows as the highest fruit.

The function of truth in self-governance opens up new problems I will only indicate here. We might try to delineate the relationship between the at once material and theoretical practices of philosophizing—by which truths are discovered and meditated, and a "subject of truth" constituted—, and the more practical sphere of ethics—in which the soul tests itself and wills to obey the truth in order to dominate its will against the passions. For Descartes, ethics implicitly accords a massive function to study—and hence to *literacy*—, as the practice by which the soul becomes capable of ruling. Writing is implicated as that practice by which we become conscious of, become, and change ourselves.

To get at this dimension, we would have to look at some of Descartes's texts from before the *Passions*, and examine the ethical, even (auto)therapeutic *telos* of learning and study there. Matthew Jones has recently pinpointed this *telos* in Descartes's *Geometry* (1637) and in his well-known epistemological texts.[170] Indeed, it endures across Descartes's career, and is at times

[170] Jones, *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution*, chapters 1 and 2, pp. 15-86. At the outset of the first chapter, devoted to Descartes, Jones apodictically asserts that the philosopher's entire project of philosophical innovation should be seen against the background of a prevalent early modern attitude towards practices of knowledge like philosophy, science, and mathematics—whether ancient and recently recovered, or new and to be invented. According to this mindset, such disciplines and the practices that, in each case, constitute them, are of import predominantly for their existential, moral, and ethical significance. They matter, that is, insofar as they serve as guidance and therapy for souls caught in the turbulent period of crisis, war, and doubt that was the late 16th and early 17th century. "Descartes's famous quest to devise a superior philosophy should be understood within such a therapeutic model of philosophy," writes Jones (p.16). He also clearly locates the *Passions* and the correspondence with Elisabeth within Descartes's career with its ethical aspirations thus understood: "In Descartes's later works, above all [*The*] *Passions of the Soul*, printed in 1649, and his letters to Elisabeth, printed a few years after his death, he articulated the ethical implications of his philosophical practice, which previously he had only outlined. Even as the emphasis in his writings shifted, the importance of exercises for cultivating oneself remained constant" (p.42). Still, my account differs from Jones's in several respects:

explicit: in the *Rules*, e.g.—the first of which reads *Studiorum finis esse debet ingenii directio ad solida et vera, de iis omnibus quae occurrunt, proferenda judicia*[171]—as much as the *Principles*—in whose prefatory letter I just mentioned, philosophizing is described as what allows us to conduct ourselves, instead of being led around, as is our default condition.[172] Before

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(1) I underline the materiality, media, and capacities (e.g., literacy) presupposed by these practices; (2) I focus on the *Passions*—a work that is unique in its combination of philosophical practice and ethical self-therapy, yet not extensively commented upon by Jones (see passing references on pp. 32, 41-6, 71, 82, 83); (3) I bring to light how the notion of *practices* of self-formation and -mastery troubles the foundations of Cartesian philosophy; and (4) I emphasize the political model of subjectivity or subjecthood in Descartes's ethical philosophy and psychology, somewhat in line with Negri's *Political Descartes*. But I am in utter agreement with Jones concerning the centrality, and historical embeddedness, of self-formational practices in Descartes. Like Hadot's and Foucault's studies of practices and exercises that constitute bodies of knowledge and selves in relation to them, Jones's work has serious implications for the history of philosophy, both as concerns its content and the ways in which it might be undertaken today with reinvigorated enthusiasm, a sense of contemporary relevance, and historical-material sensitivity. For an early recognition of the importance, and personal role, of ethical considerations for Descartes, see Claude Clerselier's "Préface" to his edition of Descartes's correspondence: *Lettres de Mr. Descartes*, vol.1 (Leyden: Charles Angot), 1657, np.

[171] "*Le but des études doit être de diriger l'esprit de manière à ce qu'il porte des jugements solides et vrais sur tout ce qui se présente à lui.*" *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit*, trans. V. Cousin, in *Œuvres*, ed. Cousin, vol. XI (Paris: Levrault, 1824), Rule I. The goal of study—which should be kept in mind no matter the object of study—is not to excel in this or that particular discipline, which we would practice to the exclusion of the others. Study is expansion of the legislation of the mind over all things; for this it must be able to speak to all things, and with an authority whose ground Descartes's entire philosophy repeatedly strives to establish. In a word, for Descartes study is a form of exercise. From the perspective of the person undertaking the intellectual work, it is *autotelic*: its end is, or is in, its practitioner. This is what the disparagement of all the *objects* of the diverse sciences means in the *Regulae*: study's object is the self, or rather one part of the self, the mind. The mind is not a medium for some object or some particular problem; no, objects are studied for how this develops an active, robust mind. This is a logic of self-practice.

[172] Drawing tacitly upon Seneca's *De vita beata* (as editor X. Kieft notes: *Principes*, trans. Moreau, p. 363, n.1 to p. 253), Descartes depicts philosophy as learning to *see*, that is, to *think*, for oneself: "Et outre cela [à savoir, que le degré de civilisation d'une nation dépend du nombre et de la qualité de ses philosophes, CC], …pour chaque homme en particulier, il n'est pas seulement utile de vivre avec ceux qui s'appliquent à cette étude, mais qu'il est incomparablement meilleur de s'y appliquer soi-même: comme sans doute il vaut beaucoup mieux se servir de ses propres yeux pour se conduire et jouir par même moyen de la beauté des couleurs et de la lumière, que non pas de les avoir fermés et de suivre la conduite d'un autre; mais ce dernier est encore meilleur que de les tenir fermés et n'avoir que soi pour se conduire. C'est proprement avoir les yeux fermés sans tâcher de les ouvrir, que de vivre sans philosopher; et le plaisir de voir toutes les choses que notre vue découvre n'est point comparable à la satisfaction que donne la connaissance de celles qu'on trouve par la Philosophie; et enfin cette étude est plus nécessaire pour régler nos mœurs, et nous conduire en cette vie, que n'est l'usage de nous yeux pour guider nos pas" (*Principes*, trans. Moreau, pp. 252-3). Other texts in which the ethical telos as self-conduct or -direction is set to philosophizing are *La Recherche de la vérité* and even, to a certain extent, the very first document we have from Descartes, his law thesis, (Nov.-Dec. 1616). There, in a florid and rather un-Cartesian

we are ready for the self-mastery described in article 50, training happens in scientific and philosophical practice. Indeed, it is happening in the composition and reading of the *Passions*, in the discovery, formulation, and absorption of the truths it mediates.

Further, to get at learning and literacy in the Cartesian care of the self, we would have to analyze the epistemological passion of "admiration."[173] If, in *wonder* (*θαῦμα*) as the wellspring of philosophizing, "admiration" had an ancient philosophical source,[174] it was a Cartesian innovation[175] in terms of the importance it received as the first of the primary passions—"la

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rhetorical dedication to his uncle and godfather, we see Descartes, riffing on Lucretius, poetizing on the shared headspring of *virtue* and the *sciences*. See *Étude du bon sens," "La recherche de la vérité" et autres écrits de jeunesse (1616-1631)*, ed. and trans. Vincent Carraud and Gilles Olivo, with Corinna Vermeulen (Paris: PUF, 2013), p. 22.

[173] In the 17th century, "admiration" hardly had the sense it does now. The latter is closer to Descartes's notion of "esteem" or "veneration." Rather, *admirer* meant, according to Furetière "regarder avec étonnement quelque chose de surprenant ou dont on ignore les causes" (cited by d'Arcy, *Passions*, p. 135). Indeed, for Descartes admiration denoted the feeling of having encountered what is an epistemic blindspot; a novelty that strikes us and stuns us precisely insofar as it is a *we-don't-know-what* (articles 53, 70-73, 75-78). The mind is like dumb in front of what it *admires*, which escapes the system of knowledge it possesses: we don't know what it is exactly, and we can't reduce or explain it since, following Furetière, we are ignorant of its causes. An object of *admiration* is, hence, precisely that upon which the Cartesian mind cannot work actively. In other words, it is an anomaly irreducible to knowledge and its application: "nous le jugeons être nouveau, ou fort différent de ce que nous connaissions auparavant, ou bien de ce que nous supposions qu'il devait être" (art. 53).

[174] For Plato as much as for Aristotle, wonder was the necessary prelude to philosophy (references in Pascale d'Arcy, *Les passions de l'âme*, n. 1. art.53, p. 248). In Plato's *Theaetetus*, the eponymous protagonist, baffled by Socrates's playful spinning of logical contradictions ("having become without becoming…"), despairs: "ὑπερφυῶς ὡς θαυμάζω τί ποτ᾽ ἐστὶ ταῦτα": "I am lost in wonder when I think of all these things" (155c). To which Socrates quips in response: "μάλα γὰρ φιλοσόφου τοῦτο τὸ πάθος, τὸ θαυμάζειν, οὐ γὰρ ἄλλη ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας ἢ αὕτη" "…this feeling [*πάθος*: passion] of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy" (155d; Fowler trans.; *Perseus.tufts.edu*). More famous, however, are the lines near the beginning of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, on the origin—first and continuing, phylogenetic and ontogenetic, as it were—, of the activity of philosophizing: "διὰ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἤρξαντο φιλοσοφεῖν" "It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize" (A2, 982, b 12; Tredennick trans. *Perseus.tufts.edu*). Wondering as the affective stimulus to philosophy: this is shared by Descartes and the two great ancients whom he took to be exemplary of the main, and each failed, traditions of philosophy before his own. For Descartes's own history of philosophy, in which he sets Plato and Aristotle one against the other, and himself against both, see the prefatory letter to the French version of the *Principles* (1647).

[175] Rodis-Lewis, "Introduction," p. 29; Hammacher, "Introduction, " li.

première de toutes les passions," in a temporal and (onto)logical sense.[176] Reading "admiration" would allow us to see how gaining knowledge, on Descartes's understanding of this concept, is inherently therapeutic. For instance, as "confused ideas"[177] the passions might be dissolved by the act of knowing them: in separating out what pertains to the soul and what to the body, a goal of the *Passions*. By making them familiar and relieving us of their surprise—that is, in allowing us to not *admire* them—, coming to know the passions might already give us the upper hand. This is how we can read the opening of article 211, the penultimate but structurally terminal article of the treatise, which thematizes the therapeutic role of learning about the passions that

[176] Art. 53. In the Cartesian system, admiration is counted "first" among the "six primitive passions": admiration, then love and hate, then desire, then joy and sadness (art. 69). As Descartes explains in art. 53, *L'admiration*, he means "the first" in the following sense: we can have admiration without knowledge of whether "cet objet nous est convenable ou s'il ne l'est pas." But while admiration is a passion before the passions are possible, and hence temporally "first," this "first" might be read instead not as a number in an enumeration—or in a temporal sequence—, but as "principle" in a logical and causal chain. For, while it logically *precedes* the passions, admiration tends nonetheless to be "joined with them" all. Sure, Descartes is not clear as to what he means. But his explanation of why admiration, unlike joy or love, has no contrary, is, if ambiguous, highly suggestive in this respect: "[l'admiration] n'a point de contraire, à cause que, si l'objet qui se présente n'a rien en soi qui nous surprenne, nous n'en sommes aucunement émus et nous le considérons sans passion" (art. 53). The absence of admiration implies the absence of passion; this is one way to read this difficult line. And the converse, we might conclude, holds as well: passion is predicated on admiration. If admiration is the first of the passions, then, this might mean that it is the necessary condition of the passions, the very ground upon which they emerge: "première" meaning primary or principle, the one, not after which, but without which the others do not follow.

[177] As stated above (see note 36, supra), this is how they are described in the *Principles* (I, art. 48). At IV§190, Descartes tells us that "[l]es affects, ou [l]es passions de l'âme…sont certaines pensées confuses que l'esprit ne possède pas de soi seul, mais du fait qu'il subit quelque chose de la part du corps auquel il est intimement uni" (p. 209). Knowledge, as the acquisition and practice of clear and distinct ideas, is in Descartes precisely the dissolution of confused ideas. That is, it would be used for the dissolution of the passions per se. Article 28 hence implies that clear and distinct knowledge of the passions is a way to their moderation: "l'expérience fait voir que ceux qui sont les plus agités par leurs passions ne sont pas ceux qui les connaissent le mieux…elles sont du nombre des perceptions que l'étroite alliance qui est entre notre âme et le corps rend confuses et obscures." Opposed to "confused" ones, clear ideas, which act as a tool by which ideas can be analyzed down to their true constituents, are a product of mental exertion and exercise. Cartesian philosophy is precisely the injunction to this sort of laborious thinking. Its ur-scenes, those famous moments of solitary doubting and the mind's groping for a sure way out of skepticism and back from the dark into the light of world, involve the questioning and rejection of everything received, handed down, and pressed upon us. *Cogito ergo sum* might be read not as an ontological certainty but as an expression of how I act when I am purely me: thinking is the action that coincides with me, the power that is the center of my being. In other words, Descartes's is a philosophy of the active, interdependent mind and its power—even of its pleasures.

the reader, arrived at this point, has now accomplished.[178] "Admiration" invites us to address the implicit ethics of study—of philosophizing as a certain sort of literacy, and of literacy in philosophizing—at play in the *Passions*, besides, or subtending, the explicit type of ethics in article 50.

Ultimately, however, the dim light shed on what Descartes means with his practices of taking active, sovereign control over the passions is eclipsed by another sort of ethics. This is a more modest, ancient, or Stoic one, one perhaps more familiar to his readers.[179] Article 144, for example, bears witness to this. There, Descartes calls "l'utilité principale de la morale" the ruling or regulating desire, i.e., an ancient "substance éthique," according to the Stoic principle of "distinguishing" "les choses qui dépendent entièrement de nous de celles qui n'en dépendent point." The domain of "substance éthique" is reduced to what was, before, just one passion

[178] "Et maintenant que nous les connaissons toutes, nous avons beaucoup moins de sujet de les craindre que nous n'avions auparavant. […]." I say that article 211, according to the structure of the *Passions*, is ultimate rather than penultimate because of the identical way in which Parts One and Two end, namely with "ethical" articles on techniques and attitudes meant to master the passions and consolidate the soul's power. Article 211 is, in Part Three, the equivalent, on this reading, of articles 50 and 148, the terminal articles of Parts One and Two. This is reflected in the content or bodies of the articles—each concerns "remèdes" or techniques to be used against the passions—, as well as in their headings: "absolute power" over the passions (art. 50), a "sovereign remedy" for them (art. 148), and a "general remedy" for them (art. 211). Article 212, the actual final article, is *excessive* in this sense, *surnuméraire*, according to the structural scheme whereby, *grosso modo*, scientific description is followed by ethical prescription. But it is excessive in another sense, too: in art. 212, Descartes appears to step outside the paradigm of dominating or controlling the passions, the Ancient and Medieval program within which he's tacitly been writing the whole time. He now asserts what seems like a newer, more affirmative view of the passions: *Que c'est d'elles seules que dépend tout le bien et le mal de cette vie*. On a close reading of this article, however, the concession to feeling is in fact re-integrated into a heroic, noble-aristocratic ethics, one Nietzsche will appreciate, whereby: the greater the foe, the greater the pleasure from the struggle and glory from victory. "[L]es hommes qu'elles [les passions] peuvent le plus émouvoir sont capables de goûter le plus de douceur en cette vie," writes Descartes, in a line that reads like a hymn to affectivity à la Rousseau. But we're not duped. As the rest of the article makes clear, especially in light of article 147 on the "interior emotions" of the soul, the line is to be understood as follows: they are the causes of this "douceur" since, if we have learned to dominate the passions, we have also learned to extract joy from even their evils: "on tire de la joie de tous [les maux]" that they can cause—the words with which the *Passions* come(s) to an end.

[179] On the rise and importance of Neostoicism in the 16th and 17th century, see P.-F. Moreau, "Les trois étapes du stoïcisme moderne," in *Le stoïcisme au XVIe et au XVIIe siècle: Le retour des philosophies antiques au siècle classique*, ed. Moreau (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), pp. 11-27.

among others, albeit a central one.[180] Virtue is what we can desire with abandon, that is, the good usage of our will: what (alone) is entirely in our control.[181] The colossal ambitions of Cartesian ethics—arming the soul with such great knowledge or "universal wisdom"[182] that it would be able to dictate to the will at every moment what to do—recedes behind an abstemious logic, which teaches endurance, moderation, and *askesis* qua renunciation in the face of affectivity, rather than mastery over it.

A parallel transformation occurs. Governance of the passions risks being replaced by a doctrine of "internal emotions," feelings aroused by our passions, no matter what they are. Like someone who reads "des aventures étranges dans un livre" or sees them "représent[ées] sur un théâtre," the soul can detach itself from its embodied self, and take a certain pleasure, "une joie

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[180] Art. 88.

[181] "[…] Or comme j'ai tantôt dit, que [le désir] est toujours bon lorsqu'il suit une vraie connaissance, ainsi il ne peut manquer d'être mauvaise lorsqu'il est fondé sur quelque erreur. Et il me semble que l'erreur qu'on commet le plus ordinairement touchant les désirs, est qu'on ne distingue pas assez les choses qui dépendent entièrement de nous de celles qui n'en dépendent point. Car pour celles qui ne dépendent que de nous, c'est-à-dire de notre libre arbitre, il suffit de savoir qu'elles sont bonnes pour ne les pouvoir désirer avec trop d'ardeur; à cause que c'est suivre la vertu que de faire les choses bonnes qui dépendent de nous, et il est certain qu'on ne saurait avoir un désir trop adent pour la vertu…" (art. 144). The "principle" of distinguishing degrees to which things depend on free will runs through the next articles. After art. 144 cited above—*Des désirs dont l'événement ne dépendent que de nous*—, follows art. 145—*De ceux qui ne dépendent que des autres causes; et ce que c'est que la fortune*—and 146—*De ceux qui ne dépendent de nous et d'autrui*. The "remèdes" (art. 144, 145) that Descartes prescribes in these articles, the mental techniques, that is, intended to "régler ses désirs," are simple and they are arguably all Stoic. The heading of article 147 suggests that all these are ways not to dominate but to not suffer too much violence (*incommodité*) at the hands of the passions. Interior emotions imply a distance vis-à-vis the embodied self and its movements. They express a split, which comes out in the grammar of the phrases that might describe the experience: we take joy even insofar as we are sad; we take pleasure in our feeling pain; we are joyous and afflicted, feeling pleasure and pain. This nominal split in the self is the sign of the shift in locus of the self itself: the soul has sundered itself from the body to which it is indelibly united.

[182] *Regulae*, Rule 1. Study should be, and should be seen as, the cultivation of "bon sens" (*bona mens*), the subject of the unfinished *Studium bonae mentis*, on which Descartes was at work sometime between Fall 1619 and Spring 1623. The first Rule of the *Regulae* glosses *bon mens* as "universal Wisdom": *...de bona mente, sive de hac universali Sapientia universali*. Despite Descartes's recurrent emphasis on the potential for each person to excel in philosophy, his texts belie this democratic tone. They make it clear that we are not given *bona mens* by nature, only a potential to develop it. We start out with minds, that is, and they must be worked on through the practice of those disciplines that develop the natural light of reason.

intellectuelle," in its own passions.[183] This aesthetic subject depicted in the example is, in fact, the model of the ideal ethical subject's self-relation: another *mise-en-abîme*. The soul itself now has a soul, as it were, which feels the former's passions as joyous emotion. Viewing your own life and passions *as a play—teatrum mundi* as a mindset—is an effective way of affective self-regulation.[184] It means a displacement of your core, from the passions that shake your self, which now becomes a fictional character, to the emotions you feel inside your real self, an actor who enjoys performing in mask. Over against an anthropotechnics of ethics as self-*dressage*, we are left with the famous Cartesian line: *Larvatus prodeo*…[185]

[183] Art. 147. "Interior emotions" are meta-passions, one might say: the passions—or rather: the emotions, the soul has for its own passions. They are the soul's feelings of the soul's being impassioned, and they are felt "dans le plus intérieur de [notre] âme." Although his language at times implies some diversity in nature among these "interior emotions," it seems that they all consist foremost in a certain "plaisir" which Descartes calls "une joie intellectuelle." This can accompany even the darkest of passions. For the soul takes delight in feeling passions excited in itself, whatever they may be: "nous avons du plaisir," he writes, "de les sentir exciter en nous, et ce plaisir est une joie intellectuelle, qui peut aussi bien naître de la tristesse que de toutes les autres passions." Insofar as interior emotions do not "dépendent…de quelque movement des esprits" (art. 147), they are properly unthinkable according to Descartes's definition of the *passions of the soul*. No doubt this is why he calls them *emotions*, movements of the soul, and not passions, which imply, indeed necessitate, movements of the body. If unthinkable, they are nonetheless experienced and felt, he wants to claim. And they are, further, that in which consists the deepest and ultimate quality of our being, in the proximate relationship of the soul to itself: "c'est que notre bien et notre mal dépend principalement des émotions intérieures, qui ne sont excitées en l'âme que par l'âme même" (art. 147).

[184] The joy which accompanies the passions that assail us amidst the real *aventures* that constitute our own lives, will be all the more pleasurable the more we arrive at a perception of the world as a novel or a stage—the world as *teatrum mundi*. This distancing mode of perception was a Stoic technique (found in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, for example), and Descartes described it in detail in a letter to Elisabeth (18 May, 1645): "en cette vie…[les grandes âmes] n'en considèrent quasi les événements que comme nous faisons ceux des comédies. Et comme les histoires tristes et lamentables, que nous voyons représenter sur un théâtre, nous donnent souvent autant de récréation que les gaies, bien qu'elles tirent des larmes de nos yeux ; ainsi ces plus grandes âmes, dont je parle, ont de la satisfaction, en elles-mêmes, de toutes les choses qui leur arrivent, même des plus fâcheuses et insupportables."

[185] *Ut comœdi moniti ne in fronte appareat pudor, personam induunt; sic ego hoc mundi theatrum conscensursus in quo hactenùs spectator exstiti, larvatus prodeo* : "Comme un acteur met un masque pour ne pas laisser voir la rougeur de son front; de même, moi qui vais monter sur le théâtre de ce monde où je n'ai été jusqu'ici que spectateur, je parais masqué sur la scène": *Pensées de Descartes (Cogitationes privatae)*, trad. Foucher de Careil, in *Œuvres inédites de Descartes* (Paris: August Durand,1859-60), p. 3.

The Passions of the Princess: Elisabeth as Reader and Critic of Descartes

Only late in his curtailed life did Descartes begin to undertake a systematic inquiry into the passions.[186] That he did was the result of his correspondence with Elisabeth, Princess Palatine of Bohemia (1618-80). Two years after it began in May 1643, their epistolary liaison turned to moral or ethical problems: the highest good, ancient ethics, physical infirmities, and, of course, the passions. Descartes's letter from 18 May 1645 inaugurates the young Princess' "spiritual direction" by the philosopher.[187] There, he diagnoses Elisabeth's longstanding "fièvre lente" as an effect of excessive "tristesse."[188] Curing her means curing sadness; fortifying her health means strengthening her soul: philosophy is therapy. In the letter, Descartes lays the basis of his ethics, espousing a thereafter fixed attitude toward his young interlocutor: slight concessions to her recede, ultimately, behind a firm humanist, optimistic conviction regarding free will and our heroic capacity to control ourselves and our affective wellbeing.

[186] There is evidence of a long-standing interest in the passions in Descartes. Diverse notations from the collections of some of his earliest extant writings might be cited; for example, the notes from the *Cartesius* or *Cogitationes privatae*, as these manuscripts came to be known. But it is first and foremost the posthumously *Compendium musicae* (likely composed in late 1618) that should be invoked. Written for a friend, the treatise begins by construing music's "object" and affective "telos" or "end": "L'objet de la musique est le son. Sa fin est de plaire, & d'exciter en nous diverses passions [*Finis ut delectet, variosque in nobis moveat affectus*]": *Abrégé de Musique* trans, Nicolas Poisson, in *Traité de la mechanique composé par Monsieur Descartes. De plus: L'abgrégé de musique du mesme autheur mis en François. Avec les éclaircissemens necessaires* (Paris: 1668), p. 53. Latin original: Renati Des-Cartes, *Musicae compendium*. (Utrecht, 1650), p.5. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace a genealogy of Descartes's thinking on affectivity. Doing so, one would locate, in the divergence between the *Compendium* and the *Passions*, a passage from a pre- to a post-*méthode* Descartes (in the same way we think of Kant as having a pre-critical and a critical period). On other words, he showed an early awareness of the passions and desire to takie them as an object of thought and writing. But a proper Cartesian approach, that is, a science of them, came late in Descartes's career. Like Kant's *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (1764) vis-à-vis his more "Kantian" treatment of the same material in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), Descartes's early and curt treatment of the passions belongs to his own pre-critical period, in which Cartesian philosophy and its mechanist physics have yet to be born.

[187] Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivvre*, p. 98. See note 92, *supra.*

[188] "La cause la plus ordinaire de la fièvre est la tristesse…," writes Descartes.

I won't retrace the origin of the *Passions*. Composed at the Princess's behest, in its original form from spring 1646 it was intended as a personal therapeutic manual of sorts.[189] Instead, I want to focus on Elisabeth as a critic of Descartes and of idealist ethics per se, indeed, as *the* ideal reader and student of his ethics. Her letters, at least from April 1645 on, are critical responses to his positions, the bulk of which were published in the final treatise, in 1649. The therapeutic efficacy of Descartes's ethics might be probed, then, by examining how his philosophical discourse was able, or not, to help quell Elisabeth's own "spiritual" afflictions.

In these letters, the self's capacity for self-transformation is at stake: to what degree we are malleable by our own, voluntary and rational efforts. Descartes has on his side thought's essential capacity to go beyond, and thereby mentally negate, what simply is. We can *think* the possibility of the soul's sovereignty, and formulate its adjudicative directives. Writing, like texts and epistolary exchanges on ethics, can actualize this possibility. Against the philosopher's conceptual *de jure*, Elisabeth wields a realist *de facto*: her own affective experience. She bodies forth her critiques, suggesting more than asserting. She brings against his *active*, virile ethics what I want to call *passive*—and *feminine*, in a sense to be defined—criticism: a critique from the side of the passions.

[189] See Geneviève Rodis-Lewis's edition of the *Passions*. Rodis-Lewis includes excerpts from the letters, suggests dates for the original, core treatise composed for Elisabeth, and offers suggestions for how the document was changed, or rather integrated into a larger whole, in order to appear under the form we know today. She speculates that it was during his trip to La Haye at the beginning of March 1646 that Descartes sent his rapidly composed treatise to the Princess, who would then, on the 25th of April of the same year, send him her comments (p. 9). Thereafter it was sent, along with a bundle of his letters to Elisabeth of a similar moral philosophical tenor, to another, even younger royal woman, Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-89), to whose court Descartes was invited. The text was expanded from what was perhaps its original core, written for the Princess—Part One, totaling 50 articles (according to Rodis-Lewis)—into a three-part treatise with 212 articles in all. When Descartes left for Stockholm in September 1649, *Les passions de l'âme* was going to print in Paris and Amsterdam (p. 10). He died in February 1650.

To do justice to the beauty and complexity of this philosophical encounter would be beyond the purview of this chapter. Instead, a schematic presentation of the core conflict between the optimistic ambition of thought and the claims of experience will have to suffice. I will focus on the three most important themes of Elisabeth's criticism: (1) the irreducible vulnerability of body and soul, under the sign of the *feminine*; (2) the absurdity of the ambitions of a "virtue" based on knowledge; (3) the inefficacy, indeed impotence, of reason in the event, or advent, of the passions. Finally, I will describe what I call (4) Elisabeth's Machiavellian lesson, when the role of master and disciple is most provocatively flipped. Elisabeth's letters tend towards *pessimism*. In them, some of the major philosophical and anthropological positions of the latter half of the century, and arguably the following one, are traced in outline.

(1) Descartes's May 18th letter lauded "les plus grandes âmes," those capable of overcoming afflictions, even of finding the more happiness in them the more formidable the attack they level on the soul.[190] Elisabeth responded on May 24th with both thanks and tacit criticism. She presents her case before Descartes like a patient before a doctor, confessing (*confesser*) a certain natural vulnerability:

> Sachez donc que j'ai le corps imbu d'une grande partie des faiblesses de mon sexe, qu'il se ressent très facilement des afflictions de l'âme, et n'a point la force de se remettre avec elle, étant d'un tempérament sujet aux obstructions et demeurant en un air qui y contribue fort.[191]

Elisabeth presents her femininity and fixed temperament not as something to be changed—the "substance éthique", the "matière principale," of discourse and "travail éthique." They are recalcitrant facts to be reckoned with. *This is how I am*, she says, and my body, like my soul, cannot be willed into health. *I am too weak for myself*. Despite appearances, a close reading of Elisabeth's letters suggests that *femininity* is not the stigmata of one gender. Instead, the

[190] This is a role in which he will cast himself in a letter from May-June 1645.
[191] Elisabeth to Descartes May 24 1645.

feminine refers to a vision of the human self in conflict with that of Cartesian humanism: as frail and vulnerable—as *passivity*. She never writes, *If I were a man…* or anything of this sort. On the contrary, her initial self-characterization as feeble woman expands, universalizing itself, implicating all humanity. *Her* experience becomes experience *per se*. "[T]out ce qui dépend de la volonté et du cours du reste du monde, est capable d'incommoder," she affirms,[192] against Descartes's humanist, Stoic conviction that felicity depends on ourselves, our will, alone. Though taken upon herself as a personal tarnish or lack, *femininity* names the passive *impotence*, manifest again and again, in lived, rather than thought, existence; in life, not letters. As the *feminine* begins to pervade, it is the philosopher, not his female disciple, who is now set on the margins of humanity.[193]

(2) On April 25th, 1646, writing from La Haye, Elisabeth offered some comments on the "Traité des passions" that Descartes had sent her earlier that same year. As usual, she celebrates Descartes in no uncertain terms.[194] But, the letter follows her usual scheme: the opening performs the rhetorical function of reaffirming the power-relation of master and disciple, opening up the space, then, for questions and criticisms. Elizabeth describes the successes and problems in the scientific and typological, that is, descriptive aspects of the treatise, before

[192] Elisabeth to Descartes 30 Nov. 1645.

[193] The explicit, marked *femininity* in her letters is no doubt why Ernst Cassirer wrote about Queen Christina of Sweden, and not Elisabeth, in the pages of his text (*Descartes*…) that he devoted to the *Passions* and the culture of Stoic-aristocratic ethics to which, according to Cassirer, Descartes's ethics, Corneille's theater, and Christina's rule gave expression (*Descartes*, pp. 174ff). Christina, as Cassirer celebrates her, was like a Corneillian hero incarnate. She resembled the ideal master of the passions from Corneille's stage and Descartes's treatise. Further, the self-sovereignty she cultivated and practiced stood in conjunction with ruling with absolute power over an entire kingdom. She was lofty and powerful, male in her ways and in her love of "virtue." She was, as she herself would point out, of a masculine, virile, nature. Christina had been reared on Epictetus. Elisabeth, the daughter of a deposed monarch, was instead a creature of misfortune.

[194] "…puisqu'il faudrait être impassible, pour ne point comprendre que l'ordre, la définition et les distinctions que vous donnez aux passions, et enfin toute la partie morale du traité, passe tout ce qu'on a jamais dit sur ce sujet." Elisabeth to Descartes April 25, 1646.

turning to problems and doubts about the ethical contents. In particular, she is skeptical of the "remedies" Descartes prescribed to be "practiced":

> Mais je trouve encore moins de difficulté à entendre tout ce que vous dites des passions, qu'à pratiquer les remèdes que vous ordonnez contre leurs excès. Car comment prévoir tous les accidents qui peuvent survenir en la vie, qu'il est impossible de nombrer? Et comment nous empêcher de désirer avec ardeur les choses qui tendent nécessairement à la conservation de l'homme (comme la santé et les moyens pour vivre), qui néanmoins ne dépendent point de son arbitre ? Pour la connaissance de la vérité, le désir en est si juste, qu'il est naturellement en tous les hommes ; mais il faudrait avoir une connaissance infinie, pour savoir la juste valeur des biens et des maux qui ont coutume de nous émouvoir, puisqu'il y en a beaucoup plus qu'une seule personne ne saurait imaginer, et qu'il faudra pour cela, parfaitement connaître toutes les choses qui sont au monde.[195]

Desires for what is not within our power are too tenacious, she says. Further, equipping the soul with judgments (its "armes propres") can only extend so far. The infinite diversity and particularity of the world, the contingencies of experience, exclude *a priori* the realization of the Cartesian "Morale" as "universal Wisdom," except, perhaps in writing. One would have to be God ("[i]l faudra avoir une connaissance infinie") in order that, at every moment in life, judgment based on knowledge would show the will the way.[196]

(3) In May/June 1645, Descartes sent Elisabeth a remarkable letter. He prescribed an Epicurean absorption in the present of sense experience so as to avoid brooding on what might irritate her passions. But he suggests another remedy for negative affects, a mental technique, tested and proven in his own life: affirm what occurs and train yourself to view it favorably. By this internal re-orientation, we act on that to which we are normally passive, affecting how it affects us, putting "contentement" in our own hands.[197] Descartes claims that by this repeated,

[195] Elisabeth to Descartes 25 April 1646.
[196] Descartes will respond to this critique with the Stoic spiritual exercise of training the soul in endurance by contemplating the bad things that may happen (letter from May 1646). Thereby, as I've characterized the inner dynamic of the *Passions*, he retreats from an immensely ambitious Cartesian ethics back to a more minimalist ancient, Stoic one: an ethics of endurance and temperance.
[197] That is, as Descartes habituated himself: "regarder les choses qui se présentaient du biais qui me les pouvait rendre le plus agréables, et à faire que mon principal contentement ne dépendît que de moi seul."

willed act of his mind, with time he undid a sickly "indisposition, qui [lui] était comme naturelle."[198] He himself demonstrated, that is, the sort of self-malleability presupposed in the *Passions*. To the Princess's *this is just how I am*, the Philosopher opposes: *no, you are always stronger than yourself*.

On June 22nd, Elisabeth responded with a letter of great cunning. Writing of her inability to turn her mind from the misfortunes afflicting her family, to which she is always exposed in words and letters she must hear and read, she suggests the impracticality—in both senses—of Cartesian ethics. For the modernity of her views, and the coy, playful pessimism streaming in-between her seemingly docile lines, Elisabeth deserves to be cited at some length:

> Monsieur Descartes,
> *Vos lettres me servent toujours d'antidote contre la mélancolie, quand elles ne m'enseigneraient pas, détournant mon esprit des objets désagréables qui lui surviennent tous les jours, pour lui faire contempler le bonheur que je possède dans l'amitié d'une personne de votre mérite, au conseil duquel je puis commettre la conduite de ma vie*. Si je la pouvais encore conformer à vos derniers préceptes, il n'y a point de doute que je me guérirais promptement des maladies du corps et des faiblesses de l'esprit. Mais j'avoue que je trouve de la difficulté à séparer des sens et de l'imagination des choses qui y sont continuellement représentées par discours et par lettres, que je ne saurais éviter sans pécher contre mon devoir. Je considère bien qu'en effaçant de l'idée d'une affaire tout ce qui me la rend fâcheuse (que je crois m'être seulement représenté par l'imagination), j'en jugerais tout aussi sainement et y trouverais aussitôt les remèdes que [je fais avec] l'affection que j'y apporte. *Mais je ne l'ai jamais su pratiquer qu'après que la passion avait joué son rôle. Il y a quelque chose de surprenant dans les malheurs, quoi que prévus, dont je ne suis maîtresse qu'après un certain temps*, auquel mon corps se

[198] Fascinating here are the traces of the older medical-magical notion of *sympathy*—as a reason of inter-contamination or transference—between the mother and the child in her womb. "Car, étant né d'une mère qui mourut, peu de jours après ma naissance, d'un mal de poumon, causé par quelques déplaisirs, j'avais hérité d'elle une toux sèche, et une couleur pâle, que j'ai gardée jusques à l'âge de plus de vingt ans, et qui faisait que tous les médecins qui m'ont vu avant ce temps-là, me condamnaient à mourir jeune," writes Descartes on the "indisposition" he cured through a certain mental technique that became habitual. On the concept of *sympathie* in Descartes's medicine and physiology, see Descartes, *Écrits physiologiques et médicaux*, ed. and trans. V. Aucante (Paris: PUF, 2002) pp. 227-237. Cartesian mechanist medicine, while setting itself against the then still dominant Hippocratic and Galenic medical models, is not a clean cut from them. On its place vis-à-vis these two traditions, which – especially the Galenic one – were prominent well into Descartes's time—though Harvey's 1628 book on the heart constituted a major event of rupture—, see Pierre Mesnard, "L'esprit de la physiologie cartésienne", *Archives de Philosophie*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (1937), pp. 181-220; H. Dreyfus-Le Foyer, "Les conceptions médicales de Descartes," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*,T. 44, No. 1 (Janvier 1937), pp. 237-286.

> désordonne si fort, qu'il me faut plusieurs mois pour le remettre, qui ne se passent guère sans quelque nouveau sujet de trouble. Outre que *je suis contrainte de gouverner mon esprit avec soin,* pour lui donner des objets agréables, la moindre fainéantise le fait retomber sur les sujets qu'il a de s'affliger, et j'appréhende que, si je ne l'emploie point, pendant que je prends les eaux de Spa, il ne se rende plus mélancolique. Si je pouvais profiter, comme vous faites, de tout ce qui se présente à mes sens, je me divertirais, sans le peiner. *C'est à cette heure que je sens l'incommodité d'être un peu raisonnable*. Car, si je ne l'étais point du tout, je trouverais des plaisirs communs avec ceux entre lesquels il me faut vivre, pour prendre cette médecine avec profit. Et [si je l'étais] au point que vous l'êtes, je me guérirais, comme vous avez fait. […].[199]

Offering a microcosm of Elisabeth's mind, these lines are the gentle inception of a definitive rotation of Descartes's thought around the axis that defines its recurrent binaries and tensions. Top becomes bottom; inside and outside intermix. Just as all virile (virtuous) men are inhabited by a feminine (affective) core, not only the body, but the mind too, runs away on its own. The *esprit* is in need of governance. This problematizes the status of the self or "I" that tries to reign it(self) in. Descartes's unified, free "self" can't be (in) the mind or soul, since there, too, not just in the ontological mind-body gap, is compulsion and non-identity. Thought begins to think on its own; the mind has a mind of its own. In other words, the Cartesian "soul" disintegrates.

By the end of the first line, Elisabeth evacuates all content from Descartes's letters. With her conditionals—refusing the either-or of affirmation and negation—and her recourse to personal experience, she dismisses the power of his "préceptes." She suspends them above the sphere of her lived existence. Her inability to use Cartesian "armes" suggests a fundamental human incapacity to fit our lives to the measure of explicitly formulated—here: *written*—rules, norms, laws, precepts, etc. Instead of their contents, Elisabeth emphasizes the therapeutic effect of the letters' form, their sheer existence: virtual presence of the friend. The creation of passion,

[199] Elisabeth to Descartes 22 June 1645 (my italics).

not its domination, friendship, not virtue or the pleasure its practice brings, may be the highest good.[200]

What's more, Elisabeth implies that any dualist account of ailments is deficient. Sure, passions, like sadness, can cause infirmities of the body, like fevers. But reason itself can also make our souls sick. Reason, then, is not purely therapeutic; on the contrary, perhaps human reason allows our problems to become problems in the first place. Human (not divine) reason deprives us of being whole, from coinciding with ourselves, either as animals—pure, passive corporeality, which the ideal of Epicurean sense-absorption names—or as gods—all-active, omniscient minds. Instead, we are split between the two, *both* creature *and* divine, that is, *neither* one, *nor* the other. *This, not our corporeal nature, is our great source of suffering*, Elisabeth's letter suggests. Our thinking souls, rather than being simply a boon and aid in directing ourselves on the way to happiness, can be an accursed obstacle we might wish to do without.

Finally, drawing on experience, Elisabeth intimates that reason's power is *either* anticipatory *or* belated. Even if "we" might be equated with the soul, then *we* have properly speaking no power in the present of experience, embedded as we are in the world and our affective relationality, a web linking us to things and others. In real life, that is, the passions seem to dispose of us as they will and reason is impractical: impracticable. Reason either works

[200] This, which one might read out of the opening lines of this letter as I have, can also be inferred from Elisabeth's letter to Descartes from 21 February 1647. Here are the opening lines: "J'estime la joie et la santé autant que vous le faites, quoique j'y préfère votre amitié aussi bien que la vertu, puisque c'est principalement de celle-là que je tiens l'une et l'autre, joint à la satisfaction d'esprit qui surpasse encore la joie, m'ayant enseigné le moyen d'en avoir." Notice how the apparent equating of friendship and virtue is, in the next clause, transformed into a hierarchical relation between the two, as virtue disappears entirely: even though she prefers both friendship and virtue to *santé* and *joie*, friendship, not virtue, is the source of both. What, if anything, is the role of virtue? Perhaps none: the whole Stoic notion of virtue as sufficient to happiness comes to nothing. Friendship, the affective basis of the correspondence and the passion working at a distance through their written words, is what counts. And this is true for Elisabeth and for Descartes, as his often profusely affectionate, and always concerned, letters betray. But Descartes doesn't see this. He thinks it is *what* he writes that helps her cope. Elisabeth suggests it is simply *that* he writes that counts.

when we don't want it too—forbidding absorption in the petty joys of common life and sense experience—or doesn't work when we would most like it too. *Que je sens l'incommodité d'être un peu raisonnable!*

(4) But the most provocative moments of the Descartes-Elisabeth correspondence are yet to come. These arise when each chooses a book to read and discuss together by letter: Descartes opts for Seneca; Elisabeth selects something very different. A whole study might be devoted to the sort of pedagogical, literate practice here actualized in their epistolary exchange: master and student tackle a text together, for the intellectual, spiritual, and ethical development of both. Literacy—its materialities, and the practices that actualize them—negates the limits of historical time. Beside the here and now, it opens up a new space, in which two people, separated by space, dialogue with another, separated by time.[201] This is a basic premise of humanism and humanist education.

[201] Whether in the fictional letters between Rousseau's lovers in his *Nouvelle Héloïse*, or here, in the real exchange between the well-read Philosopher and Princess, literacy cannot be taken for granted. One can hardly exaggerate the extent to which it conditions the very horizon of self-consciousness at a given time, including how literate persons understand themselves and construe their own self-relation. That is, studying literacy is a necessary condition for studying Western *techniques de soi* at all, and the genealogy of the modern subject, which Foucault undertook towards the end of his life, is incomplete, indeed insufficient, without at least some study of the phenomenon of alphabetic literacy. Foucault only provided small fragments of such a study, without conceiving of its importance as such: cf. Foucault, "L'écriture de soi" in *Corps écrit* n° 5, 1983, pp. 3-23. For a project that is through and through inspired by, while being a materialist, media theoretical critique of, Foucauldian archaeology, see Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997 [1985]). For the role of alphabetic literacy in self-knowledge and –relation—in this case, the discovery of the soul as seat of the intellect in ancient Greece—, see Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard/Belknap Press, 1962); and Kittler, *Optical Media*, trans. Enns (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), ch. 1. What we see in the reading suggestions of Descartes and Elisabeth is precisely how literacy and its practices condition self-relationally, the horizon of what one understands oneself, and what one strives, to be. This is something that stems from the very essence of writing: the actualization in one's present of what is, as letters, detached from the moment of its writing, "applicable," in the same sense as Descartes's "precepts," to one's life. Literacy means one disposes of various forms to which, in various combinations or just taking one, one might strive to conform one's "conduite de vie." This, too, is a reason for literacy's tendency to cause a division between actuality and ideality, what McLuhan provocatively called literacy's *schizophrenia*: Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011 [1962]), 26. All hysteria about novels, in

To capture the significance of the book-club episode, as I will call it, we must read the letters exchanged as a gesture, a *rebus*, listening to what is said with a different ear, be it teleologically pricked. For what they do not say, but show, is the clash between the two forces for which this thesis will, again and again, provide the arena: humanism at its most sober, ambitious, and optimistic, and antihumanism in its often saturnine, skeptical pessimism. Each intertext figures as personification of one side of this clash. Looking down from above, as it were, we can view them in an allegorical tableau depicting the French historical and intellectual gigantomachy of the 17th and, later, of the 20th century. Again, a schematic account will have to suffice here.

Two months after their exchange on ethics began, in July 1645, Descartes, self-conscious about what he might be able to say on a domain in which he was more a stranger than a citizen, proposed the Princess take a look at Seneca's *De vita beata* and send him her "remarques."[202] His lack of familiarity with philosophical ethics might explain the uncustomary pro-*Anciens* remark that Descartes makes to introduce the suggestion. Reading and elaborating ("renchérir") what the Ancients have to say on that "souveraine félicité" is among the "most useful" means for "acquiring" it, Descartes tells us.[203] He does this himself, offering, in his next letter, a critical

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the 18th century, for example, turns on this possibility: that writing detaches itself, becomes autonomous, time-negating form, properly or, more often, improperly "applied" to one's present moment and state. It may appear obvious, but it bears articulating how reading in the Early Modern period brought voices from historically distinct periods to bear on the same problems and the same human nature. This is a time in which the sedimentation of the historical worldview had not yet occurred. The Ancients, like the Stoics, are possible subjects of a critique, like those leveled at them in the second half of the 17th century, only because their philosophy is not taken as a document providing a window into a bygone time with its own ideology or worldview, including its own conception of human selves and human nature absolutely not to be confused with those of one's own moment. On the contrary, they can be wrong only if they are assumed to be talking about the same people (us) and the same problems (ours).

[202] Descartes to Elisabeth 12 July 1645.

[203] Ibid. "L'un de ces moyens, qui me semble des plus utiles, est d'examiner ce que les anciens en ont écrit, et tâcher à renchérir par-dessus eux, en ajoutant quelque chose à leurs préceptes, car ainsi on peut rendre ces préceptes parfaitement siens, et se disposer à les mettre en pratique." This reading method might recall what Foucault examined in ancient ethics, namely, the practice of a sort of "écriture de soi,"

exposition of Seneca's text. Despite his criticisms, the Stoic core remains, expressed even in his own amendments.[204] Elisabeth agreed on Seneca's lack of "méthode." But she had only doubts for the Stoic idea Descartes proclaimed in his latter letter, whereby "supreme felicity," "beatitude," can be reached by our will and minds alone, that is, by what depends solely on "us." We are not merely our own subjects, she counters: certain sicknesses subject us, even destroy reason entirely, thus exacerbating the already vulnerable condition of minds, which they cannot just think themselves out of.[205]

While Descartes suggested they study a book that was Stoic *par excellence*,[206] Elisabeth had something else in mind. She brings to the table *The Prince* (1532), Machiavelli's infamous treatise. A veritable manifesto of political and moral pessimism, it describes the necessary evils of the cunning ruler, seeing virtue in vice, and setting to the successful sovereign the task of learning, not how to be good, but how best to be bad. If I'm right about the isomorphism

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a literate form of mediation by which rules and precepts are recalled, ruminated, synthesized, mediated by the pen as conduit leading between their virtual suspension as laws and their actualization or incorporation as governing principles of life. Foucault considered this a practice by which a self (soi) is constituted as such.

[204] 4 August, 1645. Descartes critiques Seneca's *De vita beata* not so much for its spirit as for the vagaries of its letter, i.e., not for the eminent content ("la dignité de la matière") but for its method ("la façon dont [Sénèque] la traite"), calling the latter "pas assez exacte pour être suivie." Yet the critique should not distract from what is important: Descartes's condensed re-writing of Seneca's treatise is not only perfectly in line with what he described as the correct way to read the Ancients on ethics; his position is just as Stoic as Seneca himself, albeit, in his mind, more clear. What he provides is a variation on his moral code from 1637: three things to always keep in mind in order to "se rendre content de soi-même", "trois choses, auxquelles se rapportent les trois règles de la morale, que j'ai mise dans le *Discours de la Méthode*." The resemblance of these principles to the basic message of the *Passions* is striking. Indeed, it brings to light the treatise's debt to Stoicism, at least in the properly moral or ethical sections, even though Descartes was able to say of the "science" of the passions in article 1 that he was going to treat it as if no one before had ever written anything at all on the same subject.

[205] Elisabeth to Descartes 17 August 1645. The body's perturbations, she writes, "diminuent la force, et empêchent de suivre les maximes que le bon sens aura forgées, et…rendent l'homme le plus modéré sujet à se laisser emporter de ses passions, et moins capable à se démêler des accidents de la fortune, qui requièrent une résolution prompte." She continues: "Et c'est ainsi que je ne saurais encore me désembarrasser du doute, si on peut arriver à la béatitude dont vous parlez, sans l'assistance de ce qui ne dépend pas absolument de la volonté."

[206] Descartes also culled from Seneca's book for the *Lettre-Préface*'s famous depiction of Philosophy.

between the State and the Self in Descartes's ethics, then we might view the young Princess' book-club suggestion as one from a view on life, and on how to rule oneself, in utter tension with Descartes's Stoic optimism.

Unfortunately, we don't know exactly how Elisabeth suggested *The Prince* to Descartes. How did she describe the book to him, who seems not to have been familiar with it before? We can only imagine. All we have is his response, known to posterity as the *Lettre sur "Le Prince" de Machiavel*. Under the sober tranquility of the Philosopher's lines, we sense his profound agitation. "[P]our instruire un bon prince, quoique nouvellement entré dans un Etat, il me semble qu'on lui doit proposer des maximes toutes contraires," insists Descartes, who, in his letter, will undertake to do just that. The anthropological pessimism, upon which Machiavelli's politics rests, was especially unpalatable. To the sincere good faith of a self-contentment in virtue, Machiavelli opposes "qu'on tâche de paraître homme de bien, mais qu'on ne le soit pas véritablement," as Descartes writes, citing one of what he calls Machiavelli's "préceptes très tyranniques."[207]

> [J]e désapprouve la maxime du chapitre 15: Que, le monde étant fort corrompu, il est impossible qu'on ne se ruine, si l'on veut être toujours homme de bien; et qu'un prince, pour se maintenir, doit apprendre à être méchant, lorsque l'occasion le requiert […] Mais, pensant qu'un homme de bien est celui qui fait tout ce que lui dicte la vraie raison, il est certain que le meilleur est de tâcher à l'être toujours.

Unsurprising is the rationalist's reaction to a book so vilified it had been on the Church's Index for nearly a century (since 1557) before, thanks to a young Princess, he had to read it. The book had achieved considerable notoriety in France: some held its doctrine responsible for the political maneuvering that led to the violence of the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre.[208] Descartes could hardly have found Machiavelli's views pleasing, therapeutic, or pedagogically useful. It

[207] Descartes to Elisabeth September 1646.
[208] Andrew Curry, "Political morality?" *The Washington* Post (January 13, 1999), p. H01.

was an evil book with an evil lesson, and a different sort of discourse than his. Not a work of philosophical ethics so much as a manual of political and civil strategics, *The Prince* is a lesson in dominating others through the oftentimes brutal exercise of force and power gained by any means possible in a world in which people are motivated by a hardly disguised *Wille zur Macht*. For Machiavelli, as for La Rochefoucauld, being good is for the dupe. Being good is literally *irrational*. Descartes's "virtue"—do what reason dictates—could thus be recuperated by precisely the opposite, pessimist camp.

A month later, Elisabeth responded to Descartes's letter on *The Prince* with the deference of a student accompanied by her masterly, subtle critique.[209] Arguably, she defends Machiavelli; at least indirectly, when she explains precisely what Descartes found contestable: the assumption of evil. The best instruction demands we take things as they are, and at their most extreme, she says.[210] Further, she corrects his misreading of what Machiavelli means by "homme de bien" in the maxim whereby "qu'on se ruine, si on veut toujours être homme de bien."[211] He means, she says, someone who follows the basic "loi commune" of do unto others as you wish they do unto you. This "common law" princes are obviously permitted to break, she explains, providing an example. Machiavelli's art of governance as an art of life suggests, not that we control our passions, but that, in a corrupt world, we learn to bravely infringe the "laws" that culturally define what is held to be good and bad. (Self)sovereignty is the capacity to dispose of oneself in

[209] Elisabeth to Descartes 10 October 1646.
[210] That is, she makes it clear that Machiavelli assumes the extreme case in order to demonstrate the rule: "l'État le plus difficile à gouverner", allies "aussi méchants qu'ils peuvent être, et les affaires en telle extrémité, qu'il faut perdre toute une république, ou rompre sa parole à ceux qui ne la gardent qu'aussi longtemps qu'elle leur est utile," etc. Intriguing is how Elisabeth claims to have not read the book in years, but still recalls it in its details sufficient to set Descartes straight about essential points. That is, she is perhaps exaggerating how long it has been since she read Machiavelli. *The Prince* was on her mind.
[211] Descartes thought that the "maxime du chapitre 15," which I cited, could only make sense if what Machiavelli means by "homme de bien" is someone who is "supersititieux et simple."

this way, to step outside of the limits of the common law, and to act with reason and cunning, even in the most exceptional situations. We are here closer to Sade than to Seneca.

Elisabeth's Machiavellian lesson is provocative. But it was only one further indication of the Princess' exemplary status in intellectual history. She was *untimely*, moving a step ahead of an era that, in its understanding of human nature, would often side with Machiavelli over Descartes and the Stoics. Within decades, in other words, this ideal reader will be shown to have been a pioneering, indeed paradigmatic critic of Descartes. Before La Rochefoucauld and Pascal, before Spinoza or Molière, at the cusp of a new era in which "la dimension sensible de l'être humain en général" will enjoy widespread "revalorisation,"[212] Elisabeth, with her insistent yet gentle, *passive* skepticism, felt Descartes might have things backwards. The worldly experience of a misfortunate young woman brought before the writings of the great, solitary mind a plaint that centuries would continue to bring against him.

"N'avez-vous point lu le docte traité que Sénèque a composé de la colère?"

More than twenty years after Elisabeth stopped sending letters to Descartes, Molière's comedy *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670)[213] painted a parodical philosophical *vanitas*: of the Philosopher as hypocrite and Reason as nothing but hot air compared to the flames of real conflicts and the passions they involve. Indeed, the *maître de Philosophie* is even more ridiculous than the imbecile bourgeois Monsieur Jourdain. For the former's vulgar actions and unbridled emotions diverge from the lofty norms he preaches, prescribes, and aspires to embody. He thus stands in distinction to a host of characters and trickery all *explicitly* governed by *amour*

[212] Desjardins and Dumouchel, "L'aventure des passions au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. Apogée et déclin d'une notion théorique cardinale,"in *Penser les passions*, p. 4.
[213] *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme,* ed. Georges Couton (Gallimard: Paris, 2013). I cite from this edition.

propre. Alone, he is deluded with respect, not to others, but, more reprehensible still, with respect to himself.

Molière's criticisms of philosophy are not far from those that Elisabeth's letters, and even more so her own experience, had already directed towards Descartes's ethics. For philosophy *per se* as it appears in his play shares some of the principal ethical aims and moral pretensions that Descartes, and others before him—the Stoics especially—, thought to be within the grasp of philosophical practice: rationality as a means to settle dispute and philosophy as a remedy for the passions, as a route to happiness, as training to endure hardship, and as a way of separating oneself from the vulgar herd.

Taking part in a contemporary vein of harsh critique of rationalism and its ancient version, Stoicism, Molière's play suggests that, in philosophy, language diverges to such an extent from the real behavior of individuals as to assume a status of nothing but rhetorical reverie. While other educators have something concrete to teach—a real *technè* that can be practiced—the philosopher builds castles in the sky, ideal Republics or perfect selves. Or, as in the famous "prose" scene, philosophy merely redescribes what we already grasp intuitively, though in a jargon lacking real epistemic content. This is the vanity of science.

We can briefly recall the main conceit of the play up to the philosopher's entry. Thinking he can buy and learn his way into true nobility, Monsieur Jourdain has paid instructors in dance, music, arms, and philosophy to come to his home and to help him in his quest of self-acculturation in all those areas in which a *gentilhomme*,[214] should excel. The noble's skills and accouterments *are* his being, he thinks. Needless to say, this "bon bourgeois"[215] is terrible at whatever he sets himself to learning.

[214] A gentilhomme is someone born noble (*noble de race*): Couton, in *Bourgeois gentihomme*, n. 1, p.82.
[215] Act. III, XVI, p. 159.

In Act II, when the philosopher makes his appearance, the arms instructor has just succeeded in insulting his two colleagues, by asserting the supremacy of his "science" over all others: "…combien la science des armes l'emporte hautement sur toutes les autres sciences inutiles, comme la danse, la musique, la…"[216] The ellipsis is in the text. Knowing the play, we are sure he was about to say "philosophie." But he's cut off by the objections from the others. The quarrel quickly turns dirty, as insults and threats are hurled back and forth. Enter, in Scene II, the philosopher, precisely under the sign of the tranquilizing power of reason, the figure who should "mettre la paix entre ces personnes-ci."[217] After learning of their conflict, he addresses the parties involved from the moral high ground of his own *science*:

> Hé quoi? Messieurs, faut-il s'emporter de la sorte? et n'avez-vous point lu le docte traité que Sénèque a composé de la colère? Y a-t-il rien de plus bas et de honteux que cette passion, qui fait d'un homme une bête féroce? et la raison ne doit-elle pas être la maîtresse de tous les mouvements? […] Un homme sage est au-dessus de toutes les injures qu'on lui peut dire; et la grande réponse qu'on doit faire aux outrages, c'est la modération et la patience.[218]

These lines probably target the Stoics and Neostoics. But Molière's philosopher might as well be the author of the *Passions* and the "spiritual" epistolary admonitions and consolations of the 1640s. Seneca's *De ire* as remedy for the passions recalls Descartes's prescription of *De vita beata* to Elisabeth. And the cliché of the sage's transcendence over injury evokes "interior emotions," those joys felt even in hardship, which render our true, inner self invulnerable to whatever may befall us. Indeed, if many in the second half of the 17th century heard in Descartes resonances of the resuscitated Stoic moral outlook, which clashed with the religious severity and stern humility of the time, we cannot follow Cassirer in blaming them.[219] Echoes of Stoic moral

[216] Act II, II, p. 53.
[217] As Monsieur Jourdain implores him to do: p. 56
[218] Act II, III, p. 57.
[219] "Für die Zeitgenossen und die unmittelbaren Nachfolger Descartes's war diese Berührung seiner Moralphilosophie mit der Stoa so auffallend und unverkennbar, daß es ihnen schwerfiel, zwischen beiden

philosophy are obvious in the *Passions*, despite Descartes's claim to write as "physicien," not as orator (à la Aristotle, et al.) or moral philosopher (à la Seneca, et al.).

It's easy to guess what happens after the philosopher gives his fuming listeners the little *condensé* of Stoic ethics cited above. It's the same as in *Les femmes savantes* (1672), where self-labeled enlightened ladies betray the vanity of their own philosophical learning. Having insulted the other instructors by belittling their domains of expertise, he is insulted in turn. Irate, the philosopher hurls himself into the melee. Harsh words turn into blows. The stage directions indicate that the philosopher "se jette sur eux," making him, despite his words of peace, calm, and endurance, the first to push the conflict from verbal to physical violence.[220] Apparently, Seneca' treatise was of no real use.

Only after the conflict comes the philosophy lesson. Monsieur Jourdain balks at logic but is piqued by the mention of "la morale." He asks the philosopher what it is about. The reply is made in words whose emptiness has already been demonstrated:

> Monsieur Jourdain: Qu'est-ce qu'elle dit, cette morale?
> Maître de Philosophie : Elle traite de la félicité, enseigne aux hommes à modérer leurs passions, et…

überhaupt eine scharfe Grenze zu ziehen. Selbst Leibniz, der ein so sicheres Gefühl für alle systematischen und alle individuellen Differenzen hatte, erklärt, daß die Cartesische Moral mit der stoischen der Sache nach völlig zusammenfallen [*in re morali eadem ist*]," writes Cassirer, *Descartes*, p. 74. Indeed, in the decades after his death, Descartes's rationalism was more or less set as equal to that of those proud and hypocritical philosophers, the Stoics, whose thought had been revived in the 16th and 17th century. When Pascal, as we will see, lumps Descartes and Epictetus together into the same camp of deifiers of lowly animal creatures, he perceived something inherent to Descartes's ethical philosophy. Cassirer doesn't think so, or at least only with reservations: for Descartes both naturalized the passions, taking them as a fact of human life, as I've shown, and also accorded them an importance the Stoics and Neostoics denied them (p.74 ff). Still, I think that the scientific pretension of the *Passions* does not move Descartes into a new paradigm so much as render his position rather ambiguous, treating the passions as a scientific object while at the same time approaching them as something to be mastered and worked on, as in ancient ethics. My reading of article 212 (in note 178 *supra*) brings to light another aspect of this ambiguity, as revaluation of the passions is in fact contingent on their mastery: they are an essential ingredient in the sweetness of existence if we master them and use them at will, and are not used by them, against it.

[220] P. 59.

> Monsieur Jourdain: Non, laissons cela. Je suis bilieux comme tous les diables; et il n'y a morale qui tienne, je veux me mettre en colère tout mon soûl, quand il m'en prend envie.[221]

The philosopher's hypocrisy lends a certain *justesse* to Monsieur Jourdain's interruption. The latter might as well have added: "…comme tout le monde."

Il n'y a morale qui tienne. Claiming purchase everywhere yet nowhere up to the task of reality, actualized no-where, ethics has an odd ontological status. A beautiful yet inefficacious discourse, its paradigmatic media are writing and books. *N'avez-vous point lu le docte traité de Sénèque?* In or as writing, discourse can solidify into a world, an image, a system of ideals, norms, or laws, over against the dirt, grit, and violence of reality and the disorderly passions that reign there. A being *of* and *in* language—inhabiting "le monde sçavant," the world of letters[222]—the philosopher is the antithesis of Molieresque comedy and its realism. He sits there, alongside the idiot bourgeois, out of touch with how people actually function, what they are capable of, and what really drives them—himself included. At best he offers jargon; at worst, hypocrisy. Against this *beau parleur*, the social world, *le monde*,[223] silently bodies forth its own irrational logic. There, *Passion* subjects *Raison*, this linguistic, perhaps scriptural being—in any case: an imaginary one. After Descartes, with La Rochefoucauld and Pascal, the soul's discursive kingdom is absorbed back into the empire of the heart from which, in a movement of the philosopher's epistemic passion, it emerged.[224]

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[221] Pp. 65-66.
[222] Furetière, "MONDE," *Dictionnaire universel*, II: "les gens de lettres sont appelez le *monde* sçavant."
[223] Ibid. "MONDE, se dit aussi de la société civile, & du commerce que les personnes qui la composent ont entre elles. [… e.g.,] Le *grand monde* ce sont les gens de qualité. […] L'air du monde distingue l'homme poli d'avect le Sçavant. St. Ev[remond]. Le *monde* est un théâtre où les hommes se joüent les uns les autres. Ab[bé] de Mon[tmorel] […]."
[224] Addressing the affective, even libidinal, aspect of learning and philosophizing in Descartes is another way, one not taken here, of thinking of the relationship between knowledge, judgment and passion. Isn't the quest for and use of knowledge—be it to dominate the passions—itself guided by a passion, as Hobbes wrote in the *Leviathan* of "curiosity"? One place to start, in which we find Descartes broaching

the topic of the affectivity of learning and study, is the *Rules*. In Rule X, Descartes writes: "Eo me fateor natum esse ingenio, ut summam studiorum voluptatem non in audiendis aliorum rationibus, sed in iisdem propria industria inveniendis semper posuerim": "J'ai l'esprit ainsi fait, je l'avoue, que j'ai toujours considéré comme la plus grande volupté de l'étude, non point d'écouter les raisonnements d'autrui, mais de les découvrir moi-même par mes propres ressources" (*Règles pour la direction de l'esprit*, trans. Alquié (Paris: LGF, 2002), Rule X. p.123). There is, then, a libidinal dimension to study as an action, a pleasure that accompanies the mind's self-cultivation through exercise and effort. And a pleasure, too, in the result of this exercise. Rule I already described the *volupté* of contemplating the truth (*ad illam voluptatem, quae in veri contemplatione reperitur*), designating it as perhaps the only pleasure not disturbed by pain (*quae fere unica est integra et nullis turbata doloribus in hac vita felicitas*). Indeed, to return to the passions: even the act of dominating them carries with it a charge of pleasure or joy—a feeling of increase in power, Nietzsche would say—that gives virtue an affective rather than a rational ground (see *Passions*, article 212 and the letter to Elisabeth 18 May, 1645, that seems to be a first formulation for this article: "et cette épreuve qu'elles font de leur force leur est agréable."). Just so, in a letter to Elisabeth comparing the concepts ancient philosophers had of the *souverain bien* (18 August, 1645), Descartes takes the side of Epicurus over against Zeno, setting *volupté*, not virtue, as the ultimate good. It is for *volupté*, the prize of virtue, that we strive to be virtuous: the impetus for ethics. One would here have to study the passion of licit self-esteem in the *Passions* as well, in order to get at the affective in Cartesian ethical supremacy, *générosité*. The latter, to recall, is a virtue-passion, not just a disinterested cognitive or rational attitude (whatever that might mean). It is a feeling and a disposition or habit.

"Das wäre doch eine merkwürdige, überraschende, unsere Auffassung des Seelenlebens verändernde Tatsache, … eine Tatsache, die sich in ihrer Benennung selbst aufhebt und doch etwas Wirkliches sein will, eine contradictio in adjecto." – Freud, *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, 100.

"Ni la contradiction n'est marque de fausseté ni l'incontradiction n'est marque de vérité." — Pascal, fr. 372.

Ch. 2: Descartes Au Contraire: La Rochefoucauld and Contrariety in the *Maximes*

Introduction

In chapter one, I drew attention to the exclusion of contrariety and contradiction from the domain of the self (the soul) in Descartes's *Les Passions de l'âme* (1649). Opposition, I argued, is exorcized despite, and in the very movement of, the doctrine of the passions. In turn, this motivated my reading of the constitutive entanglement of strata in the *Passions*: between the content of the book as the soul's struggle for sovereignty and unity, for one, the theorization and vicissitudes of the concepts "passion" and "will," for another, and, finally, the rapport between the *Passions* and Descartes's earlier texts. The passions disrupt humanist idealism and its notion of a selfsame self or soul. The vogue of affect theory today is powered by this basic intuition. To contain its force, in the *Passions* Descartes's thought carries out self-directed "ethical" work, an attempt to resolve the tensions it brings to light. In this, I claimed, the book is the image of the self for which it served as a sort of therapeutics or self-training manual, a *technique de soi*.

The question of the soul's power over the passions, I argued, cannot be isolated. Instead, it is a synecdoche of a group of other, more basic problems: of free will, of the possibility for objective knowledge, or of a unified self that could be the stable causal ground of its discourse, thoughts, and actions. The problem of passion—as passivity and affectivity—, that is, concerns the status of the "I," the *subject* of consciousness and discourse, which might attribute to itself, as cause, "its" representations, desires, actions.

Passion touches on language, too, and its rapport with this self. Descartes's view of the passions, I suggested, is modeled on an analogy that might appear to be merely illustrative: the analogy of language, which emerges at crucial moments in the *Passions*. Descartes posits a split and association between ideas or "significations" (art. 50) and material supports; between, on analogy, the soul's passions and the corresponding corporeal movements. The primacy of ideas or meanings over words qua sounds and letters, inheres in this linguistic conventionalism. This view centers the soul vis-à-vis the discourse irradiating from it and, via the analogy, assures its sovereignty over the corporeal force and natural hardwiring of the passions. The structure, use, and acquisition of language pointed the way to self-transformation and -mastery. The *Passions* posits *and* prescribes a self that is a citadel of unity against inner disunion, a constant, heroic mind capable of manipulating and disciplining its body, and its language, at will.

The Cartesian optimism that, despite formidable opposition from within, ultimately triumphs in (and over) the *Passions*, can be seen on another level, a historical-philosophical one. Here, in the 17th century, the struggle between the soul, as a principle of freedom and self-identity, and the passions, as a force of nonidentity and (self)subjection, was fought out between thinkers and authors, or even, as in the fierce rivalry between Jesuits and Jansenists, between institutions.[1] Descartes occupies one pole of this conflict; on the other sits a pessimistic and often Augustinian *antihumanism*, a term whose sense will become clear in this chapter.[2] Two thinkers,

[1] See Vincent Carraud, "Le jansénisme", *Bibliothèque électronique de Port-Royal*, 2ème série (2007), n.p. Accessible online; and Paul Bénichou, "La métaphysique janséniste," in *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard 1948), pp. 121-154; Jean Mesnard sees one "option" available to 17th c. intellectual culture as the choice between an "optimism" of various brands and a "pessimism" whose "couleur…est presque toujours augustinienne": "Culture et religion au XVIIe siècle," in Mesnard, *La Culture du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1992), p. 118.

[2] The term ("anti-humanisme augustinien") is used by Philippe Sellier differently, though in a clearly related sense: to refer (anachronistically) to Augustine's own (not his disciples') critical attitude towards Greco-Roman moral philosophy, in particular, to the "pagan" virtues and heroic vision of the individual human self: "La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, Saint Augustin", *RHLF*, 69, nº3/4 (May-Aug. 1969), p. 564.

both younger than Descartes, offer different versions of this position: La Rochefoucauld, studied here, and Pascal, the focus of chapter 3. Whether they explicitly attack each other or not, the two sides of this divide hold conflicting views on human nature, affectivity, selfhood, and language.

Descartes died in 1650. The next years saw the blooming of a dark flower planted earlier in the century. Its seeds had taken root between ca. 1615 and 1640, the year of publication of Jansenius's (1585-1638) posthumous masterwork, *Augustinus*. I have no pretension to summarize this massive text, or the positions of those, called Jansenists by their adversaries, who saw themselves rather as disciples of Saint Augustine.[3] The question of La Rochefoucauld's proximity to Augustinian thought is, further, not one at all, notwithstanding doubts as to the seriousness of his commitments.[4] We need only clarify the terms of the conflict described above by providing some religious context and isolating the positions from Jansenius's book that infused 17th-century Augustinianism.

17th-century religious culture in France has been characterized as spiritualist and introspective. Rather than the noise and pomp of collective cult ritual, interiority and the insertion of practice into the intimate relation of the self with itself were privileged.[5] Jansenism

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Sellier situates this position in a "débat exemplaire qui divisa l'Europe occidentale pendant près d'un siècle" (553). Jean Lafond, in *La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et littérature* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977) argues that the "utilitarisme augustinien" we find in La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, and Nicole is based on "un pessimisme et un anti-humanisme caractérisés" (pp. 150, 151). It is Henri Gouhier who has written the most on 17th-century antihumanism, authoring the only book-length study: *L'anti-humanisme au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 1987). For Gouhier, 17th-century antihumanism opposes "humanism" qua an image of man's self-sufficiency and dignity, his potential to best realize his nature via culture, his capacity to recognize the good (truth, happiness) and guide himself towards it (ch.1, pp. 20-21). "Antihumanism" is generally Augustinian and anti-Stoic, two criteria that the *Maximes* might easily satisfy. But La Rochefoucauld does not figure in the text. This can be explained: Gouhier's focus is the theological-philosophical phenomenon of antihumanism, making his primary objects varieties of Christian humanism or antihumanism and the question of grace, and his main protagonists Jansenius, Charron, Saint-Cyran, inter alia, and Pascal.

[3] Jean Dagens, "Le XVIIe siècle, siècle de Saint Augustin," *CAIEF*, nº3-5, 1953, p. 31; Carraud, "Le jansénisme," n.p.

[4] Cf. Eric Turcat, *La Rochefoucauld par quatre chemins* (Tübingen: Narr, 2013), p. 22.

[5] Mesnard, "Culture et religion au XVIIe siècle," pp. 17-18.

satisfied these needs in its own way. Like Augustine's thought, it offered a theological backdrop upon which everyday aspects of experience and psychology become legible. Countering the Molinists and Jesuits — absurd revivalists, in his eyes, of Stoic philosophy —, Jansenius claimed that fallen human nature is deprived of any active, autonomous principle of freedom. Fallen man has no means to willfully direct himself to happiness or salvation; these come from without, as gratuitous gifts of God's "grâce efficace."[6]

In Janensius's text, human nature and its terrestrial domain are utterly severed from God and His realm.[7] Yet this schism should also be seen as cleaving between man and his own divinity, the capacity for self-transcendence promised by doctrines of free will, like Descartes's. In denying this self-surpassing, Augustinianism spoke to 17th-century French culture's growing interest, especially after the Fronde (1648-53), in the "nature" of "l'homme moyen" rather than a "nature héroïque," which was now charged with hubris and artifice.[8] The Augustinian account of fallen nature posits a self not sublime, but weak in willpower; not self-controlling, but subjected to its emotions; not constant or unified, but fractured, unstable, and akratic. This saturnine portrait suited an age still reeling from divisive civil war, which needed to make sense of a manifest human tendency for cruelty and violent conflict.

Augustinianism can also be seen as one response to the tensions produced by the new proximity of classical culture brought by humanism and its instrument, the printing press.[9] For, whether as a Stoicism reborn in printed books and their readers, or a Jesuitism offering a cheery view of man and sin, the Augustinians saw the enemy by their same pompous images of human

[6] Cf. Carraud, "Le jansénisme," n.p.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Mesnard, "Culture et religion au XVIIe siècle," p. 18.
[9] On these tensions, see Mesnard, "Culture et religion au XVIIe siècle," p. 112. Gouhier sees 17th-century Augustinian antihumanism in part as a reaction "contre les infiltrations humanistes": *L'anti-humanisme au XVIIe siècle*, p. 75.

nature.[10] Both posited human freedom and self-sufficiency, encouraging belief in the efficacy of one's own reasoning, intentions, and actions. Ancient moral philosophy saw man in a pardisal state, before sin. Be they Christian, modern iterations of such positions were guilty of the same hubris, a misunderstanding of postlapsarian human nature.[11] Despite the influence Augustine had on his thought, Descartes's assertions on self-sovereignty, -transparency, and free will in the *Passions* situate him on the side of those whose views the Augustinians attacked. [12]

Scholarship and Approach

While Pascal and Descartes are often seen as counterparts, critical commentaries that explicitly treat Descartes *and* François VI, duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613-80), are rare indeed.[13] To begin to justify the staging of their confrontation here, perhaps we might invoke a methodological injunction from *L'archéologie du savoir*. Foucault encourages us not to resort to interpretation in order to reveal, between various "faits de discours," the "relations" by which we might group

[10] See Carraud, "Le jansénisme," n.p.

[11] "Le stoïcisme, dont se recommandent des penseurs chrétiens, tels que Guillaume de Vair, Juste-Lipse ou Pierre Charron, apparut vite comme un moyen d'évacuer tant la déchéance due au péché que la croix du Christ," writes Pierre Magnard in his review of Gouhier's *L'anti-humanisme au XVIIe siècle*, in *Les études philosophiques*, nº1 (Jan.-Mar. 1990), p. 125. Note that it was precisely on these grounds that Luther had attacked Aristotle as fundamentally incompatible with Christian (i.e., Augustinian) anthropology. See Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 54-56

[12] See Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*, Introduction, and n. 19, p. 8 for a bibliography on the topic. Harrison enjoins us to be sensitive to the various rival forms of Augustinianism in the 17th century, when Augustine's thought was omnipresent in Europe. He calls "the major divide" the rift between Descartes's optimistic version and the pessimistic ones, like Jansenism or Calvinism, which more fully adopted Augustine's anthropology (pp. 54, 65-66).

[13] Sparse elements of a comparison can be found in Jutta Weiser, "Littérature et psychanalyse: la poétique du désir chez Lacan et La Rochefoucauld", *Œuvres et critiques*, XXXIV, nº 2 (2009), pp. 69-95; and Bénichou, "La démolition du héros," *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard 1948), pp.155-80. In each case, however, the anti-Cartesianism of the *Maximes* is only indirectly approached, the main propos being elsewhere. In Weiser, La Rochefoucauld exerts a fascination on Lacan because he partakes of a 17th-century "courant anti-cartésien," which, Weiser argues, "a laissé des traces profondes dans la pensée de Lacan" (72). Bénichou's main contrast is between Corneille's heroes and the demystifying pessimism of La Rochefoucauld and Pascal. Descartes is briefly invoked as the philosopher, as it were, of this aristocratic heroism, along the lines, that is, of a the Descartes-Corneille *topos* described in chapter 1.

them into heretofore un-theorized "ensembles" or "unités." Instead, we are to observe "faits de discours" in their implicit "coexistence," harmonious or tortured, revealing their relations—"qui n'auraient jamais été formulées pour elles-mêmes dans les énoncés en question"—by an analysis "de leur fonctionnement mutuel, de leur détermination réciproque." [14] The duke La Rochefoucauld never attacks the philosopher Descartes (his preference for general, oracular judgments would have in any case forbidden it).[15] But the implicit antagonism between their discourses on selves (or non-selves), passions, and language, is striking.

Perhaps it also bears recalling that early readers took the *Maximes*'s propositions on vitiated human nature seriously. Documents from the "consultation of 1663" testify to this, and to an immediate appraisal of the project as pessimistic or Augustinian. It was seen to be as opposed to the "anciens philosophes" as to their modern epigones: the "nouveaux pédants" (humanists?).[16] While some of the churchmen who read the manuscript adopted the Augustinian perspective in which the text, with all its paradoxes, became coherent and truthful, the female readers, some of them *Précieuses*, were aghast at its perversion.[17] The *Maximes* injure its reader's pride by inverting the sort of common, and commonsensical, assumptions we make about ourselves, which Descartes justified theoretically: by negating self-control and self-

[14] Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 44-5.
[15] La Rochefoucauld differs from Pascal in this preference for general propositions to *ad hominem* attacks.
[16] See the letters in La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes* suivies des *Réflexions diverses*, J. Truchet, ed. (Paris: Garnier, 2014), p. 536, 561 ff. The letter cited is 31 (in Truchet, ed., pp. 568 ff), which also calls the *Maximes* "un anti-Sénèque" and "un parfaitement beau commentaire du texte de Saint Augustin," namely, the *City of God*. For a commentary on the ensemble of the 1663 letters, which compares the masculine ecclesiastic to the feminine, aristocratic reactions, see Susan Read Baker, "The Reception of La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* (1659-1665): A Question of Gender?" *PFSCL*, no. 24 (1986), pp. 65-81.
[17] See letter 31 for the resolution of these paradoxes. It is Baker who infers that some of the four male readers were churchmen. The female readers to whom, in 1663, a manuscript of the *Maximes* was sent—de Scudéry, de Schomberg, de la Fayette, de Guyméné, de Liancourt, all converts to Jansenism—were nonetheless not so willing to hear the Duke's harsh words. They held "that Platonic view of love and friendship which marked the current of préciosité most noticeable in French society in the 1650's. The startled reaction of these female readers is almost without exception," writes Baker, "The Reception of La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* (1659-1665): A Question of Gender?", pp. 67-8.

understanding, puncturing the cherished image of a unified, individual, powerful self.[18] That the 1665 *Avis au lecteur* anticipates the Freudian logic whereby resistance is a mark, not of the falsity, but of the *justesse* of the theoretical coup, is hence not too surprising.[19] One does not easily concede to devastating truths.

"Quelle corruption il faut avoir dans l'esprit et dans le cœur pour imaginer tout cela!"[20] Madame de Lafayette's famous reaction to the Duke's text recalls Descartes's agitation in the face of Machiavelli's *Prince*, discussed in chapter 1. Indeed, the *Maximes* have often been associated with the Hobbesian or Machiavellian "realism" Descartes found so repugnant.[21] There are different approaches to reading the *Maximes* against the ethical optimism exposed in the *Passions*. Instead of espousing a social-historical frame, as did Paul Bénichou in his famous essay,[22] my treatment is minimal and incisive. I explore two specific sites of antihumanism that can be seen in their tension with Descartes's heroic optimism: the concept and function of *contrariety*, and the status of language. While the critique of language in the *Maximes* has been perceived, the concept of contrariety has been all but neglected.[23] In any case, its Aristotelian

[18] For a cognitive reader's response study of the *Maximes*, see Harold Pagliaro, "Paradox in the Aphorisms of La Rochefoucauld and Some Representative English Followers," *PMLA*, 79 (March 1964), pp. 42-50.
[19] For a commentary, see Eric Tourrette, "L'argument de l'hostilité prévisible. La Rochefoucauld et Freud," *Poétique*, n. 176, vol. 2 (2014), pp. 243-260. Tourrette neglects, however, the one text of Freud's that seems so pertinent here: the text on negation, *Die Verneinung* (1925), which I discus further below.
[20] Letter 37, Mme de Lafayette to Mme de Sablé, 1663, in *Maximes*, Truchet, ed., p. 577.
[21] "On perçoit l'influence de maîtres à penser nouveau, des réalistes, Machiavel, Hobbes, Gracián", writes Louis Van Delft in *Littérature et anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 1993), p. 39; p. 124; or Van Delft, "Qu'est-ce qu'un moraliste?," *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* (1978), N°30. pp. 113; Jean Lafond, *La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et littérature*, pp. 28, 51.
[22] "La démolition du héros," in Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pp. 155-180.
[23] In one brief passage of his article on "L'univers imaginaire de la Rochefoucauld" Sellier does mention "la réversibilité des contraires." But he sees it as the remnant of a baroque imaginary that survived beyond 1650, and that we find mixed with a more classicist, "diurne" imaginary of clarity, distinction, and discernment. Similarly, in his article on "Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère," Sellier understands the presence, in each, of the thematics of a "coïncidence des contraires" as the presence of "un vaste sillage baroque" running through their discourses: in *Essais sur l'imaginaire classique* (Paris: Champion, 2003),

extraction and importance to Augustinian thought have been ignored. Without grasping its genealogy or relationship to contemporary thinkers, like Descartes's, that exclude it, *contrariety* in the *Maximes* is deprived of any major significance.

Adopting this focus implies no direct attempt to solve the problem of the best hermeneutic frame through which to see the *Maximes*. Especially in France, scholarship on La Rochefoucauld has long debated the backdrop upon which to interpret the *Maximes*, a work that, in the Duke's biography, emerges and evolves during the time spent in the salons of Paris, where he moved in 1655 after a long, tumultuous period of political intrigues, warring, and the failure of the Fronde.[24] What and who speaks in the *Maximes*? It is notoriously hard to say. Even the Duke's place among the anachronistically baptized *moralistes* is a matter of dispute.[25]

The two main axes of the hermeneutic debate can be schematically described as follows.[26] One side, championed by Philippe Sellier, Jean Lafond, and, closer to today, Eric Tourette, embraces a pessimistic or Augustinian reading.[27] In ways that vary from critic to critic, this view takes seriously the *pessimism* of the *Maximes* and sees it in the context of the massive

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pp. 307 ff. The passage on La Rochefoucauld spans hardly a few short paragraphs, which are more or less the same as those from the article on the Duke's "univers imaginaire" just cited.

[24] Cf. Edith Mora, "La Rochefoucauld et son œuvre,"in *La Rochefoucauld* (Paris: Seghers, 1965), pp.35-87.

[25] The term 'moraliste' only appeared in 1690 (in Furetière's *Dictionnaire*): Jean Lafond, *La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et Littérature*, p. 17. Still, its modern sense, of a writer who does not prescribe rules for life, but "traite des mœurs," only emerged in the second half of the 18th century: Lafond, "Préface," in In *Moralistes du XVIIe siècle*, Lafond, ed. Paris: Bouquins/Laffont, 1992, p. i. See Philip Lewis, *La Rochefoucauld: The Art of Abstraction* (London: Cornell U. Press, 1977), p. 7, and p. 40 for the variety of intellectual allegiances that have been attributed to La Rochefoucauld's works.

[26] For a different articulation of the hermeneutic or, as he calls it, the "ideological" debate, see Eric Turcat, *La Rochefoucauld par quatre chemins*, p. 13, who sees the split between Augustinianism and Epicureanism.

[27] See Lafond, *La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et Littérature*; Lafond, *La Rochefoucuald: L'homme et son image* (Paris: Champion, 1998); Sellier, *Essais sur l'imaginaire classique*; Sellier, La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, Saint Augustin"; Tourrette, "L'argument de l'hostilité prévisible. La Rochefoucauld et Freud."

and undeniable influence of Saint Augustine's thought in France during the 17th century, which Jean Dagens called the "siècle de saint Augustin."[28]

Another side in the debate, represented, for example, by Louis Van Delft and, more recently, by Isabelle Chariatte, defends a worldly, *mondain* reading.[29] This view stresses the embeddedness of La Rochefoucauld in the cultivated literary and social circles of Paris around the mid-17th century. The themes of *honnêteté*, conversation, heterogeneity, and rhetoric are, in this context, especially crucial. The edge of the Duke's moral critique dulls. On the *mondain* reading, we might say, it is not within a monumental intellectual continuity, but rather against the values and practices of a specific cultural milieu, that the *Maximes* is and was most legible. [30]

Jean Starobinski has shown another way to both engage and surpass the debate. His "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives" is an example of an attempt at a synthesis of perspectives. [31] On Starobinski's reading, the *Maximes* progressively embrace and reject Christian moral pessimism and heroic aristocratic vitalism. This "substitution" of morals ultimately comes to rest in "la doctrine de l'honnêteté," an aesthetics of social existence, with "valeurs esthétiques" replacing "impératifs moraux" and language erected as the only domain over which humans have the power to pursue the beautiful, coherent, and peaceful existence

[28] Dagens, "Le XVIIe siècle, siècle de Saint Augustin," *CAIEF*, nº3-5, 1953, pp. 31-38.
[29] Van Delft, *Littérature et anthropologie*; Chariatte, *La Rochefoucauld et la culture mondaine* (Paris: Garnier, 2011).
[30] Alain Brunn's recent book might seem to avoid the debate entirely, focusing instead on the very status of the *moraliste* writer in the Duke's specific moment: *Le Laboratoire moraliste: La Rochefoucauld et l'invention moderne de l'auteur* (Presses universitaires de France, 2009). Still, the model of the curiosity cabinet and the very "culture of curiosity" within which he situates the *Maximes* and their apparent organizational disorder clearly support a *mondain* reading. Further, with its historicizing arguments, it too encourages the diagnostic that, on the whole, conceptual or philosophical analysis of the *Maximes* is often suspended to the benefit of hermeneutics based on history and literary sociology. Lewis's "immanent approach" in *La Rochefoucauld: The Art of* Abstraction, and Eric Turcat's recent book (*La Rochefoucauld par quatre chemins*) are two important exceptions.
[31] Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives," *NRF*, vol. 14, nº163-4, 1966, part 1 pp. 16-34; part 2 pp. 211-229.

denied in other domains of life.[32] While seductive, any such attempt to sublimate the *Maximes*' discontinuity into a progression is questionable.[33]

Though grounded in questions stemming from debates fomented by this scholarship, my approach is more in dialogue with linguistic or formal approaches, like those of Roland Barthes, Serge Meleuc, and Jonathan Culler.[34] Barthes claims that "le modèle même de la maxime selon La Rochefoucauld, c'est la relation d'identité déceptive, dont l'expression courante est la copule restrictive: *n'est que*."[35] "[O]n y reconnaît facilement ce qu'on appelerait aujourd'hui une relation démystifiante… il définit le plus (l'apparence) par le moins (le réel)."[36] Since, on Barthes's view, nearly every maxim tends to an antithesis[37]—which is often implicit—, we can say that the restrictive copula often works to reduce one thing to its *contrary*. "On ne se blâme que pour être loué" (ME25[38]), means, that is, self-reproach aims at its contrary. In some sense, then, one thing *is* its contrary.

Applying structuralism and transformational grammar, Meleuc also tried to expose the "structure of the maxim."[39] His argument is famous: each maxim explicitly or implicitly operates

[32] Ibid., p. 211.
[33] For a critique of this reading, see Lewis, *La Rochefoucauld: The Art of Abstraction*, pp. 142-3.
[34] For formal or stylistic approaches to the *Maximes* other than those mentioned here, see Lewis, *La Rochefoucauld: The Art of Abstraction*, pp. 24 ff, 154 ff, and 189-191, esp.
[35] Barthes, "La Rochefoucauld: *Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes*", intro aux *Maximes et réflexions*, 1961, in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* suivi de *Nouveaux Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 78.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Lewis (*The Art of Abstraction*) observes that "the fundamental tendency towards binary" in the *Maximes* "remains the focal point in every stylistic study of La Rochefoucauld" (157).
[38] Citations from *Maximes* refer to the 1678, 5th edition, that is, the last edition whose publication the Duke oversaw before his death in 1680, and the one printed by most modern editions. **M** refers maxims as presented in this edition, **ME** (*maximes écartées*) refers to those maxims, once called "posthumes," which La Rochefoucauld chose not to publish. **MS** refers to the *maximes supprimées*, that is, which do not appear in the 1678 edition, having been excised at some point during the publication of the previous editions (1666, 1671, 1675). **ML** stands for the "manuscript Liancourt." The three modern editions I have consulted are the 2014 Truchet edition already cited, and two others: *Maximes et réflexions diverses*, J. Lafond, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); and the André-Alain Morello edition, *Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes morales* in *Moralistes du XVIIe siècle*, Lafond, ed. (Paris: Bouquins/Laffont, 1992).
[39] Serge Meleuc, "Structure de la maxime", *Langages*, nº 13, (March 1969), pp. 69-99.

"la transformation négative" of an accepted opinion.[40] "[A]u moins très fréquemment," each is "la négation d'un certain énoncé du lecteur (c'est-à-dire de tous les lecteurs possibles)."[41] Transformational analysis reveals that the two propositions are often related, in their main terms, according to "une relation privilégiée qui unit deux lexèmes articulant antithétiquement un champ sémantique, qu'on peut ici caractériser comme étant celui de l'Homme en général; on peut représenter cette relation par: A vs -A." [42] In this chapter's terms (ones neglected by Barthes, Meleuc, and Culler), the relation is one between *contraries*: A vs. -A (non-A). La Rochefoucauld's negations do not add the "not" of denial, but the "in-", "im-" "un," or "non-" of contrariety.[43]

Culler examined not antithesis or the negation of implicitly reported ideology, but paradox in the *Maximes*. Still, his theoretical framework, in particular the definition of paradox as the apparent blurring of semantic delineations, brings his analysis very close to Barthes's and Meleuc's.[44] One observation that Culler shares with both is essential. In each approach, the trait

[40] For a critique of this position, see Geoffrey Bennington, *Sententiousness and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1985] 2008), pp. 11-15, 20.
[41] Meleuc, "Structure," p. 84; see also p. 96.
[42] Ibid., p. 86. ME25, cited above, illustrates this nicely.
[43] That is, La Rochefoucauld's negative transformations of implicit opinions often do not simply deny the latter, but replace or, as it were, correct them. Take M17, for example: "La modération des personnes heureuses vient du calme que la bonne fortune donne à leur humeur." The maxim does not mean simply: "moderation is *not* willed" or, in other words, "moderation is *not* a virtue." Rather, it transforms the implicit opinion whereby moderation is a virtue and hence the product of a person's willpower into its contrary. In particular, it is the *subject* of which the production of moderation, as an effect, is predicated, which is replaced with its contrary: will or willpower (and hence the sort of sovereign, deliberative self this assumes) finds itself substituted with its contrary: uncontrollable, arbitrary, and non-human forces, Fortune, which is the visage of exterior randomness, and, as its inner and causally subordinated correlate, *humeur*. If "vice" often names what we suffer passively, instead of bringing about actively, then "moderation" is now seen as an oddity, a randomness, a vice. *Moderation is immoderate*: this is the "im-" of contrariety (justice is unjust, men are inhuman, courage is uncourageous, etc.). The use of the word "moderation" itself is suspended.
[44] Culler, "Paradox and the Language of Morals in La Rochefoucauld," The Modern Language Review, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Jan., 1973), pp. 28-39: "A paradox presents two terms which ordinarily are in a clear semantic relationship to one another…but it presents them in a logical structure which denies that relationship or asserts the converse" (29). The two semantic relations in question are equivalence and

isolated is seen as a way in which the *Maximes* refuse the transparency aimed at by most discourse, and instead demand that the reader focus on language itself. "Paradox," writes Culler, "calls attention to itself as language and stimulates, as a corollary of the interpretative process that the form requires, a reflection on the deceptive power of language."[45] I return to this below.

While these three approaches encourage us to analyze the immanent, linguistic or conceptual aspects of the *Maximes*, they do not take the next crucial step: these aspects can and should be opened up to larger historical and theoretical problematics. In particular, since contrariety has not been isolated, a link between the concept of *contrariety* and Augustine's account of the Fall in *The City of God* has been overlooked. La Rochefoucauld might not be seen as Augustinian, but *contrariety* can be seen as being so. Further, by studying the logic of contrariety, fascinating family resemblances—what Foucault would call new *unités*—present themselves between discontinuous moments of demystifying discourse. Isolating contrariety

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opposition. In one, La Rochefoucauld introduces difference or opposition where there is apparent similarity (e.g., M1: "et ce n'est pas…par chasteté…que les femmes sont chastes."). In the other, oppositions are negated, asserting equivalence (e.g., M111: "Plus on aime une maîtresse, et plus on est près de la haïr.").

[45] Culler, "Paradox," p. 29; similarly, Barthes argues that antitheses set us in front of the "le spectacle même du sens" (p. 79). Meleuc seems to suggest that negative transformation results in drawing attention to the categories, which the maxim questions, we receive ready-made in *langue*. For a different interpretation of what we might call, with Jakobson, the poetic function of the maxim, see Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives," pp. 227-8. In forcing the reader to suspect numerous common concepts, the *Maximes* also call attention to and critique themselves, resulting in logical and epistemological problems Culler hardly touches on. Further, his contention that La Rochefoucauld never thematizes language as a source of error, but instead takes it "for granted," is quite the opposite of the truth. Culler's claim is that even in the maxims that so read like re-definitions (e.g., M44), La Rochefoucauld is not suspending the referential power of the words: "the power of these terms to designate the phenomena he has in mind is never called into question… There is, rather, a surprising confidence: language can be taken for granted" (32), writes Culler, going on to invoke *Les mots et les choses* in support of this contention. In fact, the critique of the *Maximes* sets itself precisely *against* the more Cartesian understanding of the linguistic unit as transparent representation. The text is much closer to the Pascalian moments of the *Logique*, analyzed by Louis Marin in *La critique du discours* (Paris: Minuit, 1975), than it is to the Cartesian inspiration of the book, which Foucault focused on. Indeed, the example of the *Pensées* is enough to disprove the entire historical-philosophical framework of Culler's argument—that France was naively confident in language, while the English were wary—into which he sets La Rochefoucauld.

allows us to hear the resonances between the *Maximes*, Augustine's doctrine of fallen nature, and modern antihumanist theories.

Descartes & The Duke. The Excluded Middle & The Reign of "tous les contraires"

In Descartes, I suggested, the triumph of the soul is also that of traditional logic and its metaphysics. In both, victory is the exclusion of "répugnance," i.e., the simultaneity of mutually negating things, qualities, or judgments. The law governing and taming contrariety is reflected in the Cartesian self, becoming a psychological principle—the soul, despite appearances, is never actually self-opposed (*Passions*, art. 47)—that founds an ethical imperative—we should work to resolve contradictions between our body's passions and our soul's will.

There is a great deal of philological evidence from the 17th century to suggest that the concepts of contrariety and *répugnance*, understood logically and in various figural uses, were indeed closely tied. Nicot's *Thresor de la langue françoyse* (1606), for example, offers "repugnans" as a Latin translation for "contraire," and "repugnantia" for "contrarieté [sic]."[46] In the 1st edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694), "repugnance" is simply defined as: "Contrarieté entre deux choses."[47] The entries for "répugnance," "répugnant," and "répugner" in Furetière's *Dictionnaire* (1690) also offer "contraire" and "contrarieté" as synonyms. Furetière displays the great potential for boundary-crossing of all these concepts, showing them in logical, moral, psychological, and ethical usages, including a reference to the sort of philosophical usage one finds in Descartes. Furetière's examples confirm that, in no

[46] "*Qui est contraire en toutes choses*" is, in Latin "Repugnax"; and "*Ces choses sont contraires l'une à l'autre*" would be spoken "Repugnant inter se." "Contraire," and "Contrarieté" in Jean Nicot, Le Thresor de la langue francoyse (1606), at *Dictionnaires d'autrefois*, online, accessible at http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/17. It seems that *contrariété* didn't aquire its penultimate "é" until later.

[47] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694), at *Dictionnaires d'autrefois*, online, accessible at http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/17.

matter what domain, *répugnance* was understood as something that must be resolved or rejected.[48] Descartes's thought assumed the validity of this law. On principle, the self as a domain governed by the soul excluded contrariety or inner *repugnance* as logical, psychological, or ethical unlawfulness.

Not so in the *Maximes*. *Amour-propre*, the obscure, affective, irrational core of the self, inaugurates the reign of contrariety, as opposition, difference, and dispersal in the self.[49] "Rien de si caché que ses desseins," La Rochefoucauld writes of this protean monster that inhabits us — indeed, that *is* us —, yet remains unknowable, both to us and to itself. The first maxim of the first authorized edition (1665), from which this line is taken, set the reader before a "peinture" of the unimaginable:

> ses souplesses ne se peuvent représenter, ses transformations passent celles des métamorphoses… Il est tous les contraires : il est impérieux et obéissant, sincère et dissimulé, miséricordieux et cruel, timide et audacieux. […] il est capricieux, et on le voit quelquefois travailler avec le dernier empressement, et avec des travaux incroyables, à obtenir des choses qui ne lui sont point avantageuses, et qui même lui sont nuisibles, mais qu'il poursuit parce qu'il les veut. […] Enfin, il ne se soucie que d'être, et pourvu qu'il soit, il veut bien être son ennemi. […] Voilà la peinture de l'amour-propre, dont toute la vie n'est qu'une grande agitation… (MS 1).

Il est tous les contraires. Perhaps we would do well to stop and marvel at just how odd this syntagm is. To be sure, the assertion that the case is *le contraire*, as a corrective rejoinder, for example (*Non! C'est tout le contraire!*), is common. But the act of predicating of what is apparently one thing ("il") the total sum of all contraries, is another thing entirely. What is this one thing that admits of such a plurality of illogical predication? How could we imagine it? The unmarked present tense is also troubling: not soon or over time, not once or sometime in the past,

[48] See, e.g., under "repugnant", the example: "Il ne faut point admettre cette proposition, qui est repugnante à la foi, ou à la raison". In Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, vol. 3, n.p.

[49] For Jean Rousset, the subversion of a concept of the self as a unified center that resolves contradictions, is characteristic of "l'idée classique de l'homme," which La Rochefoucauld attacks as a "virulent anti-classique": "La Rochefoucauld contre le classicisme," *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen, v*ol. 179-181 (1941-2), p. 107.

amour-propre is, now and always, "all the contraries." The depiction of *amour*-propre in MS1 has often been associated with Freud's notion of the unconscious, on the basis of the thematics of obscurity and profundity, its recalcitrance to consciousness.[50] Below I will argue that what is pertinent in the La Rochefoucauld-Freud comparison is not only the difficulty or impossibility of self-understanding, but also the principle that *amour-propre*, like the unconscious, is an illogical place or force of contrariety, which suspends the laws of negation.

Amour-propre as a principle of contrariety is a way of thinking the most bizarre aspects of human comportment and desire. As we see in MS1, moved by *amour-propre*, we may even find ourselves desiring what is in fact harmful to us. We might want what, by Descartes's definition, we fear or abhor (what we do not want), an idea, here set down as a principle, the philosopher would have found absurd. But contrariety is the rule, not the illogical or unethical exception, for selves in the fallen, tragi-comic world the *Maximes* sets forth as our disavowed reality in need of an enlightening dissection.

Self-love, we see in the citation, can even be a ground for self-enmity. Indeed, "[l]es passions en engendrent souvent qui leur sont contraires" (M11) and "[i]l y a dans le cœur humain une generation perpétuelle de passions" (M10). Passions are just the various whims, the "divers goûts de l'amour-propre" (ME28), which has no problem, we have seen, in desiring what it fears, or in making hate from love. The mind (*esprit*), "toujours la dupe du cœur" (M102), is cast about by the inscrutable, autonomous self-generation of affects. The will, in some maxims, becomes a jumble of a plurality of forces, of passions and their contraries. It dissipates into an amalgam of alien wills: "Il s'en faut bien que nous connaissions toutes nos volontés" (M295). We are dispossessed of ourselves.

[50] See, for example, Serge Doubrovsky, "Vingt propositions sur l'amour-propre: de Lacan à La Rochefoucauld," *Cahiers Confrontation*, nº3 (January 1980), p. 53; Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives,", p. 22. See references at n. 110, infra.

Contraries can be found in the same place at the same time—the heart is shot through with "diverses contrariétés," more than the "imagination" could ever "invent" (M478). Perhaps they are equivalent or always becoming one another. According to the *Maximes* the imbrication of what should be mutually exclusive constitutes the truth of our selves and our experience, though stubborn pride and our language keep this hidden from view. We tend to dwell in an inverted world. Our dearest notions, formed and vehiculed in the language we speak, read, write, and hear, projects a beautiful image of ourselves that fascinates and traps us in its spell. The *Maximes*'s critique of heroic discourse points up the linguistic media of the imaginary, oral and written.

"Contrariety" in the 17th Century & in Aristotle.

"L'imagination ne saurait inventer tant de diverses contrariétés qu'il y en a naturellement dans le cœur de chaque personne" (M478).[51] What might *contrariety* or *contraire* have meant, and what did the terms connote, in La Rochefoucauld's time?

"Contrarieté" names the relation between "choses contraires," according to the 1st edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise* (1694).[52] As a model example, the entry for "contraire" cites the phrase, obviously relevant to the *Maximes*: "*la vertu & le vice sont contraires*." The entry, which begins with adjectival uses, moves to the substantive ("le contraire") and then to the philosophical meaning of the latter, which itself refers to nominalized adjectives ("le froid" "le chaud," etc.). That is, it is a noun, used in the plural, for predicates ("qualitez") "directement opposées sous un mesme genre." The definition comes straight out of

[51] It is intriguing to note that the maxim is cited as an example of "contrariété" in Émile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1872-77), at *Dictionnaires d'autrefois*, online, accessible at http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/17.

[52] "Contrarieté," in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise* (Paris: Coignard, 1694), p. 244. The penultimate "é" did not appear until later.

Aristotle, along with the logical and physical law, a criterion for establishing true contrariety, cited as an example of philosophical usage in the entry: "*deux contraires ne peuvent subsister ensemble. le chaud est le contraire du froid. il ne peut souffrir son contraire*."[53]

In Aristotle, contraries (*ἐναντία*) are characterized by a particular type of opposition between metaphysical or linguistic predicates, or between statements.[54] Statements that are contrary, rather than contradictory, opposites, for example, are such that both cannot be true together, but they can both be false (that is, their contradictories can both be true).[55] "Every man is just" and "no man is just" (or "every man is unjust") are contrary negations of one another.[56]

But it is contrariety of predicates that is of most interest to us, though, to be sure, this too can be reflected at the level of statement. The qualities *hot* and *cold* (along with linguistic predicates "hot" and "cold") offer, in their opposition, a paradigmatic example of contrariety.[57] Obviously, the two predicates cannot hold of the same thing (*subject*) at the same time, nor can they be truthfully said of it thus. But what exactly qualifies a relation between two qualities or terms as one of contrariety? What sets apart hot from cold, black from white, or, in the realm of the passions, love from hate, desire from fear?

For this we should turn to the *Metaphysics*. There, we find a number of criteria for identifying contrariety. Contrariety names "the greatest difference" between two things that

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[53] "Contraire," in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise*, pp. 243-4. Intriguingly, the fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire* (1762) specifies that "contraire" is used both with respect to natural things and to human affairs; and contains an example attesting to the intelligibility of self-contrariety as a possibility, no doubt one imbued with a negative valency, of human comportment: "*En cela vous êtes contraire à vous-même.*"
[54] See James Bogen, "Change and Contrariety in Aristotle", *Phronesis*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (1992), p.1.
[55] Cf. Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, 10 20a16-20, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, J. Barnes, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 32.
[56] Ibid., 7 17b19-25. For it can be true that "not every man is just" *and* that "not no man is just" (i.e., "some man is just"), but it is never true that "every man is just" *and* "no man is just". I explain the privative "un-" below.
[57] On the distinction, rather problematic in my eyes, between linguistic and metaphysical predicates, see Bogen, "Aristotelian Contraries," *Topoi*, 10 (1991), pp. 53-66.

differ in species, i.e., that share the same genus and are hence comparable in terms of degrees of difference. "[O]ne thing cannot have more than one contrary," for one contrary occupies one limit, its contrary the other, and there are only two. Belonging to the same genus, contraries *can* belong to the same "matter" or "receptive material," but "not at the same time of the same subject" (though they can both *not* belong to it).[58] Contraries are, in a word, mutually exclusive. Contrariety is something we are not supposed to encounter in real life, but only virtually (a *young* flower will eventually grow *old* and wilt), or in language, though not if it is to be *true*.

Aristotle at one point suggests that all contrary oppositions are superficial forms of a more fundamental form of contrariety: "Every contrariety involves, as one of its terms, a privation," he writes. Indeed, "the primary contrariety is that between state and privation," "complete" privation, he specifies, such that "the other contraries must be called so with reference to these."[59] One contrary is endowed with a "–", the other a "+", as it were; this is another way to think their mutual exclusivity. Cold, for example, is the privation (–) of heat (+), just as vice is the privation of virtue, black of white, hate of love. Total privations (contrarieties), can often be indicated by a private prefix or suffix, something very common in the language of morals (in which the major contrariety is between virtue and vice, good and bad): (im)moderation, (un)just, (in)human, (im)moral. These privative, contrary oppositions are explicit or implied in numerous maxims.[60]

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[58] *Metaphysics*, X 1055a4-1055b29, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2, J. Barnes, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p.1668. There is another fascinating instance of contrariety I do not mention here, namely, contrariety as between things that differ the most which are "dealt with by the same faculty," a statement that links together contrariety and human cognition (X 1055a30-31).

[59] Ibid., X 1055a33-35; 1055b18-20; V 1018a25-30.

[60] We often have to solve for them, as it were. For example, in M372, we are offered one contrary ("naturels") and what might be called a gloss or a definition of the other ("mal polis et grossiers"): "[ils] croient être naturels, lorsqu'ils ne sont que mal polis et grossiers."

There is another basic type of contrariety in Aristotle, that between "the one" (as "the same and the like and the equal") and "plurality" (as "the other and the unlike and the unequal").[61] This opposition is essential to understanding the critique of the self in the *Maximes*. In the place of the one (a virtue, an individual self, or a united will) is revealed a subtending plurality of different forces—passions, humors, desires, and vices in their bizarre alchemy. The one, self-possessing self is inhabited by a multiplicity that radically undermines its assumption of self-possession. In the *Passions*, Descartes attempted to enforce the unity of the soul against such plurality. La Rochefoucauld asserts the paradox that a self, most often without knowing it, is not one or its own, but the contrary of these things. The (same) one is many (others).

This, we see, was against the rules, logical, linguistic, and natural. Contrariety, to be sure, did have an essential role to play in the real world. The *Physics* states the principle whereby all things come into being from, or pass away into, their contraries (most often indirectly, via an intermediate between the two).[62] But contraries are just that: extremes on a scale between which change, generation, and demise occur. M10, cited above, does speak of a "génération perpétuelle" of passions in the heart, deploying an idiom that, if we glance at Furetière's entry for "génération," we are tempted to identify as that of a natural philosophy still largely faithful to Aristotle.[63]

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[61] Ibid., X 1053b24-1054a12, 1054a20-32, 1055b25-29. Plurality, one passage suggests, is the privation of the one, as, in colors, black is the total privation of the one, white, which goes into the composition of the others. See the materials in Aristotle, "On Contrariety," in *The Works of Aristotle: Vol. XII Select Fragments*, Ross, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), pp. 109-114; but also p. 122, from material related to "On The Good", which cites Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentary on *Metaphysics* (250.17-20): "[…] practically all contraries are referred to the One and plurality as their first principle […]."

[62] *Physics*, I 5 188b21-22, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 1, J. Barnes, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 322: "everything that comes to be or passes away comes from, or passes into, its contrary or an intermediate state. But the intermediates are derived from the contrary." On this principle as essential to Aristotelian science, see Bogen, "Change and Contrariety in Aristotle", pp. 1-22.

[63] "Génération," in Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel* (1690), vol. II, np.

But La Rochefoucauld's "génération" is not Aristotle's "génération des animaux" or "l'action des animaux qui leur fait produire leur semblable," mentioned in Furetière's dictionary. Nor is it Furetière's "changement qui se fait perpétuellement dans la nature" whereby, as in Aristotle, one contrary arises from or passes into its contrary via the intermediates that stand between the two. M11 stipulates that "génération," while "perpétuelle," neither gives rise to sameness, as in organisms, nor the Aristotelian smooth continuity of transition between extremes. Instead, it is rather a punctuated discontinuity, a logic of ruptures and leaps from one side and the other: "Les passions en engendrent souvent qui leur sont contraires," reads the natural law of M11, making of the human passions rather curious "natural" phenomena indeed. More odd still is the notion that in the depths of the heart, the labyrinths of *amour-propre*, all contraries endure simultaneously. Despite the limits of the possible in nature, *amour-propre*, the *fons* of contrariety, allows the generation of one contrary from its other, without transition. "Le Protée des fables" is a myth; anomalous *amour-propre* exists "dans la nature" (ML53).[64]

No more than nature can we ourselves be at one and the same time at both ends of the spectrum between opposites. This held for Descartes and for Aristotle. In an implicit (if not explicit) dialogue with Saint Augustine, the *Maximes* questioned the appropriateness of these laws, and the neatness of contrary oppositions with respect to actual human experience. This meant experience not as told in the mythologizing tales of virtuous heroes, or in the books of ethical optimism of "the philosophers" whom both Duke and Saint targeted,[65] but as betrayed in

[64] "Comme il est sans doute que le Protée des fables n'a jamais été, il [en] est un dans la nature, car il prend toutes les formes, comme il lui plaît" (Truchet, ed. p.410). Sellier sees the figure of Proteus, along with the assertion that amour-propre "est tous les contraires" from MS1, as elements of a Baroque imaginary and its delectation for games or "échanges entre l'être et le paraître": Sellier, "L'univers imaginaire de La Rochefoucauld," in *Essais sur l'imaginaire classique,* p. 276.

[65] See pp.42s, infra. For Saint Augustine's thought as a critique of ancient moral philosophies, especially Stoicism, see E.J. Hundert, "Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self," *Political Theory*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Feb., 1992), ppp. 87-88.

the study of real people, in observing the illogical detours of desire. In the heart, the line of contrariety, they thought, was a circle.

Furetière's *Dictionnaire* suggests a way to perceive the link from contrariety in the *Maximes* to Augustine, in particular, to his account of fallen nature. Following custom, the entry for "contraire" signals that it is a "Terme relatif" and that contraries "se détruisent l'une l'autre," touching, again, on the law of mutual exclusivity.[66] But the more novel, and pertinent, part of the definition is the examples given for the nominalized use of the term: "La raison humaine est si faible, qu'elle croit également les deux *contraires*." Contraries *can* be present together, despite the law of mutual exclusion, given the feebleness of human cognitive capacities. In the entry for "contrariété" this allowance for illogicality grows even more manifest, so too its theological underpinnings.

"Contrariété," that is: "Combat, opposition des choses contraires." The example usages clearly show that, at the time, the concept had purchase in religious and moral discourse, and that it was associated with the Fall. The first example, a citation from Saint Évremond, reads: "A moins que la foi n'assujettisse notre raison, nous passons la vie dans une *contrariété* perpétuelle de sentiments: à croire, & à ne croire point." The second citation, from the Bishop of Nîmes Esprit Fléchier, is more striking still. Fléchier sees contrariety in terms straight out of Saint Augustine's *City of God*: "L'esprit de l'homme s'étant révolté contre Dieu, ses sens se sont révoltés contre lui; et de là viennent ces *contrariétés* que nous sentons en nous-mêmes, et cette guerre continuelle que nous sommes obligés de soutenir contre nous-mêmes."

"Où est l'homme si uniforme qui ne laisse voir de l'inégalité, et de la *contrariété* dans ses actions?" queries Saint-Évremond, the final usage in Furetière. The examples point to how the concept of contrariety found a home in the discourse on the imperfections of human nature,

[66] In Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, vol. 1, n.p.

which could be Augustinian, where *contrariété* becomes one of human nature's determining characteristics. Unlike Pascal, whose apologetics adopted Saint-Évremond's prescription of faith as the solution to inner contrarieties, the *Maximes* deprive us of any unifying principle. They abandon us, like God forsaking Adam and Eve in Augustine's account of the Fall, to the paradox of ourselves. [67]

Augustine: The Fall and the Genealogy of Contrariety

The question of whether La Rochefoucauld absorbed by osmosis Augustine's positions and their pathos, being, as he was, "surrounded on all sides" by the Jansenist-leaning Précieuses and their circles,[68] or he himself sat down with Augustine in book form, sculpting its prosaic critique with his sharp, paradoxical style, is an open one. We can imagine either situation; and, for my purposes, neither is crucial. More than a corpus of texts, Augustine's thought partakes of a robust *episteme* in La Rochefoucauld's moment.[69] For more skeptical minds needing hard proof: we do know that *The City of God* was present at the Duke's main residences where he wrote his maxims. [70]

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[67] He chose, e.g., not to include a maxim on original sin (ME20) that might at least suggest a cause for the incoherence and inner strife of the self: "Dieu a permis, pour punir l'homme du péché originel, qu'il se fît un dieu de son amour-propre pour en être tourmenté dans toutes les actions de sa vie." Like ME8, ME20 was perhaps omitted due to its overt theological and indeed Augustinian idiom

[68] Sainte-Beuve, *Port-Royal*, cited by Sellier, "La Rochefoucauld, *Port-Royal* et la Préciosité," in *Port-Royal et la littérature II* (Paris: Champion, 2000), p. 184.

[69] Indeed, some have even called the 17th century in France "le siècle de saint Augustin" (Dagens). Though not without contention: cf. Van Delft, *Littérature et anthropologie*, pp. 121-3. Even beyond France, Augustine's influence in the 16th and 17th centuries can hardly be overstated, as Charles Taylor has claimed: *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 141, 143. Peter Harrison has stressed the importance of Augustine's works for the burgeoning scientific paradigms in Europe and in England especially in the 17th century. See Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*.

[70] Sellier, for his part, firmly posits LR as "lecteur de *La Cité de Dieu*": "L'anamorphose des grands hommes," in *Port-Royal et la littérature II* (Paris: Champion, 2000), p. 172. His claim is strong, containing evidence drawn from library registers of two sites where the Duke spent a great deal of time before and during the genesis of the *Maximes*: his family's chateau at Verteuil, whose collection included

Augustine's *City of God* locates the roots of contrariety in human experience in the aftermath of original sin. His account of the Fall is at once psychological, anthropological, theological, even linguistic. Occupying books XIII and XIV in particular, it focuses on the Fall's "psycho-somatic effects."[71] If one way to read the *Maximes* is to see La Rochefoucauld's "portrait du cœur de l'homme" as a painting of the tortured psyche of Augustine's fallen man—"dans cet état déplorable de la nature corrompue par le péché," unfavored by any "grâce particulière," reads the note to the reader from the 5th edition, likely composed by the Duke himself[72] —, then we would do well to be familiar with Augustine's account, focusing in particular on the thematics of contrariety and self-opposition.

As man is made in the image of God, so, in Augustine's text, is punishment for sin exacted in precise analogical, even homological fashion. The sinful soul, forsaking God's will in an act of inordinate pride, was itself forsaken by Him. In sin, man's will went against God's. In turn, it is countered by both mind and body (XIV.15.463).[73] Fléchier, we saw, followed this Augustinian principle: the first corrupting contrariety was not between the soul and the body, as it might have been in Descartes's neat dualism. The original opposition occurred in the very will

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two translations of Augustine's text, and, in Paris, at the hôtel de Liancourt, rue de la Seine, where "l'édition du P. de Ceriziers trônait dans le grand cabinet de Mme de Liancourt" (174). Sellier thinks it must have been Ceriziers's magnificent recent translation (1655), which aspired to become "l'un des livres de chevet des 'honnêtes gens,'" that La Rochefoucauld consulted (were he unable to read the Latin). See also Sellier, "La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, Saint Augustin", n.1, p. 554. Two translations had been printed in Paris, one from 1570 (reprinted in 1580 and in 1610) and another from 1655. Sellier suggests that the Duke knew at least some Latin, but admits the ultimate uncertainty of any such claims. Cf. also Selliers's sources re the Duke's books: Mireille Gérard, "Le catalogue de la bibliothèque de La Rochefoucauld à Verteuil," dans *Images de La Rochefoucauld* (Paris: PUF, 1984), pp. 239-92, nºs 377 et 541; Jean Lesaulnier, "L'inventaire de la bibliothèque des Liancourt," *Chroniques de Port-Royal* (Paris: Mazarine, 1997), nº46, p. 221.

[71] Fredriksen, "Beyond the body/soul dichotomy: Augustine on Paul against the Manichees and the Pelagians," *Recherches Augustiniennes*, 23(1988), p. 106.

[72] Ed. Truchet, p. 267.

[73] *The City of* God, Dods, trans. (New York: Modern Library/Random House, 2000). Quis *enim enumerat, quam multa quae non potest uelit, dum sibi ipse, id est uoluntati eius ipse animus eius eoque inferior caro eius, non obtemperat?*

of man. In sin, the wicked will turned away from the will of God that had been its own and, in so choosing itself, went against itself.[74]

A rebel against God, man is now compelled to rebel against himself. He loses his paradisal self-sovereignty in the exact image of his going against the Sovereign lord.[75] Impulses of lust in the soul and involuntary movements of the body lurch forward, now autonomous, with terrible power. Sexual pleasure in particular takes up its dominion, a paradigm of those godless forces that govern a life lived "after the flesh," *secundum carnem*, in the earthly city (XIV.1.441).[76] In falling, humans "experienced a new motion in their flesh, which had become disobedient to them, in strict retribution of their own disobedience to God" (XIII.13.422), reads a passage on intercourse before and after the Fall, which caught Foucault's attention while at work on the *History of Sexuality*.[77]

Augustine's version of the Fall explains how disharmony replaced harmony. Since his will set itself against God, man is in turn subject to oppositions and deprivations. The Fall is a leap between extremes. One thing becomes its opposite: humility, pride; freedom, servitude; endless life, impending death; oneness or unity, multiplicity or division, etc. Adam's unmediated

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[74] Stephen Loughlin,"A Seeming Incompatibility between Augustine's Definitions of the Emotions in *De Civitate Dei*," *Mediterranean Studies*, vol. 8 (1999), p. 16, writes that: "Doctrines, then, which suggest that the flesh, considered as such, is the cause of every kind of moral failing, are rejected by Augustine."

[75] Peter Harrison has noted how this inversion is mirrored, "at a cosmic level," in a reversal of the "natural hierarchical relationships" established by God in *Genesis*, whereby man was to rule over all other creatures: "animals became wild and no longer acknowledge Adam's authority": *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*, p. 26. The passions and rebellious movements of the will are the psychological homologues of the ungovernable in nature: wild beasts.

[76] On the basis of *City of* God, XIV. 1, Stephen Loughlin (ibid., p.16) cautions that "flesh", and its contrary "spirit", are not to be taken as different part of the person, but rather as different modes or principles of life, which engage the entire person, body and soul. Indeed, to live according to the flesh, *secundum carnem*, is set by Augustine as equal to self-love, the will's decision to live according to itself, *secundum se ipsum*.

[77] Foucault also perceived the analogical or poetic logic of Augustine's account: "Sex in erection is the image of man revolted against God. The arrogance of sex is the punishment and consequence of the arrogance of man. His uncontrolled sex is exactly the same as what he himself has been towards God – a rebel." In Michel Foucault and Richard and Sennett, "Sexuality and Solitude," *LRB*, vol. 3, no. 9 (21 May 1981), accessed online: http://www.lrb.co.uk/v03/n09/michel-foucault/sexuality-and-solitude

perfect knowledge of the natures of all things decays into our groping ignorance and reliance on sense perception.[78] At bottom, the Fall concerns the loss of love: when love in its proper, transitive form, the love of God, which assured man's obedience in Paradise, becomes self-love, La Rochefoucauld's infamous *amour-propre*. This love is not the saving opening to otherness, but a per-version into a narcissistic closure round the (self)same.[79] Man loves himself; but, doing so, he can no longer serve or know, let alone escape, himself. Self-directed, he is self-opposed. Riddled by contrariety, he is a being not of the logical line but the vicious circle: a creature of *akrasia*.[80]

These changes obeyed a generative principle of contrariety. Yet the replacement of unity with contrariety continues to define human experience at all times in the Earthly City—that is, in the life of most people, and surely of those whose "heart" was painted or dissected by La Rochefoucauld.[81] As Charles Taylor writes, for Augustine, "the zone in which we live" is one "of half-understanding and contrary desires."[82] Yet we are unaccustomed to seeing contrariety; it is masked, by pride (faith in ourselves) and by discourse (faith in our words). In one remarkable

[78] The epistemological ramifications of the Fall as conceived in Patristic literature and in the epistemologies of the 17th century have been discussed by Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*, passim, and especially Chapter 1, "Adam's Encyclopedia."

[79] Adam's sin is conceived of as self-love, and the divide between "the love of self, even to the contempt of God" and "the love of God, even to the contempt of self" (XIV.28.477) is the main mark of distinction between the earthly city and the city of God. (XIV. 13.461).

[80] See Charles Taylor, "In interiore homine," in *Sources of the Self*, p. 138: "for Augustine…[akrasia is] the central crisis of moral experience." The *Confessions* include musings on Augustine's own experience of self-opposition, including remarks on his feeling inhabited by an alien will when he went against what he himself willed. E.J. Hundert cites the following passage from Book 7: "When I chose to do something or not to do it, I was quite certain that it was my own self, and not some other person, who made this act of will…, [but] if I did anything against my will, it seemed to me to be something which happened to me rather than something which I did, and I looked upon it not as a fault, but as a punishment": E.J. Hundert, "Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self," p. 86.

[81] On anatomical metaphors in La Rochefoucauld and moralist discourse in general in the 17th century, see Louis Van Delft, *Littérature et anthropologie*, 13, 36, and chapters 10 and 11.

[82] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 138.

moment in the *City of God,* recognition of the co-presence of contraries in human life leads to a reflection on language and its incapacity to signify this pervasive ambivalence.

Having turned towards and chosen himself, man is sentenced to death. His mortality, a new submission to Time, is the ultimate manifestation of the flesh's rebellious will. Death's compulsiveness is the symbol of all human subjection to the two main classes of "contingencies" Barthes identified in the *Maximes*: random forces of *humeurs* and of *Fortune*.[83] Death is *the* contingency, the limit, the law. The body marches towards destruction, and no effort of the soul can stop its relentless death drive. But, though striving to die, the person lives still. "The same person is therefore at once dying and living" (XIII.9.418), writes Augustine. He muses long on this and similar paradoxes.

The linguistic riddles encountered when trying to express the truth of human existence are not to be eradicated or resolved as absurd illogicalities. They are constitutive of vitiated nature. Not the obscure reality of our fallen state, but language itself is at fault. "[N]o words can explain how…the dying are said to live" (XIII.11.421). We must speak and write "as best we can" (XIII.11.420) of the present state of affairs, knowing, however, that our language, and its logic, can be mendacious.

Augustine's discussion, which might be compared to his statements on the polyvalence of the term "man,"[84] suggests that words lend a semblance of coherence to what is, in fact, a much messier picture. Fallen experience opposes the logical constraint whereby we cannot predicate of one subject at once one thing and its contrary. The *City of God*, both as an account of the Fall and as a critique of the "pagan" virtues, disobeys this rule. In Aristotelian terms, the same person is at once in possession of and deprived of life. Life *is* death. What we call "life" is not pure—

[83] Barthes, "La Rochefoucauld: Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes,'" p. 81.
[84] XIII.24.436-7.

nothing is pure —, but all is rather inhabited by its opposite. Virtue is diluted with vice, humility with pride, love with egoism. Each of us lives in this, the middle, but it cannot be excluded.

Anamorphosis: La Rochefoucauld's Critique of Discourse

Disrupting our confidence in our understanding of and mastery over actions and words, an assertion presents itself. It has the form of an axiom, a law, a truth: "On ne loue d'ordinaire que pour être loué" (M146). Meleuc might see here the inversion of a reader's (tautological) opinion: namely, that we praise others to praise others, not to receive praise ourselves. The maxim transmutes the active or transitive into the reflexive or passive, in the image of *amour-propre*, which turns love back in on the self. M146 sets what we take to be contrary qualities or actions and words—praise of others and self-flattery or narcissism—as equivalent or synonymous to one another. It goes contrary to the reader's opinion so as to demystify a faith in the dichotomy of contraries.

We turn the pages. Another decree, more troubling still: "On fait souvent du bien pour pouvoir impunément faire du mal" (M121). The sententious voice mocks us. *You think you do good to do good? that doing good is doing good?* This diabolical dictionary lists usages of words that are antithetical to their received meaning. They include their antonyms: "La magnanimité méprise tout pour avoir tout" (248): so generosity is greed? "En vieillissant on devient plus fou, et plus sage" (M210): the road to wisdom is the path to madness. So, are we heading in opposite directions at the same time? Or are the routes the same? If so, are the contraries identical? Are they contraries at all, or rather two names for the same thing? How do we read these paradoxes? And are they about *les mots*, or *les choses*, or both?

There are surely many ways to approach maxims that play on contrariety. Here, I follow a more nominalist path until diverting it in response to elements internal to the *Maximes*, namely the ambivalence of the passions, the self's lack of access to or ownership over its inner motivations, and the principle of *amour-propre* as "tous les contraires." This route itself then takes a turn. Traces of a deep epistemological skepticism put us back on the track of a radical nominalism that, from casting doubt on the reality of contrary oppositions, questions the possibility of knowledge per se. But self-implication disrupts this scheme at every step: paths crisscross and buckle-back, overlapping or undermining one another. The project of creating passages, of connecting the dots, out of the discontinuity of the *Maximes* is, after all, a dubious undertaking.

Let's begin, again, with Augustine. "Sometimes, indeed," he wrote in *The City of God*, "patent vices are overcome by other and hidden vices, which are reckoned virtues, though pride and a kind of ruinous self-sufficiency are their informing principles" (XXI.16.787). The exergue to the *Maximes* — "*Nos vertus ne sont, le plus souvent, que des vices déguisés*—confirms the evident: that Augustine's "unmasking the secret sources of heroism"[85] permeates the text and its omnipresent "language of unmasking," studied by Henry Clark.[86] Through analysis, a virtuous act can be shown to hide, to mask, a vicious intention. Seeing this is a question of the acuity of the analytical gaze, of a certain enlightened suspicion based on the doctrine of the Fall as "a fall into falsehood, unreality."[87] Often, un-reality is transmuted into truth by inversion. This is one way to read contrariety in the *Maximes*.

[85] E.J. Hundert, "Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self," p. 98.
[86] *La Rochefoucauld and the Language of Unmasking in Seventeenth-Century France* (Geneva: Droz, 1994).
[87] Thomas Merton, "Introduction" to *The City of God* (edition cited), p. xviii.

Following Sellier, we might call it *anamorphic*. In "L'anamorphose des grands hommes," Sellier draws attention to the "jeux d'optique" the Duke uses in the very form of his maxims to get at the ambivalence of virtues.[88] Such stylistic "jeux" are meant to show what they critique, embodying and denouncing "la séduction des mirages," for example, in MS68:

> Il y a des crimes qui deviennent innocents et même glorieux par leur éclat, leur nombre et leur excès. De la vient que les voleries publiques sont des habilités, et que prendre des provinces injustement s'appellent faire des conquêtes.

The ironic image painted in the first phrase is "soudain brisée par la seconde," writes Sellier.[89] Seen from one angle, enormous crimes delude us into taking them for glorious deeds. Virtue is often just such an optical illusion, an anamorphosis, for the *Maximes*.

What Sellier does not highlight, and what is not underlined by anyone who takes for granted the realism of concepts in the *Maximes*, is how a maxim like MS68 functions to denounce the *language* of virtue and heroism, whose keywords are pointed up as illusory. They are relegated to nominalism, as their transparent relation to what they supposedly denote is suspended and held up to view, perhaps negated.

Though the distribution of use and mention[90] in MS 68 seems clear, with only the final syntagm inviting us to insert implicit quotation marks (i.e., "…s'appellent 'faire des conquêtes'"), we might also read "innocents," "glorieux," and "habilités" as instances of mention, not use. The verb indicating mention in the final clause, "s'appeler,"[91] works

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[88] "L'anamorphose des grands hommes," *Port-Royal et la littérature II*, p. 173.

[89] Id. For a similar sort of analysis, see Sellier, "L'univers imaginaire de La Rochefoucauld," *Essais sur l'imaginaire classique* , p. 274.

[90] On the use/mention distinction, see Frege's "On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*," in *The Frege Reader*, Michael Beaney, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 151-171; see also Corey Washington, "Use/mention distinction and quotation," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* online (1998): Accessed (September 21, 2015). https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/use-mention-distinction-and-quotation/v-1/

[91] The presence of the verb was not a matter of indifference for La Rochefoucauld: the first version of this maxim, in the Liancourt manuscript, has "sont" instead of "s'appelent" (in *Maximes*, Truchet, ed., p. 407). La Rochefoucauld must have found it important, in the final version of the maxim, to replace one with the

retroactively to intimate that the apparently straightforward predications in the maxim are more complicated than they seem. For each clause denies the equivalences it presents for inspection: each features one term posed as subject—"crimes", "voleries publiques", "prendre des provinces injustement"—upon which other terms or predicates are then superposed, which belong to or connote a contrary semantic domain with an opposite moral value: "innocents," "glorieux"; "habilité"; "faire des conquêtes." The point is to show how the latter terms *mask*, to use the omnipresent trope—indeed, the trope of tropes, the very figure of predicates or concepts in general in the *Maximes*—what is signified by the former. We go behind the scenes in the theater of discourse.

Each clause of maxim MS68 is, in other words, analogically structured, making "s'appeler" the equivalent of "devenir" and, more disturbing still, of "être." Predication here does not deploy, but rather withdraws, the ontological force of the copula, reducing it to a sign of mention, not use. From being a transparent window to the world, language becomes an obscure surface, almost impenetrable to the outside, and thought is left to brood on the disjunction between *les mots et les choses*. Is this not the analogue of the lures and disguises of *amour-propre*, which pollutes love from the inside, making it not a window but a mirror? La Rochefoucauld encourages us to hesitate, to ponder over our language, to wonder at the assumption or imagination of reference behind the words we employ. He encourages us to think about the production, rather than the reception, of meaning, to suspect behind *être* a hidden *s'appeler*. The very distinction between use and mention is, thereby, troubled. Words are set at a distance by an implicit *entre guillemets*.

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other, encouraging us to do the same. Moreover, *s'appeler* marks the maxim's distance from the perspectives and discourse it indirectly cites. Irony, that is, is the implicit presence of quotation marks.

To be sure, as one might well retort here, demystification or unmasking has to stop somewhere: there must be an ultimate plane, to which another, a "higher" level, is reduced, like virtue to vice. In MS68, for example, "crime" seems to name something in the world with unquestioned realism; just so, "voleries" and "prendre…injustement." But the critique of our judgments of virtue is subtler, more dialectic. If all "glorious" deeds hide a crime, "crime" itself, in losing its contrary, is itself dispossessed of its evaluative charge, becoming merely a name under which are subsumed certain acts. There are, in other words, no crimes per se (for there are no *innocent* deeds), but merely what the word "crime" in certain cases denotes: acts that, in other circumstances, by other people, perhaps, are also called "glorieux" or "innocents."

Oddly enough, then, by its very demystification the language of virtue is reinstated, along with that of vice. Both have been suspended above a field of bare realities to which words only arbitrarily, in both senses, relate. Words have more to do with our *concepts* and *conceptions* of things, with our social and ideological perspective on them, our curtailed cognitive capacities, rather than with things themselves. The movement of this critique is self-implicating: as we've seen, *innocent*/*innocence* cannot be denounced as a mask without its contrary*, criminel*/*crime* being thrown away as well. This is an intimation of graver problems of self-reference, epistemological ones, posed by demystifying, antihumanist theoretical discourse, of either the moralist or the 20th-century (post)structuralist brand. I turn to these problems at the end of this chapter.

The analysis just proposed takes seriously the nominalist implication of the Duke's critique of moral language. On this view, two contraries are set as equivalent in a given maxim in order to question the realism of both terms. The tool tries to make us realize that it is the language of vices itself that has deceived us. The truth lies *underneath* this language, as it were.

But the truth, unmasked, has no inherent value, no moral charge, no meaning at all. In other words, paradox is resolved and the simultaneity of contraries reveals itself to have been a linguistic ruse, a play on words, though one with grave consequences. Culler hence saw the *Maximes* as portraying not the triumph of contrariety and paradox, but "the tenuousness and fragility of paradox itself."[92] For comparison he cites Hobbes, who set the ban on the language of virtue and vice, barring it from all "ratiocination."[93] Still, however comforting, the notion that contrariety is itself illusory cannot do justice to maxims that, like Augustine's belief in the reality of *akrasia*, posit the *real* copresence of contraries.

Virtue, vice and their attendant adjectives might be just an affair of language—and of the social conventions of discourse—, but the *passions*, which bring us to the relation of the self to itself, offer a more complex picture. A maxim like M43, for example, depicts inner strife between what we consciously will and those desires that are hidden from others and from ourselves. We are dispossessed of the sort of self-awareness that, for Descartes, made the study of the passions one of the easiest of sciences: "L'homme croit souvent se conduire lorsqu'il est conduit; et pendant que par son esprit il tend à un but, son cœur l'entraîne insensiblement vers un autre" (M43). To the more traditional contrariety of the rivals *cœur* and *esprit* is added the striking proposition: desires of the heart are often unknowable to its bearer.

Indeed, certain maxims depict an understanding of the passions in terms radically different from Descartes's. In Descartes, a passion had a physiological basis (movement of the animal spirits) and a mental correlate that was the integral perception of the former. In the *Maximes*, although the passions are sometimes shown to have a physiological ground—in the

[92] Culler, p. 28.

[93] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I, 4 (cited in Culler, p. 28): "For on man calleth *Wisdome*, what another calleth *feare*; and one *cruelty*, what another *justice*; one *prodigality*, what another *magnanimity*; and one *gravity*, what another *stupidity*, &c. And therefore such names can never be the true grounds of any ratiocination." Hobbes spells out the verdict of perspectivism that one can indeed find in La Rochefoucauld.

blood and its "divers degrés" of temperature, e.g. (MS2)[94]—, our own awareness of our passions does not exhaust their reality. Passions have a conscious, psychological reality—"on *croit* aimer sa maîtresse" (M374)—but also an underlying reality, the true ground of our passions, unknown to us ourselves: something "insensible" (M43), "secrète" (M298), "caché" (M54).

The Duke's wager is that this reality, which we might call unconscious, can *really* be the contrary of the passion we *really* feel. "Si on croit aimer sa maîtresse pour l'amour d'elle, on est bien trompé" (M374) does not mean that we do not passionately love our mistresses; we do. But, unbeknownst to us, our love is fueled by self-love, the transitive by the intransitive, the contrary, not of what it *seems* to be, but of what it *is*, for us.

Take another example, M54, a fragment of the Duke's critique of "philosophie":

> Le mépris des richesses était dans les philosophes un désir caché de venger leur mérite de l'injustice de la fortune par le mépris des mêmes bien dont elle les privait… c'était un chemin détourné pour aller à la considération qu'ils ne pouvaient avoir par les richesses.

We are not, I think, to suppose that philosophers were consciously hypocritical in their staunch "disdain"; that would accord them too privileged an access to their own motivations.[95] Even *l'amour-propre* is covered by an "obscurité épaisse qui le cache à lui-même" (MS1). Instead, the philosophers' "mépris des richesses" was secretly underpinned by love for riches and glory, according to the logic of *amour-propre* that assures that a vector travelling in one direction also goes the opposite way.

The figure of the "chemin détourné" thus becomes one of the most poignant, in my mind, of the metaphors in the *Maximes* that attempt to represent the paradoxes of desire. The metaphor

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[94] "Toutes les passions ne sont autre chose que les divers degrés de la chaleur, et de la froideur, du sang." For a commentary on this materialist proposition, see Richard Hodgson, "Les 'divers degrés de la chaleur du sang': le corps et les passions chez La Rochefoucauld," in Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature, 17, Actes…, (1995), pp. 239-247; see aso M297.

[95] See, for example, M46, which encourages us to neutralize any philosophical triumph by seeing it as a product of capricious passion imagined to be a result of reason.

itself can be said to contain a tension between the contraries of the line or path, on the one hand, and the wandering curve or circle, on the other. After all, "détourner" might mean, Furetière tells us, "[d]onner à une chose un mouvement circulaire contraire à celui qu'on lui avait donné."[96] We take the "chemin détourné" one way *in order* to go the opposite way; this, at least, is the roundabout M54 seems to depict. Even the most wayward routes serve to satisfy our deepest desires, our *amour-propre*. The figure suggests, too, that the direct paths we consciously elect turn in on themselves, that they lead round and back, or head in ways we cannot anticipate or comprehend. "Chemin détourné" can also be read as the *unknown* or *indirect* path, the detour. The trouble is that, if it is one, we are bound to mistake it for the direct way.[97]

Contrariety inheres in human experience as a principle explaining the inevitability of our *inconstance*.[98] This helps us to begin to answer an important epistemological question concerning *amour-propre* in the *Maximes*. To the question of how we *know* that *amour-propre* is "tous les contraires" (MS1), one reply is that it is what we might call a theoretical object whose presence is inferred from, inter alia, the bizarre jerks and abrupt changes that make up the norm, not the exception, of our emotional life. The idea that contrary passions infuse each other secretly helps explain how they may do so overtly as well: "Plus on aime une maîtresse, et plus on est près de la haïr" (M111). The maxim posits a deep *proximity* between love and hate that

[96] *Dictionnaire universel*, vol. 1.

[97] It is a striking coincidence—but one that is on many grounds explicable, as I suggest below—that the notion of the "chemin détourné," as Derrida renders *Umweg*, plays an important role in Freud. Here we might cite from part VII of *Die Traumdeutung* the following phrase, which is not without resemblances to the notion, in the *Maximes*, that reason itself, though it be reason, is in the service of desire or *amour-propre*: "All die komplizierte Denktätigkeit aber, welche sich vom Erinnerungsbild bis zur Herstellung der Wahrnehmungsidentität durch die Außenwelt fortspinnt, stellt doch nur einen durch die Erfahrung notwendig gewordenen Umweg zur Wunscherfüllung dar": Freud, in *Gesammelte Werke* (London: 1940–), Vol. II-III, pp. 542; Derrida, "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," in *L'écriture et la difference* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), n.1, p. 333. *Umweg* too means both "detour," the indirect way, and "circuit," the roundabout.

[98] Another sort of contrariety, which I do not touch on here, is that of contrary effects of the same thing, as in M40. This sort of interpersonal contrariety might be reduced to the immense diversity of tastes of each person's *amour-propre*, which is accorded a certain fundamental *capriciousness* that both challenges and assures its universal explanatory power.

risks bursting forth at all times.[99] This *ambivalence* results in inversions of feelings both unpredictable and distressing, even to the person *whose* feelings they are said to be.[100]

Rather than owners or masters, we are subjects or onlookers of our own passions. Their self-"generation," if it takes place in or with us, does not have *us* as its cause: "La durée de nos passions ne dépend pas plus de nous que la durée de notre vie" (M5). This entails a disconcerting consequence: our exoneration from the effects of the passions that actualize themselves in us. *Inconstance* cannot be blamed, for we are not *free* to intervene in the natural course of affects: "Comme on n'est jamais en liberté d'aimer, ou de cesser d'aimer, l'amant ne peut se plaindre avec justice de l'inconstance de sa maîtresse, ni elle de la légèreté de son amant" (MS61). We can complain or cry foul, but not *justly*. What we are compelled to do cannot be attributed to us as fault or merit. A passion like love, with its endless fluctuations and "révolutions," is no more to be blamed on us than the ocean for the *perpetuum mobile* of its waves or the to and fro of its tides.[101]

Maxims like these set passions and their effects outside the realm of the self's agency: we can do no better than humbly endure, and withhold judgment. The very basis of ethics and morals that Descartes proclaimed in his treatise is undermined.[102] With self-control in doubt, the door is open to justify the *political* administration of passions and bodies by a sovereign power that steps into the empty space left by the self's incapacity for self-rule. As in Hobbes, a conventional sphere of laws would be necessary to supplement for human nature's inherent lack

[99] See also M72: "Si on juge de l'amour par la plupart de ses effets, il ressemble plus à la haine qu'à l'amitié."
[100] See M51: "Rien ne doit tant diminuer la satisfaction que nous avons de nous-mêmes, que de voir que nous désapprouvons dans un temps ce que nous approuvions dans un autre."
[101] *Réflexions diverses* VI "De l'amour et de la mer," and IX "De l'amour et de la vie," ed. by André-Alain Morello in *Moralistes du XVIIe siècle*.
[102] See *Les passions de l'âme*, P. D'Arcy, ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), art. 152; and *Principes de la philosophie*, D. Moreau, trans. (Paris: Vrin bilingue, 2009), I.37.

of any universal principle of justice.[103] By nature, "les hommes sont, à l'égard des autres hommes, ce que les différentes espèces d'animaux sont entre elles et à l'égard les unes des autres," writes La Rochefoucauld,[104] whom La Fontaine famously saluted in fable 14, book 10, which thematizes the act of perceiving analogies between human and animal comportment.[105] Contrariety, then, might be a fitting word to describe the irreducible differences and mutual antagonisms between humans, their irrepressible *libido dominandi*. Human animals, like contraries, strive to destroy each other.

We can see that the political implications of the passions' autonomy and *inconstance* in the *Maximes* stem from the peculiarities of the self's self-relation. "Il s'en faut bien que nous connaissions tout ce que nos passions nous font faire" (M460) posits that we can neither remain, nor be, nor know what we are.[106] "On est quelquefois aussi différent de soi-même que des

[103] The association between La Rochefoucauld's view of the tyrannical ferocity of each person's *amour-propre*, and Hobbes's notion of man as a wolf to man, has been made, for example, by Van Delft and Lafond, *La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et Littérature*, p. 28. The latter draws a further analogy between *amour-propre*, Spinoza's *conatus* and Nietzsche's *will to power*, such that *amour-propre* would be a sort of "irrational energy [that] essentially escapes from consciousness' grasp." He cites Pierre Nicole who explicitly justified civil society on the same bases present in the *Maximes* "'par le moyen des roues et des gibets qu'on étable en commun, on réprime les pensées et les desseins tyranniques de l'amour-propre de chaque particulier" (*De la charité et de l'amour-propre,* ch. II). Nous ne sommes pas loin ici de Hobbes" (51).

[104] *Réflexion* XI, "Du rapport des hommes avec les animaux," in *Moralistes du XVIIe siècle*, p. 207. André-Alain Morello (n.1, p. 1087) notes the implicit *rapprochement* between amour-propre and animal instinct in La Rochefoucauld's "reflection": "Il était sans doute tentant, pour La Rochefoucauld, de rapprocher l'amour propre de l'instinct animal, et dès lors, de transformer la société en ménagerie." We might say that in "Réflexion" XI we find the transposition of the political notion of mutual "tyranny" between all men from MS 1, into the (natural) sphere of animality. Just as a menagerie needs someone to build the walls and cells that keep the animals from killing each other, so chaotic human selves need a form of transcendent power to keep them in line.

[105] The fable begins: "Je me suis souvent dit, voyant de quelle sorte / L'homme agit, et qu'il se comporte, / En mille occasions, comme les animaux," and includes with an apostrophe to La Rochefoucauld in which La Fontaine recognizes an apparent debt to the Duke: "Permettez-moi du moins d'apprendre à tout le monde /Que vous m'avez donné le sujet de ces vers" in *Fables* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), X, 14, p. 312.

[106] Cf. "Comment peut-on répondre de ce qu'on voudra à l'avenir, puisqu'on ne sait pas précisément ce que l'on veut dans le temps présent ?" (MS12); and (M295) "Il s'en faut bien que nous ne connaissions toutes nos volontés."

autres" (M135) spells out the paradox most clearly.[107] Difference inheres in the sameness of the self.[108]

In forcing us to take such statements seriously, La Rochefoucauld, I have suggested, asks that we suspend our typical convictions regarding the possible in logic, language, and in (our) nature. Challenging us to grasp *amour-propre*, the unrepresentable point of convergence of "tous les contraires" (MS1), is just such demand: this unthinkable force, god, demon, or part of the self (we aren't quite sure) with respect to which paradox alone speaks the truth. This suggests an overlooked direction in which to explore the link between La Rochefoucauld and Freud.

While, as Eric Tourrette recently observed, it has become something of a "lieu de pasage obligé" to associate the two,[109] this has so far been done on the basis of a structural analogy between *amour-propre* and the unconscious with respect to their relation to the conscious self or ego.[110] Striking new ground, Tourrette's article posits an analogy between the ways in which the

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[107] In his *Pensées*, Pascal similarly set heterogeneity in the self's self-relation, at least as much as in its relation to the Other. Whereas, in earlier philosophy, dissemblance or disproportion was used (in Aquinas, Cusa, Scotus, inter alia) only to characterize the relation between man and God, Pascal saw the same infinite distance as separating oneself from oneself. In and as ourselves we discover tension and paradox: in the striving of two opposite instincts, in the irreducible distinction between body and mind, incapable of no unity, no reduction of one side to the other. See Hélène Michon, *L'ordre du cœur: Philosophie, théologie et mystique dans les* Pensées *de Pascal* (Paris: Champion: 2007), pp. 42-45, 47.

[108] Paul Ricœur explains that *même* or *mêmeté* (sameness) is comparative, even when used to reinforce identity (as in *soi-même*), rather than as an adjective or a noun (e.g., *la même chose*). *Même* is always used in implicit opposition to its contraries: "autre, contraire, distinct, divers, inégal, inverse": *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p.13. M135 not only inverts the meaning of "même" by setting it as equivalent to its implicit contrary and disrupting its function to reinforce *identity*. In so doing, the maxim undermines the distinguishing function of *différent* or *autre*: if difference is embedded in the hyphen, as it were, between "soi" and "même"—if the hyphenated *même* becomes not a reinforcement of sameness, but a separation, a distancing—the distance between oneself and others seems, on the other hand, to shorten.

[109] Tourrette, "L'argument de l'hostilité prévisible. La Rochefoucauld et Freud," p. 243. In its references, the article provides a comprehensive bibliography of the La Rochefoucauld-Freud comparison.

[110] La plupart des critiques semblent aujourd'hui bien d'accord pour reconnaître en La Rochefoucauld un des premiers explorateurs de l'inconscient," writes Van Delft, *Littérature et anthropologie*, p 131. See, e.g., Paul Bénichou, "La idea de inconsciente en el clasicismo francés" *LOGOS*, II, nº 3, 1934, pp. 9-33, esp. 22ff; Bénichou, "L'intention des Maximes," in *L'Ecrivain et ses travaux* (Paris, Corti, 1967), p. 6; Paul Masson-Oursel, "La Rochefoucauld devant l'inconscient" *Psyché*, nº4 (1947), p. 143-149.

two great critics of the mythical self accorded an important role to the resistance they anticipated in the recipients of their propositions. The fascinating similarity between *amour-propre* as a principle contrary to logic and the a-logical nature of the unconscious has, however, gone utterly unnoticed.

An obvious work of Freud's to which we might turn here is "Über den Gegensinn der Urworte" (1910).[111] This remarkable text excerpts Karl Abel's work on antithetical meanings of words and phonetic reversals, positing an "Übereinstimmung" between the dream-work and these peculiar properties of archaic languages.[112] The material, Freud thinks, speaks to an observation from *Die Traumdeutung* on the irreverence of the dream-work for rules of contradiction and contrariety. Freud cites himself:

> Höchst auffällig ist das Verhalten des Traumes gegen die Kategorie von Gegensatz und Widerspruch. Dieser wird schlechtweg vernachlässigt. Das »Nein« scheint für den Traum nicht zu existieren. Gegensätze werden mit besonderer Vorliebe zu einer Einheit zusammengezogen oder in einem dargestellt. Der Traum nimmt sich ja auch die Freiheit, ein beliebiges Element durch seinen Wunschgegensatz darzustellen, so daß man zunächst von keinem eines Gegenteils fähigen Elemente weiß, ob es in den Traumgedanken positiv oder negativ enthalten ist.[113]

In the dream, something is not "not" its contrary; there is no "no" or "not." Instead, one thing can be its opposite: two contraries brought together or "represented in one," according to the dream-work's playful illogicality. For the *Maximes*, certain aspects of real human experience display the character of Freud's dream, and provoke the same uncertainty. Life is a sort of "Sprache des Traumes," an archaic language like Abel's Old Egyptian, in which each phenomenon can be read

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[111] Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* (London: 1940–), Vol. VIII, pp. 213-221.
[112] Ibid., p. 221.
[113] Id., p. 214. The exclusion of the "no" of negation from the dream suggests what one can confirm on reading this citation and the rest of the text, namely, that contrariety, not contradiction in the sense of denial ("P" contradicts "not P"), is the operative concept for describing the dream and its "work." Since the dream is a positivity, a fabric like an image and not a discourse or text that can say "no," Freud must mean "contradiction" in the sense of mutual exclusion, i.e. of contrariety, not negation (as in Aristotle). *Since it is cold, it is not hot*: it is this sort of "not," one that relies upon contrariety, that is absent from the dream.

forwards and backwards. Like the dream images, things reverse or invert themselves.[114] We must view them from different angles, like the anamorphic "médailles" to which La Chappelle-Bessé likened "l'homme corrompu" in the *Discours* on the *Maximes* included in the 1665 edition: "la figure d'un saint et celle d'un démon dans une seule face et par les mêmes traits."[115]

Fifteen years later, Freud published another short text, "Die Verneinung," which brings us even closer to *amour-propre* as "tous les contraires."[116] In the dream-work, we saw, the law of mutual exclusion of opposites is suspended. In "Die Verneinung," though Freud's object is different—analysis and association, not dream-work—, his preoccupation is similar. He sketches a concise theory of predicative judgment ("Urteilsfunktion") in order to describe the particularity of the unconscious with respect to negation: "man in der Analyse kein »Nein« aus dem Unbewußten auffindet"[117] For Freud, a verbal negation testifies to the affirmation, in the unconscious, of what is verbally (consciously) negated. It means, that is, the contrary of what it says.[118] The unconscious becomes a realm devoid of the grammar, syntax, or logic of normal language or thought: ideas are present together in a timeless simultaneity. The unconscious is the site from which nothing can be excluded and in which nothing excludes anything else: "il est tous les contraires"

But we can detect another deep resonance with La Rochefoucauld. Freud's text exemplifies how his theory encourages a tireless *distrust* of our judgments concerning ourselves. Self-assessments are to be viewed with suspicion. In analysis, negation is the mark

[114] Id., p. 221 on the "Umkehrung ihres Darstellungsmaterials."
[115] Ed. Truchet, pp. 269 ff, here p.278.
[116] Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* (London: 1940–), Vol. XIV, pp. 9-15.
[117] Ibid., p. 15.
[118] For Freud, the judgments *yes*, or affirmation, and *no*, or negation, are themselves contraries that ultimately stem from the contrariety between the two basic instincts. Affirmation is the substitute for the pleasurable conjoining of the self with something good. It corresponds to Eros. Negation was originally the rejection of something bad out of the body. It corresponds to Eros's contrary, the destructive instinct (14).

("Merkzeichen") of repression, the disavowal of a painful, perhaps ego-harming truth that cannot be allowed to hold.[119] In the *Maximes*, *amour-propre* already denoted a force, "pride," that is accorded a function similar to that of repression: without our awareness, it works to keep the mind from recognizing our self-serving interests (M358).

"To 'know thyself' is to be known by another. This was Freud's powerful revision of the Delphic injunction," Philip Rieff writes in *The Mind of the Moralist*.[120] In both form and content, Rieff's formula might have come right out of the *Maximes*. It seeks to capture the paradoxical re-definition of self-understanding Freud operated, whereby self-knowledge as self-reflexivity becomes self-knowledge as exposure to an analytical discourse and gaze from without. The *Maximes* is such a discourse, its reader, a resistant patient whose self-understanding is challenged on each page. Self-knowledge does not come from oneself. Self-knowledge is self-delusion. In Freud and in the *Maximes*, such paradoxes stake a claim to truth and encourage us to seek the truth in paradox.

In light of this, the nominalist reading of the simultaneity of contraries in the *Maximes* might again be nuanced. When we find a statement like, "La vertu n'irait pas si loin si la vanité ne lui tenait compagnie" (M200), we might imagine a person who, when pressed, would deny that vanity motivates their virtuous acts. In no simple sense could we say that they are lying, that "they" are hiding the truth. For their denial is a tacit avowal hidden from themselves, perhaps even more so than from us. Unwitting self-delusion is, after all, the easiest ruse to pull off: "Il est aussi facile de se tromper soi-même sans s'en apercevoir qu'il est difficile de tromper les autres

[119] Id., "gelten lassen" — to hold, to be valid. When the patient denies that a person in a dream is his mother, Freud encourages us to gloss the statement as follows, in a prosopopoeia of the psychic processes behind negation and repression: "Es ist so, als ob der Patient gesagt hätte: 'Mir ist zwar die Mutter zu dieser Person eingefallen, aber ich habe keine Lust, diesen Einfall gelten zu lassen.'"

[120] Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1961), p. 76.

sans qu'ils s'en aperçoivent" (M115).[121] Our ordinary thoughts and actions take on something of the Freudian parapraxis.[122]

The threat of self-delusion explains the copresence, in the *Maximes*, of an ideal of *honnêteté* as self-understanding and confession (M202), or constant transparency to others (M206), *and* a bar on the very possibility of self-knowledge or sincerity.[123] As a technology of the self, that is, viewed as an ethics, the text encourages self-understanding as self-suspicion

[121] See also MNP9: "Il ne faut pas s'offenser que les autres nous cachent la vérité puisque nous nous la cachons si souvent nous-mêmes."

[122] This is another avenue down which to approach the similar importance of contrariety in Freud and La Rochefoucauld. For the former, parapraxis (*Fehlleistung*) is another manner in which contrariety infuses our everyday lives. The *Fehlleistung* consists in the substitution of one (failed) act or utterance by another, which betrays an intention contrary to that which animated the former. See *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* in *Gesammelte Werke* (London: 1940–), Vol. XI, p. 37. Contrariety is both explicit and implicit in the lapsus: the most common and striking sort consists in saying precisely the contrary of what one intended, a phenomenon Freud explains by the "conceptual affinity" and "psychological association" that exists between mutually contradictory elements (*Gegensätze*) (27). And Freud thinks – or assumes –that contrariety of meaning and intention can be found even where it is not present on a superficial level. Indeed, in approaching the parapraxis, one of Freud's main hermeneutic tools is, in each case, to posit a contrary sense behind the apparently meaningless slip. Further, the same logic of negation as admission that we find in "Die Verneinung" is present in Freud's theory of the *Fehlleistung*. The emergence of contrary intentions in the slip is covered up by a denial from the person who committed it and who asserts having wanted to do the opposite of what occurred (cf. 43). For La Rochefoucauld, actions in general are close to the Freudian slip, insofar as they often express an intention that is in fact contrary to the deeper, hidden intention animating it. Rather than contrariety emerging primarily in the failure or mistake, as in Freud, opposition animates the successful, intentional act per se. The predominance of *inconstance* in La Rochefoucauld might also be set in dialogue with parapraxis. The jerks between opposing feelings reveal the "affinity" between contrary affects and intentions, which coexist, *in potentia*, in the depths of the heart.

[123] "Les faux honnêtes gens sont ceux qui déguisent leurs défauts aux autres et à eux-mêmes. Les vrais honnêtes gens sont ceux qui les connaissent parfaitement et les confessent" (M202). MS74 similarly hints at a virtue of confession, and M457 also suggests and ethics of transparency. But compare M138: "On aime mieux dire du mal de soi-même que de n'en point parler." And M63, which sees truth-telling as a hidden desire for our words to be viewed with adulation. M383 turns sincerity into self-aggrandizement. Similarly, M184 sees the goal confession is to save our reputation: we admit in order to better our social profile. On this, see also M327. M494 sees *amour-propre* as a sort of censor à la Freud. For the impossibility of self-knowledge, the main maxim is MS1. Another is M36 which accords something of natural teleology to the impossibility of total self-knowledge, something that Nietzsche might have asserted (Cf. *Zur Genealogie der Moral* [Leipzig: Neumann, 1887], §13. See also M460, or M295, on our inability to know all our diverse "volontés," and M269, which forbids anyone from knowing "tout le mal qu'il fait." Another related maxim is M315, on self-distrust (*défiance*), which forbids us from rendering visible "le fond de notre cœur." Another is M439, which asserts that we do not have perfect knowledge of what we desire.

while posing serious epistemological problems undermining this self-relation's very possibility. *Amour-propre* is "semblable à nos yeux…qui sont aveugles seulement pour eux-mêmes" (MS1).[124] The therapeutic profile of the *Maximes*, as we may call it, is hence difficult to assess.[125] I return to this impasse, also encountered by demystifying theories of the 20th century, at the end of this chapter.

Individuals, Imperceptibles, and Unknowables

Let us turn back to the *Maximes* now to further explore the movement of contrariety and linguistic critique. Despite the challenges raised by the passions and *amour-propre*, other maxims might allow us to pursue the more nominalist reading we began. Take M44: like MS68, it too invites the addition of quotation marks. Unlike the former, on the other hand, M44 pursues a movement of deconstruction that does seem to reach a rock-sold basis:

> La force et la faiblesse de l'esprit sont mal nommées ; elles ne sont en effet que la bonne ou la mauvaise disposition des organes du corps.

Here it is not evaluative judgment but basic conceptual predication that is targeted. The intervention consists in an opposition between two self-forming technologies, two different discourses on selfhood, one idealist, the other pessimistic, even materialist.

The maxim questions the very idea that we know we have a mind, or what such a thing may be; it suspends a basic element of our self-relation. For it seems to withdraw from the term "esprit" any immaterial reference, countering an opinion invoked in the first clause. The body, not the mind, is the ground of the latter's strength or weakness. And these qualities themselves

[124] Perhaps the text qua mirror is the only recourse, though it's not clear that amour-propre can or wants to recognize itself even there.
[125] "[L]es *Maximes* restent beaucoup plus aptes à informer qu'à réformer," writes Turcat, *La Rochefoucauld par quatre chemins*, p. 11.

are but our designations for anatomical patterns, the random layout of our organs, over which we are powerless.

The lure of this materialist reading is strong; multiple maxims support it, submitting all human persons and actions to blind, biological processes, the inner counterpart to "Fortune."[126] Some critics have hence adopted this perspective.[127] We would be, then, nothing but the epiphenomenon of our passions and humoral fluids, a hallucination of human selfhood hiding the pulsing of inhuman forces. The self is flayed, reduced to disparate forces: a non-self. No wonder Nietzsche was a sympathetic reader of La Rochefoucauld. Some maxims would have us see the "I" or self as just the sort of "Verführung von Seiten der Grammatik," he chided, an illusion of language breeding a popular, superstitious belief ("Volks-Aberglaube") in the existence and coherence of something like an "I," "subject," or "soul."[128]

At the end of critique, then, there are only bodies and organs, humors and passions, along with things we can simply designate descriptively, as long as we withhold all evaluative judgments.[129] Indeed, this "we" itself is indeterminate, since it refers to selves whose existence is problematic. All anthropological terms are to be viewed with suspicion and stripped down to an objective bedrock. Still, even the materialist reading, which seems to finally arrive at the level at which we can at least acquire some certain ideas about the world and ourselves, can be problematized. For La Rochefoucauld's linguistic critique does not stop at problems of moral

[126] E.g., M297, MS2.
[127] Cf. Hodgson, "Les 'divers degrés de la chaleur du sang': le corps et les passions chez La Rochefoucauld"; Lafond, *La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et Littérature*, pp. 32, 159-160.
[128] *Jenseits von Guten und Bösen* (Leipzig: Neumann, 1886), Vorrede; cf. *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, §13.
[129] Cf. M1: "Ce que nous prenons pour des vertus n'est souvent qu'un assemblage de diverses actions et de divers intérêts…". Acts and interests are indisputable realities; "virtue," but an evaluative term to be held in suspicion.

value and psychological assessment. Some maxims question the realism of universal terms or concepts in general.

Wandering through the book, we are struck to find, towards the end of the long suite of general propositions seeming to claim to universal validity, the following maxim: "Il est plus aisé de connaître l'homme en général que de connaître un homme en particulier" (M436). The proposition points up the level of abstraction occupied by the others, and points below or beyond them, to something that is not subsumed by their general terms and cannot be. At that point, either we are to suspect that each maxim, though masquerading as a general moral law, is in fact a statement about a particular individual—in which case it no longer concerns us at all.[130] Or, if we take the maxims to be universal categorical statements, they cannot be true, since, in being directed to us all, they miss each of us "en particulier." [131]

But perhaps knowledge of things "en particulier" is simply impossible for us. "Pour bien savoir les choses, il en faut savoir le détail; et comme il est presque infini, nos connaissances sont toujours superficielles et imparfaites" (M106). A statement like this reminds us that the *Maximes* belong to the age of the *je ne sais quoi*.[132] It suggests, behind the words the text uses in its confident assertions, the presence of something mysterious, unsayable: a swarm of variations, degrees, details, and differences, a field of unknowable *individuals* the mind can never exhaust.[133]

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[130] It is in this respect relevant to recall that one common contemporary criticism of La Rochefoucauld was to have painted and analyzed not the heart per se, but his own.

[131] True, the addition of restricting words ("souvent," "plupart," "d'ordinaire," the indefinite article "des," etc.) appears to exonerate the maxims from this critique. In fact, such words merely particularize the statements they qualify in a way to make them, again, potentially irrelevant to each individual case (like mine, a reader may think).

[132] See Richard Scholar, *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi: Enquête sur un énigme*, Constantinesco, trans. (Paris: PUF, 2010).

[133] Drawing a similar insight, M. W. G. Moore writes that La Rochefoucauld takes common concepts whose meaning and extension seem unproblematic and reveals them as "umbrella-words" subsuming a

We can, for example, perhaps admit that the passions direct our comportment, but can we understand how? The heart's functioning is as unknowable as the works of the hidden God: it directs our actions "insensiblement" (M43). Just so, while blood or humors might be the underlying agents of all we attribute to a human self, their inner logic is *imperceptible*, too complicated for us to grasp: "Les humeurs du corps ont un cours ordinaire et réglé, qui meut et tourne imperceptiblement notre volonté… sans que nous puissions le connaître" (M297.)[134] The synthesis of regularity and unknowability is what is essential here. The *je ne sais quoi* in Pascal has the same structure; similarly, his *esprit de finesse*.[135] The "réglé" suggests we can understand the rule; but we can't.

In the *Maximes*, there is an equivalent outside the self to the imperceptible order of the humors inside. Our emotions stir or settle not due to the major events in our lives—those we might imagine we consciously name as the causes of our highs and lows. Rather, our "humeur" depends on the "petites choses qui nous arrivent tous les jours" and that form an immensely complex "arrangement" (M488) beyond our comprehension. Do we have names for these "little

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disconcerting variety of things: "La Rochefoucauld et le mystère de la vie," *Cahiers de l'association internationale des études françaises*, nº 18 (1966), p. 106. Lafond suggests that this focus on the rift between reality and the ideas we make of it is what constitutes the originality, if there is one, in La Rochefoucauld's psychology: *La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et littérature*, p.48.

[134] The first state of this maxim, in the Liancourt manuscript, is even clearer: "Nous ne nous apercevons que des emportements et des mouvements extraordinaires de nos humeurs… mais personne quasi ne s'aperçoit que ces humeurs ont un cours ordinaire et réglé qui meut et tourne doucement et imperceptiblement notre volonté à des actions différentes; […]" (Truchet, ed., p. 409). La Rochefoucauld's maxim, along with MS1, can be put into dialogue with the theory of imperceptible ideas in Pierre Nicole and the Benedictine François Lamy (on both, see Weiser, "Littérature moraliste et psychanalyse," pp. 80 ff). In his *De la connoissance de soi-mesme* (1684–1689), Lamy addresses "imperceptible" or, as he called them, "clandestine" ideas. Without us being aware, these give rise to our passions. At most, we perceive these "confuses & indistinctes" ideas in the mode of a *je ne sais quoi*, as not available for us to clearly grasp (Lamy cited by Weiser, p. 82). Weiser argues that Lamy's text displays the transference of the idea of the *je ne sais quoi* from a theological context, where it might still refer to the "imperceptibles operations de la grâce divine" (as in Bouhours's *Entretien d'Ariste et d'Eugene*) to a psychological usage, where it refers instead to the unconscious thoughts that cause and modulate our passions (82).

[135] See *Pensées* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976), §1 (Brunschvicg): "…car les principes [de l'esprit de finesse] sont si deliés et en si grand nombre qu'il est presque impossible qu'ils n'en échappent."

things," or can we only gesture to them, negatively, as the outside of our awareness and concepts? What about the names of the passions? If they are nothing but "degrees" of blood temperature (MS2), perhaps even these concepts are rather unwieldy vis-à-vis a continuum of infinitesimal differences.

Lewis suggests we identify the problem raised by M106 as "an ultimate paradox of destructive criticism itself": "Nothing in the *Maximes* indicates why or where the pursuit of critical negation should stop; nothing suggests that the process of demystification can ever get to the absolute bottom of things, can ground a claim to fully adequate knowledge."[136] Indeed, the positing of the quasi-infinity of small details, all of which concur to form an unknowable pattern, rule, or "arrangement," threatens to undermine the status of all assertions, including, of course, the *Maximes*. What, then, is the status of this knowledge that asserts that all knowledge is imperfect? This is a large problem, which, as Lewis's words suggest, is not unique to the *Maximes*. Indeed, we can think of Pascal, or Kuhn, or Foucault. For the moment, however, it is important to draw some general conclusions concerning unknowability and the self's ethical self-relation.

There was a parallel in Descartes between man knowing nature and man dominating his nature (the passions, the body) via knowledge and its application. Self-mastery is predicated upon this correspondence. The *Maximes* oppose the Cartesian conjunction on both levels. With respect to the passions, we are not active but fundamentally passive. This posited, any route to grasping this passivity is barred by restrictions set on our knowledge. Despite our thoughts and words, in their constitution and interaction things are indefinitely diverse (M106). Grasping the "arrangement" or "cours ordinaire et réglé" of minute, imperceptibly differentiated elements is beyond us. Faced with this limit, we might adopt a view of ourselves and the world that is at

[136] Lewis, *La Rochefoucauld: The Art of Abstraction*, p. 143.

least subjectively true, though, we suspect, objectively false: the self and world are utter "caprice," randomness.[137] Neither the world nor the self is harmonious or constant: both betray a fundamental *Inconstance*.[138] This is the inversion of Descartes. To the vanity of science now corresponds the vanity of the pretension to mastery over oneself.

La langue, l'imaginaire, les livres

La Rochefoucauld, I have argued, accords language a role in shaping perception. Reduction of one thing to its contrary has the effect of suggesting that words can mislead us into imagining reference where we really only have meaning. That is, it shows language in its autonomous existence, against an assumption of its transparency to the world of things and their relations. He points to the power of *langue* over thought: the relationship between signs—and in this case, the extreme difference between them—produces meaning, shaping perception. Descartes imagined language as the pairing of material supports with "significations" in the mind, according to an act of arbitrary (free) association, a view Adorno would have seen as symptomatic of "idealistic consciousness."[139] The position was typical of the confidence in language's representational

[137] Cf. Bénichou, cited in Lafond, *La Rochefoucauld: Littérature et Augustinisme*, p. 23: "je crois surtout que la théorie de l'amour-propre chez La Rochefoucauld, en tant qu'explication positive et cohérente de la conduite humaine, se fait sur un fond qui, finalement, dissout presque cette idée dans celle d'une incohérence, d'un caprice, d'une incompréhensibilité de la nature humaine."

[138] This shows similarities with the skeptical vision of the world that, in a Montaigne, for example, set itself against the prior more optimist Rensaissance humanist visions of the correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm and the human capacity to know them both and their interrelation. See Jean Mesnard, "Au-delà de la Renaissance: 1580-1630," in *La culture du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1992), p. 33 ff. Mesnard describes the pairing of "visions du monde," as he calls them, with textual and artistic forms. Many of his remarks, concerning, for example, a new "mode de composition déroutant," or the attention to detail in a universe full of inexhaustible diversity, would be useful for understanding the intimate relation between the form of the *Maximes* and a certain epistemological attitude toward the world whose origins we can situate in the twilight of the heroic age of the Renaissance.

[139] "Es ist Zeichen aller Verdinglichung durch idealistisches Bewußtein, daß die Dinge beliebig benannt werden können": Adorno, "Thesen über die Sprache des Philosophs," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 366.

transparency in *l'âge classique*, as described by Foucault.[140] Breaking with this, La Rochefoucauld hints instead that relations between words have power over us. To the self's subjection to its passions corresponds its capture in language.[141]

Meleuc glimpsed the critique of *langue* when he construed the typical maxim as "la négation d'un énoncé 'bien-formé', c'est-à-dire conforme aux règles de la langue, du lecteur par l'auteur."[142] To be "conforme aux règles de la langue" is, for example, to keep opposite semantic domains distinct, or identical ones identical. It means to have the semantic redundancy of the dictionary entry, the banality of our everyday, rule-bound *parole*. Breaking these rules presupposes them: play with contrariety can be called a "paradigmatic negation," i.e., the substitution of one word for its contrary in *langue*, an operation that "s'appuie en fait sur l'existence d'un paradigme entre le nom Y de non-A et le nom X de A"[143] Violence done to the paradigm directs the mind to something like *the things themselves*, where the neat relation between contraries in *langue* cannot be found. It sunders a realm of clear ideas from a world of murky realities,[144] like the fallen earth, cut off from God.

In other words, we find something like the recognition of the symbolic and a critique of the imaginary in the *Maximes*. The distrust of language betrays an anxiety about our submission

[140] Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966); see Culler, "Paradox and the language of morals," pp. 32-33, which relies heavily on Foucault. Still, we should only accept this view with caution, given figures like Pascal, Lamy, La Rochefoucauld, Nicole, all of whom had ideas on language that diverged significantly from the representational model considered paradigmatic by Foucault and Culler.
[141] In this he is close to Arnauld and Nicole of the *Logique*, which, though profoundly Cartesian in inspiration, also focuses on the aspects of language that disrupt the representational transparency of the sign: tropes, *idées accessoires*, associations, etc. See Weiser, "Littérature et psychanalyse," pp. 78 ff. These perspectives tend to accord language a certain autonomy, a power, that is recalcitrant to the user, exceeding and subverting conscious intention and understanding. Following Weiser, the authors of *Logique* needed to focus on the figural and metaphorical character of language for theological reasons, namely, for example, in order to conceive the real equivocity of the Eucharist.
[142] Meleuc, "La structure du maxime," p. 84; see also p. 96: "la négation portait sur les articulations de la langue, et créait par là même cette rhétorique qui semble, mieux que tout autre trait, définir la Maxime [à savoir, "cette rhétorique se fonde sur l'articulation binaire A vs -A dans la plupart des cas"]."
[143] Jean-Claude Milner, *Le périple structural: Figures et paradigme* (Paris: Verdier, 2008), 94.
[144] Cf. Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives", p. 24.

to linguistic relations and our tendency to project or "hypostatize" language in the world.[145] Take M136 for example: "Il y a des gens qui n'auraient jamais été amoureux s'ils n'avaient jamais entendu parler de l'amour." Lacan, whose fascination with La Rochefoucauld is known, cites this maxim in his "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse"[146] As Serge Doubrovsky observes, Lacan's reading pushes M136 away from the imaginary toward the symbolic: "une reconnaissance authentique de ce que l'amour doit au symbole et de ce que la parole emporte d'amour," writes Lacan.[147] His interpretation is important. It leads towards the assertion, a page later: "que l'inconscient du sujet soit le discours de l'autre."

Viewed instead in terms of the imaginary, M136 means that, to pursue love is to desire an idea shaped by representations of the love of others.[148] The thought was not sterile in an age that was witnessing the ascension of the novel.[149] The Duke was hardly a stranger to their charm. He had a particular predilection for *L'Astrée*, whose ideal image of love animated a whole social and literary movement whose business was to "parler de l'amour": Preciosity.[150] Stepping back from the literate culture of love out of which he and his *Maximes* arose, M136 cautions that the stories

[145] "Hypostatization is the act by which contingent relations in language (affinities: contrast: homonyms: alliterations, and so forth) are turned into necessary or apparently necessary relations in experience": Peter Stern, *Lichtenberg: A Doctrine of Scattered Occasions* (1963), pp. 202-3, cited, though for different purposes, in Culler, at p. 30.

[146] See Doubrovsky, "Vingt propositions sur l'amour-propre: de Lacan à La Rochefoucauld," pp. 56-57. Michael Moriarty has discussed other aspects of Lacan's reading of La Rochefoucauld, namely, his focus on the inauthenticity and agressivity of *amour-propre's* peculiar "hedonism," in *Fallen Nature, Fallen Selves* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 239-241 (see also p. 103, on Lacan's admiration for St. Augustine). Moriarty also mentions Lacan's repeated references to Augustine and the early modern moralistes in *Early Modern French Thought I: The Age of Suspicion* (Oxford, 2003), p. 8, n.12.

[147] See Doubrovsky's comments, "Vingt propositions sur l'amour-propre," pp. 56-7.

[148] See also M76 and M77.

[149] See Camile Esmein-Sarrazin, *L'essor du roman: Discours théorique et constitution d'un genre littéraire au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2008).

[150] Urfé's monumental novel was "his favorite," writes Harold Pagliaro, "Rochefoucauld, Françis VI duc de la (1613–1680)," in *European Writers: The Age of Reason and the Enlightenment*, George Stade, ed., vol. 3. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1983), p. 51; see especially Alain Mazère, *La Rochefoucauld: Le duc rebelle* (Paris: Le Croît vif, 2007), p. 27, and passim. On *L'Astrée* and préciosité, see Robert Lathuillère, *La préciosité*, vol. 1 (Geneva: Droz, 1969), pp. 324 ff.

of our passions do not tell or write themselves. They pursue paths fore-told or pre-scribed by others. Stendhal, another critic of the romantic imaginary, would later lash out at French women for confusing love with its depiction in novels. Readers stifled the spontaneity of feeling, or, having a too elevated idea of love and themselves, were condemned to disappointment with a reality now rival to an ideal world on paper.[151] This *topos* was destined to enjoy a long life.

In the epoch of the Précieuses, certain literary practices might have been seen as complicit with self-love and a disavowal of reality, that is, with *vanity*. Many of the dominant literary women were accused of "un amour démesuré d'elles-mêmes…elles apparaissent comme narcissiques, comme affligés d'une hypertrophie du 'moi idéal.'"[152] "[L]'intensité des rêveries idéalisantes chez les romancières" matched their taste for the amorous, heroic ideals in Petrarch, d'Urfé, and Corneille.[153] Literate practices helped maintain the distended ego. "Le *moi idéal* sert de support aux identifications à des personnages prestigieux, à des héroïnes grecques et romaines par exemple," writes Sellier.[154] Literary or historical characters could serve as mirror images: self-loving egos fixate on them, identify with them, mis-recognize themselves as the images, as Lacan would have it. The Précieuses' predilection for literary pseudonyms is well known.[155]

Compared to the imaginary ideal characters and emotions they cherished and penned, real life could only seem bleak to *Précieuses*. Some (Sellier mentions Catherine de Vandy, whose

[151] Stendhal, *Rome, Naples et Florence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), pp. 128-9: "On sait que les lettres d'amour, et quelquefois la conversation tendre des femmes littéraires, ne sont, en général, qu'un centon des romans qu'elle admirent" (129). Rousseau had leveled a similar attack at novels and literacy in general.

[152] Philippe Sellier, "'Se tirer du commun des femmes': La constellation précieuse," in *Essais sur l'imaginaire classique* (Paris: Champion, 2003), p. 207.

[153] Ibid., p., 208.

[154] Id., n. 18, p. 207.

[155] Belinda Jack observes how use of pseudonyms in Précieuses circles allowed a more integral absorption into the world of the books they wrote, read, and discussed: "Members of these circles themselves assumed pseudonyms and the line between life and fiction blurred. […] The use of a pseudonym, like the mask, encouraged 'play' and rather than creating a barrier between the reader and the author, actually functioned as a way of breaking down the divide between real life and the fictional worlds of the novels associated with these coteries": *The Woman Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 158.

vain disappointment La Fontaine mocked in "La fille") "ont attendu des Princes tellement charmants qu'elles ne les ont jamais rencontrés."[156] But Catherine Descartes's case is more paradigmatic still of the proud Précieuse type. Refusing even the possibility of disappointment, Descartes's niece renounced love "comme il est" entirely, and embraced it instead only in the mind, that is, in books and conversations about them. As she wrote to Madeline de Scudéry, a most distinguished scribe of "pur" love:

> Vous m'avez donné une si belle idée de l'amour dans tout ce que vous avez écrit, que je n'en ai rien voulu rabattre. J'ai cru qu'il fallait aimer ainsi, ou n'aimer pas du tout. / Vos beaux livres m'ont fait connaître / Un amour généreux, pur et sans intérêt, / Et qui l'a vu tel qu'il doit être / Ne peut le souffrir comme il est.[157]

"Beaux livres" are here tacitly recognized as the medium of Platonic ideas. In fixing an abstract type or form, they allow knowledge ("connaître") of something in its pure ideality, that is, isolated from any of its possible contraries. Such novels are complicit with the dictionary, then, which offers the word in the purity of its meaning in *langue*. A mind that takes the ideal entities of discourse to be the true archetypes of reality's shabby instantiations might search long and hard, it will never find something in the pristine state enjoyed in words. "Il est du véritable amour comme l'apparition des esprits : tout le monde en parle, mais peu de gens en ont vu" (M76). The maxim is remarkable for both according and denying existence to "véritable amour." We all *speak* of it, but we can't *see* it. And even if it appeared, it would only be as a specter, that

[156] Sellier, "'Se tirer du commun des femmes'", p. 208. La Fontaine's fable (VII, 4) plays precisely on the division between ideal type outside of time (the "fille" waits for the ideal she has in her mind, who, of course, never arrives) and the multiplicity of real individuals in time (the mediocre suitors who stream by, disdained by the pretentious girl). The *vanitas* becomes explicit as the tables turn: her own traits begin to lose their ideal beauty and she realizes that she herself is submitted to the same limits she refused to admit in her suitors. From the world of ideal love and men she falls hard: the end of the fable sees her with a "maltrou."

[157] Cited in ibid, p.209.

is, as dead or absent. Present as absent, on earth "true love" has the ontology of what is mediated by the linguistic sign.[158]

Just as pernicious as hearing, reading, or writing about love was to expose oneself to a discourse, stored and disseminated primarily in books, which offered an embellished and seductive portrait of the human self: philosophy, especially the humanist and Stoic sort, inspired by ancient thought. The target had been Augustine's too:[159] "les sages" (M20), "les philosophes" (M46), or "la philosophie" (M22). In light of the content of these polemical maxims, or MS21, which attacks Seneca *ad hominem*, and of course, the famous frontispiece, we can assume that readers understood "philosophy" to mean one Stoic in essence or inspiration. "Un anti-Sénèque," after all, is all how one reader of the 1663 *Maximes* manuscript designated its author.[160] Another more explicitly hinted at the association between vanity and the reading of philosophy. Philosophy books usually promote a type of self-knowledge that renders one "plus superbe et plus amateur de soi-même," he argued. The maxims deliver self-knowledge bereft of flattery, resulting in self-hate, -suspicion and -renunciation.[161]

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[158] In the *Maximes* we do sometimes find phrases concerning the "véritable" form or idea of something, like love (see also M77 and M473), valor (M215), or "bonté" (M481), etc. But this Platonism—which, I should say, is compatible with my comments on nominalism and the critique of *langue*—serves in the *Maximes* to emphasize the unattainability of such pure forms for us on earth. That is, it is a pride-shattering rather than ego-supporting gesture, even if it uses the same medium as the *Précieuse.* For the *latter*, the division between ideas and instantiations meant a flight out of time, out of the *monde*, a plunge into the imaginary. For the *Maximes*, even if we might pursue ideals, the division between the idea and the reality prescribes humility in the world and distrust for idealist images of humans, their relations, and their capacities.

[159] Augustine's focus on ambivalence and *akrasia* was meant as a corrective to "pagan," i.e. predominantly Greek or Hellenistic, moral philosophy, which in his time was already something that only survived in books and their readers. Augustine grouped its different forms together according to what he saw as their consensus, namely, "that the distinctly human characteristic of the rational will motivates all men," writes Hundert, "Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self," p. 87. Augustine was often a guiding force in 17th c. critiques of stoicism, as Gouhier has shown: *L'anti-humanisme au XVIIe siècle*, p. 128.

[160] Letter 31, in *Maximes*, Truchet, ed., p. 568.

[161] Letter 35, in *Maximes*, Truchet, ed., p. 573. The anonymous author writes: "Quiconque saura bien cet écrit n'a plus besoin de lire Sénèque, ni Épicète, ni Montaigne, ni Charron, ni tout ce qu'on a ramassé

At the hands of certain humanists, Stoicism had made a significant comeback in in late 16th and early 17th century Europe, forming a certain "climat stoïcien du temps," in the words of Jean Mesnard.[162] In the face of "l'inconstance du monde" this philosophy—"forme ultime de l'humanisme"—asserted our capacity to attain to "la constance du sage."[163] Opposing this imaginary image of a unified, self-possessing and self-transcending self, the *Maximes* also implicitly target Descartes's *Passions*, itself a sort of philosophy qua "thérapie de l'âme."[164] Whether Stoic, Neostoic, or Cartesian, philosophy claimed the ability to reinforce human beings against the world by checking the passions it stirs: the negative affects, for example, like fear of death (M504), or sadness and despair, that set in when we are afflicted with "les maux" of life (M22).

But to believe this promise was to fall prey to the illusory inversions of reality Augustine denounced in his attack on "pagan" virtues. M22 brings forth the same critique of philosophy we found in one of Elisabeth's letters. The Princess wrote of her incapacity to put philosophy into practice when it would truly be of use. The maxim transforms her personal testimony into a law: "La philosophie triomphe aisément des maux passés et des maux à venir. Mais les maux présents triomphent d'elle" (M22). Despite its self-training regimens, philosophy vanquishes "maux" only as ideas or thoughts. When misfortune falls upon us with a weight that is anything but intellectual, philosophy shows its power to be imaginary. Apparently active and efficient, it is in fact passive and ineffective.

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depuis peu de la morale des sceptiques et des épicuriens. On apprend véritablement à se connaître dans ces livres, mais c'est pour en devenir plus superbe et plus amateur de soi-même ; celui-ci nous fait connaître, mais c'est pour nous mépriser et pour nous humilier ; c'est pour nous donner de la défiance et nous mettre sur nos gardes contre nous mêmes."

[162] Mesnard, "Au-delà de la Renaissance: 1580-1640," *La Culture du XVIIe* siècle, p. 35; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 159.

[163] Ibid, pp. 35, 42. Cf. Gouhier, *L'anti-humanisme au XVIIe siècle*, ch. 12 "Antihumanisme et stoicisme."

[164] See André-Jean Voelke*, La Philosophie comme thérapie de l'âme* (Paris: Cerf, 1993).

M46 goes further, allowing the exception only to demolish it. Even where "philosophy" seems to have succeeded in delivering the promised detachment from "la vie"—in Epicurus, e.g.— this was not due to some triumph of reason over the irrational parts of the self. On the contrary, this philosophy was the *product* of a desire—an idiosyncratic "goût" peculiar to the philosopher's *amour-propre*—, which alone had the power to bring about a detachment from life *imagined* to be the effect of philosophical activity. The capriciousness of the *amour-propre*'s inclinations—here "attachment" to life, there utter "indifférence" for it—has no more rational, hence generalizable, foundation than taste in matters of aesthetic judgment, M46 asserts, offering another exemplary instance of the reduction of things to their contraries.

Thus we might understand ME50: "Il est plus nécessaire d'étudier les hommes que les livres." Certain books, especially philosophical ones (but novels, too) had the capacity to paint a cohesive image of the self that, seducing us, leads us astray, into *error*. In the *Augustinius*, Jansenius had already called "*philosophia errorum fons, haereticorum mater*" (source of errors and mother of heresies).[165] In flying the banner of this critique of philosophy, the *Maximes* allow us to perceive, under the moral and theological visage of Augustinian pessimism, a material culture aspect: a humanist, scholarly, bookish way of approaching the self, and oneself, is opposed by a more worldly sort of seeing, thinking, and writing. This worldly method emphasizes direct *observation* and *experience* of its objects: human behavior and moral

[165] Carraud, "Le jansénisme." Cf. Malebranche *La Recherche de la vérité* (Lyon: Rivoire, 1829),V.1, p.354.

psychology.[166] It is only natural, perhaps, that it would be the *modus operandi* of an aristocrat with no formal education.[167]

Seeing the La Rochefoucauldian maxim on "analogy with scientific research" is not new. Commentators have long viewed the typical maxim, which tends towards abstract, impersonal statement, as a "synthesis of experiences" similar to "the conclusions of experiment" in science.[168] Yet the precise scientific model implicitly invoked in such assessments has not been designated. In maxims like ME50 and M106, the *Maximes* do not just implicitly cast themselves as aligned with any sort of "science"—as if the word needed no qualifications, especially in the 17th century—, but with something similar to the new, experiential paradigm emerging in La Rochefoucauld's time.

[166] The opposition between education as book learning and learning as direct experience has a long history that, though extending back before La Rochefoucauld's moment, was destined to reach its paroxysm only in the centuries that followed, as Humanist anxieties about learning expanded into worries about reading literature in an age of mass literacy.

[167] "Anti-intellectualist" is how Lafond characterized the "attitude" of the *Maximes*, insofar as they tend to point up the rift between things and ideas. "Anti-philosophical" is Corrado Rosso's term: Lafond, *La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et littérature*, p. 44, and n. 105. In his "Discours" from the 1665 edition, La Chapelle-Bessé defended the "disorder" of the *Maximes* by associating methodical, systematic order with a bookishness that is cut off from real life and experience: "je préférerai toute ma vie la manière d'écrire négligée d'un courtisan qui a de l'esprit à la régularité gênée d'un docteur qui n'a rien vu que ses livres" (in *Moralistes du XVIIe siècle*, p. 234). One of the anonymous readers of the 1663 edition already had the same impression of worldly instead of literate, formally educated knowledge. See letter 35 in *Maximes*, Truchet, ed., p. 572: "ce faiseur de maximes n'est pas un homme nourri dans la province, ni dans l'Université; c'est un homme de qualité qui connaît parfaitement le cœur et le monde…et qui s'est donné le loisir d'en étudier et d'en pénétrer tous les détours et les finesses."

[168] Lewis, *La Rochefoucauld: The Art of Abstraction*, pp. 18, 19. "Synthesis of experiences" comes from Lanson *L'art de la prose* (Paris, 1911), cited in Lewis, p. 18. Lewis mentions Pierre-Henri Simon's image of maxims as "a collection of clinical entries." Lafond similarly cautions against seeking a "system" in the *Maximes* by invoking the experiential rather than theoretical nature of the maxim: "s'il est dangereux de parler de 'système' quand on évoque la philosophie du moraliste, c'est dans le sens où, comme l'a dit W.G. Moore, les réflexions 'sont des aperçus, des apports d'expérience'" (*La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et littérature*, p. 20).

This "new" science, whose Augustinian impetus is known, stressed repeated observation or testing of nature, and the imperfect, fragmentary character of the knowledge thus derived.[169] Its proponents considered that adulation of ancient authors' works, especially Aristotle's, had produced slavish adherence to an imaginary model of Nature, mediated by methodical, systematic treatises, that was to be rejected and replaced by tedious experimentation and observation, the sort of procedures no book could replace. *Study Nature herself instead of books!* This injunction was a *topos* of the New Science.[170] ME50 proclaims the same principle with respect to morals and human psychology. Studying men instead of books sought to forbid the formation of a coherent image of the self we mis-recognize as ourselves.[171] If "le moi, dans son aspect le plus essential, est une function imaginaire" (Lacan), then this technique was an assault on "le moi" as a coherent image similar to that leveled, in science, on the Aristotelian image of nature.[172] Against subjection to the imaginary, observation and experience yield disparate perspectives that perhaps do not form a consistent picture.

Indeed, in the *Maximes*, they do not. The text is an unbounded field, a non-totalized "ensemble of statements," some of which are mutually contradictory yet "all of which are valid simultaneously."[173] Rather than the progress of becoming in a linear path of synthesis,

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[169] See Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*. It is worth mentioning that, at the turn of the 17th century, Francis Bacon gave perhaps the first theoretical justification for the same sort of short, anti-systematic forms of writing, with their refusal to depict knowledge as anything but fragmentary and imperfect, that would be practiced in *moraliste* writing in France in the second half of the century. See Lafond, "Préface," in *Moralises du XVIIe siècle*, p. xxvii.

[170] See David Olson, *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 8 "Reading the Book of Nature"; Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*, pp.92-3.

[171] For Lacan, the identification with the mirror image—alienation in the imaginary— condemns the subject, in Joël Dor's words, to "la 'méconnaissance chronique' qu'il ne cessera d'entretenir avec lui-même": *Introduction à la lecture de Lacan*, I (Paris: Denoël, 1985), p. 101.

[172] Lacan, *Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil,1978), p. 56. Malebranche explicitly critiqued Seneca for his seductive imaginary portrait of the ideal human: *La Recherche de la vérité*, V.1, II, Ch. 4 "De l'imagination de Sénèque," pp.343-60.

[173] Lewis, *La Rochefoucauld: The Art of Abstraction*, p. 142.

systematization, or teleological triumph, we experience a constant fissuring of unity and continuity. The white spaces between maxims materialize this effect of rupture as we transition between an ensemble of different, often rival, perspectives.

This dis-unity and dis-order, which so strike modern readers, did not go unnoticed in the text's own time. Marc Escola describes how the *Maximes*'s lack of a clear principle of composition or continuity qualified it as a non-book more than a book in its age. Further, the amalgam of perspectives and voices across the "collection" of enunciations have as effect either a plurality of authorial voices or pose the paradox of a voice that is not one but many.[174] In other words, the text has qualities similar to the elusive self it describes: incoherence, heterogeneity,[175] contrariety, producing a feeling of "vertige de l'irréel" or "du néant," as what seems to be the self, the *subject* or substance of the text's language, is unveiled as yet more alien forces, more bits of non-self, *ad infinitum*.[176]

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[174] See Escola, "Ceci n'est pas un livre: prolégomènes à une rhétorique du discontinu," *XVIIe siècle*, nº 182 (1994), pp. 71-82. Escola claims that the three authors Pascal, La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld were associated in their time more according to the rhetorical or stylistic similarity of their texts than by any similarity in thought or *doctrine*. They were seen under the sign of "'une nouvelle manière d'écrire'" (71), one that did away with, or could not achieve, composition, *dispositio*. The apparent absence of *dispositio* that so struck readers in the *Maximes* was antonymous, in its age, to what constituted a book per se. To negotiate the anomaly, readers might have approached such an incoherent text as a collection of *excerpta* from a missing whole that, for various suppositional reasons (Pascal's untimely death, La Rochefoucauld's deficiencies as a writer), remained incomplete and fragmentary (73-74). Escola seems to suggest that what remained unrecognized at the time was what we see now: how discontinuity might itself be operative as a principle of the continuity of a text, constituting an object Escola proposes to call a "texte discontinu" (79). Alain Brunn (*Le laboratoire moraliste*) hence sees La Rochefoucauld as paradigmatic of a modern sort of author as collector, analyst, editor of moral or historical truths.

[175] Indeed, some commentators have found in the *Maximes* the doctrine of a modern, we might even say postmodern, "hétérogénéité du moi." See Richard Hodgson, "Les 'divers degrés de la chaleur du sang': le corps et les passions chez La Rochefoucauld," pp. 239-247; Patrick Laude, "Perspectives on Subjectivity and the Ego in Seventeenth-century French Thought," *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, XVII, 33 (1990), pp. 531-46.

[176] Barthes, p. 83. For other readings that see in La Rochefoucauld the dissolution of all elements of selfhood, see Jean Starobinski, "Complexité de La Rochefoucauld", *Preuves*, vol. 135 (May 1962), pp. 33-40; Rousset, "La Rochefoucauld contre le classicisme," p. 108; Van Delft, *Littérature et anthropologie*, p. 39: "Au plus profound, il n'y a personne qui puisse encore dire moi." There is here another evident link to Augustine who, as E. J. Hundert writes in "Augustine and the Sources of the

In focusing on *contrariety* I have not sought to reduce the *Maximes* to what might rightly be seen as just one aspect of a text of such a heterogeneous, discontinuous, and anti-systematic character. Still, the element I have isolated speaks precisely to those qualities that encourage us to resist totalizing perspectives and closure. Contrariety is "in" the *Maximes*, as an operative concept I have isolated, but also as a recurrent stylistic obsession and a way to imagine a certain coherence in the text's incoherence, and the correspondence between the materiality of the text and its subject matter. The portrait of the heterogeneous self is incarnated in the exploded form of the text, just as the systematic unfolding of the treatise on the *Passions* coincided with the becoming of a soul victorious over its passions. As van Delft perceived, in the early modern period, "[a]ux formes du moi correspondent donc des formes littéraires."[177] The divide between the *practices* of writing and reading the continuous or discontinuous forms, between two types of *techniques de soi*, subtends the conflict between different conceptions of the self.

Foucault and Self-implication

In its textual materiality and its content, the text is the medial analogue of the form of the self, uncovered and dissolved, in propositions that are not progressive so much as simultaneous elements of an overlapping mosaic. Now that the self has become eccentric to other forces, what remains is hardly what we might consider a "self" at all, but rather its contrary, a non-self. Why speak of selves, rather than passions, organs, or humors? Might virtues and vices be best studied via an analysis of contrary oppositions in *langue*, rather than, as we naively imagine, in real human behavior? Might morals be an affair of perspective? Might nature be convention? Are

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Divided Self," "detected at the center of his own emotional experience unintelligible forces whose authority over rational considerations he was powerless to contain" (p. 87). Hundert describes how, in self-reflection, Augustine groped after a self that wasn't there. The unifying, rational core of ancient philosophers was missing, a fiction floating over the reality of inner division.

[177] *Littérature et anthropologie*, p. 12.

social identities just theatrical performances? Does the humanist-anthropological centrality of "man" or "self" imprison us in illusions? The sorts of questions the *Maximes* provoke are ones that would inform the thought of several French theorists in the second half of the 20th century.

Writing on La Rochefoucauld in the heyday of structuralism, Roland Barthes hinted at the parallelism. For Barthes, through relentless demystification, the subject of the *Maximes*—in both senses of the term: the human self and/as the object of discourse—is deprived of all reality. "*L'homme n'est pas sûr*," Barthes wrote, adding a verdict directed at more than just the *Maximes*: "Ce vertige de l'irréel est peut-être la rançon de toutes les entreprises de démystification, en sorte qu'à la plus grande lucidité correspond souvent la plus grande irréalité." "*L'homme n'est pas sûr*": written in 1961, this gave striking contemporary relevance to the *Maximes*, of which six new editions appeared in the 1960s alone.[178] Five years after Barthes's text, Foucault ended his *Les mots et les choses* with a similar pronouncement, which rendered explicit the deconstruction of "man," "subject," or "self" already at work in 1960s theoretical discourses. These theories ran the same risk of "irréalité" as the *Maximes*. What is the ground of discourse after traditional concepts are demolished? Who or what speaks and tells us that the subject of language is an illusion and its discourse something it cannot control?

Whether in the *Maximes* or the 1960s and 70s, demystifying nominalism tended to get caught in a circle of self-implication. *Les mots et les choses*, for example, investigated how objects of discourse—.e.g, "l'homme"—are not given in themselves, but instead are shaped by language, by *énoncés*, that regulate each other and condition the possibilities of discourse in a

[178] Turcat, *La Rochefoucauld par quatre chemins*, p. 9. A large section of Turcat's book is dedicated to attributing to La Rochefoucauld the role of predecessor of another giant of structuralism, Lévi-Strauss. See Chapter 3, pp. 109 ff. We can see that Barthes's vision of the Duke as predecessor of the contemporary intellectual whose "tâche est contestatrice" should be taken seriously. Michael Moriarty has repeatedly emphasized the significance, with Barthes's critical corpus, of his writings on French *moralistes*, e.g., in *Fallen Nature, Fallen Selves* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 9s.

given historical moment. What the *Maximes* did synchronically, as it were, in pointing up the divide between meaning and reference, and the imperfection and perspectival quality of human knowledge, Foucault did diachronically. His book prescribes humility in all questions of truth, now that knowledge's historicity is manifest.

The truth of *this* knowledge, however, is not questioned. Accepting it is to hold a dogmatic belief in a discourse seeking to undermine all dogmatism. To believe many of La Rochefoucauld's most reductive, antihumanist maxims requires the same sort of baseless allegiance. But perhaps belief, conviction in Pascal's sense, is the most these theories allowed. Historical analysis, in Foucault, and experience and observation, in La Rochefoucauld, offered enough evidence for statements that, on their own terms, could not be proven. Like original sin in Pascal or *amour-propre* as "tous les contraires" in the *Maximes*, the historicity of knowledge was the best explanation for Foucault's findings. Conviction is the best we can do anyways, these discourses imply; believe it, or not.

In Foucault's *L'archéologie du savoir* (1969) the paradox of self-implication moves to selfhood and its discursive production. In the introduction, Foucault associates the end of a traditional practice of writing history—in terms of teleological continuities and syntheses that exclude difference in order to narrate the becoming of the same— with the end of "la souveraineté de la conscience." "L'histoire continue, c'est le corrélat indispensable à la fonction fondatrice du sujet," writes Foucault,[179] terms that throw into relief the importance of the discontinuity of the *Maximes* described above.

With continuity held in suspicion, the distrust of the book resurfaces: for Foucault, the "livre" is the traditional medium through which the old sort of writing and its "subject" perpetuates itself. Like the continuity and unity this *practice* of writing privileges, and the

[179] *L'archéologie du savoir*, p. 22.

"sovereign" self it has for its "correlate," the book presents itself as a unified, singular object with clear delimitations. Yet under the surface hides a multiplicity, an open "champ complexe de discours," the book's true substance. Stripped of its singular status, it becomes just a "nœud dans un réseau."[180] The same holds for the subject: an apparent individuality dissolves into a complex field of desire, language, social comportments, etc., whose anonymous "laws" and "rules" condition us in ways we cannot fully know or account for.[181] We should recall that *L'archéologie du savoir* was published the same year that Foucault, in his famous "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" proclaimed the author to be a "function" of certain sorts of *discours*. Along with Barthes's "La mort de l'auteur" (1968), which recalls remarks made about the *Maximes*,[182] Foucault's text sounded in Antoine Compagnon's words, "le *credo* de la théorie littéraire des années 1970."[183]

And yet… At the end of the introduction (and of the conclusion) to *L'archéologie* the "je" of the author Michel Foucault is egregiously present and, what's more, explicitly in the place of something like the origin and cause of his discourse and his *books*. Here, he laments misunderstandings of *Naissance de la clinique* and *Les mots et les choses*: "Que ces dangers, je n'aie pas été capable de les éviter, me chagrine: je me console en me disant que…" Here, he synthesizes a narrative of struggle and triumph, of a fall into obscurity and a rise to clarity of something like meaning, purpose, intention: "sans les difficultés soulevées, sans les objections, je

[180] Ibid., p. 36.
[181] While claiming no allegiance to Structuralism, Foucault mentions psychoanalysis, linguistics, and ethnology as the fields that have "décentré le sujet par rapport aux lois de son désir, aux formes de son langage, aux règles de son action, ou aux jeux de ses discours mythiques ou fabuleux" (p. 23; cf. p.286). As in the *Maximes*, the self is dissolved into a field of forces, dispossessed of what it takes to be its own.
[182] The end of Barthes's introduction to the *Maximes* reads: "On sait que les maximes de La Rochefoucauld sont effectivement nées de jeux de salons (portraits, devinettes, sentences); et cette rencontre du tragique et du mondain, l'un frôlant l'autre, ce n'est pas la moindre des vérités que nous proposent les *Maximes*: leurs découvertes peuvent ici et là passer, emportées par l'histoire des hommes, mais leur projet reste, qui dit que le jeu touche à la mort du sujet" (88).
[183] Compagnon, "Introduction: Mort et réssurection de l'auteur," first session of a course at the Sorbonne, available online at http://www.fabula.org/compagnon/auteur.php.

n'aurais sans doute pas vu se dessiner d'une façon aussi nette l'entreprise à laquelle, bon gré mal gré, je me trouve désormais lié."[184]

The result of this struggle, the fruit of this realization, is in our hands: it is this *book*, nothing less than a systematic treatise, Foucault's own *Discours de la méthode*. It is as if this book alone escaped its own censure on books; as if Foucault were the only sovereign consciousness, the only subject to escape the forces of history, desire, language… The *moraliste* was a writer set "en retrait" vis-à-vis the *teatrum mundi* he dissected, pretending not to be an actor himself.[185] Foucault's position, in *Les mots et les choses* for example, was not very different.[186]

But perhaps we should be more generous in interpreting such instances of self-implication. Perhaps what they imply is that, like the contrarieties or concepts of *langue* targeted in the *Maximes—vertu*, *esprit*, *soi-même, amour, innocence*, etc.—, we might, indeed, we have

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[184] Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, p. 28.

[185] "Il se met en retrait, chercha la distance critique, la perspective propice à l'ironie": Louis Van Delft, "Qu'est-ce qu'un moraliste?" In: *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, 1978, N°30. p.111. See Doubrovsky ("Vingt propositions…," pp. 58ff) for a critique of the position of the *moraliste* and of the 20th c. theorist, in this case, Lacan: "La validité universelle de l'énoncé inclut son énonciateur: le *moi* de La Rochefoucauld, de Pascal ou de Lacan n'échappe nullement à la loi qui s'édicte: leurs vertus ne sont que vices déguisés, comme les miennes…" (60).

[186] The last lines of the introduction to *L'archéologie* suggest Foucault was perhaps aware of the paradox of his "je," which is not to say that he escaped it. He scripts an imaginary dialogue. To an irked voice, of a reader no doubt, exasperated by Foucault's perpetual refusal to adopt a fixed locus or identity, he has a famous repartee: "Plus d'un, comme moi sans doute, écrivent pour n'avoir plus de visage. Ne me demander pas qui je suis et ne me dites pas de rester le même : c'est une morale d'état civil ; elle régit nos papiers. Qu'elle nous laisse libres quand il s'agit d'écrire" (29). But this might be read in at least two radically opposed ways. Either heterogeneity in the self is the ground of the *perpetuum mobile* of identity that surfaces in writing—since, after all, the self-identical status of the author is an effect of the text—, or, writing is simply a way to "n'avoir plus de visage," a method *for* a "moi" to experiment with other forms of thought or experience that, ultimately, are synthesized into a single subject's history or consciousness. Writing would aim, then, at introducing heterogeneity into the self. It would something of a spiritual, even mystical medium for an imaginary-intellectual communion with otherness. The latter interpretation might be confirmed by a late interview with Foucault, which is something of a pendant to the last page of the introduction to *L'archéologie*: "How an 'Experience-Book' is Born," in *Remarks on Marx* (New York: Semiotext[e], 1991), pp. 25-42. "In addition, the books I write constitute an experience for me that I'd like to be as rich as possible. An experience is something you come out of changed" (27). Writing is a spiritual exercise for self-transformation. See also the end of my chapter on Althusser (chapter 5).

no choice but to, continue to use "je" and to write "books," though the substance or reference of these things has been changed, set at a remove, veiled in mystery. We must continue to use *langue*, but we view our words with suspicion; we speak, but we don't know who or what speaks.

The success of such attempts is debatable. As in Pascal's "véritable méthode," for them to work we would have to always keep in mind that the terms used—"je", "moi," "esprit," "vérité," "vertu," for example—do not have their received meaning, but have been redefined, be it with a simple *je ne sais quoi*. 'When I write *je parle*, read: *je ne sais quoi parle*,' etc. Yet Derrida, whose iconoclastic attacks on concepts might remind us of La Rochefoucauld's deconstruction of binary opposites ("la perception pure n'existe pas; "Le 'sujet' de l'écriture n'existe pas," etc.[187]), gives us subject for caution. Long after La Rochefoucauld and two years after Foucault, in 1968 Derrida wrote his own version of "les fins de l'homme." And there, following Nietzsche no doubt, he put up a wall even deconstruction could not tear down: "la simple pratique de la langue réinstalle sans cesse le 'nouveau' terrain sur le plus vieux sol."[188] We think we are on our outside, away, in difference at last; in fact, we're standing still. *Langue* is (as wily as) *amour-propre*.

Hence the recourse to novel forms or styles of writing, a step Foucault did not take: devices like *rature*, or, in *Glas* and "tympan" from *Marges*, the use of two columns, literalizing the heterogeneity of the text, rendering the book illegible.[189] Hence, centuries before, the early modern *formes brèves*, like the *essai*, the *maxime*, the *remarque*, which emerged—in Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld, and La Bruyère, respectively—as new conceptions of the human and the self, and the preferences and expectations of a new worldly readership, rendered older, more

[187] "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," p. 335.
[188] Derrida, "les fins de l'homme," in *Marges[:]de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), pp. 162-3.
[189] "tympan," in *Marges*, i-xxv.

continuous forms of writing, like the treatise, unacceptable.[190] Hence the *Maximes*, which shattered the treatise or novel form, giving materiality to an intangible (non)self in whose heart dwells "tous les contraires."

There remains, still, the epistemological knot. The *Maximes* pronounced a verdict a Foucault or Derrida would not challenge: "nos connaissances sont toujours superficielles et imparfaites" (M106). But perhaps this most insurmountable obstacle is in fact demystification's only hope for success. "Only thought which does violence to itself is hard enough to shatter myths," wrote Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[191] In being this "hard," in questioning its own right to make its assertions, the *Maximes* prefigured numerous 20th-century texts that delivered and faced the consequences of a critique of language, knowledge, and the subject.

Consciously or not, however, these antihumanist works promote humility of a theological, even a Christian, sort. Ultimately, they seem to demand that we observe a negative theological ban on speaking confidently as if we ever knew "what" we are talking about. Like Augustine, Adorno, or the young Wittgenstein, perhaps their loquacity aims for silence. Striving for self-negation, whether consciously or not, they seek a Heideggerian, mystical *Gelassenheit* in which one might be overcome by a wordless Truth. It is the task of part two of this thesis to uncover the theological content under the theoretical husk of 20th-century French antihumanists,

[190] Lewis, *La Rochefoucauld*, p. 53; Lafond, "Préface," in *Moralistes du XVIIe siècle*, pp. ii-iv, xxvi ff; Lafond, *La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et litérature*, pp. 116 ff, and esp. 122, where Lafond writes that the maxim is diametrically opposed to the scholastic treatise ("elle s'y oppose diamétralement"), the latter seeking completion, clarity and methodically connected totality, the former tending towards non-finito ("l'inachevé"), ambiguity, and only fragmentary, problematic insights. For the historical and social context of the emergence of the "formes brèves" prized by a laic public and cultivated by the *moralistes* from Montaigne on, see Lafond's "Preface," passim.

[191] *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Jephcott trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.2.

and to address, then, the philosophical and political implications of their broad popular and academic appeal. But first, let us turn to Pascal.

Ch. 3: Pascal, Language, and Practices of the Self

Introduction: A Pascalian Homology

With his each of his maxims, La Rochefoucauld brings us to occupy different points of view from which selfhood, as presupposed and exalted in idealist philosophy and literature, disintegrates as such. Under the pomp of heroic discourse and ideology, behind the imagination, its ego, and tyrannical *amour-propre*, there are only passions at war, blood varying wildly in temperature, unsayable particulars mocking our groping concepts, Godless matter moving in random motion, and death, the vanishing point of the world tableau, where the epiphenomenona of the human life and mind return to what they ultimately are: mere dust. La Rochefoucauld's famous gesture of unmasking[1] is a dismantling of the theater of psychological and social life, a peeling away of its paraphernalia to get at an underlying core. He operates a reversal of values in which essence becomes surface and accident, substance. Being is unmasked as non-being.

Whereas La Rochefoucauld's analysis went by brief gnomic incisions – in this conforming to a genre that demanded *brevitas* and aphoristic syntax[2] – Pascal was unconstrained in his reflections and preparatory notes for an unfinished apology of Christianity, the *Pensées* (1670).[3] More overtly one of the "disciples de Saint Augustin,"[4] Pascal lingered longer over the image of a postlapsarian self bereft of being. The latter is a self of utter indigence, of "misère,"[5] which people hide from themselves and others under an imaginary, exalted "être imaginaire"

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[1] See Henry Clark, *La Rochefoucauld and the Language of Unmasking in Seventeenth-Century France* (Geneva: Droz, 1994).
[2] See Jean Lafond, "Préface," in *Moralistes du XVIIe siècle*, Lafond, ed. (Paris: Bouquins/Laffont, 1992), *passim*.
[3] Following custom, citations from the *Pensées* refer to both Lafuma and Sellier editions: *Oeuvres*, Lafuma, ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1963); *Pensées, opuscules et lettres*, Sellier, ed. (Paris: Garnier, 2011).
[4] Cf. *Ecrits sur la grâce*, in *Oeuvres*, Lafuma, ed., pp. 311-3; see Philippe Sellier, *Pascal et Saint Augustin* (Paris: Armand Collin, 1995), pp. 6s.
[5] On the Jansenists' use of the term "misère," see Éric Dubreucq, "L'intériorité désertée et le fond du cœur: Le rapport à soi dans la liasse de Pascal sur le divertissement," *Méthodos*, 5 (2005), n.p. (¶75-7).

(806/653), with which they identify.[6]

In the *Pensées*, a similar structure as in the *Maximes* organizes the homologous depictions of self and society, *inter alia* (also: meaning, truth, etc.). A paradigm of this homology is given in our impoverished access to what Koyré called the "infinite universe," as depicted in the fragment on "les deux infinis" (199/230).[7] Human experience deals only with *phenomena* proportional to us – composed by imagination and sensation –, which, in nature, come apart and are engulfed ad infinitum, and ultimately rest on infinity and nothingness, "vide." Just so, the ontology of self and society is a swirl of imaginary entities around an unexperienceable empty center. The imagination's theater of "being" represses real "non-being,"[8] and people, delirious, live and act in it as if it were true.[9]

Like the *Maximes*, the *Pensées* aim to alienate us from the most presupposed and unquestioned aspects of this delusion, like the self, the "moi"[10]:

> Qu'est-ce que le moi?
>
> Un homme qui se met à la fenêtre pour voir les passants, si je passe par là, puis-je dire qu'il s'est mis là pour me voir? Non, car il ne pense pas à moi en particulier. Mais celui qui aime quelqu'un à cause de sa beauté, l'aime-t-il? Non, car la petite vérole, qui tuera la beauté sans tuer la personne, fera qu'il ne l'aimera plus. Et si on m'aime pour mon jugement, pour ma mémoire, m'aime-t-on moi? Non, car je puis perdre ces qualités sans

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[6] The idea, Lacanian *avant la lettre*, that the *moi* is imaginary, an image formed by the identification with what others think about us, is elaborated at great length in Nicole, "De la connaissance de soi-même," in *Essais de morale*, in *Œuvres philosophiques et morales de Nicole*, Jourdain, ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1845), pp. 11s. Nicole, invoking Pascal on *divertissement*, also considers that all social intercourse is designed to boost our grandiose imaginary egos. The *moi* is "une image fantastique de grandeur," he writes (17).

[7] Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957). See especially p. 43 on Pascal as voicing the experience of the unbeliever after the loss of the more homely cosmos and humanity's central place within it.

[8] In Pascal, the imagination is defined by this capacity, writes Gérard Ferreyrolles: "l'imagination fait de l'être avec du non-être: elle convertit un bonheur futur et rêvé en un bonheur réel," *Les reines du monde: L'imagination et la coutume chez Pascal* (Paris: Champion, 1995), p. 260.

[9] For Pascal, like Spinoza or Luther, pride is a sort of mad delirium: see Gérard Bras, "Divertissement et servitude: deux pensées de l'aliénation," in *Pascal et Spinoza*, Bove et. al., eds. (Paris, 2007), 237; H.C. E. Midelfort, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Stanford, 1999), 98-9.
On the discourse of *theatrum mundi* in Pascal and in his century more broadly, see Jean-Claude Vuillemin, *Épistémè baroque: Le mot et la chose* (Paris: Hermann, 2013), 263-336.

[10] See Vincent Carraud, *L'invention du moi* (Paris: PUF, 2010).

> me perdre moi. Où est donc ce moi, s'il n'est ni dans le corps, ni dans l'âme? Et comment aimer le corps ou l'âme sinon pour ses qualités, qui ne sont point ce qui fait le moi, puisqu'elles sont périssables? Car aimerait-on la substance de l'âme d'une personne abstraitement, et quelques qualités qui y fussent? Cela ne se peut et serait injuste. On n'aime donc jamais personne, mais seulement des qualités.
> Qu'on ne se moque donc plus de ceux qui se font honorer pour des charges et des offices! Car on n'aime personne que pour des qualités empruntées. (688/567)

The fragment is extremely rich; here, I highlight only one of its aspects, its dialectical movement. First, it seems to adopt the position contrary to the critical one that I am arguing is found in La Rochefoucauld and Pascal. That is, the fragment says that qualities are indeed mere accidents, separable from "la personne" without harming the latter's identity or being. But this then extends from corporeal qualities to predicates of the soul. Idealism is undermined by a mystery: the person's identity does not consist in qualities of the soul, either. The soul, the "moi," is an empty substance that cannot be experienced, or loved: "Et comment aimer le corps ou l'âme sinon pour ses qualités?" "Cela ne se peut," because qualities define "la personne," for us. In other words, in the fragment, Christian idealism is espoused, yet tragically set out of reach by our postlapsarian incapacity: our Love is not Platonic or abstract, but fixated on accidents. People *are* in fact no more than what the Imagination makes of their qualities. Non-being has become being, for us.

This reading is corroborated by another fragment, which displays only the second, pessimistic part of this dialectical movement. Entitled "diversité," it points up the incongruence between particulars and the concepts, the words, which subsume them:

> Un homme est un suppôt, mais si on l'anatomise, que sera-ce ? la tête, le cœur, l'estomac, les veines, chaque veine, chaque portion de veine, le sang, chaque humeur du sang ?
>
> Une ville, une campagne, de loin c'est une ville et une campagne, mais à mesure qu'on s'approche, ce sont des maisons, des arbres, des tuiles, des feuilles, des herbes, des fourmis, des jambes de fourmis, à l'infini. Tout cela s'enveloppe sous le nom de campagne. (65/99)

Concepts bring together a "diversity" of particulars under the semblance of the same. Discourse,

that is, occupies a different order from that of the world of things, which is infinitely complex and particular. As above, here a certain Platonism posits the Ideas, but labels them as merely imaginary.[11] People delude themselves into thinking they love a person *per se*, rather than their beauty or judgment. Just so, when we use words, we imagine we have grasped reality in our hands. On closer look, it comes apart "à l'infini." "L'homme" thought of as a substance or, in later parlance, a *subject* – "suppôt" means *subjectum,* Aristotle's *hypokeimenon*[12] –, is desubtantialized. The Self – the Subject – is flayed alive.[13]

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Forming the point of juncture between the 17th- and 20th-century parts of the thesis project, this short interlude focuses on two domains in which the *Pensées* deployed the critical discourse of the "non-being" of the self: (1) on language; and (2) on belief, truth, and justice. First, Pascal undermines the conventionalism of his time, suggestively positing something close to Wittgenstein's concept of *use* (vs. meaning), or what became known in 20th-century French

[11] Cf. Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972 [1961]), n.1 p. 51: "Le platonisme…à partir du XVIe siècle, est un platonisme de l'ironie et de la critique": "comparé à l'essence et de Dieu, tout l'ordre humain n'est que folie" (pp. 50-1).

[12] Sellier, n.1, p. 196 in his edition. Cf. Furetière, "Suppost," which intriguingly adumbrates the equivocity that will term subject, which names the basis of human individuality and its freedom all the while, on the other hand, evoking the specter of subjection: "Terme dogmatique [i.e. scholastique], qui se dit de ce qui sert de base et de fondement à quelque chose… ['Suppost'] se dit quelquefois des personnes sousmises et sousordonnées à une autre." See Balibar, Cassin, and Libera, "Sujet," in Cassin, ed., *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* (Paris: Seuil/Robert, 2004), 1233-53. See also, the discussion of the terms "suppôt" and "personne" in Léonard de Marandé, *Abrégé curieux et familier de toute la philosophie, logique, morale et métaphysique* (Paris: Blaise, 1642), pp. 546-7, which sheds light on how Pascal is here undermining both.

[13] Compare this to Pascal's prior, less critical or analytic comments on the word "homme" in "De l'esprit géométrique" (1655), in *Pensées*, Sellier, ed., p. 660. "Homme" is there taken to be a primitive word, i.e., that bears no definition. In the *Pensées*, what the opuscule posited as a clear, identical idea naturally attached to this word – "l'idée que j'en ai naturellement et … [qui est] plus sûre que celle qu'[on] me donne par son explication inutile" – is dispossessed of its self-evidence: perhaps this idea, along with its self-evident, stable, and natural (i.e. universal) qualities, is an illusion of language that hides real complexity. In this, the opuscule's "homme" is subject to the same fate as all primitive words – and all purportedly *natural* things, among which, especially, human nature, "man", itself – in the *Pensées*, as discussed in detail below.

theory as the primacy of the signifier.[14] Second: the *Pensées* adopted a view homologous to its take on language. Just as Meaning, the "moi," and concepts are in fact imaginary entities that hide and depend upon diverse particular things and qualities – reversing the values of accident and substance –,Truth, Justice, and belief's Object are not timeless or self-same, but contingent, resting on the socially-regulated practices or ways of life particular to the person believing the truth, obeying the law, or holding the belief. This theory, of "la machine" (821/661) and of "la force de la coutume" (634/527), prefigures certain Structuralist positions and the late 20th-century interest in the historically contingent, material practices that constitute different sorts of subjectivity, a field opened by Foucault and now explored by many others.[15]

But the similarities between these aspects of the *Pensées* and signature theoretical objects of 20th-century theory are as mysterious as they are fascinating. Far from grounding his discourse in philosophy or science, Pascal based it on an Augustinian anthropology over against the naïve optimism of those he termed "les philosophes." On the other hand, the 20th-century French philosophers and theorists in question thought their discourse the furthest from the questionable metaphysics of theology. What happened to this theological ground, then, in modern French theory?

Pascal on Language

Comprised of but a few reflections strewn across the *Pensées* and the opuscule *De l'esprit géométrique* (1655), Pascal's meditations on language have long intrigued his editors and commentators. Only two years after his death, Nicole and Arnauld's *Logique de Port-Royal*

[14] See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), §43; Joël Dor, *Introduction à la lecture de Lacan* (Paris: Denoël, 2002), I, ch. 6, and *passim*.
[15] On this paradigm, which he calls the study of "anthropotechnics," see Peter Sloterdijk, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009).

already borrowed heavily from them, unsuspecting that these might undermine the Cartesian position that the book largely adopted.[16] Let's turn to a couple of the most illustrative examples of how Pascal problematized the accepted view – still held by him at times – of language as transparent, representational medium for "ideas," and of the primacy of meaning or reference over the materiality of the sign.[17]

Our first example comes from a fragment that implicitly defends the *modernes* by positing the indefinite creativity, not of ideas, but of the material disposition of words:

> Qu'on ne dise pas que je n'ai rien dit de nouveau: la disposition des matières est nouvelle. Quand on joue à la paume, c'est une même balle dont joue l'un et l'autre, mais l'un la place mieux.
> J'aimerais autant qu'on me dît que je me suis servi des mots anciens. Et comme si les mêmes pensées ne formaient pas un autre corps de discours par une disposition différente, aussi bien que les mêmes mots forment d'autres pensées par leur différente disposition. (696/575)

The text plays on concepts of sameness and difference via a hierarchical image of meaning. This aims to confound the naïve critic, perhaps a proponent of the *Anciens*, who thinks that ideas are fixed to words such that they remain the same no matter what becomes of the words mediating them,[18] like a man who imagines his love would survive the loss of his beloved's beauty.

The fragment's first lines oppose a given set of "matters" or "materials" to different sorts of "order" or "positioning" (classical rhetoric's *dispositio*). The game analogy shows that identity lies not in the former ("the same ball"), but in the latter: placement defines a player's

[16] See Louis Marin, *La critique du discours: sur la "Logique de Port-Royal" et "Les Pensées" de Pascal* (Paris: Minuit, 1975).
[17] Besides the discussion of Descartes on language in chapter 1, *surpra*, see Foucault, *Les mots et les* choses (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 60-136; and Jonathan Culler, "Paradox and the Language of Morals in La Rochefoucauld," *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Jan., 1973), pp. 32-3.
[18] Compare Pascal's *pensée* to La Bruyère's opening "remarque" in his *Caractères* ("Des ouvrages de l'esprit," I): "Tout est dit, et l'on vient trop tard depuis plus de sept mille ans qu'il y a des hommes et qui pensent. Sur ce qui concerne les mœurs, le plus beau et le meilleur est enlevé ; l'on ne fait que glaner après les anciens et les habiles d'entre les modernes" (Paris, LGF, 2014).

particular game, a writer's unique thinking or meaning.[19] The next lines confirm this: they identify different, increasingly basic elements of linguistic analysis – "corps de discours," "pensées," "mots" – and order them into layers of dependence: the being or identity of the first is contingent on the "disposition" of the next, while the nature of *pensées* is not independent but contingent on the how *mots* are combined. Ultimately, discourse analysis leads not to ideas or thoughts, but to a bedrock of words and differences between them. Words have primacy. Not merely representing or transmitting meaning, in their differings – in their different combinations – words constitute meaning.

That Pascal has *meaning* in mind when he writes "pensées," and not – or, not only – statements (i.e., propositions), is clear from two fragments that condense, as it were, the one cited above:

> Les mots diversement rangés font un divers sens. Et les sens diversement rangés font différents effets. (784/645)
>
> Les sens.
> Un même sens change selon les paroles qui l'expriment. Les sens reçoivent des paroles leur dignité au lieu de la leur donner. Il en faut chercher des exemples. (789/645)

The first fragment depicts the same hierarchy between *mots* and *sens* as above. The second is fascinating: at first it seems to posit sameness of meaning ("un même sens") but in fact posits a diversity of meanings according to the particularities of words and their dispositions, as above. Hence the significance of the fragment's title: not "Meaning" but "meanings" ("les sens"), a

[19] The word "disposition" could also be used to define the identity or nature of person's body, another meaning the term held in Pascal's time: see Furetière, "Disposition," in *Dictionnaire universel*. This sense is likely in Pascal's mind when he evokes the "corps de discours." On the analogy, this body of discourse is made of "thoughts" which themselves are made of words in combinations, just as the identify of a person's body is determined by its particular complexion, itself reducible to a unique combination or composition of traits and body parts, and, further, of the four humors in infinitely variable proportions.

plural usage that is extremely unusual for Pascal's time, as for ours.[20] The equivocity or plurality of meaning(s), along with the subjection of thought to the words themselves: these ideas again appear when we compare the *Pensées* to the text the authors of the Port-Royal *Logique* (1662) relied on, "De l'esprit géométrique" (1655). The opuscule places us before a further aspect of language: its social nature and constraints.

Alongside the *Pensées* and the *Logique*, Pascal's opuscule is the most important source for his ideas on language. Dating from before he began the apology (1656-57),[21] the text, dealing with demonstrative method, is still in part imbued with the heroic rational scientific impetus of the young Pascal. With respect to language and meaning, it is hence more optimistic and conventionalist than the later, theological *Pensées*. I focus on only two of the opuscule's positions, how they run into problems and are ultimately countered in the later text. In "De l'esprit géométrique" we witness a confrontation between 17th-century science's dream of clarity and control over its medium (language), and the social dimension of meaning, which renders claims to linguistic sovereignty both imaginable and problematic.

While it announces itself as a *Discours de la méthode*,[22] the opuscule really begins with failure. A "veritable méthode" exists, but outside our reach, for we cannot satisfy its first

[20] The entry "Sens" in Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* shows that the word was only used in the plural when speaking of the five senses or when speaking of the points of view, the angles, from which something is seen or considered. With the shift from "Meaning" to "meanings," the entirety of language – understood not as a mere lexicon, but as words deployed in different combinations – becomes equivocal or figural, as it were, though there is no literal usage to which the plurality of uses can be referred, something expressed in the paradox of "un divers sens."

[21] On this chronology, see Sellier, "Introduction" to his edition, p. 26.

[22] See the manner in which Pascal depicts the promising contents of his text, "De l'esprit géométrique," p. 676: "j'en ferai deux sections, dont la première contiendra les règles de la conduite des démonstrations géométriques, c'est-à-dire méthodiques et parfaites, et la seconde comprendra celles de l'ordre géométrique, c'est-à-dire méthodique et accompli : de sorte que les deux ensemble enfermeront tout ce qui sera nécessaire pour conduire […] du raisonnement à prouver et discerner les vérités, lesquelles j'ai dessein de donner entières." This "tout ce qui sera nécessaire pour conduire […] du raisonnement à prouver et discerner les vérités," cannot but recall the subtitle of Descartes's *Discours:* "Pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences." Indeed, if this subtitle expresses a main goal of

criterion: “de n’employer aucun terme dont on n’eût auparavant expliqué nettement le sens.” In definitions, we ultimately arrive at “mots primitifs, qu’on ne peut plus définir” – *being*, *space*, *movement*, *time*, etc.[23] But our incapacity to define primitive words is compensated by the presence, in all minds, of identical ideas signified by them:

> On voit assez de là qu’il y a des mots incapables d’être définis; et si la nature n’avait [pas] suppléé à ce défaut par une idée pareille qu’elle a donnée à tous les hommes, toutes nos expressions seraient confuses; au lieu qu’on en use avec la même assurance et la même certitude que s’ils étaient expliqués d’une manière parfaitement exempte d’équivoques; parce que la nature nous en a elle-même donné, sans paroles, une intelligence plus nette que celle que l’art nous acquiert par nos explications.[24]

Given the identity of these *idées* across all speakers, primitive words are naturally, universally, understood.[25] They form the non-discursive yet intersubjective natural foundation upon which all clear, rational, scientific discourse might erect itself.

Descartes’s book, then Pascal’s text clearly offers itself as a complement to his: it discusses the method, not of discovering truths, but proving them and, in so doing, of discerning them from falsehoods, the three operations (discovering, proving, and discerning truths) being, Pascal writes in the first line of the opuscule, the “trois principaux objets dans l'étude de la vérité” (p. 675). See Desmond M. Clarke, “Pascal’s Philosophy of Science,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, Hammond, ed. (New York, 2003), pp. 102-21.

[23] Ibid., pp. 677-9.

[24] Ibid., p. 681.

[25] Ibid., p. 680: “ces termes-là désignent si naturellement les choses qu’ils signifient, à ceux qui entendent la langue, que l’éclaircissement qu’on en voudrait faire apporterait plus d’obscurité que d'instruction.” Pascal is careful to say that he doesn’t mean we all understand the “essence” of the things that these words signify (that is, the essence of the things represented by the ideas which the primitive words signify). Rather, upon using, hearing or reading a primitive word, “tous portent la pensée vers le même objet,” reminding us that, in *l’âge classique*, the sign was a representation of a representation, a sort of mini-tableau which showed (represented) the idea of it said: see Foucault *Les mots et les choses*, and Rorty*, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1979). To be sure, in Pascal’s passage, the distinction between “essence” and “le même objet” is unclear at best, void at worst. For one thing, if there were a clear “idea” or “object” attached to these words, why would it be ineffable? For another, Pascal later implies that these ideas *are* indeed effable: it is precisely the role of a “proposition” or “définition de chose” as distinguished from a “définition de nom,” to put into words the “idea” signified by primitive words *in all minds* (p. 682; and the “art de persuader,” as the second version of the opuscule is called, casts out entirely primitive words and the notion that they cannot be defined [see p. 702]). As concerns the first problem: underlying the logic of primitive words – this combination of absence (of articulable identity) and presence (of identical ideas, nonetheless) –, it seems that it is merely the fact that people are able to use and understand terms like “time” and “movement” in everyday speech without defining them exactly (or being able to), which leads to the *inference* that they have the same

Hence the limit and ground of meaning is both the impossibility of the "true method" (for we cnnot go any further) *but also* the foundation of the most perfect of human methods, "l'ordre géométrique." A philosopher should have no problem in the elaboration of a method grounded in truth, or in purifying its language. Via a chain of definitions, a clear, identical meaning for all words and all users could be assured: the idea of a perfect language rises high over the murky swamps of ordinary speech.[26] The purifying tool would be "définitions de nom": one could take any word (except a *mot primitif*) and clarify or re-define it.[27] Stripped of its "sens ordinaire" it has acquired in use (*usage*) – that is, in Saussurian terms, stripped of its signified, removed from its place or *case* in *la langue* – the term could be made to mean what the thinker wanted it to mean, via a clear definition using "termes parfaitement connus."[28]

But the imperative – repeated no less than seven times in the short text –, that, for this to work, one must "always mentally substitute" the definitions of terms for the terms themselves when using them (or, by extension, when hearing or reading them), expresses an anxiety

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natural "idea" in mind. That this inference on the basis common *use* – or, as it is now termed, that this mere "conjecture" – is indeed at stake is clear from fragment 109/141, discussed below.

[25] "De l'esprit géométrique," p. 681.

[26] As is well known, this was quite a powerful dream in the 17th century (and an enduring one: e.g., Frege, Russell, the early Wittgenstein…). See Jürgen Trabant, *Mithridates im Paradies: Kleine Geschichte des Sprachdenkens* (Munich: Beck, 2003), pp. 122-156, 293-314; Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

[27] "De l'esprit géométrique," p. 677.

[28] Ibid., pp. 682, 677-8: "en sorte néanmoins que le nom imposé demeure dénué de tout autre sens, s'il en a, pour n'avoir plus que celui auquel on le destine uniquement. […] [I]l paraît que les définitions sont très libres, et qu'elles ne sont jamais sujettes à être contredites; car il n'y a rien de plus permis que de donner à une chose qu'on a clairement désignée un nom tel qu'on voudra." Ch. 12 of Antoine and Nicole's *Logique* (Paris : Gallimard, 1992) offers a remarkable example of this idea of being able to take words from common language "en les regardant comme s'ils n'avaient aucune signification, pour leur donner celle que nous voulons qu'ils aient, en désignant par d'autres mots simples qui ne soient pas équivoques, l'idée à laquelle nous voulons les appliquer." A particularly contentious example: the word "soul": "je regarderai le mot *d'âme comme si c'était un son qui n'eût point encore de sens*, et je l'appliquerai uniquement à ce qui est en nous le principe de la pensée, en disant: J'appelle âme ce qui est en nous le principe de la pensée" (I. XII, 79 ; my emphasis).

concerning its possibility.[29] Why would one have to keep in mind the new definition of a sign if the latter's attachment to the idea it signified were merely conventional? Even more troubling: does the injunction itself not imply that terms can be used *without* holding their definitions in consciousness, without possessing their meaning in any real sense at all? Pascal's insistence on the impossible mental act of always having present clear definitions for every word used betrays the fact that a purification of language is rendered impossible by the recalcitrance of word use's social essence: for each word, there is a "sens ordinaire et reçu de tous,"[30] a "sens" accorded by "usage,"[31] which is not arbitrary if language is viewed synchronically or from the user's perspective.

When viewed from a diachronic or external position, *de jure* words are *known* to be conventional, "signes d'institution."[32] However, *de facto* language is not an affair of the individual, as Saussure emphasized in dividing *langue* from *parole*. Use depends on custom and rules that cannot be arbitrarily altered by any user. The most he or she can do is combine words into different "dispositions." The opuscule, then, is like Saussure's "arbitraire du sign" as criticized, or clarified, by Benveniste: for users, signs are not arbitrary.[33] They might imagine sovereignty, but they are subjects of the sign and *usage*.[34]

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[29] "De l'esprit géométrique," pp. 678, 699, 700 (2 occurrences), 701, 702, 703.
[30] Ibid., p. 682.
[31] *Logique*, I. XIII "Observations importantes touchant la définition des noms", 84: "La troisième observation est que, quand on est obligé de définir un mot, on doit, autant que l'on peut, s'accommoder à l'usage, en ne donnant pas aux mots des sens tout à fait éloignés de ceux qu'ils ont, et qui pourraient même être contraires à leur étymologie."
[32] *Logique*, I. IV, 48: "Ainsi les mots sont signes d'institution des pensées".
[33] See Benveniste, "Nature du signe linguistique" (1939), in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 49-55.
[34] On the legislation of "l'*Usage*, que chacun reconnaît pour le Maître et le Souverain des langues vivantes," see Vaugelas, *Remarques sur la langue française, utiles à ceux qui veulent bien parler et bien écrire* (Paris: Camusat and Petit, 1647). For the history of the notion of the supremacy of use (*uso, consuetudo, usage, usus*), see, for the 17th century, Hélène Merlin, "Langue et souveraineté en France au XVIIe siècle: La production autonome d'un *corps de langage*," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 49 (1994), 369-94; and, in general, Trabant, *Mithridates im Paradies*, pp. 307-8, who cites analogous

In the *Pensées*, Pascal would deal the fatal blow to his already problematic position regarding primitive words. Given their importance to method and the possibility of an unequivocal language or medium for science, the stakes could not be higher.

> (*C'est donc une chose étrange qu'on ne peut définir ces choses sans les obscurcir*.) Nous supposons que tous les conçoivent de même sorte. Mais nous le supposons bien gratuitement, car nous n'en avons aucune preuve. Je vois bien qu'on applique ces mots dans les mêmes occasions, et que toutes les fois que deux hommes voient un corps changer de place, ils expriment tous deux la vue de ce même objet par les mêmes mots, en disant l'un et l'autre qu'il s'est mû. Et de cette conformité d'application, on tire une puissante conjecture d'une conformité d'idée. Mais cela n'est pas absolument convaincant de la dernière conviction… Non que cela éteigne absolument la clarté naturelle qui nous assure de ces choses… mais cela la ternit et trouble les dogmatistes, à la gloire de la cabale pyrrhonienne […] […] (109/141)

Identity of meaning, i.e. Meaning itself, is mere "conjecture," an inference based on the "application," the use of a word in similar contexts, and by no means a provable, let alone intuitable reality. If this goes for the *mots primitifs*, it applies *a fortiori* to all other words. We do not *know*, but merely "suppose," that Meaning exists 'behind' them, stable and identical for all minds, Pascal sees, "à la gloire de la cabale pyrrhonienne." As in the late, skeptical Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*, "use" and context dethrone Meaning.[35]

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The *Pensées* portray a double state of linguistic subjection. First, meanings and ideas are dependent on, even reducible to, the material qualities of discourse, like the "disposition" of

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assertions in Quintilian (on "consuetudo"), Castiglione (on "la consuetudine"), and Wittgenstein, and notes how the concept is associated in each of these authors with an ideal finesse and ease, which is of an ultimately courtly origin. If this is true, then in the social constraints on the possibility of an ideal, clarified language, we witness the triumph of the worldly over the scientific, the social over the intellectual or theoretical.

[35] See Trabant, *Mithridates im Paradies*, pp. 303-14, esp. 304-5. For the later Wittgenstein, meaning can be conceived neither as a fixed reference nor as a fixed sense, signified, of a word or signifier. "Statt dessen konstituiert sich für Wittgenstein die Bedeutung der Wörter in jedem Sprechen, bzw. in der Vielzahl der Verwendungsweisen des Wortes" (p. 305). One might say that the shift in Wittgenstein's position on meaning between the *Tractatus* (1921) and the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* is analogous to that underwent by Pascal's linguistic thought between the opuscule "De l'esprit géométrique" and the *Pensées*.

words. We might think we are dealing directly with Meaning or our thoughts; for us, language's contingent, material aspects are the basis of its use, understanding, and emotional power.[36] Second, word use obeys social constraints. Although one can imagine a private or clear language – the ability to refunction words ex nihilo – the reality is that words themselves make their own rules. Their "sens," their *vouloir dire*, depends on their will, as much if not more than on ours.

What explains our subjection to language in its corporeal, rather than its ideal or abstract aspects? The Fall of man: on the view of Augustinian anthropology, Adam's sin brought about a reversal of hierarchy in the faculties, such that the senses and the imagination, once servants of the intellect or reason, now reign on high.[37] In the *Pensées*, this takes the form of a dependence on contingent material contexts and of the indefinite fragmentation of what was once one, and is now lost. The proliferation and autonomy of meaning, in language, is one example. Others, which we will now explore, include the postlapsarian plurality of truths, beliefs, and concepts of justice.

Pascal on "Custom" and "The Machine"

Like Montaigne's *Essais*, the *Pensées* repeatedly display the relativity, hence fragmentation or indefinite multiplication, of truth, belief and justice. In one fragment, for example, Pascal imagines a king who has the opportunity to establish *ex nihilo* his government of the world. The privilege, the fantasy of sovereign control over law, is a curse. For "Justice" itself is inaccessible; there is no external criterion or rule to follow:[38]

[36] Cf. 44/78, inspired by Montaigne (*Essais*, II,12): "Le ton de voix impose aux plus sages, et change un discours et un poème de force."
[37] On Augustinian epistemology and psychology in the 17th century, see Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); on Pascal's Augustinianism, see Sellier, *Pascal et Saint Augustin*.
[38] Cf. 21/55, 697/576.

> Sur quoi la fondera-t-il, l'économie du monde qu'il veut gouverner ? Sera-ce sur le caprice de chaque particulier, quelle confusion ! Sera-ce sur la justice, il l'ignore. Certainement, s'il la connaissait, il n'aurait pas établi cette maxime, la plus générale de toutes celles qui sont parmi les hommes : que chacun suive les mœurs de son pays. L'éclat de la véritable équité aurait assujetti tous les peuples. […] On la verrait plantée par tout les États du monde et dans tous les temps, au lieu qu'on ne voit rien de juste ou d'injuste qui ne change de qualité en changeant de climat. Trois degrés d'élévation du pôle renversent toute la jurisprudence. Un méridien décide de la vérité. […] Vérité au-deçà des Pyrénées, erreur au-delà. […] (60/94)

As in La Rochefoucauld's critique of heroic discourse, we are tempted to see Pascal as implying quotation marks around the concepts of *Justice*, *Truth*, and *Equity* here. "Justice" – that is, what is called "Justice" – is reduced to being simply those things of which the qualities "juste" or "unjuste" are predicated according to prevailing custom. There is no such thing as Justice, or Truth, just customary ways of speaking about things as just or unjust, true or untrue.

Yes, there are "les lois naturelles," which, like primitive words, might provide at least some fixed point of reference in justice. But just as this epistemological and linguistic optimism is undermined in the *Pensées*, so is the possibility of natural laws providing some sort of eternal anchor. If such laws are real, they are inaccessible to our corrupt minds: "Il y a sans doute des lois naturelles, mais cette belle raison corrompue a tout corrompu" (ibid.). All is custom, artifice, habit and acculturation; nothing is fixed. "Rien, suivant la seule raison, est juste en soi, tout branle avec le temps" (id.)

In the same fragment, Pascal invokes a phrase from Tacitus's *Annals* (III, 25), which Montaigne cited in the *Essais* (III, 13): "*Ut olim vitiis sic nunc legibus laboramus*." The phrase means: "As before we suffered from crimes/vices, now we suffer from laws."[39] Given the context in which it is deployed, perhaps Pascal cited the phrase to evoke, not only how laws can

[39] See Montaigne, *Essays*, III, 13, Screech, trans. (New York: Penguin, 2013), p. 1203 (translation modified.) Note that Tacitus wrote "utque antehac flagitiis ita tunc legibus laborabatur": *Annales ab excessu divi Augusti.*, Fisher, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906); Montaigne writes: "ut olim flagitiis, sic nunc legibus laboramus." Pascal hence replaced "flagitium" with "vitium" (fault, vice, crime).

be criminal, but also how "crimes" or "vices" become "laws" or "norms," across space and time ("en peu d'années…les lois fondamentales changent" [id.]). When read as "Before it was 'crimes' from which we suffered; now it is from 'laws,'" that is, the phrase points to a major concern of Pascal's political thought: the lack of foundation of laws in anything but their being accepted, customary: "la coutume fait toute l'équité, par cette seule raison quelle est reçue" (id.).[40] But it also brings forth the same specter of violence behind all law evoked by Walter Benjamin in his 1921 *Kritik der Gewalt*:[41] the ultimate origin of laws is an act of lawless violence or usurpation of power. Indeed, the maintenance of political order itself depends on the foundational crime's remaining hidden under the apparent justice of the law, an illusion of custom, as Pascal writes:

> […] Il ne faut pas que [le peuple] sente la vérité de l'usurpation. Elle a été introduite autrefois sans raison, elle est devenue raisonnable. Il faut la faire regarder comme authentique, éternelle et en cacher le commencement si on ne veut qu'elle ne prenne bientôt fin. (id.)

Since, at any moment, laws are only grounded in custom (or *usage*[42]), which itself is founded in its being itself, i.e., "par le seule raison quelle est reçue," then Justice as people typically imagine

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[40] See Ferreyrolles, *Pascal et la raison du politique* (Paris: PUF, 1984), ch. 1.

[41] "Zur Kritik der Gewalt," in *Gessamelte Schriften*, II, I, Tiedemann and Schweppenhäuser, eds. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 179-203, esp. 188, 197-8, 202. Cf. Derrida, *Force de loi* (Paris: Galilée, 1994).

[42] See "usage" in Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*: the concept "usage" is equivalent, but also somewhat superordinate, to "coûtume" (for it is at once synonymous with "custom," as the beginning of the entry shows, but also can be used to designate the customary in custom, as it were, what makes it itself, i.e., its being *usage*: "C'est l'*usage* qui a établi les Coûtumes de France qui passent pour loix en chaque Province"). The tautology is, besides, a beautiful expression of the internal, self-justification of custom, and of customary laws or norms, in general. Indeed, the entry invokes the same genealogy of law as in the *Pensées*: "L'*usage* ancien passe en force de loy," and displays the link between custom/usage and practice, the social and the individuals: what is "usage" is learned only through "la pratique" "exercice," or "habitude," not "l'étude" or "la théorie." Intriguingly, the entry displays how the term crosses the boundaries of the Pascalian domains isolated in this chapter: law, language (Furetière cites Vaugelas), religious ritual, etc. Moreover, the entry accords the concept the same double usage possessed by the concept of "la machine," i.e., both synchronic and diachronic: "usage" denotes how something is used or employed, as well as (diachronically seen now) the customary or traditional way, the sedimented way – the *usual* usage –, or rules, of something, some action, etc. That is, like "machine," "usage" refers to the

it – existing 'behind,' 'above,' or 'underneath' the laws of their country – is imaginary. Pascal here spells out what was implied with respect to Meaning:

> Rien n'est si fautif que ces lois qui redressent des fautes. Qui leur obéit parce qu'elles sont justes, obéit à la justice qu'il imagine, mais non pas à l'essence de la loi. Elle est toute ramassée en soi, elle est loi et rien davantage. […]. (id.)

The first line uses paradox to recall the ultimate injustice of laws. Behind them is no Justice; there is nothing behind them at all. Obeying laws, one obeys custom, their "essence," for laws are founded internally or tautologically: only in their being "laws" at a given place and time. Like Meaning, Justice is an inference based on the behaviors of people submitted only to "usage." That people believe in such abstract entities bears witness to "les prodigues de l'imagination humaine" (id.). The supreme power in humans,[43] the Imagination composes the spectacle of reality and society in which one lives, a logical tableau in which Justice, Truth, Meaning, have their fixed place and particular colors. Pascal reveals the stuff, the paint underneath the illusion, and how randomly it is flung on the canvas. But before one cries out for revolution, he cautions that the conclusion is not simple, but dialectic. Unfounded from without, based on no "Justice," laws are still just for us, and for the same reason: Justice *per se* is unattainable, a fiction. The *doxa* – i.e., one must obey established laws – is thus correct, though wrong in its justification.[44]

The concept of "custom" gets at the socially and historically contingent rules that govern life while distracting away from themselves, pushing people to posit another order of things that grounds, justifies, and renders necessary the customs they follow. That is, "custom" is a concept

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self-constitution – via force and repetition in the element of time – of rules or systems, *structures*, that become powerful constraints, and formative force, on society and individuals.

[43] See "Imagination" (44-5/78): "C'est la partie dominante dans l'homme […] L'imagination dispose de tout. Elle fait la beauté, la justice et le bonheur qui est le tout du monde. […]"; and Ferreyrolles, *Les reines du monde*, *passim*.

[44] See Ferreyrolles, *Pascal et la raison du politique*, 10.

that is close to the modern notion of *ideology*.[45] In order for "custom" to perform this function, there must be some articulation between the customary – the social – and the individual – the personal. There must be some point, in other words, at which custom, understood as certain socially and historically contingent practices, is able to enter into and shape the individual. Pascal's name for this point is "la machine." For custom to define what a person assumes to be Truth, Meaning, and Justice, the "machine" must act as an interface. Through it, customs form an individual into the subject of a given culture.

The concept "la machine" reflects the influence of Descartes and Saint Augustine, notes Philippe Sellier. Augustine was "frappé par le rôle des routines dans l'existence humaine" and saw that physical, not merely mental, force was needed to change habits and ultimately the lifestyle they constituted: "pour briser la violence hypocrite des habitudes, saint Augustin admettait le recours à la violence physique."[46] As for Descartes: though the term "la machine," which denoted the animal body understood as a mechanism, is his own, the importance he accorded to habit, training (*dressage*), and self-training, for example in *Les Passions de l'âme*, is of an entirely different order than what Pascal has in mind. As we will see, the *Pensées* went much further than Descartes, so far, indeed, as to suggest that even the truths we know intuitively and indubitably – that is, the sort of ideas on which Descartes found the only firm footing in philosophy – are contingent on customs and the training of "la machine."

Further, Pascal's concept subsumes more than Descartes's: "la machine" now denotes the body *and* the imagination, as distinct from reason but also, though more vaguely, from "the

[45] The most obvious reference here is Marx and Engel's *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishard, 1976), which deploys a famous *camera obscura* metaphor to get at the inversion of reality in ideology (similar to Pascal's depiction of the inverting power of custom's force exerted on the body and imagination), and also espouses a view of law as ideology's reflection that echoes the merely tautological justification of law and custom in the *Pensées*.

[46] Sellier note 2, p. 172 and n.1, p503, in his edition of *Pensées, opuscules et lettres*. Cf. Sellier, *Pascal et saint Augustin*, pp. 540-54.

heart." "La machine" is dual: the interface by which custom can act on the individual in and as practices or habits, it is also the sum of these, their sedimentation over time into a conglomerate of subliminal automatisms, be they psychological.[47] That we and our beliefs are to a great extent reducible to how our "machine" is manipulated by custom explains why direct appeals to people's "mind" (*esprit*) will always be vain. Such idealism rests on misrecognition of the self:

> Car il ne faut pas se méconnaître: nous sommes automate autant qu'esprit; et de la vient que l'instrument par lequel la persuasion se fait n'est pas la seule démonstration. Combien y a-t-il peu de choses démontrées! Les preuves ne convainquent que l'esprit. La coutume fait nos preuves les plus fortes et les plus crues; elle incline l'automate, qui entraîne l'esprit sans qu'il y pense. Qui a démontré qu'il sera demain jour, et que nous mourrons? Et qu'y a-t-il de plus cru? c'est donc la coutume qui nous en persuade; c'est elle qui fait tant de chrétiens, c'est elle qui fait les Turcs, les païens, les métiers, les soldats, etc.[…]. (821/661)

Custom is a force that works materially on the "machine" – bending it and manipulating it in certain ways, according to differences in custom –, which itself directs the mind, subliminally. As in the relationship between Meaning and words, Pascal uncovers a base level of material differentiality, which explains identities and differences on a more immaterial plane. One does not observe Christian custom because one is Christian; one "is" or becomes Christian as a product of the practices that partake of Christian custom.[48]

With the idea that "la machine" unconsciously directs the mind, Pascal's notion comes close but is not identical to his concept of "le cœur," a notion also opposed to that of "l'esprit" and "la raison." For example, the idea that persuasion is a result not of reason's appeals to the

[47] Cf. 25/59, which gives a neat portrayal of the route from repeated sense experience of an orchestrated spectacle – power's theatricalization ("La coutume de voir les rois accompagnés de gardes…") – to the imagination's constitution of an imaginary object via association or metonymy (even when unaccompanied and without his pomp, the king elicits the passions of fear and admiration as if he were surrounded by his army), and ultimately to automatic, unconscious judgments, that is, to ideology, which is reflected in words that express and reinforce, confirming it as natural rather than conventional, justified rather than arbitrary, etc.:"Et le monde qui ne sait pas que cet effet vient de cette coutume croit qu'il vient d'une force naturelle. Et de là viennent ces mots: Le caractère de la divinité est empreint sur son visage, etc." (ibid).

[48] This idea rather intrigued Althusser: see the discussion of his theory of ideology in chapter 5, *infra*.

mind, but of the force custom exerts on the machine, seems linked to a famous dictum that accords the heart its own logic: "Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point" (423/680). The Pascalian "logic of the heart," so admired by Heidegger,[49] is elaborated in a fragment it will be useful to cite at some length before returning to the relationship between "la machine" and "le cœur":

> Nous connaissons la vérité non seulement par la raison mais encore par le cœur. C'est de cette dernière sorte que nous connaissons les premiers principes, et c'est en vain que le raisonnement, qui n'y a point de part, essaie de les combattre. Les pyrrhoniens, qui n'ont que cela pour objet, y travaillent inutilement. Nous savons que nous ne rêvons point, quelque impuissance où nous soyons de le prouver par raison. Cette impuissance ne conclut autre chose que la faiblesse de notre raison, mais non pas l'incertitude de toutes nos connaissances, comme ils le prétendent.
>
> Car la connaissance des premiers principes comme qu'il y a espace, temps, mouvement, nombres, [est] aussi ferme qu'aucune de celles que nos raisonnements nous donnent. Et c'est sur ces connaissances de cœur et de l'instinct qu'il faut que la raison s'appuie et qu'elle fonde tout son discours. Le cœur sent qu'il y a trois dimensions dans l'espace et que les nombres sont infinis, et la raison démontre ensuite qu'il n'y a point deux nombres carrés dont l'un soit double de l'autre. Les principes se sentent, les propositions se concluent, et le tout avec certitude, quoique par différentes voies, et il est aussi inutile que ridicule que la raison demande au cœur des preuves de ses premiers principes pour vouloir y consentir qu'il serait ridicule que le cœur demandât à la raison un sentiment de toutes les propositions qu'elle démontre pour vouloir les recevoir.
>
> Cette impuissance ne doit donc servir qu'à humilier la raison, qui voudrait juger de tout, mais non pas à combattre notre certitude. Comme s'il n'y avait que la raison capable de nous instruire. Plût à Dieu que nous n'en eussions au contraire jamais besoin et que nous connussions toutes choses par instinct et par sentiment ! Mais la nature nous a refusé ce bien, elle ne nous a au contraire donné que très peu de connaissances de cette sorte. Toutes les autres ne peuvent être acquises que par raisonnement. […] (110/142)

Here, "first principles" perform the same function as primitive words in "De l'esprit géométrique" or "natural laws" in fragment 60/94, both cited above. That is, they appear under the guise of a natural, universal foundation for knowledge and belief, which ratiocination of any sort is unable to seriously undermine, or confirm. Though the skeptic Descartes is implicitly attacked ("Nous savons que nous ne rêvons point…") there is agreement with the dogmatic

[49] See Gérard Guest, "Pascal – et Heidegger. Heidegger lecteur de Pascal," *Les études philosophiques*, no. 96 (2011), pp. 41-60.

Descartes here, but with a significant reversal: yes, there are indubitable first principles on which Reason's edifice can be erected, but they are known by the heart not the mind, and they are based more on naïve sense experience than anything else.

Still, this leaves entirely open the question of "la machine," a concept that seems to cast doubt upon the natural status of "first principles," if not their epistemological primacy and locus in the "heart." While Pascal does not explicate the articulation between the two concepts, it is clear enough: the "heart" names one of the two aspects under which the "machine" can be considered. That is, rather than the seat of the natural or universal in man, the "heart" is the "machine" qua the sum of practices and habits sedimented into subliminal, automatic directives of thought or judgment, feeling and volition. As such, it is contingent upon how the "machine" qua material interface – sense experience and imagination – is manipulated by different customs and their practices.

This conclusion, which fits exactly with how both "natural laws" and "primitive words" are denaturalized under the postlapsarian gaze of the *Pensées*, becomes apparent when one reads the fragments dealing with "heart" and "machine" side by side. But other fragments spell it out more explicitly, like these two, whose skepticism is even more extreme than that of "les pyrrhoniens":

> Qu'est-ce que nos principes naturels, sinon nos principes accoutumés? Et dans les enfants, ceux qu'ils ont reçus de la coutume de leurs pères, comme la chasse dans les animaux?
> Une différente coutume en donnera d'autres principes naturels. Cela se voit par expérience. […] (125/158)

> […] La coutume est une seconde nature, qui détruit la première.
> Mais qu'est-ce que nature ? Pourquoi la coutume n'est-elle pas naturelle ?
> J'ai grand peur que cette nature ne soit elle-même qu'une première coutume, comme la coutume est une seconde nature. (126/159)[50]

[50] Cf. 418/680, 630/523: "Il n'y a rien qu'on ne rende naturel. Il n'y a naturel qu'on ne fasse perdre."

Here, Pascal doubts deeper than Descartes.[51] First principles, apparently engrained in our hearts or minds by nature, are not firm grounding for knowledge.[52] For any point at which we might wish to place the Natural and Universal in humans risks being nothing other than a mirage, a production or spectacle of its other: artifice and custom.[53] With nature corrupted in the Fall, custom alone is natural to humans. Universal Human Nature is fragmented and replaced by a proliferation of customs that fashion different hearts and natures. The animal "instinct," evoked in the long fragment on the heart above, is here reduced to acculturated principle in humans. These fragments suggest an infinite layering of customs with no discernable pure origin, and in

[51] On being more skeptical than the doubting Descartes, see Nietzsche's August/September, 1885 fragment "NF-1885,40[23]," in his *Nachlaß* (accessible at Nietzschesource.org).

[52] Hence, not only is the second criterion for the superhuman "véritable méthode" – namely, to use only propositions derived from others previously proven – impossible to satisfy: for we ultimately arrive at indubitable axioms ("principes") that rest on nothing but themselves, and hence neither are nor can be proven as such ("De l'esprit géométrique," pp. 677, 679). But now also this bedrock of indubitable principles, the foundation for the best human method, is undermined, in the exact same manner as the natural universality of primitive words (and, we will see, of natural laws). In other words, the geometrical method, the *ratio* that Descartes instituted for all sciences in general, is depicted by a more optimistic Pascal in the opuscule as a locus of certitude, because it "ne suppose que des choses claires et constantes par la lumière naturelle, et c'est pourquoi il est parfaitement véritable, la nature le soutenant au défaut du discours" (p. 679). But this sup-position, the ground that it posits and on which it rests, is now, in the *Pensées*, suspected of being unsure: "first principles" are not universal or reflections of the truth – they are not *innate*, no expression of "Nature" –, but products of custom, both variable and uncertain. This leads to an intriguing consequence: similar to how all language becomes figural, in the *Pensées*, first principles come to be, ultimately – that is, on some absolute, *essential* level –, equivalent to the other sort of "principes" to which they had been diametrically opposed in the earlier opuscule, namely, aesthetic or "pleasure principles." The notorious variety and instability of the latter had ruled out any hope for erecting a science on the basis of them: "La raison de cette extrême difficulté vient de ce que les principes du plaisir ne sont pas fermes et stables. Ils sont divers en tous les hommes et variables dans chaque particulier avec une telle diversité qu'il n'y a point d'homme plus différent d'un autre que de soi-même dans les divers temps" (p. 699). This verdict now looms over all "principes" in general. But the locus of destabilizing diversity is different: in the case of "principes du plaisir," it insists between persons and even within a person viewed across time (i.e., across space and time). In the case of "premiers principes," diversity is apparent more between peoples or within the same people viewed over time (again: diversity across space and time). But diversity in first principles is also, and more essentially – eternally, outside of time, an no matter in what locus – , between all humans, any human, and Nature: our experience, on which our "first principles" are based, is proportional to and contingent upon us, not Nature, which, in Pascal, is like God: the disproportional, the *dehors*, par excellence.

[53] Even such basic indubitable things as "nombre, espace, mouvement" – that is, those ideas that primitive words designate –, and things we try to label with the words "nature, nécessité," are in fact contingent on particular sorts of corporeal experiences, writes Pascal (418/680).

which “Nature” emerges as a difference between layers, not as a fixed point under, above, or outside them.

Given the primacy of custom and the machine with respect to the heart and its “natural” beliefs, Pascal pushed the atheist readers of his apology to recognize that the mere desire to believe in Christian dogma was not sufficient. Instead, they would have to accustom themselves, to train themselves like animals against their old habits to the point where the new beliefs cease to become principles or phrases one must actively strive to keep in mind, and become intuitive, subliminal, and “natural”:

> […] Enfin il faut avoir recours à [la coutume], quand une fois l’esprit a vu où est la vérité, afin de nous abreuver et nous teindre de cette créance, qui nous échappe à toute heure. Car d’en avoir toujours les preuves présentes, c’est trop d’affaire. Il faut acquérir une créance plus facile, qui est celle de l’habitude, qui sans violence, sans art, sans argument, nous fait croire les choses et incline toutes nos puissances à cette croyance, en sorte que notre âme y tombe naturellement. Quand on ne croit que par la force de la conviction, et que l’automate est incliné à croire le contraire, ce n’est pas assez. Il faut donc faire croire nos deux pièces : l'esprit, par les raisons, qu'il suffit d’avoir vues une fois en sa vie; et l’automate, par la coutume, et en ne lui permettant pas de s’incliner au contraire. *Inclina cor meum, Deus…* […] (821/661)

The only way to reform one’s life, especially regarding something so contrary to naïve worldly experience as God and the Fall, is by acting on the machine, by submitting it to certain customs or practices that subtend beliefs in these otherworldly things.

This is thematized in the “Discours de la machine” (418-426/680), also known as “le pari,” which was intended to “ôter les obstacles” on the path to faith (11/45). The reader is brought to recognize that he overestimates his capacity to freely decide on what he believes in: “C’est le cœur qui sent Dieu, et non la raison: voilà ce qui est la foi.” In other words, the discovery of oneself as made up on a subliminal level of a blind mechanism leads, here, to the possibility of manipulating it in view of a spiritual transformation. The “wager” is supposed to clear the way: its role is not to bring about belief but the realization that one has nothing to lose,

and much to gain, in undertaking the practices of the self, as Foucault would say, for becoming a subject of God.[54]

The "discours" features an imaginary dialogue. The atheist, who believes that he is *naturally* unable to believe even if he wants to or is rationally convinced of God's existence, is told to practice belief, to carry out its rituals, until it might *become* natural:

> '… Et je suis fait d'une telle sorte que je ne puis croire. Que voulez-vous que je fasse ?' – Il est vrai. Mais apprenez au moins que votre impuissance à croire, puisque la raison vous y porte et que néanmoins vous ne le pouvez, vient de vos passions. Travaillez donc, non pas à vous convaincre par l'argumentation des preuves de Dieu, mais par la diminution de vos passions. Vous voulez allez à la foi, et vous n'en savez pas le chemin ? Vous voulez vous guérir de l'infidélité, et vous en demandez les remèdes ? Apprenez de ceux qui ont été liés comme vous et qui parient maintenant tout leur bien : ce sont gens qui savent ce chemin que vous voudriez suivre et guéris d'un mal dont vous voulez guérir. Suivez la manière par où ils ont commencé : c'est en faisant tout comme s'ils croyaient, en prenant de l'eau bénite, en faisant dire des messes, etc. Naturellement même cela vous fera croire et vous abêtira. […] Mais pour montrer que cela y mène, c'est que cela diminue les passons, qui sont vos grands obstacles, etc. […]

A third concept here enters into the constellation of notions opposed to the rational or mental in human nature: the passions. They are the bonds by which the heart is attached to certain things. Sedimented and tenacious, the passions are an element of the "machine" and are therefore both habitual and to some extent manipulable. The practices of belief subdue their force and weaken their worldly attachments. By disciplining the machine – repeatedly bending body and mind to Christian practices – the will is subjected, and a new second nature built over the old one. For faith is not a product of Nature but of a type of work –self-directed "ethical work, Foucault would say"[55] – that transforms and produces nature: "Travaillez donc." The *Pensées*, then, are goads for "la machine," moving it via appeals to feeling and imagination, setting it into motion

[54] See *Histoire de la sexualité II: L'usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 18-9, 40-1, 45.
[55] Ibid., pp. 38-9: "travail éthique qu'on effectue sur soi-même."

on the way to the practice of faith and, perhaps over time, to faith itself.[56] If reading Plato might produce the right disposition for the Christian life (612/505), certainly the spiritual exercise of reading Pascal's apology was to be way of manipulating "la machine" to this end.

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Pascal's theory of "custom" and the "machine" is ambiguous. One the one hand, uncovering the "force de la coutume," i.e., that "la coutume est notre nature" (419/680) opens the possibility of one's taking control of this "force" and remaking oneself by training and habituation to new practices. Understanding how we are constituted by custom, rendering conscious the subliminal "machine" with its automatisms that form a large part of ourselves, points the ways to spiritual change: to the work of self-transformation. On the other hand, original sin leads custom's "force" back to the corruption of Human Nature, which both explains

[56] Whether or not, in the *Pensées*, practices are not only the necessary but also the sufficient condition for belief, is not an easy question to answer. In one fragment, Pascal seems to say so: "J'aurais bientôt quitté les plaisirs, disent-ils [les athées], si j'avais la foi. Et moi je vous dis : vous auriez bientôt la foi si vous aviez quitté les plaisirs. […]" (816/659). Similarly, in another fragment, he writes: "L'homme est ainsi fait qu'à force de lui dire qu'il est un sot, il le croit. Et à force de se le dire à soi-même, on se le fait croire" (99/132). Finally, in the "discours de la machine," we saw, Pascal states even more clearly: "Naturellement même cela [i.e., faisant tout comme si vous croyiez] vous fera croire et vous abêtira" and "Qui s'accoutume à la foi la croit." But this naturalist optimism ("naturellement") is countered, as in other domains this chapter has explored, by a more postlapsarian position. On this view, it is absurd that, without the help of God's grace, we could take such control over ourselves that we could manipulate our 'machines' into believing with intuitive certainty whatever we wish. The verdict passed on such optimism is that it is superstitious: "Il faut que l'extérieur soit joint à l'intérieur pour obtenir de Dieu; c'est-à-dire que l'on se mette à genoux, prie des lèvres, etc., afin que l'homme orgueilleux qui n'a voulu se soumettre à Dieu soit maintenant soumis à la créature. Attendre de cet extérieur le secours est être superstitieux; ne vouloir pas le joindre à l'intérieur est être superbe" (944/767). In other words, the view of man as lowly creature or programmable machine risks coinciding with its optimist, humanist foe on the question of the capacity to work on and transform oneself. For humanists, man is like an artist sculpting a stone, an idea exemplified by Pico della Mirandola's *Discourse on the Dignity of Man* (1486), and later given typical expression, for example, in Descartes's *Passions de l'âme*, which saw the passions as a natural language that could be remade through and through. Distance between the two positions is reintroduced with the idea of God's grace and the Augustinian position on freedom and *akrasia*: in fact, the manipulation of the machine in practices or exercises is only a preliminary step; the rest of the path is made only if God wills it (whether or not this more Jansenist version of the Christian *techniques of the self* is contradicted by Pascal's more staunch relativism is another question). With the notions of corrupt human nature, the supremacy of the passions over reason, and the perversion of the will, Augustinian anthropology posits an unmanipulatable hedonist core in human nature, an innate, fixed mechanism that only God can alter. On this view, practices of the Christian custom are not sufficient for producing faith *ex nihilo*, though they are a *sine qua non* for it.

the self's plasticity and posits a core perversion of the will that limits capacities to alter ourselves without God's grace.[57]

Further, and without invoking the Fall at all, any optimism concerning the ability to remake oneself against one's prior "coutume" faces the same barrier that obstructed the path to the clarification of language in "De l'esprit géométrique." That is, the notion that belief – like Justice, Truth, or Meaning – is a product of involuntary social conditioning undermines the sovereign power one might take over it. The ideology of our society is hedonist and worldly, and is inculcated into us "dès l'enfance," in the very ways we conceive of "happiness" (139/171). To change, a *retraite* is necessary, as the Port-Royal *solitaires* saw. But would isolation from Custom's social kingdom suffice to undo the work of years of acculturation? Wouldn't we fail to bring about an internal change, like a philosopher trying to keep in mind nominal definitions of words whose customary meaning constantly clouds his mind? Even Descartes, who also undertook to reform the mind, recognized the crushing recalcitrance of illusions from childhood sense experience, habitual "prejudices," and baseless assumptions, which make up the bulk of mental life.[58] A total rupture with them with was at best an ideal, at worst, an illusion.

[57] Cf. the note 56, *supra*, and Pascal's fragment 7/41, for example: "[La foi] est un don de Dieu."

[58] Cf. the end of the first of Descartes's *Méditations* (AT, IX): "Mais il ne suffit pas d'avoir fait ces remarques, il faut encore que je prenne soin de m'en souvenir; car ces anciennes et ordinaires opinions me reviennent encore souvent en la pensée, le long et familier usage qu'elles ont eu avec moi leur donnant droit d'occuper mon esprit contre mon gré, et de se rendre presque maîtresses de ma créance. […] Mais ce dessein est pénible et laborieux, et une certaine paresse m'entraîne insensiblement dans le train de ma vie ordinaire. Et tout de même qu'un esclave qui jouissoit dans le sommeil d'une liberté imaginaire, lorsqu'il commence à soupçonner que sa liberté n'est qu'un songe, craint d'être réveillé, et conspire avec ces illusions agréables pour en être plus longuement abusé, ainsi je retombe insensiblement de moi-même dans mes anciennes opinions, et j'appréhende de me réveiller de cet assoupissement, de peur que les veilles laborieuses qui succéderoient à la tranquillité de ce repos, au lieu de m'apporter quelque jour et quelque lumière dans la connoissance de la vérité, ne fussent pas suffisantes pour éclaircir les ténèbres des difficultés qui viennent d'être agitées" (p. 18). See also, *Sixièmes réponses*, ¶10: AT, IX, pp. 238-43.

Conclusion: The Latent Augustinianism of Modern Theory

As we have seen, the *Pensées* construct homologies between different domains: meaning, truth, justice, the self, etc. If Pascal's discourse on faith is indeed homologous to these, then the suspicion arises that the objects of faith are products of the practices that supposedly 'express' faith – prayer, reading, mass, etc., – not prior or transcendent to them. The only way to stave off this conclusion is by Pascal's remarkable *deus ex machina*: as clarified by Augustine, Christianity and its dogma are true and real because of their capacity to explain why there is no Reality, just semblances; no Truth, just truths; no Meaning, just meanings; no Justice, but laws; no subject or Self, just qualities, etc.

The doctrine of the Fall, that is, is so persuasive, even binding, because of its capacity to be *both* the ultimate cause, hence explanation, of the opposition between substance and accident, being and non-being, etc., into which humans are thrown after Adam's sin; *and* the third moment, or dialectical sublation, of the opposition itself. The logic is as follows: Truth was replaced by truths because of the Fall, which in its explanatory power thereby becomes the Truth; Meaning is imaginary and only meaning*s* are real because of the Fall, which becomes the Meaning that the plurality of meanings signifies, and so on, for Faith, Justice, etc. The Fall, then, is a *hypothesi*s that pessimist critique verifies in all domains via negative proofs: the *absence* of Meaning, Truth, Justice – even of God – speaks positively for it—and for Him. The theories of the "machine" and "custom" confirm this otherworldly Truth precisely in their worldly materialism.

But atop this metaphysical basis sits secular concerns. The *Pensées* are interested in material and social constraints that condition the freedom of the individual one might imagine oneself to be, an illusion everywhere tied up with that of having direct access to abstractions like

Meaning, Justice, or Truth, even the Soul. Focus is placed on the contingent, material bases of selfhood and ideology, to which people are subliminally subjected to such an extent that they everywhere mistake custom for Necessity, usurpation for Justice, servitude for Freedom, etc., and, ultimately, artifice for Nature. The individual or *moi* is dissected and critiqued as a fabrication or illusion, something intended to bring about a deliverance from the bonds and narcissism of this self, breaking open the monadic ego to the diversity and heterogeneity that everywhere conditions it.

Late 19th- and 20th-century anti- or post-humanist philosophy came strikingly close to these positions. Mirroring the theories of "custom" and "machine," what Sloterdijk termed "anthropotechnics" became a major concern of modern secular, even anti-Christian, philosophers, like Nietzsche, Agamben, Althusser, or Foucault. Analogous to Pascal's notion of the equivocity or plurality of meaning, theorists, like Lacan and Derrida, posited the signifier's primacy and even the imaginary status of the signified or Meaning. Finally, the critique of the concept of Nature – the culture-nature dialectic, and the unthinkability of the clear, absolute origin of culture – is too much an aspect of French postwar thought (in Levi-Strauss, Derrida, etc.) to attach it to one theorist alone.

In several domains of 20th-century French thought, the Pascalian or Augustinian positions came back, arguably unrecognized, with redoubled force. Unrecognized, for there had been a dramatic reversal in the justification for such positions. Rather than on a thinker like Augustine – a figure so fundamental for 16th- and 17th-century thought, so crucial to the Reformation and to the formation of a concept of the secular world *per se*[59] –, the modern thinkers based their own

[59] See Jean Dagens, "Le XVIIe siècle, siècle de Saint Augustin," *CAIEF*, nº3-5, 1953, 31-8 ; Sellier, *Pascal et Saint-Augustin*, introduction; Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*; Meredith J. Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge, 2005), 6-28; Irena Backus,

pessimist critiques on "scientific," "materialist," or "theoretical" foundations – Marxist, Nietzschean, Freudian, Structuralist – that were built precisely in opposition to a philosophical idealism that smacked of theology or metaphysics.[60]

While they had Pascalian instincts, as it were, the 20th-century thinkers and theorists who were are influential for our time hence did not think of themselves as theologians. Indeed, they set themselves the furthest possible from the metaphysical origin, and *telos*, that once confirmed and fomented these instincts. They refused, or omitted, the final move of Pascal's dialectic: often, they stuck with the opposition or reversal of subject and accidents, nature and culture, etc. Where Pascal posited *and* denied access to the Ideas, they considered them *purely* imaginary, illusions of language. And they were silent on the ethical, even spiritual ramifications of their theories – like La Rochefoucauld, the *worldly* Augustinian anti-philosopher, everywhere using, *showing*, postlapsarian analysis but not *saying* so, and, as a duke, finding it indecorous to openly preach.

But the Duke was aware of what he was doing – as his letters, and certain *Maximes*, confirm. What of the 20th-century thinkers in question? Whether they were correct in their self-understanding, and theory had eradicated theology and its mysticism, is addressed in chapter five. The opposition between metaphysics or theology, on the one hand, and theory or science, on the other, that chapter will suggest, is more naïve than it seems, and perhaps hides a complex dialectic whose unfolding is ongoing today. Theology and mysticism, that is, were the repressed of theory. As such, they were bound to return in its very heart, in its unacknowledged

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Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615) (Boston: Brill, 2003), ch. 1 and the references cited therein at note 1.

[60] For a general introduction, see Vincent Descombes, *Le même et l'autre: Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française , 1933-1978* (Paris: Minuit, 1979); and Kritzman, ed., *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought* (New York: Columbia, 2007), pp. 92-5, 110-117; François Dosse, *History of Structuralism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 2 vols.

presuppositions and ethical ramifications, in what one might call its implicit, and vast, spiritual strivings. But in order to understand this reemergence at all, we must first address another peculiar 20th-century phenomenon, the Cartesian humanism of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Ch. 4: Descartes in the Mirror of History: Jean-Paul Sartre — 20th-Century Cartesianism in the Shadow of the *Sciences humaines*

Foreword: Husserl

Within the first seconds of the lecture Edmund Husserl gave at the Sorbonne's Amphitheatre Descartes on February 23rd, 1929, the site's namesake was claimed as originary "patriarch" of the sort of philosophy Husserl had come to discuss. The talk was as much a homecoming as the importation of a foreign way of thinking. Descartes was the *Erzvater* of phenomenology, and phenomenology was Cartesianism reborn:

> [K]ein Philosoph der Vergangenheit hat auf den Sinn der Phänomenologie so entscheidend gewirkt wie Frankreichs größter Denker René Descartes. Ihn muß sie als ihren eigentlichen Erzvater verehren. Ganz direkt, ausdrücklich sei es gesagt, hat das Studium der Cartesianischen Meditationen in die Neugestaltung der werdenden Phänomenologie eingegriffen und ihr diejenige Sinnesform gegeben, die sie jetzt hat und die es fast gestattet, sie einen neuen Cartesianismus zu nennen, einen Cartesianismus vom 20. Jahrhundert.[1]

When Husserl, aided by Eugen Fink, reworked the "Paris Lectures" for publication as *Cartesian Meditations* – in French in 1931, in German only in 1950 –, this passage changed considerably. Had Husserl overstated, to his French audience, the role of Descartes in the emergence of his philosophy? Or, since speech was now to be made print, was he merely shifting from oral hyperbole to written precision, more thoughtfully stating what could, and could not, have been adopted from Descartes?

> Frankreichs größter Denker René Descartes hat [der Phänomenologie] durch seine Meditationen neue Impulse gegeben, ihr Studium hat ganz direkt auf die Umgestaltung der schon im Werden begriffenen Phänomenologie zu einer neuen Form der Transzendentalphilosophie eingewirkt. Fast konnte man sie danach einen Neu-

[1] *Pariser Vorträge* in *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, Strasser, ed. (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), p. 3. Since this text is a reconstruction of the original lecture, one should also consult the outline of the talk that Husserl prepared for his French audience (in *Cart. Med.*, 187s). It shows that the opening emphatically took Descartes as a model for the new phenomenology, proclaiming the "eternal value" of the *Meditations*' "radical reflection" and stating the demand for "a new beginning and new Cartesian Meditations" given philosophy's shabby state of "decadence" and chaotic "fragmentation" (196).

> Cartesianismus nennen, wie sehr sie, und gerade durch die radikale Entfaltung Cartesianischer Motive, genötigt ist, fast den ganzen bekannten Lehrgehalt der Cartesianischer Philosophie abzulehnen.[2]

Descartes is no founder of phenomenology; studying his *Meditations* merely gave it "fresh impetus," new life. A distinction is now drawn between Cartesian principles or motifs (*Motive*) – the meaning[3] or style,[4] the *form* of thinking Descartes invented – and the *content* of Cartesianism (its *Lehrgehalt*).[5] While the latter will have to be rejected, it is out of radical fidelity to the former. Descartes's form, his style and intuition, are followed to their extremes, *against* the content of Descartes's own philosophy. He inspires – imbues – phenomenology, but the latter is more Cartesian than he ever was. It harvests what he only planted. Phenomenology is no Cartesianism transported *tel quel* into the 20th century, but "a Neo-Cartesianism," faithful to the spirit, not the letter, of the *Meditations.*

For Husserl, the return to the *Meditations*' project of erecting "an authentic science from absolute foundations"[6] was not some arbitrary product of historical recidivism, but a task demanded by the current historical-philosophical moment when viewed from a particular angle of illumination. Husserl was like Benjamin's historian, grasping the "now" in relation to a past

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[2] *Cart. Med*., §1 (43).
[3] "Sinn": *Pariser Vorträge*, in *Cart. Med*., pp. 5, 10.
[4] In a work published the year of the Paris lectures, Husserl wrote of "the style [*der Stil*]" of Descartes's *Meditations*, which, Husserl claimed, was abandoned and only adopted again in his own transcendental phenomenology: *Formale und Transzendentale Logik* (Halle: Max Niemer Verlag, 1929), p. 6. Years before, he had already described aspects of his project as "doing justice" to "a core [*ein Kern*]" of the *Meditations*, which had not yet "developed to its pure implication": *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie,* I (Halle: Max Niemer Verlag, 1913), §46. In the *Krisis* (1936), Husserl's last major published work, he again returned to Descartes's importance for phenomenology (§§16s). He described "a profundity [*eine Tiefe*]" in the *Meditations*, so deep and "difficult to exhaust that even Descartes himself was not up to the task": *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie*, Biemel, ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954), §17 (76).
[5] Cf. Derrida's own division between Descartes's historical and metaphysical project, in "Cogito et l'histoire de la folie," in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris, 1967).
[6] *Formale und Transzendentale Logik*, p. 6.

object suddenly brought into resonance or "constellation" with the present:[7] the contemporary "situation" of disunity and disarray in the sciences and philosophy — so "swollen" and "lacking in uniformity of method, that there are nearly as many philosophies as philosophers," Husserl said — was delineated in light of the epistemological confusion that a young Descartes confronted some three centuries before. Thinking this "constellation" of past and present offered Husserl, as Benjamin would say, "a revolutionary chance,"[8] a path: "Eine universale Besinnung kann, nachdem die Wissenschaftslage in der Tat derjenigen ähnlich geworden ist, wie sie Descartes in seiner Jugendzeit vorfand, den kühnen *Weg der Cartesianischen Meditationen* versuchen."[9]

What is striking about Husserl's relationship to Descartes is his notion of their facing "similar" (*ähnlich*) situations – the notion, that is, of there existing between them an *Ähnlichkeit*: a "similarity" or, as Husserl himself posits or recognizes their common ground, an *affinity*. This affinity, Husserl saw, connected both philosophers in moment, in the adversarial "situation," and in method, the "way" out of this situation.

Today, we might take exception to such apparent disregard for historicity. Yet Husserl skirts our blame, perhaps, by combining his an-historicist affinity with historical awareness. As stated above, he is keen to abstract a form or intention from Descartes, leaving its contingent historical fulfillment aside. Moreover, in the very idea of affinity or analogy lies the recognition

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[7] "On the Concept of History" in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, Jennings and Eiland, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), XVII; *The Arcades Project*, trans. Eiland and McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), N3,1.

[8] "On the Concept of History," XVII.

[9] *Formale und Transzendentale Logik*, p. 6. See also one of the supplements to the *Krisis*, p. 392, perhaps from 1936-7, where Husserl again reflects on this lamentable philosophical situation of confusion, and how it spurs us to reflect on "our philosophical patriarchs," like Descartes. Cf. also *Pariser Vorträge*, p. 5. On the parallelism between the philosophical situation of uncertainty and skepticism that Descartes faced, and the late 19th-century situation of the positivist sciences, especially empirical psychology, which equally tended to relativism and skepticism, see Paul S. MacDonald, *Descartes and Husserl: The Philosophical Project of Radical Beginnings* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), pp. 6-8, 23-61.

of sameness in structure *and* difference in content. *Affinity* is based on the perception or feeling, be it irrational, of some structural similarity, or homology, some common ground. Husserl saw a homology between his and Descartes's time and philosophy.

Affinity – Sympathy – History

Around the same moment that Husserl arrived in France to discuss the correspondences between phenomenology and Descartes, André Gide and André Malraux were planning to undertake a new sort of literary history.[10] Or, rather, precisely *not* a history: it would be a *tableau* with "portraits" of past French writers. Academic or historical approaches to literature, Gide insisted, tended to *reduce* literary works to historical cultural movements, political circumstances, geographical climes, economic and social conditions, etc. Passed through the crucible of this scientific approach, the great author had his "thoughts trammeled": he turned out to seem "beaucoup moins indépendant et original qu'il n'avait pu d'abord nous paraître et se croire lui-même."[11]

If the science of History takes the author as dead and as an unwitting product of the past – like a plant studied by a botanist, in one of Gide's images –, literary portraiture renders him alone and in the flesh. It focuses on the singular figure of the author and the œuvre, made present and alive by the force of the painter's "prédilection" and "sympathie" for his "modèle." Gide was playing on words: "model" meant the figure to be represented *and* the figure acting as the painter's model of himself: his forerunner, his homologue. The *portrait* was also a mirror: "Dans

[10] Charles-Olivier Stiker-Métral dates the beginnings of the *Tableau* project to 1928: "Le XVIIe siècle au prisme du *Tableau de la littérature française* des éditions Gallimard (1939)," *Les Lettres romanes*, vol. 68 n° 3-4 (2014), p. 443. For a general background to the project in the context of anti-Academic literary editing practices, see Joëlle Gleize and Philippe Roussin, "Métamorphose d'une bibilothèque," in *La bibliothèque de la Pléiade: travail éditorial et valeur littéraire*, Gleize and Roussin, eds. (Paris: EAC, 2009), pp. 51-9.

[11] Gide, "Préface," in *Tableau de la literature française* [II]*: de Corneille à Chénier* (Paris: NRF/Gallimard, 1939), p. 7.

cet auteur, il se reconnaît un peu lui-même… Les conditions historiques changent; sous un costume différent, un homme découvre un frère aimé dont l'exemple le guide et l'assure." Such is how Gide presented the *Tableau* when volume II, *de Corneille à Chénier*, finally appeared in 1939, long before volumes I and III:[12] a "galerie de portraits," where each modern author presents "tel grand auteur du passé, avec lequel secrètement il s'apparente."[13] This secret sympathy or affinity took no heed of the "historical conditions" stressed by the academic. Historical conditions are just the "costume" under which a naked form persists, unchanged, across time.

That the *Tableau* began, out of chronological order, with Corneille and the volume dominated by the 17th century, is telling. In the first three, deeply politicized decades of 20th-century France, "la valeur et la fonction du classicisme et du XVIIe siècle" had been hotly debated in literary and intellectual circles.[14] Gide and others associated with the *Nouvelle revue française* (NRF) who contributed to the *Tableau*, took a position that accorded foundational status to 17th-century authors. They claimed, for example, a "genealogy" leading directly from modern prosaists back to the great 17th-century masters of French prose, the *moralistes*.[15] The NRF's *Tableau* abrogated difference and time in favor of affinity with the 17th century. Volume II gave textual representation to their anti-historicist ideal of "une communauté transhistorique" of French classics in which 20th- and 17th-century authors would be joined in the present.[16]

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[12] Volume I, *de Rutebeuf à Descartes*, would only appear in 1962; volume III, *de Mme de Staël à Rimbaud*, only in 1974.
[13] Gide, "Préface," in *Tableau*, II, pp. 7-8.
[14] Charles-Olivier Stiker-Métral, "Le XVIIe siècle au prisme du *Tableau*," pp. 444-5.
[15] Ibid., p. 453-4.
[16] Ibid., p. 454: "une volonté d'homogénéisation entre auteurs du présent et du passé, comme si l'activité littéraire était identique au début du XXe siècle et au cours du XVIIe" (449). See also Malraux's comments on the project as cited by Gleize and Roussin, "Métamorphose," p. 57: "Ce dialogue avec le passé reconnaissait pour valeur suprême la *présence* des œuvres." The authors point out how this project can be seen in relation to Malraux's *Musée imaginaire*.

One reader of the *Tableau* volume II, and of Husserl, was Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre knew the group around Gide at the NRF and had read many of their works. While he didn't take part in their *Tableau* project, he did implicitly take a stand in the debate concerning the contemporary significance of the 17th century. I have used "affinity" to describe two concurrent ways in which French 17th-century writers and philosophers became re-actualized in the early decades of the 20th century: in Husserl and in the NRF *Tableau.* This chapter shows in what manner this concept might also characterize the tie that Sartre understood to link his philosophy to Descartes's, at least during the first period of Sartre's career (prior to the Marxist turn of the 50s[17]). This connection is harder to grasp, however, being less explicit than Husserl's or those NRF writers who saw themselves in the literary giants of the 17th century. But Sartre's affinity for Descartes can be shown, and, I claim, it extended to the point that he saw his contemporary adversaries as resurrections of those who, in chapters 2 and 3, were described as Descartes's own. On some level, Sartre was aware that he was to become the Descartes of his century.

Chapter Description

This chapter explores that awareness. I argue that, in *L'être et le néant* (1943), a 17th-century conflict replays itself, shaping crucial aspects of Sartre's approach, concepts, and goals. In between the lines, across the imaginary space between pages, 17th-century humanism and antihumanism spar and receive new form. To be sure, Sartre did not describe his project in these terms. The beginning of *L'être et le néant* identifies a contemporary context of philosophical problems it presumably seeks to address. Still, the 17th-century antagonism makes itself known through Sartre's unsaid yet discernable recognition of an *affinity* between his philosophy and

[17] On Sartre's turn to Marxism and his efforts to reconcile it with existentialism, see, for example, David Detmer, *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity* (La Salle: Open Court, 2008), pp. 187-215. See also Dominick LaCapra, *A Preface to Sartre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 117-68.

Descartes's, and between the enemies that his philosophy attempts to topple and those that, in the 17th century, posed a virulent challenge to Cartesian humanism: the *moralistes*.

Of course, we would do well not to ascribe more to Sartre than is reasonable: the parallelism between the 17th-century conflict and the 20th-century clash between Sartre and antihumanism, is the object of this thesis, not of *L'être et le néant*. Nonetheless, the presence and importance of Descartes and the *moralistes* in this and other texts from the same period is striking and demands reflection. What might it mean? What is Sartre's relationship to these 17th-century figures, or to the 17th century in general? Why are the *moralistes* mentioned in the company of modern psychology and psychoanalysis? No scholarship seems to have been dedicated to these questions. On my reading, the presence and role of these early modern rivals in Sartre's early work express an implicit, if not unwitting, recognition of the 17th-20th century parallel at the heart of this thesis, as much as an early attempt to constitute it in writing.

In other words, there is a silent, overlooked genealogy of thought in *L'être et le néant*, in which 17th-century problematics shape the later discussion and are simultaneous, copresent with the present—with Sartre's own moment. This is Sartre's history of philosophy, similar in spirit to the NRF's *Tableau*. His position on constitutive, ontological "liberté" and his concept of "la conscience" renew and elaborate more than they depart from Descartes's *cogito*. Much of what Sartre accomplishes with his repeated drawing of the ontological line between *pour-soi* and *en-soi* can be read back into Descartes as an amendment of what (for Sartre) had gone wrong. *L'être et le néant* attempts to surpass problems encountered by the Cartesian dualism that, in *Les passions de l'âme*, had both promised and undermined a heroic ethics of freedom and "générosité"

Wielded against the *moralistes* and their modern equivalents or successors – psychology

and psychoanalysis, especially –, Sartre's existentialist phenomenology is the untimely revenge of Descartes: the triumph of the irreducibility and absolutism of consciousness over the modes of thought that, since the 17th century, had tried to reduce to mere illusion the intuitive certitudes of consciousness and its undetermined freedom. Even Heidegger, whom we often consider as Sartre's role-model *malgré lui*, is attacked for having misunderstood Descartes's lesson—Heidegger, whose very effort in *Sein und Zeit* was to place *Dasein* in place of the Cartesian approach to subjectivity.

With the notion of "mauvaise foi," Sartre posited a fundamental tendency to flee from (1) freedom, or *immanence*, into the arms of (2) determinism, or *transcendence*. The Sartrien awareness of freedom can be described as the understanding and assumption of the *immanence* of consciousness and its radical independence and heterogeneity from any *thing* worldly or objective, including the thing (ego or psyche) that consciousness becomes when perceived from an external, i.e. not *immanent*, i.e., *transcendent* perspective. Attitudes or perspectives that are *transcendent* stand over against the existential awareness of consciousness and freedom. In these transcendent views, which Sartre tirelessly critiques, subjectivity is seen (and sees itself) as determined from without by something *transcendent*, that is, external or heterogeneous to consciousness proper: language, gods, social entities, psychological forces, and historical situations are examples. This basic binary (immanence vs. transcendence) – whose presence my introduction tried to uncover in the earliest instances of (anti)humanism – is central to Sartre's philosophy and to the quasi-Cartesian criteria by which he judges the tenability of philosophical and scientific (or theoretical) perspectives.

For Sartre, the perspective of "transcendence" is our natural or default attitude. It relies on a self-misrecognition, whereby one fails to admit the dimension of consciousness and instead

"reifies" or reduces the self to a field of entities that, like things in the spatio-temporal realm of Nature, inter-act with others according to certain specifiable laws. Subjectivity disappears as it is fragmented into quasi-autonomous forces (passions, drives, ego, id, superego, etc.); it is broken open and subjected to the order of nature or to a pre-extant social structure. The ontological imprecision in our self-relation, which underpins this attitude for Sartre, is no less serious than that committed by those who, so Descartes, failed to understand the referent of "themselves" to be "their minds alone": "They were inclined instead to take 'themselves' to mean only their bodies."[18]

With its roots in the layman's default way of thinking, the transcendent view was given paradigmatic form by the 17th-century *moralistes*. In Sartre's mind, they practiced a style of psychological analysis that portends modern psychologism, in the form of psychology and psychoanalysis. As I will argue, Sartre discerned a common structure in the social and human sciences (Fr.: *les sciences humaines*), and worried how they might contribute to a sort of determinism in which freedom, along with the self, would become a vacuous myth. He points out the epistemological and ethical compromises of such determinism or transcendence, and, I argue, he hints at its mysticism, hidden metaphysics, sado-masochism, and antihumanism. In his critique of modern forms of "moraliste" discourse, I see Sartre articulating an attack on later antihumanism *avant la lettre*. That is, while the admittedly hyperbolic heroizing of consciousness in Sartre's early work leaves no question as to why his philosophy could be so easily superseded by the next, less optimist generation of French thinkers, *L'être et le néant*'s unrelenting critique of the reification of subjectivity also prepares us to discern the theological or mystical nature of the antihumanist theories that came into fashion after and against his

[18] Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, I CSM (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1985), I, §12.

philosophy.

Sartre and Descartes – Critique and Affinity

Sartre came on the philosophical scene with a work that contains a penetrating, technical dissection of Descartes's *cogito*. *La transcendence de l'ego* (1936) shows the *cogito* to be not primary, but secondary, a product of "reflection": the result is the error of making consciousness into a thing or substance. In other words, the psychological ego is not correctly strained off from non-substantial consciousness. Hence the *cogito* appears as the product of a "Je" that thinks,[19] and reflecting consciousness misidentifies itself with this ego.[20] Despite the fecundity of the *cogito*, then, Descartes falls prey to a typical temptation: the identification of consciousness with its degraded mirror image or reification.[21]

This critique is crucial: it displays how, for Sartre, the *cogito* was both an essential orientation for any philosophy – a timeless form that anyone could and should actualize – and historically, in Descartes's own enactment of this form, a failure.[22] This separation between Descartes's philosophy as a rich field of potentiality, on the one hand, and its contingent actualization was, we saw, at play in Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. It is essential for

[19] *La transcendance de l'ego: Esquisse d'une description phénoménologique* (Paris: Vrin, 1966), pp. 27-8. This text is hereafter cited as ***TE***.

[20] Cf. Husserl, *Krisis*, §§18-19; compare also Derrida's reading of the cogito in "Cogito et histoire de la folie."

[21] For a concise overview of this slippage, see Matthews, *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy* (New York, 1996), pp. 8-9.

[22] See *TE*, p. 72, where Sartre's language confirms that, for him, "le cogito," is a form or procedure, distinct from its concrete realization by Descartes: "le cogito, s'il est opéré correctement, est…" The definite article ("le") means that Sartre supposes the identity of "the cogito" to be intelligible, and to endure, irrespective of Descartes's use of it (which Sartre capitalizes: "le Cogito"). The reasons for the impurity of Descartes's "Cogito" are offered on p. 73: *his* Cogito was part of a personal project and the result of "motivations psychologiques." Hence it failed to fully separate the psychological ego from consciousness according to *the* cogito's true, formal promise. Husserl similarly distinguished Descartes's idea of an absolute foundation for knowledge from Descartes's own attempt to realize this idea, which "failed" due to the "unnoticed prejudices" secretly (mis)guiding the *Meditations*: *Formale und Transzendentale Logik*, pp. 6-7.

understanding how Sartre understood his relation to Descartes. Descartes could reappear in the early 20th century only as a form purified from its old content.

L'être et le néant also contains a number criticisms addressed to Descartes and could, if one stressed the Heideggerian aspects of the book, be read as an anti-Cartesian work. For example, Sartre denounces Descartes for having hypostasized the ego of the *cogito* (thus "l'erreur ontologique du rationalisme cartésien"[23] [23]); for having reified the "passions" and opposed them to reason, just like the "moralistes" (201; 485 s.); for not having seen the importance of the existence of others for the *cogito* (321-22); or, for not having understood how consciousness's structure presupposes the existence of something it is not, of something *en-soi* (280).[24] Indeed, Mary Warnock has highlighted the essentially "anti-Cartesian" approach of existentialism as expounded in Sartre's book: instead of worrying about the world's existence or the possibility of a true science of it, Sartre, like Heidegger, finds his subject of study already in an all too real world experienced more proximately than through an idealist or early modern form of "knowledge"[25] or perception, which cast "l'homme" as the "spectateur" of Nature.[26]

But Sartre's commitment to Descartes went deeper than his words. While unmistakable, his critiques seem occasioned by a recognition of what could simply not be carried over from Descartes, given the moment of philosophy in which Sartre inscribed himself, rather than by an intention akin to Heidegger's, in *Sein und Zeit*, to demolish the primacy of subjectivity that, according to Heidegger, Descartes established in philosophy. Sartre's attacks on Descartes focus only on certain aspects of Cartesian philosophy – the primacy of epistemology over ontology, or

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[23] *L'être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Gallimard/Tel, 1943), p. 23. Hereafter: ***EN***.
[24] However, in another passage Sartre recognized how, for Descartes, the *cogito* iplied the idea of a perfect being, thus producing a recourse to "transcendence," to that which the *cogito* lacks, or is not: "il est *cogito* hanté par l'être" (*EN*, 125).
[25] Warnock, "Introduction," in *Being and Nothingness* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. xii.
[26] Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, in *Œuvres et lettres*, ed. Bridoux (Paris: Gallmard/Pléiade, 1953), V, p. 154. Hereafter: ***DM***.

the reification of subjectivity or of certain modes of consciousness, like emoting – that were capable of being bracketed out, as it were, in order to embrace what Sartre appears to have considered the more fundamental, even timeless, aspects of Descartes's philosophy. These latter are at once ontological and ethical. They include the unbounded, quasi-divine freedom of consciousness over any given facticity, the primacy of intuition in knowledge, and the irreducibility of consciousness to things or conditions. Descartes's errors, it appears, had nothing fatal about them for Sartre.

This gesture of bracketing out the contingent from the necessary in Descartes – i.e., Sartre's belief that he could subtract certain elements of Cartesian philosophy without impinging upon the identity of Descartes's thought or harming the intelligibility of the other, championed Cartesian elements – is shown with fascinating clarity and, characteristically, without a hint of hesitation, in a 1946 text that Sartre wrote as a preface to a book of selections from Descartes, "La liberté cartésienne." Before returning to the philosophical treatise, it will be useful to discuss this short, rich text.

I. "Cartesian Freedom"

> *But perhaps I am something greater than I myself understand, and all the perfections which I attribute to God are somehow in me potentially, though not yet emerging or actualized. […] But all this is impossible.* — Descartes[27]

In "Cartesian Freedom,"[28] Sartre argues that, in Descartes's works, freedom is equivocal. Sartre at first identifies a dualism, but by the end of his text, we perceive a tripartite division within what Descartes understood as freedom: the third concept, the one Sartre wants to render manifest

[27] *Meditations* III, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. II, CSM (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1984), p. 32. Hereafter: ***M***.

[28] See Marek Jędraszewski, "On the Paths of Cartesian Freedom: Sartre and Levinas," in *Man Within his Life-World*, A.-T. Tymieniecka, ed. (London: Kluwer, 1989), pp. 671-83; Nicolas Grimaldi, "Sartre et la liberté cartesienne," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. 92, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1987), pp. 67-88.

and champion, appears like an inflation or realization of the second, itself in tension with the first, the traditional, centuries-old understanding of Cartesian freedom in France.[29] The latter, the product of Descartes "l'homme de science" (296), takes freedom to be the autonomy of thought in its search, "par ses propres forces," to *discover* a pre-established order of essences or truth. Here the mind is free as "autonomie" but not as "productivité"; the mind is spontaneous and responsible for its acts, yet the "objet" of discovery is "fixé" (291).

But this concept of freedom in fact hides another, by which Descartes strove to "sauver l'homme": so as to keep subjectivity from disappearing under the weight or compulsion of a divinely instituted order of truth — a "sacrifice" of "la subjectivité humaine" condoned by Spinoza, Sartre contends —, Descartes endowed man with the free power of will (*volonté*) to assent or dissent to ideas: that is, to decide, not merely discover, the truth (292). Hence it is no longer God, the creator of ideas, but "l'homme" who is "l'être par qui la vérité apparaît au monde… Finalement, il faut dire oui ou non — et décider seul du vrai pour tout l'Univers" (292). Each person is like God *within* the given world: while the will can't *make* anything per se, it is free to *make of* anything what it wishes.

But here, Sartre has gotten ahead of himself: he is anticipating the third sort of freedom in Descartes, already paring down the contingent from the essential. This explains the non-linear order of "La liberté cartésienne," a text that tumbles over itself, rolling back and forth. For the possibility of total freedom is *de facto* curtailed in Descartes: once one takes into account the relation between the understanding and the will in his epistemology, the latter ceases to be free.

What the understanding perceives with clarity and distinction the will is compelled to affirm: truth is again something *discovered* and binding, universal and unquestionable. Descartes ends up coming closer to Spinoza and Leibniz in adopting an ultimately theological vision of

[29] "La liberté cartésienne," in *Situations,* I (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 288.

truth and subjectivity's relation to it (297-8).[30] If ideas and their order are pre-established and the will compelled to recognize ready-made truth, ultimately it is God who thinks through the mediation of humans, compelling assent by a force that Sartre recognizes as strikingly akin to the theological concept of "grace" (296-8).[31] That is, the compulsion to affirm points, again, to the *transcendence* of the order of truth and essences to which the mind – of any individual – is subjected, as a subject is bound to a totality of royal laws.

Ultimately, then, this freedom of "l'homme de science" boiled down to a negativity. It was the power to affirm *or* deny only in the domain of evil or untruth, the power to freely err and sin (304).[32] However, this was not Descartes's own or authentic experience of freedom, Sartre thinks. Under the shell of historical circumstances and facts, under the robes of the dogmatic "savant," Sartre finds a radical, living contemporary. As a "bon chrétien" and as a thinker of his time, Descartes's epistemology could not but be predicated on the *transcendence* or metaphysics of truth. But Descartes the man — "*l'homme*, en Descartes," "cet homme indépendant et orgueilleux…cet individualiste…" — had an "intuition" of a freedom so expansive, so ambitious and utterly unbound by transcendence, that he could only attribute it to God. Sartre's incredible reading of the third Cartesian notion of freedom, then, replaces every instance of "God's freedom" in Descartes with human freedom; or, rather, with Descartes's own personal freedom, but only insofar as it is the same for each and every consciousness:

> c'est donc de sa propre liberté, telle qu'il l'aurait conçue sans les entraves du catholicisme et du dogmatisme, qu'il parle lorsqu'il décrit la liberté de Dieu. […] Or, le Dieu de Descartes est le plus libre des Dieux qu'a forgés la pensée humaine; c'est le seul Dieu créateur. […] Ici le sens de la doctrine cartésienne se dévoile. Descartes a parfaitement compris que le concept de liberté renfermait l'exigence d'une autonomie absolue, qu'un acte libre était une production absolument neuve dont le germe ne pouvait être contenu dans un était antérieur du monde et que, par suite, liberté et création ne

[30] Cf. *M*, V, pp. 44-5.
[31] Cf. *M*, IV, pp. 39-41.
[32] Cf. *M*, IV, pp. 41-3.

> faisaient qu'un. […] elle est l'acte extra-temporel et éternel par quoi Dieu [i.e. l'homme libre] fait qu'il y ait un monde, un Bien et des Vérités éternelles. (305-6)

This third sort of freedom conserves and develops the crucial aspect of the second: it is pure negativity, a constant ability to negate the given, to rupture with things, to break the continuity of being; but it is, further, compelled to no pre-given truth whatsoever. In this sense, Descartes's methodic doubt is "le type même de l'acte libre" (300) and is expressive of radical freedom understood as the capacity to negate even one's empirical self so as to become, as it were, pure negation or suspension of the given, pure doubt: "une liberté désincarnante et désindividualisante: car le sujet pensant…n'est d'abord *rien* que négation pure, ce néant…qui n'est *rien d'autre* que le doute lui-même" (303). In addition to negativity, however, what is added to freedom in its third, absolute version is *creativity*. No act of consciousness is explicable by a preceding condition or cause, and "world," "the Good," and "eternal Truths" are the products, not discoveries, of each individual consciousness.

This divine sort of freedom, made synonymous with human consciousness, is what Sartre described in *L'être et le néant*. Indeed, the text on "Cartesian freedom" offers a more developed *post factum* genealogy of Sartre's concept than that provided by the remarks we find in the treatise. In both texts, however, Descartes was raised to the status of the founder of a concept of *freedom* as distinct from *power*, which would be essential, even constitutive, for existentialism.

The conferral of originary status on Descartes is confirmed by Sartre's repeated insistence on mentioning the former's debt to Stoicism while also positing him as an absolute (unconditioned) innovator in the understanding of freedom: "Descartes a fait ici, après les stoïciens, une distinction capitale entre la liberté et la puissance. Être libre, ce n'est point pouvoir

ce que l'on veut, mais c'est vouloir ce que l'on peut" (295):[33]

> Encore que cette doctrine s'inspire de l'Επόχη stoïcienne, personne avant Descartes n'avait mis l'accent sur la liaison du libre arbitre avec la négativité: personne n'avait montré que la liberté ne vient point de l'homme en tant qu'il est, comme un plenum d'existence parmi d'autres pleins dans un monde sans lacune, mais en tant qu'il *n'est pas*, au contraire, en tant qu'il est fini, limité. Seulement cette liberté ne saurait être aucunement créatrice, puisqu'elle n'est *rien*. (301)

But where had Descartes experienced this radical negativity, this divine freedom he felt as his own while openly denying that it was?

It could not have been in science, where truth was God's business and where the most one could hope for was a lucid submission to His order. Instead, it was in the domain of what we might call ethics, in the dynamic relation of the self to itself. Descartes's intuition of freedom took the form of "ce sentiment orgueilleux d'être le véritable auteur de ses actes et le créateur continuel de ses entreprises" (304), a feeling one detects in certain auto-referential assertions in the *Discours* or *Meditations*,[34] and that one finds, attributed to all humans, in texts like the *Principles of Philosophy* and *Les passions de l'âme*.[35]

Sartre's elucidation of "Cartesian Freedom" tries to separate from a more official, epistemological Descartes – the one that had been a master of French philosophy for centuries, the one that Heidegger attacked – a more unofficial, ethical Descartes, the one of interest to this dissertation: the Descartes of the freedom to dispose of oneself, the Descartes of the passions who "entrevoyait, en quelque sorte, cette vérité paradoxale qu'il y a des passions *libres*" and

[33] Here as in similar passages in *EN*, Sartre probably had in mind the third "maxime" of Descartes's provisional moral code from the *Discours*, the first clause of which was cited in *EN*, p. 527: "de tâcher toujours plutôt de me vaincre que la fortune […]" (*DM*, III, 142). Descartes himself posits the resemblance between this maxim and the ethical practice of an ancient group of "philosophes" who, unnamed, appear to be Stoics (*DM*, III, 143).

[34] Cf. *M*, IV, p. 39: "I know by experience that [the will or freedom of choice] is not restricted in any way. […] so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God." See also *M*, synopsis of the second meditation, p. 9.

[35] See, for example, *Passions*, §§ 41, 152-3; *Principles*, I, §§ 37, 39, 41. Of these, Sartre cites *Passions*, §§41,153 and *Principles*, §41 in "La libertée cartésienne," pp. 295, 299.

"prisait par-dessus tout la vraie générosité" (303), as Sartre writes, before citing the definition of "générosité" offered in *Les passions de l'âme* (art. 153.) In ways easy to overlook, these concepts – "orgueil" and "générosité" – had already been important in *L'être et le néant*.

Sartre's "Cartesian Freedom" is essential to the present discussion for other reasons, too: for highlighting the implicit importance of the 17th century in Sartre's work around the time of *L'être et le néant*, and for offering us a glimpse into what I am calling Sartre's "humanisme," and its relationship to Descartes.

From its opening lines, "Cartesian Freedom" evokes a mid-17th-century context with the names Richelieu (1585-1642), Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), and Corneille (1606-84). But these figures – who, we should note, connote an era *before* the time of Louis XIV, and prior to the time of Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, or Racine: the context of chapters 2 and 3 – are more than Descartes's historical contemporaries: while their role is not clear at first, by the end of Sartre's text we are led to the conclusion that, for him, these figures – *creators* of artworks or institutions – shared Descartes's radical intuition of freedom. Not being "métaphysiciens," however, they never articulated it as such.

On the other hand, Sartre evokes major post- and anti-Cartesian thinkers, like Leibniz (1646-1716) and Spinoza (1632-77), signifiers of the age immediately following the emergence of Cartesianism. While Leibniz seems to represent a position closer to Descartes's first idea of freedom – a middle-ground between immanence and transcendence –, Spinoza is here cast in a role that would be more and more evoked, and celebrated, in the 20th and 21st centuries: as an anti-subjectivist, antihumanist thinker, someone who submitted the subject to the whip of a

rational and irrepressible Necessity.[36] Spinoza saw the individual as a mere "mode" through which a transcendent order of truth expressed and affirmed itself (291). His position seizes upon the rotten core of Cartesianism, recourse to God, and takes it to its inmost consequence.[37]

In "sacrificing human subjectivity" to a pre-given order, and in making the individual mind a mode or expression of the transcendent, Spinoza comes to occupy the most extreme pole, the limit, over against "Cartesian Freedom." On the other hand, figures like Richelieu and Corneille – indeed, the epoch of Descartes, insofar as Sartre evokes it here – implicitly become embodiments of Cartesian freedom in the authentic, third sense. Such is the latent 17th-century conflict, and intellectual history, in this text; something similar, we shall see, was at work in the sinews of *L'être et le néant*.

In "Cartesian Freedom," then, the 17th century contains a sort of panorama spanning the range of positions on freedom: in anti-subjectivist metaphysicians (Spinoza), in philosophers or *savants* keen to mediate between God and the will (Descartes "l'homme de science," Leibniz), and, finally, in mid-17th-century artists, politicians, and other inventive types, who had an intuition of the sort of freedom that, for Sartre, truly constitutes subjectivity (Corneille, Richelieu, Vincent de Paul, "*l'homme*, en Descartes"). This shown, not stated, foregrounding of the richness and importance of the 17th century for debates about freedom and the status of the human being, helps to draw out the full implications of the striking claim made at the end of Sartre's text: following Descartes's century, he writes, there was a 200-year long failure to transfer freedom from God to humans, that is, to realize Cartesian freedom (308).

What this statement makes clear is that Sartre's understanding of the history of

[36] See, for example, Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Antonio Negri, *Spinoza for Our Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Frédéric Lordon, *La société des affects* (Paris: Seuil, 2013).
[37] Spinoza's antihumanism is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

philosophy is rather peculiar and, I think, driven as much by a feeling of personal affinity as by anything else: he sees philosophy as a short-circuiting between Descartes's moment and the 20th century, Sartre's own time. It follows that, for him, the problems and possible notions of freedom were now largely the same. It follows that Sartre would be championing a radical, neo-Cartesian freedom against any neo-Spinozist recourse to transcendence or to a reified, pre-established order of things. As we will explore below, Sartre clearly had certain modern-day adversaries in mind: psychology, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and the human and social sciences. But the new Spinozas of the age had not yet fully made their entry. In the 1940s, Sartre could only vaguely foresee, in the form of various contemporary adversaries or adversary positions, the robust anti-subjectivist positions soon to emerge in French thought.[38]

Finally, "Cartesian Freedom" is crucial for justifying the significance ascribed to *L'être et le néant* in this chapter insofar as this text displays how Sartre did have a *positive* meaning for "humanisme" and "humaniste," a sense that was, by implication – or by *identification*, one might say, i.e., via Sartre's affinity for Descartes – retroactively applied to *L'être et le néant*.[39] While, in *La Nausée* and in *L'être et le néant*, the two terms, if they appeared at all, had been used disparagingly – in the former, to mock a pedophiliac autodidact[40]; in the latter, to point up the vacuousness of the "'nous' humaniste,'" i.e., the "nous-objet" or idea of the totality of "humanity" under the gaze of God[41] –, in Sartre's text on Descartes's freedom their meaning is different: more abstract, positive, and, in fact, less complex.

The adjective "humanist" arises to qualify Descartes's intuition of radical freedom: "Ainsi découvrons-nous d'abord dans ses œuvres une magnifique affirmation humaniste de la

[38] See, again, Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology*, passim.
[39] Cf. Sartre's concept of "l'humanisme nitzschéen" in "Un nouveau mystique," in *Situations* I (Paris, Gallimard, 2010 [1947]), pp. 204-5.
[40] See Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), e.g., pp. 170-2.
[41] *EN*, p. 463.

liberté créatrice, qui construit le vrai pièce à pièce… et qui nous dispose à la *générosité*" (296). In turn, the nominal form is employed to characterize the *sine qua non* of "humanisme": that God's freedom be recognized as the human's own, that we grant "cette vérité, base essentielle de l'humanisme: l'homme est l'être dont l'apparition fait qu'un monde existe" (308). Sartre's "humanism" consists, then, in maintaining that each consciousness *freely* creates a world; that, in other words, the contingently given *en-soi*, the *situation* – including the given qualities of one's body – is never binding or transcendent – it never determines us from without. Rather, it is made into *what it is for oneself* according to freedom's choices.

That Sartre, after the appearance of his treatise, was implicitly claiming the label of humanism for himself – as in the famous lecture from the preceding year, "L'existentialisme est un humanisme" (1945)[42] – should not trouble us too much, nor should his retroactive attribution of the seed of this "humanism" to Descartes be condemned forthright. As Andrew Copson has recently elucidated, these terms are "akin to an analyst's categories": "humanism" itself being "a post hoc coinage," it is *eo ipso* capable of being retroactively applied to those who did not espouse this label.[43] Similarly, if Descartes's intuition of radical freedom was called "humaniste," one might label Spinoza the "antihumanist" of Sartre's text, a term that could apply as well to any of those who, in some way or another, "sacrifice human subjectivity" to something transcendent or pre-given, something *en-soi*. In *L'être et le néant*, this antihumanist role is played by the *moralistes* and their 20th-century descendants.

II. *Being and Nothingness*

I realize that I am, as it were, something intermediate between God and nothingness, or

[42] See Thomas Flynn, *Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 45-62; Edward Baring, "Humanist Pretensions: Catholics, Communists, and Sartre's Struggle For Existentialism In Postwar France," *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2010), pp. 581–609.
[43] Copson, "What is Humanism?," in *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Humanism*, Andrew Copson and A.C. Grayling, eds. (Chichester: Wiley, 2015), p. 5.

between supreme being and non-being. — Descartes[44]

Sartre, then, was as eager to hold on to his affinity to Descartes as he was to place Cartesian errors at a distance. Indeed, in *L'être et le néant*, despite the criticisms of Descartes, Sartre's positions end up looking rather Cartesian—if not in detail, at least in spirit or pathos, as well as in what may be called its heroism or ethical import. But also in terms of the adversaries against which Sartre orients his treatise: psychology and psychoanalysis, the forms of *psychologism* Sartre critiques, are portrayed as new, scientific armatures for the 17th-century proto-psychology of the *moralistes* – the writers that had once dissected the heroic self. Just as, in "Cartesian Freedom," the 17th century was a historical mirror in which to clarify the conflicts of Sartre's era and his position on freedom – and, implicitly, that of his adversaries –, in *L'être et le néant*, a silent 17th-century conflict pitting Descartes against the *moralistes* runs parallel to and informs that in which Sartre finds himself.

As I suggested above, Sartre can be seen as undertaking a project similar to Husserl's: to 'purify' Descartes of those elements – for example, the theory of the *passions* – that belied his deepest insights, in order to realize them in a new, more radical form. We have no access to any awareness of this project, to be sure, but can infer it in its outward manifestations: in those sites at which Sartre's affinity to Descartes becomes clearest. Sartre clarifies Descartes against his posthumous adversaries – the *moralistes*, psychoanalysis, Heidegger, etc. – and even against aspects of Descartes's own thought.

Descartes's *cogito* had misfired, Sartre believed. Descartes turned the ego into a substance or thing, and was unable to distinguish the psychological ego – present or constituted

[44] *M*, IV, p. 38.

in reflection – from consciousness proper, what Sartre calls "le pour-soi" or "subjectivité."[45] Further, given consciousness's or the *pour-soi*'s structure as, in every case, positional of something (consciousness *of* something) and non-positional of itself (consciousness (of) itself), "[i]l y un *cogito* préréflexif qui est la condition du *cogito* cartésien" (19).

Before consciousness reflects on itself – i.e., so as to "know" itself by and in positing itself as an *object* – it is always in a more immediate and certain relation with itself as conscious (of) itself or "présence à soi" (113). But this relation is precisely not one of identity. Indeed, recognizing the constitutive negativity or gap of non-coincidence of consciousness with itself, is essential to understanding its ontological peculiarity, as *pour-soi* or non-being, as well as its negative power vis-à-vis the world of facticity, that is, all that is *en-soi*: "L'être de la conscience, en tant que conscience, c'est d'exister *à distance de soi* comme présence à soi et cette distance nulle que l'être porte dans son être, c'est le Néant" (114). Sartre places consciousness in Nothingness, thus removing it from the blind, determinist systems of the *en-soi*. It is this Nothingness, consciousness, that englobes the world, not vice-versa. The pre-reflexive *cogito* grasps at this truth.

Sartre critiqued Descartes but kept the term *cogito*: this peculiar fact demands reflection. What might it mean? Sartre understood Descartes's *cogito* as having been perverted from within – we saw before in what way –, and as hence unable to realize its potential. The reduction to the *cogito* – the bracketing out all the objects of the world in order to perceive the nature of consciousness, and its relation to the world – was hence still an important step, indeed "la première démarche d'une philosophie" (18), if only to clear the way to the true, pre-reflexive

[45] Husserl had made the same mistake, Sartre thought (see *TE*, passim). To distinguish consciousness from the Kantian "sujet" – as well as from "ego" (which, for Sartre, comprises, as its two parts, the "moi" and the "je"), he prefers "subjectivité" ("l'immanence de soi à soi," an expression that itself might be problematic if we pose the question of identity between the two "soi"): see *EN*, pp. 23, 139s, 197. But Sartre's terminology is not always self-consistent: e.g., *EN,* p. 353.

cogito, which Descartes, hewing to the personal psychological ego, failed to perceive. The *cogito* was a form that Descartes didn't fulfill.

The Cartesian *cogito* was still a fundamental orientation, as long as one understood that reflection or knowledge was only a secondary relation of consciousness to itself; the originary, pre-reflective one is there all along.[46] The Cartesian reduction expels all *en-soi* from consciousness; the pre-reflexive *cogito* expels consciousness from itself: it is a non-epistemic self-awareness of itself as not self-identical, as consciousness (of) itself. Thereby, it ensures consciousness is never reified into an *en-soi* that could then be, as had happened before, tacitly smuggled into the *pour-soi*'s place. If Sartre maintained Descartes's term for this *cogito*, it was because he considered it to be, as it were, the exploitation of a potentiality identified by Descartes, the Cartesian *cogito* lifted to the second degree at which it ruptures with all that is given, including itself. On this condition alone was radical freedom thinkable; on this condition alone was the endless movement of Sartre's treatise possible, in its attempt to show, without reifying, the *pour-soi.*

Faithful to Descartes while 'purifying' his positions, Sartre more than once asserts the primacy of the *cogito* in *L'être et le néant*. Indeed, he has harsh words for any discourse that does not recognize its authority. In one illuminating passage, for example, he critiques *Sein und Zeit* for having bypassed the *cogito* (109-110). Given the cliché of the misguided Heideggerian orientation of the treatise,[47] and Sartre's confused attempt to associate his "humanism" with Heidegger's in the infamous 1945 conference, his critique of Heidegger should be scrutinized very closely. It might disclose something about Sartre's book that the history of his relationship

[46] CF. *TE*, p. 39, and the editor Sylvie Le Bon's helpful note 29 on that page.
[47] See Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism, and Being* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 59-103; see also Antoine Hatzenberger, "Réflexion complice et réflexion purifiante chez Sartre et Heidegger," *Philosophiques*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1998), pp. 63-71.

to Heidegger would have us not see.

In the passage, Heidegger's project is described as an attempt to avoid, on the one hand, "l'erreur substantialiste" of Descartes, and, on the other, the solipsism of Husserl, who trapped himself, as it were, between the brackets of the phenomenological reduction: "il s'est enfermé dans le *cogito*," espousing a "phénoménisme…[qui] côtoie à chaque instant l'idéalisme kantien." Heidegger broke with philosophy to find a new way. Choosing a path radically other than Descartes's or Husserl's, Heidegger "aborde directement l'analytique existentielle sans passer par le *cogito*." Thus deprived of "la dimension de conscience," *Dasein* "ne pourra jamais reconquérir cette dimension."

To be sure, *Dasein* wasn't deprived of all self-relation, Sartre avers: "Heidegger dote la réalité humaine d'une compréhension de soi qu'il définit comme un 'pro-jet ex-statique' de ses propre possibilités." Still, without the negativity, the non-coincidence or perpetual disequilibrium, of consciousness with itself, it cannot have the ontological peculiarity that is essential to it, namely, as Sartre often repeats: "comme étant ce qu'il n'est pas et n'étant pas ce qu'il est" (e.g., 32). Lacking this negativity, *Dasein* becomes stuck as what it is, as mere consciousness *of the world*, a sort of unconscious mirror passively reflecting what presents itself, be it its so-called "own possibilities." As such, this consciousness cannot have a negative or free relation to the world, and instead becomes an *en-soi* like any other: "Ce caractère ek-statique de la réalité-humaine retombe dans un en-soi chosiste et aveugle s'il ne surgit de la conscience d'ek-stase. A vrai dire, il faut partir du *cogito*" (110).

Despite Sartre's understanding of his supposed proximity to Heidegger, or his seeming inability to draw out any consequences from this critique in *L'être et le néant*, the attack on *Sein und Zeit* in this passage, if properly read, is enough to highlight an insurmountable rift between

their two projects.[48] *Dasein*, Sartre says, is tacitly reified or reduced to an entity that is what it is, to an *en-soi*. Though he doesn't spell out the consequences of this reification, the rest of his treatise allows us to extrapolate. As an *en-soi* or as comporting elements of *en-soi*, consciousness becomes passive and governed by the law of inertia like all things that are what they are.[49] In other words, *Dasein* can have nothing to do with Sartrean "conscience." The latter is pure spontaneity: "il n'y a aucune inertie dans la conscience" (96).

L'être et le néant is, *inter alia*, an attempt to dispel any ontological confusion between *pour-soi* and *en-soi* so as to ensure the sanctity of freedom, which Sartre would later identify as the third, radical sort of "Cartesian freedom," the essential basis of "humanism." The introduction of passivity into consciousness or subjectivity constituted, for Sartre, the error, and temptation, par excellence. Heidegger's *Dasein* was one step in the direction of subjecting consciousness to something transcendent to it – be it natural, as in psychological determinism, or divine, as in Spinozist necessity –, the subjection of consciousness that forms a part of we can call *antihumanism*. In other words, in perceiving the reification of subjectivity in Heidegger, Sartre shows some sign, albeit underdeveloped, of being privy to a hard, antihumanist core in *Sein und Zeit*.

But Sartre merely subjected Heidegger to the same sort of *clarification* to which other figures or disciplines are submitted in the treatise. Fundamental ontological insights, acting like principles, guide its perpetual movement. In light of what Sartre poses as consciousness's ontological peculiarity – to not be what it is, and to be what it is not – and negativity – being its

[48] I should say that, here as elsewhere, I have no business *justifying* Sartre's readings. To be sure, he is anthropologizing "Dasein," tugging it towards his own "pour-soi" or "consciousness," which he equates with "l'homme," though explicitly not with the empirical human studied by the human sciences, like psychology or anthropology. But all this – which is well known – is beside the point here. What is important is that Sartre believed he found something basic to Heidegger's undertaking in *Sein und Zeit* that set it at odds with Sartre's own project, perhaps on a level that Sartre himself did not understand.
[49] See *EN*, pp. 96, 352-3; *TE*, 49.

own nothingness, it negates the world or "nihilates itself" free from the given, including itself (58) –, *L'être et le néant*, like a machine, churns through analysis after analysis. It elucidates everyday situations so as to display the intuitive clarity of Sartre's theory, and eviscerates any sort of discourse that supposes, especially in an unreflected mode, the reification of subjectivity. The basic ontological distinction between *en-soi* and *pour-soi* is the frame through which everything can be re-described and seen anew.

But what about this basic ontological binary itself? To be sure, Sartre's distinction between *pour-soi* and *en-soi* poses a relation of "internal" rather than "external negation" between the two.[50] As such, they are not considered distinct in the sense that two objects or substances are – like *res cogitans* and *res extensa* –, where the negation of one from the other (purportedly) concerns neither in their being or essence. Hence, it seems, Sartre would avoid the soul-/mind-body dualism of Descartes or the problems it posed; but he would also be unable to claim its crucial ethical ramifications that Descartes, for example in the *Les passions de l'âme*, was at pains to justify.

In a technical sense, then, Sartre tried to guarantee that the *pour-soi* would not think itself utterly loose from *en-soi* – as in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, according to Sartre. While the *en-soi* is independent of the *pour-soi*, the latter depends on the former, if only insofar as it supplies the *pour-soi* with something to *not be*, a facticity over against which it nihilates itself: something from which to be *in*dependent. Nevertheless, this relation accorded the *en-soi* no capacity to act on the *pour-soi* – or vice versa (25). Sartre thus conceived of two "modes" or "types" of being (23). The premise of his treatise is a *radical* distinction:

les réflexions qui précèdent ont permis de distinguer deux régions d'être absolument

[50] "Par négation interne, nous entendons une relation telle entre deux êtres que celui qui est nié de l'autre qualifie l'autre, par son absence même, au cœur de son essence"; "La [négation externe] apparaît comme un pur lien d'extériorité établi entre deux êtres par un témoin" (*EN*, 211)

> tranchées: l'être du *cogito préréflexif* et l'être du phénomène. Mais, bien que le concept d'être ait ainsi cette particularité d'être scindé en deux régions incommunicables, il faut pourtant expliquer que ces régions puissent être placées sous la même rubrique. (30)

In the end, we are faced with what can hardly be called anything but an ontological dualism;[51] and Sartre's task ends up sounding a lot like the Cartesian problem of understanding the interactions between soul, or mind, and body – the two finite substances. Further, from just as basic an ontological distinction as Descartes's, Sartre would derive equally important ethical consequences. Before turning to these, one further rather Cartesian-sounding quality of consciousness should be mentioned. It will later be important for understanding Sartre's critique of psychology.

This quality is non-extension, i.e., consciousness is "*inétendu*": "le dévoilement de la spatialité de l'être ne fait qu'un avec l'appréhension non-positionnelle du pour-soi par lui-même comme *inétendu*" (215). Along the lines sketched above, Sartre is keen to maintain a relation of internal negation between the *pour-soi* and the *en-soi*, such that the former grasps itself as *not* a particular *en-soi* across from which it emerges. Hence, he assures us here – perhaps anxious lest we take his dualism for Descartes's – that "le pour-soi ne saurait être inétendu d'abord pour entrer ensuite en relation avec un étendu." For "le concept d'inétendu" is a privation: "il n'est que la négation de l'étendue." As the *pour-soi* poses the spatiality of all that is *en-soi*, "il se nie lui-même comme étendu" (215). Despite the assertion of its necessary relation to extension, the ontological goal is achieved: consciousness is non-extended. The indivisibility of consciousness is guaranteed, in distinction to all that is spatial or divisible.

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[51] See Frederic Jameson, *Sartre: The Origins of A Style* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 65 [?], 71. Cf. Warnock, who accepts Sartre's dualism uncritically, in "Introduction," xiii: "Given that there are these two kinds of beings in the world, Sartre's whole concern may be seen as an attempt to describe what exactly the relation between them is […,] to analyse the connexions between these two radically different kinds of entities." See also Descombes, *Le même et l'autre: Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933-1978)* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), pp. 64-70.

Long before, in *Les passions de l'âme*, Descartes had similarly tried to counter Aristotelian psychology so as to assure the freedom of the soul. He warned against following those who considered that, in the tumults of emotion, the soul was divided against itself, with one part lurching one way, another in a contrary direction. The so-called "combats" within the soul "qu'on a coutume d'imaginer" were not *in* the soul at all, but in fact *between* the soul and body. The "erreur" of thinking otherwise stems from not adequately drawing the line between the two natures, soul, non-extended substance, and body, extended substance.[52] The soul was indivisible: passions arose from the body and never truly impinged upon the soul's will, though we might tend "to imagine" otherwise. The soul-body distinction assured that the passions – and hence the external world of bodies, acting through the passions and sensations of the body proper – could never act directly on the soul or challenge its sovereign will.

This, at least, was Descartes's ethical project, formulated without taking into account the considerable problems it in fact encountered on its own terms. Symptomatic of his dualism, these stemmed from according the soul a corporeal seat, the pineal gland, where the soul could interact with the body, and vice versa.[53] The result was that Descartes found himself asserting, on the one hand, that the passions did indeed inflect the soul's will, all the while maintaining, on the other, that the soul was *absolutely* free and could dispose of its passions absolutely. Though Sartre

[52] *Passions*, art. 47. See. art. 30: "[l'âme] est d'une nature qui n'a aucun rapport à l'étendue ni aux dimensions ou autres propriétés de la matière dont le corps est composé." On in- or non-extension, or indivisibility, and extension, or divisibility, see *Meditations*, III, p. 30, and VI, p. 59.

[53] It is intriguing to note that, in "La liberté cartésienne" (295), Sartre cited lines from articles 34 and 41 of *Les passions de l'âme* where Descartes mentions the pineal gland and, importantly, in which he presents the unbounded power of the soul to act through it on the movements of the body — *not* vice versa. In other words, Sartre bracketed out the implications of the pineal gland theory, which in fact exposed the soul to be influenced by the movements of the body and, through them, the outside world. Indeed, it is telling that the only other citation from the *Passions* in "Cartesian Freedom" (invoked on p. 296 and quoted on p. 299) is another site of great importance for Descartes's ethics: the definition of "la générosité," the passion of freedom: justified self-esteem of knowing one's free will and being determined to make best use of it.

would not articulate the problematic aspects of Descartes's doctrine in this manner, he was critically aware of how conceiving of affectivity as a battle between the passions and the soul, like the *moralistes*, contradicted the soul's radical separation from the body or all that is *en-soi*, and, in turn, undermined the heroic concept of consciousness's total freedom.

Les *Moralistes* – Psychology and Psychoanalysis

> *Who will save us from the reification of consciousness? He would be the savior of philosophy, indeed, the creator of philosophy*. — Husserl[54]

The great menace to consciousness's self-understanding of its ontological status as distinct from the world, and the ethical importance of this self-understanding, is a form of psychologism[55] with 17th-century origins. Within the historico-philosophical space opened by *L'être et le néant*, similar in this to "La transcendance de l'ego," we are offered a striking genealogy. While Sartre traces his concept of freedom back to Descartes (and the Stoics), the psychologizing discourses that challenge this freedom lead back to proto-psychological or proto-psychoanalytic thought of the 17th-century French "moralistes." In turn, the *moralistes* are depicted as lending a voice to naive self-understanding, the sort of thinking about oneself we tend to do, in our default flight from "angoisse" or the consciousness of our freedom: "la moralité quotidienne est exclusive de l'angoisse éthique" (73). This genealogy is one of what might be called *the sciences of bad faith*: those human or social sciences that encourage us to understand ourselves as identical with our re-presentation in self-reflection or in the discourses that analyze us from without as things *en-*

[54] Unpublished 1920 manuscript (A I 36, 193b), cited in Bernet, Kern, and Marbach, *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992), p. 62: "Wer errettet uns vor der Realisierung des Bewusstseins? Das wäre der Retter der Philosophie, ja der Schöpfer der Philosophie."

[55] The critique of psychologism was a topical theme in philosophy. Sartre inherited it from Husserl and Georges Politzer. See Renaud Barbaras, *Introduction à la philosophie de Husserl* (Paris: Vrin, 2015); Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology: Lectures, Summer Semester 1925*, Scanlon, trans. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977); Politzer, *Critique des fondements de la psychologie* (Paris: Rieder, 1928).

soi.

In *L'être et le néant*, the genealogy is implicit. Rather than stated outright, it is manifest in how Sartre conceives of the *moralistes*, psychoanalysis, and psychology as all doing something similar, as united by a basic *affinity*. That is, they are united as embodiments of a single *form* of thinking, one that is implicitly at odds with Descartes's *form* of the reduction to subjectivity and immanent self-understanding, which Sartre tried to re-actualize. But, if tacit in Sartre's book, his view of 17th-century *moralistes* as exemplifying a mode of thought that feeds into modern psychology or psychoanalysis had been more explicit in "La transcendance de l'ego." There, Sartre seemed to subsume "la psychologie non-phénoménologique en general," which includes psychoanalysis, under the model of "la théorie des moralistes" or, as he also writes, "la psychologie de La Rochefoucauld."[56]

The 17th-century *moralistes* [57] offered a *form* of psychological analysis and psychologizing self-understanding later radicalized by modern psychology and psychoanalysis. Sartre saw these discourses as so unified that he posited "l'identité foncière de *toutes* les

[56] *TE*, pp. 37-8, 42, 43, 50. Indeed, when describing Sartre's text, Simone de Beauvoir perceived Sartre as tracing the domain of "l'autonomie de la conscience irefléchie" against "La Rochefoucauld et la tradition psychologique française": *La force de l'âge* (1960), cited in Le Bon's introduction, *TE*, p. 9. Michael Moriarty has commented on other, political aspects of Sartre's (and Barthes's) critique of the *moraliste* current in 17th-century French literature, in *Fallen Nature, Fallen Selves: Early Modern French Thought II* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 5-12, 402.

[57] Which 17th-century *moralistes* did Sartre have in mind? It seems that he didn't distinguish much between them: while La Rochefoucauld is named in "La transcendance de l'ego," and not in *L'être et le néant*, it is clear that Sartre is thinking of him when he evokes the *moralistes*: he mentions, for example, "les maximes et les descriptions des 'moralistes'" (390) and "le trop fameux 'amour-propre'" (674). Deeper than explicit references, though, is the fact that the entire discussion of "cette psychologie moraliste que le XVIIe s. français nous a livrée" (421) is clearly a continuation of the critique of "la psychologie de La Rochefoucauld" from "La transcendance de l'ego"(42, 43). In this tradition Sartre included Pascal, whom Sartre mentions as an example of "les plus perspicaces des moralistes" (*EN*, 608) and who is one of the writers who comes to mind when Sartre mentions "la trop fameuse 'lutte de la raison contre les passions' des moralistes" (67), Finally, the reference to the *moraliste* analysis of "caractère" (*EN*, 389-90) evokes the *Caractères* of La Bruyère.

méthodes psychologiques."[58] In what precisely does this form or method consist?

At its foundation, it entails the refusal to draw a distinction that would transfer ontological dualism of *en-soi* and *pour-soi* into the ethical realm of one's relations to oneself: the distinction between the *pour-soi* and its reified representation, the psychological "ego" or "psychè" (197), the unified domain of "le psychique" or "la succession de faits psychiques" (195). Psychologizing discourses share the *psyche* as their object (194) or field of reference, and they see the self as reducible the psyche's qualities and states.

The psychological ego, the psyche, and its objects are constituted in naïve self-reflection, "impure reflection." This is the attempt – whether actually undertaken or as one's default mode of self-understanding – to grasp oneself as another. Hoping to *know* itself in the way that it *knows* another person or any *en-soi* – i.e., from the exterior –, consciousness reflects on itself. What it finds is consciousness projected as a thing that no longer lives or *exists* its affects, as in lived existence, but that *has* them or is impinged upon by them, that battles them or is moved by them to certain actions. This is how emotional experience, for example, appears when *analyzed* either retrospectively,[59] in self-reflection, or externally, when witnessed in other people, "à travers la perception des comportements."[60]

Impure reflection is a mode of "mauvaise foi" insofar as it entails a misguided "affirmation d'identité" (196). Consciousness tricks itself into identifying with the *en-soi* constituted in reflection – the ego or psyche –, all the while implicitly grasping or intuiting itself as *not* this thing. A science like psychology then offers a systematic theory of this "monde de la réflexion": "l'objet transcendant de la conscience réflexive, c'est aussi l'objet de la science

[58] *TE*, note d, p. 54.
[59] See *EN*, p. 182 on what Sartre calls "passéification" – i.e., reification that proceeds by viewing something in the past tense while tacitly projecting this past into the present.
[60] *TE*, p. 54.

appelée psychologie."[61] As such, psychology – in the *moralistes*, in psychology proper, or in psychoanalysis – consists of a theoretical armature of analysis for the typical acts and pitfalls of self-reflection and analysis of the behavior of others. Experience becomes an *effect*, explicable by recourse to psychological qualities of the ego and the interaction between psychological "facts" or "objects."

For Sartre, *moraliste* psychology – "cette psychologie moraliste que le XVIIe s. français nous a livrée" (421) – is exemplary for splitting the unity of subjectivity or consciousness and reifying the resulting grab bag of things: passions, forces, appetites, tendencies, dispositions, characters, or habits, etc. Analyzed in these terms, the mind becomes a container, a space, in which "forces anagonistes" interact or vie for supremacy, as in "la trop fameuse 'lutte de la raison contre les passions' des moralistes" (67), a phrase that might be a loose citation of Pascal.[62] The self, that is, is subject to the same judgment that we are bound to make of others when we spontaneously analyze their actions or emotions as expressions or emanations of their "character," or deep inner "disposition."[63] The *moralistes* dealt in the confusion of "impure reflection" by reducing the self to how it appears "for others":

> Ce caractère n'existe donc que sur le plan du pour-autrui et c'est la raison pour laquelle les maximes et les descriptions des 'moralistes', c'est-à-dire des auteurs français qui ont entrepris une psychologie objective et sociale, ne se recouvrent jamais avec l'expérience vécue du sujet (389-90).

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[61] *TE*, p. 54.

[62] The phrase recalls two lines from the *Pensées*: "Guerre intestine de l'homme entre la raison et les passions" (S514/L621); "Cette guerre intérieure de la raison contre les passions" (S29/L410). The exact line had recently appeared in André Joussain's *Les passions humaines* (Paris: Flammarion, 1928), p. 67, and before that had been used in a number of positivist psychological works, and in texts by Émile Peillaube (1864-1934): "Analyse générale de la vie psychologique" (1901-2) and "La determination des éléments de la vie consciente" (1905). Peillaube is a fascinating figure: founder and director of the *Revue de philosophie*, he was a priest and important Neo-Thomist who set himself the task of integrating the new scientific psychology with the newly reinvigorated Catholic Philosophy, Neo-Scholasticism. See Henryk Misiak and Virginia Staudt, *Catholics in Psychology: A Historical Survey* (New York: McGraw-Hill,1954), pp. 162-73. Sartre cited Peillaube's 1910 book *Les Images: Essai sur la mémoire et l'imagination*, in his 1936 work *L'imagination* (Paris: PUF, 1983), p. 32.

[63] *TE*, pp. 52-4.

But the *moraliste* went a step further: he placed the ego and its interests – a *Moi* and its limitless libido or *amour-propre* – at a remove from spontaneous consciousness. Long before Paul Bénichou,[64] Sartre recognized in La Rochefoucauld a psychoanalyst *avant la letter*: he was "un des premiers à avoir fait usage, sans le nommer, de l'inconscient."[65] Indeed, the critique of moralist psychology in "La transcendance de l'ego" must be read in tandem with Sartre's critique of Freud in *L'être et le néant*. The *moralistes* posited the conflict of "forces antagonistes" (67) in the mind as the underlying chemistry of moral life, prefiguring what Sartre calls "le langage et la mythologie chosiste de la psychanalyse… [et] toutes les métaphores représentant le refoulement comme un choc de forces aveugles" (87).

In positing that consciousness is to be explained by recourse to what consciousness does not spontaneously grasp – e.g., an unconscious with its "tendances" or a latent "battle" of conflicting "passions" or faculties –, psychology, but especially the *moralistes* and psychoanalysis, devalues spontaneous and immanent, that is subjective self-understanding, which Sartre calls "intuition" (85).[66] In place of this, a sort of self-knowledge is proposed that is in fact knowledge of the self from without, from the perspective of the other: "je ne puis me connaître que par l'intermédiaire d'autrui" (85). Even more than psychology, psychoanalysis places me in an exterior position to myself, that is, in a position of *knowledge* from which I

[64] See chapter 2 for the discussion of Bénichou's influential argument.
[65] *TE*, p. 38.
[66] Note that, although Sartre distinguished between "intuition," in the sense of consciousness's immanent self-grasping, and "knowledge" per se, which demands a transcendent object distinct from and in some sense external to a subject, he nevertheless accorded intuition an epistemological status: intuition is a sort of paradoxical, immediately certain knowledge: "Il n'est d'autre connaissance qu'intuitive" (208). On the other hand, knowledge proper, i.e., of objects or what is *en-soi* (including the psyche or ego), is, for Sartre, at best only probable. Perhaps it is best to see "intuition" as similar if not identical to what Sartre calls non-positional consciousness, i.e., what is denoted by the phrases "consciousness (of) itself" or "presence à soi." This might explain how he could write that "l'intuition est la présence de la conscience à la chose" (209).

appear as a mysterious object or natural system ruled by laws of cause and effect. We are taught to suspect intuition, and to instead operate a self-*analysis* according to certain learned theoretical schema and rules, just as a natural scientist is taught to reduce effect to cause, appearance to being:[67]

> cette tentative ne pourra réussir que si je me défie de tout espèce d'intuition, que si j'applique à mon cas *du dehors* des schèmes abstraits et des règles apprises. Quant aux résultats, qu'ils soient obtenus par mes seuls efforts ou avec le concours d'un technicien, ils n'auront jamais la certitude que confère l'intuition: ils posséderont simplement la probabilité toujours croissante des hypothèses scientifiques. (85)

In this way, psychologizing discourses offer a systematic or scientific apotheosis – and new tools and words – to "impure reflection," in its quest, at the price of intuitive certitude, for a self-knowledge condemned to be no more certain than any scientific model or explanation.

If this is its structure, how do we understand psychologism's possibility and its patent successes? What precisely is the position of the psychologist, *moraliste*, or analyst, and what of the people who believe their theories and *apply* them to themselves?

Insofar as the psychologizing perspective and the self-application of it are modes of relating to others – either as objects of knowledge, or as masters for self-knowledge – they can be elucidated in terms of what Sartre calls "Les relations concrètes avec autrui" (401s).[68] Read

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[67] Cf. *TE*, p. 49, where Sartre discusses two "errors" of psychology: first, to disregard all "introspection," as in La Rochefoucauld or psychoanalysis, which demands "une interprétation symbolique" of apparent emotions in order to get at the true, underlying one, which is thus posited as unconscious; two, to accept all introspection as infallible, in the sense that one could conclude directly from an affective consciousness to the existence, as this consciousness's cause, of a feeling (Hate, Love, etc.). But note that what is erroneous for Sartre about this sort of latter judgment – typical of positive psychology as distinct from psychoanalysis – is not the reliance on intuition but rather the positing of a being – the emotion – as cause, posited *in* the psyche, of what then becomes its effect or appearance, the affective consciousness. Both sorts of judgments reify consciousness and render it passive, and both project what is in fact constituted after the fact – in reflection or analysis – into the place of temporal and ontological precedence.

[68] Sartre himself encourages us to read entire discourses or ways of thinking about people, and about ourselves, in these terms. Indeed, he writes that "toutes les conduites complexes des hommes les uns envers les autres ne sont que des enrichissements de ces deux attitudes fondamentales" (*EN*, 447), that is, of (1) love (or hate), and of (2) desire and "les attitudes derivées [du désir]," i.e., *sadism* and *masochism*.

this way, reductive psychologism supposes an attitude of (1) "indifférence envers autrui" or even of (2) "sadisme"; on the other hand, the attitude of those who believe in and apply psychological schemes to themselves – that is, the attitude of most people – is an elaborate form of (3) "masochism."

(1) The attitude towards others of "indifférence" (420) consists in implicitly adopting a godlike position as *spectator* of the world, as being the only observing consciousness of a whole world of people reduced to things. Thus, people are granted only a reified and passive psychological subjectivity that can be explained, predicted, and manipulated like any natural mechanism. *Moraliste* psychology exemplified this view of others:

> A partir de là, il sera possible de les utiliser au mieux de mes intérêts, si je connais leurs *clés* et ces 'maîtres-mots' qui peuvent déclencher leurs mécanismes. De là cette psychologie 'moraliste' que le XVIIe siècle français nous a livrée; de là ces traités du XVIIIe siècle, *Le moyen de parvenir*, de Béroalde de Verville; *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, de Laclos; *Traité de l'ambition*, de Hérault de Séchelles, qui nous livrent une connaissance *pratique* de l'autre et l'art d'agir sur lui. (421)[69]

In "indifference," the knowledge disclosed is, implicitly, *power*, the ability to intervene in the causal order thus disclosed, like any knowledge of nature produced in natural science.

But unlike in natural science, where the subject might indeed be able to take an exterior and totalizing position on a sphere of objects, in the case of people, we can do so only in bad faith. In order to refuse to admit that others – that people – have the dimension of true, free consciousness, we must be ourselves on some level in denial of our own.[70]

For Sartre, the bad faith of the totalizing perspective or "point de vue totalitaire" is typical of discourses that fail to begin with the *cogito*, with the consequence that they omit

[69] One might note here the curious inclusion of the facetious, chaotic, and often obscene *Moyen de parvenir* (1617), far more Rabelaisian than *moraliste*, alongside two works written more than a century later and more obviously representative of what Sartre has in mind. Also, note that the de Séchelles book – a collection of maxims – is in fact entitled *Théorie de l'ambition* (not *Traité*).

[70] "Sadism" towards others hence in some sense supposes a degree of "masochism" towards oneself (and vice versa).

consciousness, apply a problematic external perspective on all people, and are hence unable to distinguish between consciousness – "rigoureusement irréductible à la connaissance" – and the *objects* of knowledge (282-3). Hegel is thus critiqued by Sartre for having unwittingly assumed a position from nowhere, and having "forgotten himself" as *pour-soi*: "Mais si Hegel s'oublie, nous ne pouvons oublier Hegel. Cela signifie que nous sommes renvoyé au *cogito*" (282-3).

(2) In reducing others to things and in attaining practical knowledge by which they might be manipulated, "indifference" is on its way to "sadism" (439-40). The sadist actively delights in acting on others as *en-soi*, and in forcing them to see themselves as no more than their utter, material facticity, what Sartre calls "la chair." The sadist violently "incarnates" (439) the other, renders the other "flesh." Flesh is the furthest from the "non-extended," spontaneous *pour-soi*: it is pure corporeality, pure extension, pure *en-soi*. When flesh manifests itself unjustified by any situation or intention of consciousness, it produces "the obscene." In conjuring the obscene, the sadist reveals to the other "l'inertie de sa chair" (441), i.e., what is not independent from but totally subject to the blind laws of nature. The sadist seeks the victim's free and utter self-identification with pure, non-conscious flesh (443).

But this aporetic goal – the willful abdication of free consciousness, a free abandonment of freedom – is precisely that of psychologizing discourses as understood by Sartre. They desire the self-application of their reduction of subjectivity to psychic "facts" or "objects" or "forces," etc. in their law-governed interactions. Further, like the sadist, who uses force "pour incarner autrui" (439), psychologism relies on a certain "violence" to introduce inert objects *into* subjectivity: "ces tendances ou ces forces, qu'on insère par violence dans la psychè" (235). If the sadist reduces the victim to a material body determined by mechanistic laws of motion, the psychologist reduces subjectivity proper, consciousness, to a passive domain, a "corps

psychique" (377) characterized by "l'inertie et l'absence de toute transcendance" (353): "la psychologie non-phénoménologique en général…est une psychologie de l'inerte."[71] Like Nature, then, the psychic field posited by psychology is a domain of objects *en-soi* ruled by determinist laws. Psychologism has as its horizon a total "déterminisme psychologique," which is the analogue of natural "déterminisme universel" (60). Freedom is negated by the "violent" introduction of a causal chain into subjectivity. The latter becomes either the mere spectator, the site in which this chain unfolds, or nothing but an effect of this chain itself (484).

Sartre's critique of the projection into consciousness of a spatial domain like that supposed in natural science is particularly intriguing for the way in which it points up psychologism's rationality, its scientism, as unwitting irrationality, religious superstition, or magical-thinking. For the psychological facts or objects – states, dispositions, instincts, passions, etc. – are related to one another like things in the world, i.e., "en pure relation d'extériorité" (235), by external negation. As such, they are deprived of any real force by which they could interact with one another. Our image of their interaction is achieved only by sleight of hand, with the introduction of a magical interaction at a distance into what is supposed to be a tight, mechanist system. A tacit animism, that is, underlies this sort of determinism. Psychoanalysis makes recourse to "une unité magique reliant les phénomènes à distance" (88), like Proust, who is cast by Sartre as the modern heir to the *moralistes* and as the literary counterpart to modern psychology and psychoanalysis.[72] In his lengthy psychological dissections of the quasi-human interactions between psychic objects – pleasures, emotions, etc. –, Proust displays the irrational presuppositions of seemingly rational psychological or psychoanalytic analyses:

On essaie de nous entraîner vers une interprétation mécaniste du psychique… Et

[71] *TE*, p. 50.
[72] In *EN*, compare Sartre's critique of psychoanalysis, p. 87-88, to the passage on Proust, 203-5; see also *TE*, p. 50.

> pourtant, on ne peut s'empêcher de nous montrer entre les états d'étranges relations presque interhumaines (créer, fabriquer, ajouter) qui laisseraient presque supposer que ces objets psychiques sont des agents animés. Sous l'analyse de Proust, l'analyse intellectualiste. (204)

There is, then, a certain occult quality to psychological and psychoanalytic explanations: as consciousness (the *pour-soi*) is reified, in turn what is supposed to be *en-soi* takes on something of a personhood or consciousness (88). Psychologism is a sort of neo-Aristotelianism; Sartre attacked its superstitions, like Descartes centuries before, who attempted to dispel the animist Scholastic imagination of the passions.

(3) But psychological reduction, like the sadist, cannot function without a victim, and a willing victim is even better. Like the sadist's prey, someone who believes, and self-applies, the psychological reduction can be called a "masochist." The masochist delights in the "abdication de [s]a transcendance": he seeks to shed his subjectivity and freedom, to become only inert flesh subject to outside forces (417-8). Just so, belief in psychological explanations or determinisms is masochist insofar as it entails thinking oneself subject to an objective, psychic sphere that transcends consciousness and is beyond control: "Le sens profond du déterminisme, c'est d'établir en nous une existence sans faille d'existence en soi" (484).

Yet this flight from freedom – the self-alienation of consciousness in the discourse of the other – does not arise with the constitution of analytic psychological discourses. Masochism is already at the core of bad faith. Just as the *moralistes*, or psychoanalysis, elevate the results of "impure reflection" (our default self-understanding) to the level of theory or science, so do psychological reductionism and determinism arise only on the basis of a fundamental mode of relating to oneself. They are scientific versions of our default bad faith and evasion of the freedom disclosed in anxiety:

Tout se passe en effet comme si notre conduite essentielle et immédiate vis-à-vis de

> l'angoisse, c'était la fuite. Le déterminisme psychologique, avant d'être une conception théorique, est d'abord une conduite d'excuse ou, si l'on veut, le fondement de toutes les conduites d'excuse. Il est une conduite réflexive vis-à-vis de l'angoisse, il affirme qu'il y a en nous des forces antagonistes dont le type d'existence est comparable à celui des choses, il tente de combler les vides qui nous entourent, de rétablir les liens du passé au présent, du présent au futur, il nous pourvoit d'une *nature* productrice de nos actes et ces actes mêmes il en fait des transcendants, il les dote d'une inertie et d'une existence d'extériorité qui leur assignent leur fondement en autre chose qu'en eux-mêmes et qui rassurent éminemment parce qu'elles constituent un jeu permanent d'*excuses*, il nie cette transcendance de la réalité-humaine qui la fait émerger dans l'angoisse par delà sa propre essence; du même coup, en nous réduisant *à n'être jamais que ce que nous sommes*, il réintroduit en nous la positivité absolue de l'être-en-soi et, par là, nous réintègre au sein de l'être. Mais ce déterminisme, défense réflexive contre l'angoisse, ne se donne pas comme une *intuition* réflexive. Il ne peut rien contre *l'évidence* de la liberté, aussi se donne-t-il comme croyance de refuge, comme terme idéal vers lequel nous pouvons fuir l'angoisse. (75)

Determinism is a "croyance de refuge," Sartre writes: a superstition or dogma that poses as rational while in fact relying on a libidinal flight from freedom and an occult belief in the animation of psychic objects. The prima facie rational belief that humans have an *essence* or *nature* that causes their acts and psychic states (desires, emotions, etc.) is in fact a dogmatic way of reassuring people of their impotence and lack of responsibility. But anxiety is primary and irreducible; it arises from the very ontological condition, the negativity, of the *pour-soi*. Determinism is *reactionary* and, as such, always includes what it opposes; in other words, it is always beginning from or tending to failure.

Notwithstanding full-fledged psychological determinism, even the belief in the *free* ego can be seen as a sort of masochistic, mystical thinking. For the ego, my ego, is like a God inside of me, acting through me, as I look on: "comme un petit Dieu qui m'habiterait… Fiction éminemment rassurante puisque la liberté a été enfoncée au sein d'un être opaque" (77). The "fiction" of the ego is "reassuring" because it provides an explanatory scheme for my behavior, by recourse to the purportedly objective qualities, dispositions, or tendencies of my ego or nature. Thinking this way, I am relieved of recognizing the utter spontaneity of my actions, the

freedom of my consciousness, at any given moment, and instead think them as necessarily tied to my ego. Though this is the condition of possibility of bad faith, it seems to be a practical necessity for everyday life. Indeed, "la fonction essentielle de l'ego" is "pratique": "de masquer à la conscience sa propre spontanéité," as Sartre writes in "La transcendance de l'ego" (81). The ego is the safeguard, the *garde-fou* of consciousness against the awful negativity of utter freedom:

> Tout se passe donc comme si la conscience constituait l'Ego comme une fausse représentation d'elle-même, comme si elle s'hypnotisait sur cet Ego qu'elle a constitué, s'y absorbait, comme si elle en faisait sa sauvegarde et sa loi. (82)

Belief in the ego is a way to flee anxiety and the horror of starting anew, utterly undetermined from without, at any given moment. Freedom is projected into the ego, this god inside; and consciousness, abdicating its god-like freedom, drowns itself in its image. Sartre's ambition in *L'être et le néant* was to display this willful abdication and hence show that there was, at every moment, the possibility of reversing this reversal, of emerging from the spell of bad faith into the horrible lucidity of anxiety. "Humanism" entailed recognizing that the God or any entities or laws that religion explicitly, or psychologism implicitly, posited as transcending and determining the self, were nothing other than consciousness's mirror image, the demons it created to elude anxiety.

Of the psychic demons we like to imagine as haunting our minds, *L'être et le néant* seems to focus on the one with which the *moralistes* "populate the mind": emotions or "passions" (67).[73] Emotions are "psychic objects" imagined as "states" of the ego and as something transcendent, that is, that "happens to me" (197) or that presents itself as "a sort of

[73] For Sartre's theory of emotions, see Detmer, *Sartre*, pp. 35s; Anthony Hatzimoysis, *The Philosophy of Sartre*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 41-77.

visitation."[74] They are thus imagined as mysterious things or "forces" that combat each other, and that *cause* us to do things.[75] But only if we pretend that we are not aware of consciousness's non-identity with the psyche, only if we choose to ignore the negativity and non-being of consciousness, can we think of ourselves as a thing pushed around by other things called emotions, according to "une pscyhologie des états."[76]

Sartre posits that emotions, as actually existed by consciousness, are never endured passively, but are rather *auto-affections*. On a fundamental level, each person freely makes a basic choice whether to relate to the world emotionally, that is irrationally, as to a world on which I try to act *magically*; or voluntarily, as a world on which I choose to act rationally (488-9).[77] On a more everyday level, in experience consciousness chooses an affective mode and, in so doing, marks its ontological non-coincidence with it: "il n'y a aucune inertie dans la conscience. Si je me fais triste c'est que je ne *suis* pas triste; l'être de la tristesse m'échappe par et dans l'acte même par quoi je m'en affecte" (96). Far from being overwhelmed by emotions, according to popular psychology, we are in fact often underwhelmed by them. As a result of the negativity that separates consciousness from itself and from the world, our suffering never takes on the consistency of a thing that simply is what it is. Thus the ironic quip: "On souffre et on souffre de ne pas souffrir assez" (127).

Like "impure reflection" or psychological analysis, art and language represent emotions as things *en-soi*; they realize the ideal or "value" of the emotion, which existence never delivers (127-8). Though, in bad faith, when looking to rid ourselves of responsibility, we would like to

[74] See also *TE*, pp. 45-51. Cf. the phenomenology of nausea in *La nausée*.
[75] Sartre was arguably correct in attributing this "transcendent" view of emotion to a common (both lay and specialized) view of emotion, at least in the West. See Catherine Lutz's dissection of the Western understanding of emotion, from her article, "Depression and the Translation of Emotional Worlds," in A. Kleinman and B. Good, eds. *Culture and Depression* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1985), pp. 77-82.
[76] *TE*, 50.
[77] See Sartre, *Esquisse d'une théorie des emotions* (Paris: Hermann & Cie, 1939).

believe that emotional experience might "happen to" us as it is represented in these discourses and media – that it might tear us in half, press tears from our eyes, and carry us away –, consciousness is always aware of emotion as a charade or "comédie de souffrir," as an act that must be played in such a way, with certain lines and gestures, and with a certain degree of effort (128).

If we properly grasp ourselves and purify our "impure" self-understanding, if we refuse to identify with how we are re-presented, on Sartre's terms we should realize that there is no struggle to be had with emotions. Even when emotions, like fear, shame, and pride, arise from the feeling of ourselves as objects-for-others when they freely set their gaze upon us – "notre façon d'éprouver affectivement notre être-pour-autrui" –, consciousness is always free to resist this alienating reification and to rend itself from the other's gaze, transcending both its *être-pour-autrui* and the situation into which the latter is embedded (327-330). Strictly speaking there is no being seized unawares or surprised by emotions, or anything else, for Sartre: "Il n'est jamais rien qui étonne, dans le monde, rien qui surprenne, à moins que nous ne nous déterminions nous-mêmes à l'étonnement" (552). Hyperbolically heroic, Sartrean consciousness sits like a rock amid rushing water.

In this, Sartre returned to Descartes's project all the while critiquing his ultimately *moraliste* or proto-psychologist notion that passions were natural things, determined from without, which pressed upon and battled with the soul, *in* the mind (201; 485-9). In dispelling the irrational illusions of the psyche, which spatialized and divided consciousness – in operating, that is, an *enlightenment* of emotion, which cast out the eerie demons and powers and revealed human agency where it was apparently most absent –, Sartre reenacted Descartes's expulsion of

passions from the non-extended soul. Only the reified ego could be *affected* by a thing.[78] Consciousness itself has nothing to do with the determinist causal scheme in which interactions between things *en-soi* take place. The heroic ontological and ethical aspects of Descartes's *Passions* are maintained, while the problematic scientist ones are abstracted away.

As in Descartes's *Passions*, in which the passion of "générosité" arises from the recognition of freedom, there are privileged affects in *L'être et le néant*. *Angoisse*, of course, is one, in which consciousness grasps itself as negativity or freedom. But there is a positive or, as it were, an active correlate to the more reflexive affect of anxiety: *orgueil*. Translation here is problematic: "orgueil" is precisely not *pride*, for which Sartre uses the term "fierté" (or "vanité"). "Pride" is an inauthentic attitude or mode of bad faith (329-330). *Orgueil*, on the other hand, is one of the two "authentic attitudes":

> En un mot il y a deux attitudes authentiques: celle par laquelle je reconnais autrui comme le sujet par qui je viens à l'objectité — c'est la honte; celle par laquelle je me saisis comme le projet libre par qui autrui vient à l'être-autrui — c'est l'orgueil ou affirmation de ma liberté en face d'autrui-objet (330).

But "shame" is not a goal for Sartre. On the contrary, shame involves a negation of freedom: as the basic feeling of one's "être-objet," reduced in the eyes of another qua sovereign subject, shame is the pre-condition for masochism (418). The latter is delight in shame: it is the refusal to transcend one's shameful "être-objet" in freedom, a refusal to *not* coincide with what one supposedly is. "Orgueil," on the other hand, is the "affirmation" of freedom. While pride, like shame, relies on the gaze of the other, this *orgueil* is esteem in one's own eyes. Affirmation moves past the negative terror of anxiety into the positive acceptance of freedom. *Orgueil*, as the refusal of bad faith, is linked to anxiety as its authentic resolution. And both are peculiar insofar as Sartre seems to suggest that they are, unlike normal emotions, not auto-affections made in bad

[78] *TE*, 64.

faith, but ones that emerge from the latter's suppression.

"Orgueil," which, I am arguing, is Sartre's version of Cartesian "générosité," makes its other appearance in one of the most ethically-charged passages in *L'être et le néant*. In "Liberté et responsabilité," a late section of the book explicitly devoted to moral considerations, Sartre's tone becomes emphatically exhortative. Though it is easy to overlook, he returns to the notion of justified "orgueil":

> La conséquence essentielle de nos remarques antérieures, c'est que l'homme, étant condamné à être libre, porte le poids du monde tout entier sur ses épaules: il est responsable du monde et de lui-même comme manière d'être. Nous prenons le mot de 'responsabilité' en son sens banal de 'conscience (d')être l'auteur incontestable d'un événement ou d'un objet'. En ce sens, la responsabilité du pour-soi est accablante, puisqu'il est celui par qui il se fait qu'*il y ait* un monde ; et, puisqu'il est aussi celui qui *se fait être*, quelle que soit la situation où il se trouve, le pour-soi doit assumer entièrement cette situation avec son coefficient d'adversité propre, fût-il insoutenable ; il doit l'assumer avec la conscience orgueilleuse d'en être l'auteur, car les pires inconvénients ou les pires menaces qui risquent d'atteindre ma personne n'ont de sens que par mon projet ; et c'est sur le fond de l'engagement que je suis qu'ils paraissent. Il est donc insensé de songer à se plaindre, puisque rien d'étranger n'a décidé de ce que nous ressentions, de ce que nous vivions ou de ce que nous sommes. […] Il n'y a aucune contrainte, car la contrainte ne saurait avoir aucune prise sur une liberté. (598-9)

An *orgueil* like that which Sartre would attribute to Descartes[79] – "the *man*," not the thinker – and to Richelieu or Corneille, appears as the only authentic attitude to adopt in active life. *Orgueil* is the feeling of autonomy in the face of others – or of the authority of discourses of others, everyday or scientific – and the world of facticity, the situation.

To be sure, Sartre did not want autonomy or freedom to be understood as total *power* to have or do whatever one desires. He understands himself as following Descartes and the Stoics in positing freedom as the capacity to willfully dispose of the given by changing one's relation to it, i.e., as negativity (529; 59). In other words, one can sense a tension within Sartre's understanding of freedom similar to that uncovered, in chapter 1, in Descartes's *Passions.*

[79] In "La liberté cartésienne" (304): "ce sentiment orgueilleux d'être le véritable auteur de ses actes et le créateur continuel de ses entreprises."

Alongside Sartre's rather heroic idiom for describing consciousness in its inalienable freedom of immanent or self-determination, there is, in other words, a rather Stoic-sounding ethics of endurance in *L'être et le néant*. Consciousness's freedom vis-à-vis the situation seems close to a negative freedom. Though infinite, its positive sphere might be limited to the self: "Descartes, le premier, reconnaissait à la fois que la volonté est infinie et qu'il faut 'tâcher à nous vaincre plutôt que la fortune'" (527).

However, given the notion, adapted from Husserl's phenomenology, that the "world" itself, or any given *en-soi*, has meaning or importance only *for* and by a consciousness, in *L'être et le néant* the Stoic or negative of freedom could constantly be conflated with a positivity or, as Sartre wrote in "Cartesian Freedom," a creativity. Consciousness acts freely and freely relates to the world, that is, makes of it what it is. Only from without, i.e., from the perspective of the other, is freedom curtailed; from within, save in bad faith, freedom is infinite: "La liberté est totale et infinie, ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'elle *n'ait pas* de limites mais qu'elle *ne les rencontre* jamais" (576).

Even death, for Sartre, can be no limit, for it does not partake of the *pour-soi*'s existence. He critiques Heidegger for having stressed the mortal dimension in the analysis of *Dasein*: rather than being "the *ownmost* possibility,"[80] death was precisely what could not occupy this position, for Sartre: "la mort ne saurait être ma possibilité propre; elle ne saurait même pas être une de *mes* possibilités" (585). As with the other critique of Heidegger, this one is really taking aim at the absence of distinction between *pour-soi* and *en-soi*. For the introduction of death – the mortality of flesh – into consciousness is equivalent to its reification, to seeing it from without, a perspective for which it is indeed a transient thing, subject to the same natural laws as any other.

[80] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* §53, p.

Sartre contra The Human Sciences: Proto-Structuralism and Antihumanism

> *Jeder, der ernstlich Philosoph werden will, muß sich einmal im Leben auf sich selbst zurückziehen und in sich den Umsturz aller vorgegebenen Wissenschaften und ihren Neubau versuchen*.
> — Husserl[81]

While he doesn't make the connection explicit, it is clear that, for Sartre, the same mortification of consciousness as found in Heidegger underlies the human and social sciences – "les sciences humaines," in French. Physiology works with what has been revealed through the dissections of anatomy, which studies, in the corpse, the pure "extériorité" of the human (388-9).[82] Just so the sciences that reduce humans to the dissection of their given facticity or situation –historical, social, biological, psychological, etc. – treat subjectivity as what is already-passed,[83] as what has already become just a complex of inert matter, a corpse. In doing so, their champions and acolytes partake of what Sartre calls "l'esprit de sérieux qui, comme on sait, règne sur le monde" (674).

This "esprit" is worldly: it prioritizes the *en-soi* over the *pour-soi*, subjecting the latter to what is transcendent to it. Marx is credited with being a major figure in its modern theoretical constitution: "Marx a posé le dogme premier du sérieux lorsqu'il a affirmé la priorité de l'objet sur le sujet et l'homme est sérieux quand il se prend pour un objet" (626).[84] But Marx is only the historical materialist analogue of the *moraliste*, psychologist, or psychoanalyst. For Sartre, these discourses all relied on the reduction of subjectivity to its contingent material *situation*. All

[81] *Pariser Vorträge* in *Cart. Med*., p. 4.
[82] Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §276.
[83] Cf. *EN*, pp. 238-9: "Le sens du réalisme, du naturalisme et du matérialisme est au passé: ces trois philosophies sont des descriptions du passé come s'il était présent." "C'est pour avoir contemplé le psychique *au passé* que les psychologues ont prétendu que la conscience était une qualité qui pouvait ou non l'affecter, sans le modifier dans son être" (155). Robert Wicks has highlighted the importance of the reaction to science in 20th-c. French thought, in *Modern French Philosophy: From Existentialism to Postmodernism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 1-6.
[84] For Sartre's confrontation with Marxism, see Aronson, "Sartre and Marxism: A Double Retrospective," *Sartre Studies International*, vol. 1, no. 1/2 (1995), pp. 21-36.

theorized from the exterior and totalizing "point de vue totalitaire" from which subjectivity could only appear as an effect of circumstances, passions, drives, linguistic norms, and social customs or rules. While not as apparent in the text as psychology or psychoanalysis, sociology and linguistics should be included among the targets of Sartre's phenomenological ontology.

Sociology was not explicitly present in *L'être et le néant*.[85] But an earlier text shows that he must have had it in mind when he later critiqued psychologism, Marxism, or the *moralistes*. Nearly twenty years before *L'être et le néant* appeared, in 1927 a student journal printed Sartre's text on "The Theory of the State" in contemporary French thought.[86] This article dates from well before Sartre's discovery of phenomenology. That is, the preoccupation with the human sciences – as a general form of thought, if not each individually –, predated his mature philosophical career. For sociology occupies a structurally identical role in the 1927 article to that played by psychoanalysis or Marxism in the 1943 treatise, and Spinozism in the text on "Cartesian Freedom": namely, as a discourse that subjects the individual to a pre-established, transcendent order.

"French sociology," Sartre writes, posits the existence of a rather peculiar sort of facts ("faits sui generis"): "représentations collectives." These are thought to exist outside the individual, like so many rules or laws that secretly govern members of the society. Sartre cites from Émile Durkheim's elucidation of "social facts," the proper object of the science of sociology, in *Règles de la méthode sociologique* (1895):[87]

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[85] The only occurrence of the term in *EN* is for purposes of an analogy: "la métaphysique est à l'ontologie comme l'histoire à la sociologie" (667).

[86] "La théorie de l'État dans la pensée française d'aujourd'hui" (1927), republished in *Revue française de science politique,* vol. 47 (1997), pp. 89-106. Sartre also critiques sociology in "Un nouveau mystique" (cited above).

[87] See *Règles de la méthode sociologique* (Paris: Alcan, 1895), pp. 6-7. As was not rare for him, Sartre did not cite Durkheim verbatim, but rather wove together theoretical affirmations selected from three contiguous paragraphs. In particular, what Sartre conveys with the last line from the citation above is, in

> Il y a des manières d'agir, de penser, de sentir, qui présentent cette remarquable propriété qu'elles existent hors des consciences individuelles. En outre, ces types de conduites ou de pensée sont doués d'une puissance impérative et coercitive en vertu de laquelle ils s'imposent à l'individu. Ils ne peuvent avoir d'autres substrats que la Société, soit la Société politique dans son intégralité, soit quelqu'un des groupes partiels qu'elle renferme… (31)

Sartre, not Durkheim, capitalized "Society." He did so to bring out what he saw as the hidden metaphysics at the basis of the science of sociology. While the supposition of "social facts" is French sociology's "postulat scientifique," this in turn has for its condition of possibility an unstated "postulat métaphysique" by which the very substratum of sociology's facts, Society, comes into being as "un être à part, ayant sa vie propre et supérieure aux individus qui la composent" (33). This metaphysical postulate is that of "synthèse créatrice," i.e., that "'le Tout est supérieur à la somme de ses parties'" or that "de l'addition des parties peut surgir quelque chose de nouveau" (33).[88] For Sartre, the problem with this postulate snuck in by sociology is that it assumes a perspective from which the totality and the parts could be distinguished one from the other, and then compared. In other words, the adoption of a position similar to what he would later call, in reference to Hegel, the "point de vue totalitaire," is unjustifiable and in the end dogmatic: "Il y a donc, en sociologie française, un recours original ou final, comme on voudra, à une notion *métaphysique* fort douteuse" (33).

Only God, as His position is described in *L'être et le néant* (282; 329), would be capable of adopting the utterly external view from which to determine the real existence of "society" and

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Durkheim's paragraph, expressed with greater precision (and more advantageously for Sartre's purposes in the article). For Durkheim clearly distinguishes between the individual as substance or substrate and the substrate of social facts as posited by sociology, "society" – or, as Sartre wrote it, "Society": "Voilà donc un ordre de faits qui présentent des caractères très spéciaux […] Ils constituent donc une espèce nouvelle et c'est à eux que doit être donnée et réservée la qualification de *sociaux*. Elle leur convient ; car il est clair que, n'ayant pas l'individu pour substrat, ils ne peuvent en avoir d'autre que la société …" (8).

[88] The concept of "creative synthesis" was first described by Wilhelm Wundt. See Arthur L. Blumenthal, "A Wundt Primer: The Operating Characteristics of Consciousness," in *Wilhelm Wundt in History: The Making of a Scientific Psychology*, Rieber and Robinson, eds. (New York: Kluwer, 2001), pp. 129s.

its "facts" – customs, values, norms, rules, behaviors, etc. – as distinct from and transcendent to individuals. Furthermore, it is only from this position, impossible for consciousness proper,[89] that *relativism* becomes possible as a mode of thought. Relativism, when discussed by Sartre, refers to the notion that meanings exist *en-soi* as objects in the world, such that they are revealed differently, and in each case validly, to discrete perspectives on them (359). But relativism is also, implicitly, a consequence of the idea that subjectivity or some aspect of it is produced, as an effect, by something external to it (history, society, ideology, etc.). Both modes of relativism rely on the totalizing, external position, from which:

> [b]ien plus qu'il ne paraît 'se faire', l'homme semble 'être fait' par le climat et la terre, la race et la classe, la langue, l'histoire de la collectivité dont il fait partie, l'hérédité, les circonstance individuelles de son enfance, les habitudes acquises, les grands et les petits événements de sa vie. (527).

Marxism was mentioned as a manifestation of this "esprit de sérieux." But we should also recall psychoanalysis and *moraliste* psychology, sociology, as understood by Sartre's 1927 article, or Pascal's *moraliste* concept of "la force de la coutume," discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis. What these discourses have in common is what Sartre considered the unspoken ground of sociology: an unjustified metaphysics positing beings *en-soi* that transcend and constitute subjectivity. In other words, though sociology does not make an explicit appearance in *L'être et le néant*, it is unmistakable that the way in which Sartre attempted to expose its hidden metaphysics has an intimate connection with how he later depicted the *moralistes*, psychologism, and Marxism—and linguistics.

In the study of language, Sartre found another mode of what he considered a

[89] See *EN*, p. 595: "il n'y a aucun point de vue absolue duquel on puisse se placer pour comparer des situations différentes, chaque personne ne réalise qu'une situation: *la sienne.*" See also p. 282: "je ne puis transcender mon être vers une relation réciproque et universelle d'où je pourrais voir comme équivalents à la fois mon être et celui des autres: je dois, au contraire, m'établir *dans mon être* et poser le problème d'autrui à partir de mon être."

problematically metaphysical form of thinking.[90] Based on the sparse material on this science in the book, Sartre viewed linguistics on analogy with psychology or psychoanalysis: as a science that conferred independent being, and a certain coercive power, upon certain abstract entities, in this case linguistic ones: the "words" of which a "language" or "dialect" is made, and the "rules" or "laws" that govern any possible use:

> Les recherches des linguistes peuvent ici tromper: leur statistiques mettent au jour des constantes, des déformations phonétiques ou sémantiques d'un type donné, elles permettent de reconstituer l'évolution d'un phonème ou d'un morphème dans une période donnée, en sorte qu'il semble que le *mot* ou la *règle syntaxique* soit une réalité individuelle, avec sa signification et son histoire. […] Mais c'est qu'on ne se place pas sur le véritable terrain du concret. (559)

From the perspective of consciousness, the real "concrete terrain" for Sartre, language use is not the law-governed choice and combination of *words,* but a spontaneous production of *phrases* bound by no external limit or laws, in view of a freely chosen intention or "signification": "Ainsi est-ce à l'intérieur du projet libre de la phrase que s'organisent les lois du langage; c'est en parlant que je fais la grammaire; la liberté est le seul fondement possible des lois de la langue" (562).[91]

What linguistics (and later structuralists) would consider the pre-given materiality, rules, and basic building blocks of a language are, for Sartre, subordinate to consciousness's intended signification or *designation*.[92] The intention is ontologically originary to and organizes the

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[90] For another reading of Sartre on language, see Thomas W. Busch, *Circulating Being: From Embodiment to Incorporation. Essays on Late Existentialism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), pp. 62-9.

[91] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, "Sur la phénoménologie du langage" (1951), in *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 105-22.

[92] It is telling that Sartre's understanding of language accords a central if not exclusive role to *designation*, as if the phrase's primary function, as well as the "intention" underlying it, was to signify some thing, i.e., something external, not a meaning or concept (see *EN* 560-2). The linguistic "sign", for Sartre, is typified by its ideal transparency vis-à-vis what it signifies or designates, and its utter servility, like the body to which it is compared, with respect to the ends for which consciousness makes use of it (see *EN*, 370). That this is Sartre's understanding of language, one manifestly distinct from and indeed

material elements it uses, not vice versa: "ni les mots, ni la syntaxe, ni les 'phrases toutes faites' ne préexistent l'usage qu'on en fait" (560). This gnomic position went against the grain of linguistics and set Sartre at odds, *pre facto*, with the structuralists and others who would be influenced by the linguistics developed by Saussure.

But Sartre didn't mention any linguists in his book. Instead, a simple note singled out one theorist of language as exemplary of what he took linguistics to be doing,[93] Brice Parain (1897-1971).[94] This detail carries crucial importance, and not just for understanding Sartre's view of the human sciences. If one reads the Parain works Sartre had in mind, it becomes clear that his presence in *L'être et le néant*, as yet another adversary to critique, is fascinating evidence for the argument that 17th-century conflicts resurfaced in the book.

Parain is primarily thought of as Sartre's editor at Gallimard for *La Nausée*.[95] While this

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lagging behind developments in linguistics after Saussure, is confirmed by Sartre's comments on language in *Qu'est-ce que la litérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948). There, poetry is disparaged with respect to prose, since the former, like music and the plastic arts, turns its representational medium into a thing or being in its own right, carrying no clear signification and making it politically ambiguous. Since poetry's materials are linguistic signs, it constitutes a linguistic perversion – "le langage à l'envers" –, for language, Sartre thinks, is a conventional "instrument" that can and should be freely *used*, as in prose and ordinary speech, to designate and reveal things, aspects of the world and of the human condition, and truth (11-48). Later French thinkers inspired by Saussurian linguistics would contest precisely these two doctrines, that of the referential function and transparency of linguistic signs, and that of the subject's capacity to freely dispose of them: signs become opaque and begin to rule over the subjects that use them. Poetry, Sartre thought, was distinct from prose insofar as it did not use (*s'en servir*) but served language (*servir*) (17). For the thinkers in question, this became not the marginal but natural relation of the subject to language. Such developments were adumbrated, in a less systematic fashion, in the work of Brice Parain, discussed below.

[93] True, early in "Aller et retour," Sartre would differentiate between Parain's approach to language and the more impersonal one of the "linguiste": "Aller et retour," in *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010 [1947]), p. 220. However, in the earlier *L'être et le néant*, Parain is clearly cited as exemplary of the linguist's reification of language – as a structure with certain laws – over against the subject. Furthermore, even in "Aller et retour" itself, by the end of the article Parain has taken on the same status, even though his reification of language is ultimately grounded not through statistical or philological evidence, as in linguistics, but via recourse to God. In other words, although the approaches of Parain and the linguists are different, for Sartre their results are the same.

[94] On Parain, see *Brice Parain: Un homme de parole*, Besseyre, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

[95] Parain might also be remembered for his cameo as "le philosophe" in Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1962), tableau 11. Many of the themes he discusses with the female protagonist in the film are dealt with in the works I mention here. Relevant to the current discussion is also Parain's dialogue with Father R.P.

was his professional relation to Sartre, his philosophical one is as complicated as it is little known. After a period of intense, engaged commitment to the Communist Party (1929-33), in the books he published in the early 1940s, Parain showed himself to be an extraordinarily subtle thinker and a Christian, who placed himself in the lineage of Plato and Pascal, and posited human finitude in the face of language. In Parain's linguistic thought, the religious and metaphysical aspects of the human sciences that Sartre critiques come explicitly to the fore. Further, Parain's allegiance to Pascal over Descartes – and Plato over Aristotle – makes a striking counterpart to Sartre's affinity for Descartes.

An entire study could be devoted to the silent dialogue with Parain in *L'être et le néant*, and how it relates to Sartre's gnomic statements on language. While this debate began with the footnote, it was boisterously pursued by Sartre the following year, in "Aller et Retour" (1944), an article whose sheer length confirms the importance Parain held for Sartre.[96] The article purports to be a sort of review of Parain's doctoral thesis, *Recherches sur la nature et la fonction du langage* (1942), published the same year as his more condensed "thèse complémentaire," *Essai sur le logos platonicien*.[97] But "Aller et retour" is no typical review: Sartre surveys Parain's entire career up to date, seeing it as somewhat exemplary of the ethical situation of the WWI generation. That is, from heroic utopianism – a belief in "la plasticité de la nature humaine" –

Ducarle on Pascal, which another prominent New Wave director, Eric Rohmer, filmed in 1965. But Parain is also known for the comments he made during the discussion following Derrida's January 1968 talk on *différance*. Among other things, Parain stated that what Derrida designated by this neologism was in fact "the God of negative theology." Derrida defended himself in the strongest terms. See *Derrida and 'Différance,'* Wood and Bernasconi, eds. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 84-5.

[96] "Aller et retour" was the longest of the texts (among them "La liberté cartésienne") printed in the 1947 *Situations I*. The original 1944 text was slightly altered when it was printed in the volume.

[97] Parain, *Recherches sur la nature et la fonction du langage* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942); *Essai sur le logos platonicien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942). Before Sartre's "Aller et retour," Parain's *Recherches* had been an object of more favorable interest for Maurice Blanchot, "Recherches sur le langage," in *Faux pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), pp. 102-8. Albert Camus had also published on Parain before Sartre: "Sur une philosophie de l'expression," (1944) in *Œuvres complètes*, I (Paris: Gallimard/Pléiade, 2006), pp. 901-10. Sartre read both texts and seems to have appreciated neither: "Aller et retour," pp. 222, 230.

Parain returned, after the War, to a more modest way of thinking the human being as circumscribed by certain limits, which should be lucidly embraced: an "ordre naturel" of the body, needs, and labor, and the transcendent order of language, ultimately founded in God.[98]

The presence of Parain in *L'être et le néant*, I said, is easy to overlook: Sartre doesn't name him in the body of the text. A footnote, inserted after "récemment" in the following passage, cites Parain's *Essai*:

> On a pu soutenir récemment qu'il y avait comme un ordre vivant des mots, des lois dynamiques du langage, une vie impersonnelle du logos, bref que le langage était une *nature* et que l'homme devait le servir pour pouvoir l'utiliser sur quelques points, comme il fait de la Nature. Mais c'est qu'on a considéré le langage *une fois qu'il est mort*, c'est-à-dire, une *fois qu'il a été parlé*, en lui insufflant une vie impersonnelle et une force, des affinités et des répulsions qu'on a empruntées en fait à la liberté personnelle du pour-soi qui parle. On a fait du langage *une langue qui se parle toute seule*. Voilà l'erreur à ne pas commettre, pour le langage comme pour *toutes les autres techniques*. (561)[99]

Parain here is exemplary of a neo-Spinozist or proto-Structuralist view of language as a system or structure that, like Nature, comprises a set of entities bound by pre-established, immutable laws. Users can at best lucidly serve, not break these laws.[100] Sartre describes this notion in similar terms to those he used for the *psyche*, the field of psychology: it is a reification or

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[98] "Aller et retour," pp. 217, 233, 236-8, 239, 244.

[99] Compare this to what Parain had said on the "laws" of the "tool," and of language, in *Recherches*, p. 169: "l'outil a ses lois, qui ne sont pas les miennes. Ainsi du langage."

[100] This might be the dividing line between Parain and true Structuralism or antihumanism. Parain conceived of language as a form that demands we follow or fulfill it in the way that it prescribes; that is, he seems to accord a certain distance, for the individual, within which to relate to language. See, e.g., *Recherches*, p. 174: "A proprement parler, il [le mot « maintenant »] est une forme que nous devons remplir et qui nous impose sa loi parce qu'elle ne peut pas être remplie par n'importe quoi" (cf. Sartre, "Aller et retour," p. 247-9). Language is in every case a *promise*, and keeping it correctly the best ethics. As he writes in *Recherches*, "la conscience" – by which he might be mean "conscience," "consciousness," or, as I see it, both – consists in the "recognition" of the "power" of language (of the word), and the act of "converting ourselves to its law" (178). Parain thus posits something like lucid submission to the transcendent structure of language, not an unconscious determination by it. However, 1) perhaps the thinkers studied in the next chapter agree with him, implicitly at least, on this point, even though they do not spell it out or describe it ethically; or 2) if they don't, we cannot ignore Parain's other statements that seem closer to Structuralist and Post-Structuralist notions of language, and seem to close off the very space he had opened up. To cite just one: "Le langage n'est pas un vide devant nous… Il est la règle de notre pensée et de notre action humaine, extérieure et par conséquent transcendante à nous" (175).

projection of consciousness. For Sartre, language bursts immanently from consciousness, is subordinate to the latter's intentions like any other "technique," and cannot have a being of its own. For Parain, the transcendence of language can be experienced, is disclosed by linguistics, and is grounded in God.[101] No wonder Sartre singled out his *Essai* in *L'être et le néant*.

In the introduction to the *Essai*, Parain describes two possible positions concerning the, for him, inescapably *metaphysical* problem of language[102]: one, an Aristotelian view that makes language conventional or, in any case, subordinate to the human being; the other, a Platonic or theological view, that ascribes language independent being and divine origin. Parain accords each position moral values that leave no doubt as to his own position: "Selon, pourtant, que nous postulons que [le langage] est d'origine divine ou d'origine humaine, notre pensée est religieuse ou empirique, et notre attitude humble ou vaine" (9). [103] For Parain, the entire French philosophical tradition followed Descartes in opting for vanity (15).

This opposition between vanity, as human pride, and humility, as recognition of the transcendent (God), immediately situates us in a Christian, *moraliste* perspective. Indeed, one is reminded of the "disciple" of Saint Augustine, Pascal, who denounced the *vanity* of those optimists, like the Aristotelians or Descartes, who held faith in human capacity to grasp absolute Truth. Just so, it is against the hubris of those – like Sartre – who would submit language to the human that Parain places himself, along with Plato and, crucially for the present discussion,

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[101] For Parain, the study of different languages goes hand in hand with the proof of language's divine language: "L'étude des langues n'enseigne pas autre chose. Elle enseigne, en effet, que le langage est un fait social, qui dépasse l'individu. Il faut avouer que les raisonnements par lesquels on prouve ordinairement que le langage ne peut pas avoir été inventé par l'homme sont irréfutables" (175-6). See also a passage from *Retour à la France*, cited by Sartre in "Aller retour," p. 251 where the fact that language is the "loi de notre pensée" is considered "la meilleure prevue de l'existence de Dieu." See Sartre's commentary, "Aller et retour," pp. 251-2.

[102] Cf. Camus, "Sur une philosophie de l'expression," p. 901: "Quelle est l'originalité de Parain? Il fait du langage une question métaphysique."

[103] Cf. *Recherches*, p. 13, 175-6. I

Pascal.

Parain looks back to the late Platonic dialogues for a notion of language – *logos* – as a "type of being" in its own right, "un système de rapports entre les éléments de la phrase" that transcends humans (204).[104] They are bound, whether they want to or not, to submit to the "laws of its structure":

> Platon constate ensuite [dans *le Sophiste*] que nous ne pouvons pas transformer cette matière [i.e., le langage, matière du raisonnement] à notre guise parce qu'elle nous impose certaines lois de sa structure. Par exemple, quoi que nous voulions énoncer, nous sommes obligés de mêler l'être à tout, car le verbe être sert de coupole à tout jugement. (153)

As the modern counterpart to Plato, Parain names Pascal, mentioned repeatedly in the *Essai*.[105] With his dialectics, his famous "'Renversement continuel du pour au contre'" (132), Pascal is the modern heir to the "tourments dialectiques" of Plato's skepticism (184). He is the 17th-century representative of a tradition continuing to Parain. For Parain, a clear analogy thus presents itself: Plato is to Aristotle as Pascal is to Descartes (184-5)[106]: while Descartes and Aristotle made language dependent on humans or reason, and acted as if it need not be scrutinized first and foremost so as to assure knowledge, Plato and Pascal saw language as something independent that could not be avoided: language was *the* problem.[107] In critiquing Parain's *Essai*, then, Sartre implicitly took a position against the postlapsarian skepticism of Pascal and for Descartes. For Parain, on the other hand, Pascal's reflections on language were both unavoidable and

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[104] Cf. *Recherches*, p. 12.
[105] E.g., *Essai*, pp. 9, 20, 21, 59, 68, 96, 107-9, 111, 132, 134-7, 175, 183, 184-5. Parain primarily refers to Pascal's opuscule "De l'esprit géométrique" in which the problem of indefinable "primitive words" is discussed. Pascal is also extraordinarily present in the *Recherches*, and a fragment from the *Pensées* serves as epigraph for the entire book. In the *Recherches*, Pascal takes on the status of being a sort of Hegel *avant la lettre* and, as such, the ultimate origin for one of the two "methods" that Parain sees as having dominated the modern French and German philosophical traditions, respectively: the Cartesian method and, against it, "la dialectique historique" exemplified by Hegel or, before him, Pascal (3, 7). On Pascal vis-à-vis Descartes, see pp. 78-84 and the chapter "Descartes et Pascal," pp. 85s.
[106] Cf. *Recherches*, p. 190.
[107] Cf. *Recherches*, p. 46.

unsurpassable: "Toute philosophie qui ne réfute pas Pascal est vaine. Et aucune philosophie ne réussira, sans doute, à le réfuter."[108]

The stakes were high; the risks, metaphysical. Parain deployed an ultimately theological mode of thinking that posited the finitude of consciousness in the face of something transcendent – language – whose autonomous being is only thinkable as given by God.[109] Language is "la forme nécessaire de notre pensée" (184), Parain writes.[110] Knowledge can be about nothing but what is revealed through and in language. A fixed "system" or "structure" of divine origin, language is "l'intercesseur auprès de nous" of "le monde intelligible" (181) or, as Parain also writes: "du monde de la permanence et de la régularité" (169)[111] – i.e., of an order of Truth created by God. Sartre strove instead to submit language to consciousness in such a way that, as he would assert in "Aller et retour": "il n'y a pas de problème métaphysique du langage."[112]

So as to further adumbrate the discussion of antihumanism in the next chapter, two more aspects of Parain's linguistic thought should be briefly mentioned: his allegiance to Nietzsche, contra Descartes, and the place of relativism, as revealed through the study of history.

In Parain's *Recherches*, Nietzsche rose to a status that he would often hold for the next, antihumanist generation (e.g., in Foucault or Deleuze): as an anti-Cartesian and antihumanist.[113]

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[108] *Recherches*, p. 106.
[109] See "Aller et retour, pp. 246, 251.
[110] Cf. *Recherches*, pp. 155, 169, 175.
[111] Cf. *Recherches*, pp. 28-9.
[112] "Aller er retour," p. 264; this was diametrically opposed to Camus's positive assessment of Parain (cited in a note, *supra*). Cf. Sartre's Kantian critique of the proto-Structuralist realist idealism of Parain (256-8). Sartre contests the notion of the pre-given identity or form of the linguistic sign (a given word), arguing that these are possible only via a "synthèse d'identification" enacted by an individual consciousness.
[113] See Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Post-Structuralism* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

Parain cites an analysis of the *cogito* in the *Will to Power*[114] to display what Nietzsche called Descartes's naïve belief in grammar (26-7).[115] If language mediates experience and structures thought, the *cogito* is no different. Certitude of the individual subject's "extra-phenomenal existence" in the *cogito* is hence granted only if one grants that language is unproblematically related to reality, a postulate Descartes didn't make outright but silently accepted as true (27). Sartre would have agreed that the ego qua substance or subject is indeed an illusion. But the idea that language mediates consciousness's self-relation as much as its relation to the world would have been, for him, to confuse pure and impure reflection and to place language in the place of consciousness itself.[116] Indeed, perhaps it is not incorrect to say that what Sartre found so untenable about Parain's philosophy was that it accorded much of what Sartre ascribed to the *pour-soi* to language instead.[117]

Our finitude in the face of Language is coupled with our finitude in the face of History, for Parain. Here was undeniable proof of relativism – i.e., that our given language, our system of thought, is not a transparent medium of World or Truth: "L'histoire confond les dogmatiques. Vérité aujourd'hui, erreur demain" (14). Placing the movement of reason into the dimension of

[114] Parain used volume I of G. Bianquis's translation of the F. Würzbach edition (Paris: NRF, 1935), § 98. The fragment cited does not appear in more recent standard editions. In Nietzsche's Nachlaß (accessible at Nietzschesource.org), it is categorized as "NF-1885,40[23]," and dated to August/September, 1885.

[115] Cf. Sartre's condescending, and doctrinaire, judgment on Parain's use of Nietzsche *contra* Descartes, "Aller et retour," pp. 258-9: "On sait que Nietzsche n'était pas philosophe. […]," etc.

[116] This is not what Sartre explicitly says in "Aller et retour," but it can be inferred from his remarks there on "le silence de la conscience" (258-9) and from the entire discussion of the *pour-soi* in *EN*.

[117] To mention two revealing examples: for Parain, it is language – and, in particular, denomination – that detaches and circumscribes entities from the undifferentiated, positive plenitude of the world, and that allows us to be also thus distinguished, that is, to become ourselves: see *Recherches*, pp. 22-3, 30-1 (on denomination, see 108); cf. Sartre, "Aller et retour," p. 245. Second, Parain accorded great importance to negative statements, foreshadowing what Sartre would say about the negativity of consciousness in *L'être et le néant*. Negative statements disclosed language's autonomy vis-à-vis the world of positivities: negation was the key "au domaine de la liberté et du langage" (72). Here, language seems to be equated with freedom, over against the world. But this freedom is subject to language's order. Parain's central notion is the submission of human freedom to language's form or "will" (170, 173). Real freedom would be possible only on condition that we destroy language and enter into eternal, otherworldly silence (183-4). Sartre termed this silence "un ultra-silence" in "Aller et retour," pp. 253-4.

history is the work of *dialectics*, Platonic, Hegelian or Pascalian, in which language is used on itself, against itself, as a means of "revelation." If relativism might thus result from the transcendence of the linguistic system, itself subject to historical mutation, relativism also comes in the shape of the uncontrollable, irreducibly personal and affective dimension of language: each enunciation might ultimately be determined by personal temperament and subjective impressions (63).[118] Parain seems to occupy a middle ground between those who held this determinist, "expressionist" view, and those who believe that language is instead a means for attaining to Truth. He is *moraliste* for holding the path to Truth to entail a battle with our "passions." But he thought language was the means to purify oneself of them.

More important than Parain's precise position is that he understood the divide to play itself out over the history of thought since the rise of Christianity. It was a conflict that he and (unwittingly) Sartre were repeating:

> Voilà le problème de notre destinée. C'est celui de notre capacité de découvrir la vérité et il est inclus, depuis la fin du monde antique, dans les querelles sur la liberté entre augustiniens et thomistes, entre protestants et catholiques, entre jansénistes et jésuites, dans les controverses entre philosophes sur les modes de la connaissance… Au fond de lui il y a le problème de la nature et des fonctions du langage. (63)

Parain here put his finger on precisely the debate two of whose moments are studied by this thesis, and which I have described, broadly, in terms of humanism and antihumanism. He not only highlights the importance of language in this conflict, something I have tried to show in each chapter; he also underscores the theological history of what we now perceive as a theoretical or secular divide. In the apparently modest note on Parain in *L'être et le néant,* it was

[118] Or, as Parain wrote in *Essai sur la misère humaine* (Paris: Grasset, 1934), by the "système ordonné" that includes a particular "langue" and the "normes" of a particular person's social class and epoch. The linguistic sign is only interpretable beyond its referential value insofar as it occupies a determinate place in this "system": "Le signe pris isolément n'a d'autre rapport avec l'objet signifié que de désignation… il est pour ainsi dire flottant … il n'acquiert de réalité que dans un système ordonné" (cited in "Aller et retour," p. 226).

against this deep, theological pull that Sartre resisted.

By assimilating Parain's idealist, Christian, and self-proclaimed Pascalian position with the science of modern linguistics, Sartre implicitly touched on a major problem: that of the metaphysical basis of the human or social sciences, and their ethical ramifications. His analyses tend to suggest that these discourses, in their shared structure or form, come to resemble the antihumanist or Spinozan negation of "human subjectivity" against which he placed the Cartesian humanism he himself championed. Insofar as structuralism and post-structuralism would take to new extremes the view of the human subject as submitted, even reducible, to pre-extant *structures* and their laws – insofar as they would choose the path, not of Husserl or Descartes, but of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Saussure, or Heidegger –, Sartre's analyses pose in advance the question of the metaphysics of the antihumanist theories that would arise with the next wave of French thought. Indeed, it is fascinating to see how *L'être et le néant* attacks the very discourses – Spinozism, psychoanalysis, linguistics, Marxism, Heideggerian deconstruction – out of which 20th-century antihumanism proper was to emerge.

But *theory* had not yet been invented; *science* was the target. For Sartre the unity of the human sciences, and the basis of their affinity with the psychology of the 17th-century *moralistes*, lay in a shared crypto-theology or -metaphysics. *L'être et le néant* took up the task of an ontological and phenomenological critique of their hidden, unjustified postulates. Seeing Sartre's project in this way, as a critique of *sciences*, is tantamount to understanding it as a continuation of Descartes's project, via Husserl. Existentialism places *knowledge* on a lower rung, as a derivative mode of consciousness. But there is an unmistakable epistemological project in *L'être et le néant*, inseparable from its ontological and ethical aims.[119]

[119] See David Guy Joannis, "Le projet épistémologique de Sartre," *Philosophiques*, vol. 23, n° 2, 1996, pp. 305-15.

Husserl had described the "goal" of Descartes's *Meditations* as a reconstruction, and absolute foundation, of philosophy (understood as "universal unity" of all sciences). Towards this aim, Descartes had deployed "a subjectively oriented philosophy."[120] The imperative to put the given sciences into question via recourse to subjectivity was equivalent to the very possibility of philosophy: "Jeder, der ernstlich Philosoph werden will, muß sich einmal im Leben auf sich selbst zurückziehen und in sich den Umsturz aller vorgegebenen Wissenschaften und ihren Neubau versuchen."[121]

Sartre's critique of the human or social sciences is a reenactment of Descartes's and Husserl's own epistemological critiques. On the basis of what consciousness discloses about itself with certainty – in reduction and the (*pre-reflexive*) *cogito* – the sciences that purport to tell us how we really are become merely probable and revealed to be in fact sciences of a reified self, not of consciousness. In other words, armed with a fundamental method grounded in subjectivity – phenomenological ontology –, we find good reason to doubt that the sciences are true of us. This, then, is enough to bracket them out entirely.

Beyond scientific knowledge, to be like Descartes or Husserl, Sartre would also have to undermine the validity of naïve experience and self-knowledge upon which scientific knowledge was based. He attempted this with his notion of "bad faith" and "esprit de sérieux." These default, everyday attitudes are the condition of possibility for moralist (proto-)psychology, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, i.e., for antihumanism and its success. But Sartre's critique of common bad faith was not only, implicitly, an elaborate reworking of Descartes's distinction between "mind" (*mens*) and anything else one tends to falsely think oneself to be.[122] It was also an unspoken return to and indeed justification for the sort of phenomenology that had found in

[120] *Pariser Vorträge*, p. 3.
[121] Ibid., p. 4.
[122] Cf. *Principles*, 1, §§8, 12.

Descartes its founding father. The naive self-understanding for which psychoanalysis or psychology serves as theoretical armature, as conceived by Sartre, was equivalent to what Husserl saw as the default mode of thought before phenomenological enlightenment: "the natural attitude."[123]

In "La transcendance de l'ego," Sartre claims that what Husserl called "the natural attitude" in fact encompasses the practical function of the ego: "'l'attitude naturelle' apparaît tout entière comme un effort que la conscience fait pour s'échapper à elle-même en se projetant dans le Moi et en s'y absorbant" (83).[124] Bad faith or vulgar, *moraliste* self-understanding is, clearly, the new definition or name given to the "natural attitude," the naive attitude adopted so long as phenomenological philosophizing has not begun.

In turn, when read alongside the 1936 article in this way, the critique of bad faith and its theoretical modes in *L'être et le néant* can be seen as giving a more thorough ontological basis to the foundational gesture of Descartes's philosophy and, indeed, of phenomenology itself: the reduction or ἐποχή, which breaks with "the natural attitude." In the article, Sartre claimed that Husserl had failed to justify the reduction: it appeared ex nihilo, as a "miracle" or arbitrary "méthode intellectuelle." In Sartre, it is no abstract methodological principle: it is identical with "angoisse" itself, the troubling recognition of consciousness's radical distinction from the ego, Sartre claimed: "que la spontanéité s'arrache brusquement du Je et se donne comme indépendante… l'ἐποχή n'est pas un miracle… c'est une angoisse qui s'impose à nous" (84).

The circle comes to a close: from Descartes to Husserl through Sartre the enthusiastic phenomenologist of the 1930s, the reduction is traced to *L'être et le néant*, where it dons a new garb, becoming an affect that splits consciousness from all facticity. The ἐποχή of

[123] On "the natural attitude" (*Einstellung*), see Husserl, e.g., *Ideen*, I, §§27s.
[124] See also, *TE*, p. 18.

phenomenology finds its justification as a way of living "angoisse" that does not seek shelter, in bad faith, but remains in the storm. The very undertaking of Sartre's book – with its endless meanderings, its repetitions, and the presiding concern to never let its object, "la conscience," become an object per se – is thus both a project of or on "angoisse" and an attempt to awaken it in the reader. Though the equation between "angoisse" and "l'ἐποχή" is not explicit in *L'être et le néant*, it is the new and arguably more potent introduction to phenomenology, a modern heir to Descartes's doubt. To take hold, to shake existence free of its reified forms, philosophy must begin in the thick of undeniable experiences and inevitable, distressing moods – moods we flee in bad faith.[125] In suspending *anxiety* and in active *orgueil*, consciousness must rend itself free from the world and worldliness.

III. Sartre – Ontology and Ethics: Rigor and Rhetoric

Sartre's *L'être et le néant* can hardly be lauded for its technical clarity. There are serious philosophical problems with his notion of consciousness or the *pour-soi*. In particular there is the issue of the interaction between the "non-extended" *pour-soi* and those elements of facticity that somehow are said to be its own, in particular, the body. Descartes had encountered this problem. Sartre, though not positing something so occult as the pineal gland, hardly made things better. Arguably, he only rendered the interaction between *pour-soi* and that most peculiar *en-soi*, the body, more mysterious.

Another problem is that of the personhood of pre-reflexive consciousness and its status as, in a unique sense, *causa sui*.[126] In "La transcendance de l'ego," Sartre had tried to show that

[125] Compare Heidegger's notion of boredom in *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983).
[126] *Causa sui*, not of the fact of its being and situation, its facticity or particular *en-soi* – which is contingent – but of its nothingness or existence, as *pour-soi* (see *EN*, 115-20).

consciousness, if purely grasped, is impersonal yet individuated (78).[127] Indeed, the eerie force of the *cogito* is its power to shed the skin of the empirical person or ego, such that something radically different can reveal itself. But Sartre cautioned not to conflate consciousness with some Freudian "unconscious" behind the personal ego, as posited by a "thesis" that, Sartre says, is "generally accepted" (78). Consciousness is indeed distinct from the ego, but it is unified, self-transparent and self-producing at every moment: "une spontanéité se produisant elle-même" (78).

Sartre underlined the bizarreness of this self-determining consciousness. He termed it "cette spontanéité monstrueuse" transcendent to "freedom" itself, which he apparently still attributed to the empirical person or psychological ego. In *L'être et le néant*, however, consciousness is now synonymous with unbridled freedom, while its strikingly ambiguous impersonality has been totally flattened out by its tacit re-personalization: Sartre ends up equating consciousness with the self all the while distinguishing the two.[128] Consciousness is indeed something like a free God I find behind my empirical self, but this God is no monstrosity to be feared. He is none other than me, myself, and it is I that am radically free.

Such technical problems make Sartre's text seem just as dogmatic as the discourses he critiqued for their unjustified metaphysical postulates. But to see *L'être et le néant* in this way, as primarily a technical work or as a book of ontology, as Sartre would have it, would be a mistake.

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[127] In "La liberté cartésienne," Sartre went even further: "[Descartes] cet homme indépendant et orgueilleux…cet individualiste…a conçu une liberté désincarnant et désindividualisant: car le sujet pensant…n'est *rien* que négation pure, ce néant…qui n'est *rien d'autre* que le doute lui-même" (303). However, perhaps the term "désindividualisant" is here synonymous with de-personalizing. If so, the lack of consistency across the texts as regards the personal and individual status of consciousness is nonetheless striking.

[128] One could argue that this is found in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as well, where the phenomenological reduction condemns the ego of the natural attitude – the "natural human ego" – to mere appearance and sets the transcendental ego as equivalent to the true self, discovered only thanks to this procedure: see *Pariser Vorträge*, pp. 10, 15.

Despite Sartre's critique of Heidegger for dealing in ethics where he was supposed to be uniquely concerned with ontology,[129] Sartre's own work tends towards ethics at nearly every moment, even at the basic level of its idiom. Above all, one might say that the book strives to intervene in our self-relation or self-understanding: that it is a *technique de soi*[130] based on a sort of intuitive ontology. "L'ontologie ne saurait formuler elle-même des prescriptions morales," writes Sartre (673). And yet his entire discussion has aimed at exposing the ruses of bad faith, at having us "renoncer à *l'esprit de sérieux,*" as he writes immediately thereafter (674). "Aussi sommes-nous déjà sur le plan de la morale…" (674).[131]

What Sartre asks of us is to put into question those "scientific" discourses that claim to tell us how or who we are and, in doing so, how we ought to be. Sartre, that is, was wary of the normative in the descriptive. He saw that any apparently analytic description of the self – for example, an analysis of the psyche or of the relations between given temperaments and sorts of behavior – tends to prescribe how the self should act and see itself. For we all are prey to a fundamental temptation: bad faith.

This was Sartre's answer to the theological, postlapsarian image of temptation, whereby the latter is desire for the prideful, autonomous use of the will. On the contrary, for Sartre, the damning temptation is the drive to *not* think oneself autonomous enough, to see oneself from the perspective of another, ceding *orgueil* for *shame*. The Fall is reversed. We have not fallen away from our real autonomy, except in our imagination and by means of some sort of collective

[129] *EN*, pp. 116, 575, 610. Perhaps Sartre was simply wary of how Heidegger mixed ontology with not so much ethics as a certain ethics: one that presupposed "le sens religieux du transcendant" (116), as he writes in a passage discussing Heidegger's conflation of the recognition of contingency with the feeling of guilt.

[130] See Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité II: L'usage des plaisirs* (Paris, 1984), 18-9, and the Foucauldian framework delineated in chapter 1.

[131] See Jean-Christophe Merle, "La psychanalyse existentielle et morale chez Sartre," *Le Portique*, vol. 16 (2005), n.p.;

illness — a delusion of pettiness, not grandeur. The diagnosis of default bad faith explains the success of human sciences as based on a secret complicity with subjection to the "laws" that, these discourses proclaimed, bind us on all sides. On Sartre's view, the average person flees freedom into this subjection, freely donning the shackles. Masochism towards oneself accompanies sadism towards others.

Sartre, then, might have answered the technical problems raised above by an accusation of bad faith. Only in bad faith would we not admit that we are intuitively aware of the distinction between *pour-soi* and *en-soi*, or that, in the pre-reflexive *cogito*, we at all times grasp ourselves as free and as always rupturing with the given situation in all directions. Only from without is consciousness's relation to something like the body or language mysterious; only from without can we convince ourselves that we are not free. In other words, like Descartes, Sartre believes that from immanent self-evidences we can be assured of our freedom in a way that no knowledge can undermine, and which suffices for acting freely. In other words, his project is rhetorical and exhortative. He encourages us to believe and affirm our freedom; and he demands we believe that any other way we might act, that is, any other way we might see and comport ourselves, ultimately rests on magical or religious superstition. Perhaps this would also be a fitting – if not entirely satisfactory – response to the technical problems encountered by Descartes's in the *Passions*. No quibbling about dualism, no metaphysical logomachy, can keep us from, *for us* – that is, for phenomenology: *in fact* – acting in freedom and being aware of our autonomy.

IV. Afterword. Sartre and Corneille: New Heroes to be Demolished

Sartre's description of "consciousness" is heroic and his ethics is a new heroism of the self. Indeed, the heroic idiom in texts like *L'être et le néant* and "Cartesian Freedom" is undeniable:

"[La réalité-humaine] est entièrement abandonnée, sans aucune aide d'aucune sorte, à l'insoutenable nécessité de se faire être jusque dans le moindre détail" (*EN*, 485). No matter what others think, no matter what science says, no matter the recalcitrance of the *situation*, a self-lucid consciousness grasps itself as free and must affirm its unbounded freedom with *orgueil* – with the awareness that it is as much the author of its acts as of the meaning of the world, and that nothing can truly motivate it from without. Heroic consciousness shows its freedom in the dramatic moment of action or choice of a goal, which Sartre conceived on the paradigm of "l'action révolutionnaire": a negating "rupture" with a given situation circumscribed as such, as the given, in light of the posited end, a non-being.

Furthermore, in equating bad faith and default self-understanding – the ideology of alienation of the normal person, who believes in the human sciences – Sartre's heroism has an unmistakable air of aristocracy. This is an aristocracy not of blood, however, but of the few who are able to rise to lucid subjectivity. The *orgueil* of heroic Sartrean consciousness, that is, is similar to Descartes's "générosité," as described in chapter 1. Descartes took this term, which had long referred to noble birth, and redefined it so as to divorce it from any *given* qualities over which one has no control.[132] Like *générosité*, Sartrean *orgueil* is not inborn or a property of bloodline (contingency), as in historical aristocracy. On the contrary, both are, as it were, bourgeois forms of aristocracy, won or earned through a change in self-perception: in the recognition of freedom and its use or affirmation. But though they are not given but attained, *orgueil* and *générosité* overlap with the qualities that real aristocrats claimed for themselves on the basis of birth. The aristocratic ethos is real, though its means of attainment has been redefined. Thus the comparison between Descartes's ethics and the aristocratic code of Cornelian tragic hero, with his pride and "générosité," has often been made. Sartre explicitly saw himself

[132] See chapter 1.

and his epoch as Cornelian. His heroic consciousness was the new visage of a character that fascinated him: the heroic aristocrat of Cornelian tragedy. Sartre's basic concerns with freedom and psychologism, and his tacit dialogue with the 17th century, resurface in his theory and history of theater.[133]

In the manifesto-like "Pour un théâtre de situations" (1947), Corneille appeared as *the* great French tragedian. For Sartre, there were the Greeks, and then Corneille—and then, presumably…Sartre himself: "La grande tragédie, celle d'Eschyle et de Sophocle, celle de Corneille, a pour ressort principal la liberté humaine."[134] This tradition of the "theater of situations," in Sartre's eyes, was the necessary orientation of the modern stage, which playwrights like Anouilh, Camus, and Sartre himself had begun to revive. In this theater, a given situation of the most universal sort demands a choice. In making a free choice in relation to the situation, the protagonist posits an end and acts to achieve it. In doing so, he implicitly defines a moral code or system of rights, and a whole mode of being or life. The situation is meant to manifest how "man" is free in situation and is the creator of values under which he acts. In order for freedom to be revealed in its "highest degree," death must always be present as a possible choice, for in choosing death "[la liberté] accepte de se perdre pour pouvoir s'affirmer."[135] In this, Sartre approached the ethos of Corneille's tragic hero, who accepts the outcome of death as the most spectacular affirmation of justified *orgueil*.

This notion of choice refers back to Sartre's theory of action. The situation does not

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[133] See Marcel Gutwirth, "Jean-Paul Sartre à l'école De Pierre Corneille," *MLN*, vol. 79, no. 3 (May, 1964), pp. 257-63; Marc Beigbeder, "Théâtre philosophique? II. Sartre," *Esprit*, vol. 12, no. 162 (Dec., 1949), 924-42; Geoffrey Brereton, "The French Theater in 1659 and 1959," in *Essays by Divers Hands*, Green, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 1-15; Serge Doubrovsky, *Corneille et la dialectique du héros* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963).

[134] "Pour un théâtre des situations," in *Un théâtre de situations*, Contat and Rybalka, eds. (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 19.

[135] Ibid., p. 20.

determine the choice, no more than the psychological temperament or character: the end is posited freely. The future, not the past, determines the present. The opposing view – that of the *moralistes*, psychoanalysis, or psychologism – was expressed in its own sort of theater, which Sartre calls "le théâtre psychologique, celui d'Euripide, celui de Voltaire et de Crébillon fils."[136] But in an earlier text, "Forger des mythes" (1946), Sartre had one playwright in particular in mind when discussing the psychological theater or "théâtre de caractères," Racine, whom Sartre described at some length in opposing him to Corneille:

> Racine peint l'homme psychologique, il étudie les mécanismes de l'amour, de la jalousie d'une manière abstraite, pure, c'est-à-dire sans jamais permettre à des considérations morales ou à la volonté humaine d'infléchir leur mouvement inévitable. Ses personnages ne sont que les créatures de son esprit, la fin résulte d'une analyse intellectuelle. Corneille, au contraire, en montrant la volonté au cœur même de la passion, nous restitue l'homme dans toute sa complexité, dans sa réalité totale.[137]

Racine here plays the role of the psychological determinist, guilty of a sort of mechanist or naturalist view of the human being as defined by a *character* that is its *nature* in the same sense that any natural being has an essence or nature from which its acts or appearances emanate. Like the *moralistes* or psychoanalyst in *L'être et le néant* or *La transcendence de l'ego*, Racine has tacitly replaced the free self with the results of an a posteriori psychological *analysis*. As a result, causality moves in reverse: not from future to present, according to the free positing of rights or ends particular to consciousness, but from past to present, according to a necessary unfolding of *passions*, which is like that of any natural phenomenon or process *en-soi*.

On the other hand, Corneille is existentialist *avant la lettre*; he shows the human being as a synthetic unity. Moreover, there is a tacit assimilation between Corneille and Descartes at play here. Sartre's notion that Corneille places the will at the heart of passion – rather than vice versa, like the *moralistes* and Racine – clearly resonates with what Sartre said about Descartes in

[136] Ibid., p. 19.
[137] "Forger des mythes," in *Un théâtre des situations*, p. 60.

"Cartesian Freedom," which dates from the same year as "Forger des mythes" (1946): Descartes "entrevoyait, en quelque sorte, cette vérité paradoxale qu'il y a des passions *libres.*"[138] By taking up the traditional opposition between Corneille and Racine, and in implicitly projecting into it the antagonism between his philosophy and the sort of psychological *esprit de sérieux* it opposed, Sartre's considerations on theater during the 1940s confirm the importance of the French 17th century to his early philosophy and his understanding of its historical situation. But perhaps this historical parallel was already on the minds of his contemporaries; perhaps Sartre's conception of Corneille was not entirely of his own creation.

While Sartre's early philosophy was in formation, one French writer in particular was working to revive interest in Corneille, Jean Schlumberger (1877-1968). We know that Sartre read some of Schlumberger's books and that he noted the importance of Corneille in one of them, *Le Camarade infidèle*, a novel of 1922.[139] In this text, Corneille represents a heroic code of ends – and of the definitive instant of action that can define, and redeem, a whole life – over against the modern capitalist spirit, which focuses on means and past *character*.[140] For the NRF's 1939 *Tableau de la littérature française*, discussed toward the beginning of this chapter, Schlumberger authored the entry on Corneille, which opens the volume. Schlumberger began by acknowledging the modern reign of Racine, who had risen to power after a rather long Cornelian era: "[p]endant deux siècles et demi" Corneille's theater had enjoyed unrivaled supremacy in France, and served as the reference for "les lois mêmes de la grandeur d'âme et plus ou moins

[138] "La liberté cartésienne," p. 303.
[139] See the letter from Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir, 24 mars 1940, in *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres*, de Beauvoir, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), II, p. 149. Schlumberger is cited in multiple Sartre texts. In *EN* (544), Sartre makes reference to the dramatic alteration of the hero's "projet fondamental" in Schlumberger's *Un homme heureux* (1921); in his talk on "Le style dramatique" (1944), Sartre discusses Schlumberger's *Césaire, ou, La puissance de l'esprit* (1922, reprise in 1943): in *Un théâtre de situations*, p. 39. The crucial citation of Schlumberger in Sartre's "Aller et retour" is discussed below.
[140] For a synopsis of the novel, see Maurice Rieuneau, *Guerre et révolution dans le roman français de 1919 à 1939* (Geneva: Slatkine, 2000), pp. 144-7.

explicitement, une sorte d'orthodoxie héroïque, magnifique et vital contrepoids de l'orthodoxie chrétienne."[141] Corneille had always won "l'opinion commune"; Racine's "cult" was merely the product of the elitist "jugement de quelques raffinés."[142]

Sartre seems to have appreciated Schlumberger's text; he ended "Aller et retour," on Brice Parain and the post-WWI generation, with a long citation from it, introduced as follows: "Ce que Schlumberger dit quelque part de Corneille s'applique admirablement à l'après-guerre [WWI], encore qu'il fasse profession de la mépriser, ainsi qu'au retour qui l'a suivie et, peut-être, à ce qui suivra ce retour":

> Point de grand mouvement qui ne parte d'une création… avec ce qu'elle comporte de brutal, de sommaire et, si l'on veut, d'artificiel; point non plus auquel ne succède, après qu'on a vécu plus ou moins longtemps sur ces nouveaux types, le besoin d'une mise au point plus minutieuse, d'un 'retour à la nature', c'est-à-dire aux types moyens. L'alternance des deux disciplines est nécessaire. Quel soulagement, lorsqu'une œuvre modestement vraie vient remettre à leur place les grandes figures exaltées, devenues avec le temps d'assez vides fantoches! Mais quel sursaut lorsqu'une affirmation péremptoire permet un nouveau départ dans une époque stagnante, où l'analyse se fait de plus en plus méticuleuse, raffinée et rampante, lorsqu'un homme se remet à la fière entreprise d'inventer l'homme![143]

Schlumberger here laid out a progression from purportedly "artificial" and exalted heroism to a sort of "'return to nature,'" a focus on "average types" and increasingly meticulous psychological "analysis." This in turn leads to stagnation and a need for a new creative rupture or beginning. The manner in which Sartre deployed these lines at the end of "Aller et retour" is striking and expresses, again, his desire to postulate an analogy or affinity between his situation

[141] Schlumberger, "Corneille," in *Tableau*, II, p. 15.
[142] Ibid., p. 16. Note that Sartre also held Corneille's to have been "populaire" as opposed to Racine, more elitist or decadent: see the 1955 interview published as "Théâtre populaire et theater bourgeois," in *Un théâtre de situations*, p. 72.
[143] "Aller et retour," p. 266 (the ellipsis is Sartre's); see Schlumberger, "Corneille," in *Tableau*, II, pp. 24-5.

and that of the 17th century.[144] Arguably, he implicitly situated his philosophy as the new point of departure after an age of *analysis* with its de-heroizing of the human being and belief in the impossibility of invention. A Racinian spirit had ruled long enough;[145] it was time for a return to Corneille.

This had been Schlumberger's point well before it became Sartre's credo. Schlumberger's short text on Corneille appeared belatedly in the 1939 *Tableau*, having been ready for publication by 1929.[146] For Schlumberger, the entry on Corneille served as a sort of atrium to his main work on the poet, which was published in 1936 for the tercentennial of *Le Cid*, *Plaisir à Corneille*, "un volume entièrement consacré aux vivants rapports que nous pouvons conserver avec Corneille."[147]

Both texts argue for and posit a renewed interest in Corneille. But the one from 1936 – an uncertain time in Europe, and one of mounting war – is more inscribed into its historical moment. Positing Corneille's contemporary importance, in the opening passage Schlumberger takes up and develops the ideas expressed in the passage cited by Sartre in "Aller et retour." He situates Corneille's contemporaneity within a fascinating micro-theory of the ebb and flow of culture with respect to the ethical demands made on art.

Evoking the Racine-Corneille binary – a sort of titanic battle of contraries stretching out

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[144] Note that what Sartre elided from the passage were the words "de cette sorte," which means that Schlumberger's words are not directed to any epoch in particular, but take the progression from Corneille to (on my reading) Racine – and back again –, to be paradigmatic of the movement of culture or art in general. This is confirmed by the citation from Schlumberger's *Plaisir à Corneille*, discussed below.

[145] In his article on Schlumberger's *Plaisir à Corneille*, Michel Deucadin describes Racine's preeminence during the first decades of the 20th century, a trend that grew in the 20s and only began to really shift around 1936, the year of the tercentennial of *Le Cid*: Deucadin "Plaisir à Corneille," in *Jean Schlumberger et la "Nouvelle Revue Française*," Salmon, ed. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), pp. 265-6.

[146] Schlumberger, "Corneille," in *Tableau*, II, p. 15, n. 1. Indeed, the text had appeared in the *NRF* that year: "Corneille," *NRF*, nº192 (Sept. 1929), pp. 333-46.

[147] Schlumberger, "Corneille," in *Tableau*, II, p. 15, n. 1. It should be noted that Schlumberger's goal is to resuscitate Corneille as great author of *tragi-comedies*, not only or even primarily tragedies.

over time, in which each epoch or movement is defined by its allegiance to one or the other –, the passage notes that, while Racine has reigned supreme since Romanticism, Corneille's exit from the "gouffre d'indifférence" is perhaps not far off.[148] The binary expands, with each pole – "Corneille" and "Racine" – acting like a magnetic field, drawing into its center other terms, creating new constellations, new, homologous binaries, *by affinity*:

> Admirablement symbolisée par ces deux noms, la lutte éternelle continue, avec des vicissitudes diverses, entre un art héroïque et un art de jouissance ou de connaissance pure, un art qui construit une image exemplaire de l'homme, et un art qui la défait par l'analyse et le raffinement. Dans les époques où la civilisation semble menacée, où il faut se ressaisir, vaincre des habitudes de mollesse, reconstituer une éthique, on réclame les fortes leçons des poètes affirmateurs. Au contraire, lorsque la sécurité est si bien établie qu'elle pèse aux esprits indépendants, et lorsque le patrimoine de culture est si riche qu'on peut s'en montrer prodigue, chacun se tourne vers les dispensateurs de voluptés délicates ou vers ceux qui, scrutant minutieusement l'étrange phénomène humain et l'acceptant tel qu'il est, s'intéressent à toutes les manifestations de la vie plus qu'à leurs conséquences. Le courage ne trouve plus d'emploi qu'à creuser, qu'à dissocier, qu'à redécouvrir, sous des armatures morales devenues encombrantes, un peu de naturel, de justesse ou de cynisme. Mais un jour vient où l'élan sur lequel on vivait s'épuise ; au choc d'événements un peu sévères, les esprits s'inquiètent, sentent qu'autour d'eux tout est miné ; ils réclament des directives ; et si la vitalité est encore assez forte, le mouvement constructeur peut recommencer. […] l'heure de Corneille s'annonce de nouveau. […].[149]

In this section of *Plaisir*, which continues on past what I've quoted here, Schlumberger offers what one might call a *logic* of culture, and a diagnosis of the moral needs in a time shaken by war, which Sartre all but adopted as his own.[150]

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[148] *Plaisir à Corneille* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936), p. 9.
[149] Ibid., pp. 9-10; cf. the afterword, esp. pp. 272 s.
[150] Schlumberger's preface to *Plaisir à Corneille* deserves a more extensive study than what I can undertake here, especially as to how it relates to Sartre's philosophy as it emerged in the 30s and 40s. To take just one example, we might analyze the similarities in the two author's perspectives on Proust. In *EN*, – as in earlier works such as *La transcendence de l'ego*, p. 50, and *L'imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940), p. 137 –, Sartre critiqued Proust as, it seems, the modern literary heir to the *moralistes*: Proust dealt in reified notions of psychic causality, with his perpetual *analysis* of subjectivity as a passive locus in which psychic forces or emotions interact and conflict, causing behavior. In this, he was a perfect literary counterpart to psychoanalysis in *L'être et le néant* (*EN*, 204, 608). Similarly, for Schlumberger, Proust represents the paroxysm of the 20th century's analytic or Racinian period: in its ethical passivity – in being a turn away from will ("la volonté") towards knowledge ("l'intelligence") – and in its taste, therefore, for analysis *ad infinitum*: "Une œuvre comme celle de Proust a marqué l'aboutissement

In Schlumberger's lines, Corneille and Racine take on the magnitude of Freud's *Eros* and *Thanatos* – giant powers coursing through the ages, informing other binary divisions in culture and thought. *Synthesis* vs. *analysis* is one visage of this "eternal struggle"; affirmation vs. negation, is another; construction vs. destruction, a third; and others still could be listed. Understood in this way, the two major playwrights of the 17th century could function as "symbols" of much more, and continue to serve as condensations of entire systems of thought according to the basic attitude taken towards subjectivity: transcendence (analysis) and immanence (synthesis), for example, or humanism and antihumanism.

Schlumberger's view of culture as a cyclical battle between "Racine" and "Corneille" was consonant with Sartre's largely binary image of this history of thought in the 17th century, and his own understanding of the significance of his project with respect to the history of philosophy.

For Sartre, we saw, the 17th century was implicitly divided between, on the one hand, the age of Descartes and Corneille, Richelieu and Vincent de Paul, with its budding affirmation of freedom, its ethical heroism, its focus on immanence or the individual's free self-determination; and, on the other, the post- and anti-Cartesian ways of thinking that followed, in Leibniz or Spinoza, discussed in "Cartesian Freedom", or in the *moralistes*, critiqued in *L'être et le néant*. These were *reductive* or analytical ways of treating the human being or subjectivity; they practiced a sort of sadist hermeneutics, which read through acts, intentions, and thoughts – indeed, through subjectivity itself – to a pre-established order, be it divine or natural, which *determined* subjective phenomena. Some two hundred years were needed, after the 17th century,

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extrême de ce que peuvent donner l'analyse et l'acceptation passive des caractères." Proust's very existence represented, for Schlumberger, an unsurpassable limit in analysis whose very existence signified the inception of a counter-swing of the pendulum, towards construction: "l'approche d'un tournant" (10). Alongside Freud, Proust was, as it were, the Racine of the early 20th century.

in order to realize what, in Descartes, was only intuited, and what, in Corneille, was left unsaid. Sartre adopted the role of the keeper of a great humanist promise never proffered as such. In a time of war, barbarism, and occupation, such promises needed to be kept.

But Schlumberger's passage also acts as a useful *prognosis*, notwithstanding its obvious schematic nature, its over-sized scale. For the cultural logic he identifies is not ephemeral but "eternal": it stretches on beyond the present, into the distant horizon, past the war to come that Schlumberger could only vaguely foresee. Following the epoch in which "la civilisation semble menacée," with peace and leisure reinstated a new Racinian period would emerge. To qualify it, given Schlumberger's analysis of its typical traits, a loaded term comes to mind: *decadence*. Don't we hear a Nietzschean echo in Schlumberger's phrases, in the ones describing the glut of cultural patrimony or the *weight* of security on independent minds, or in the diagnosis of a tendency to crave fleeting, purely aesthetic pleasures or to be fascinated by analyses of "l'étrange phénomène humain," inquiries which refuse to reflect upon the practical ramifications of their objects of interest? Indeed, Schlumberger implies that any Racinian period is frivolous, elitist, politically sterile, and cynical[151]—an attitude appropriate for bored intellectuals[152] and for a time with no collective crises of historical consciousness; an in-between, static period of play: of "jouissance."

But we can suspend the moral – and nationalist – pathos of Schlumberger's words to concentrate on the descriptive aspects of his cultural logic. The future Racinian period attendant upon the temporary triumph of Corneille would be one committed to *analysis*: a time of

[151] Besides the passage cited, see also pp. 271-4. At one point, Schlumberger suggests that such a time's distaste for the haughty heroism of Corneille hides in fact an attachment to not being challenged, a "goût du confort et du laisser-aller," which harmonizes perfectly with the time's predilection for realist – reductive – analytic description, rather than for ethical ideals and prescriptions. Here we find a union between complacency with the given – status quo or with humans as given – for which Guy Debord criticized the Structuralists.
[152] Ibid., p. 11.

immobility, of a turning-inward, of activities driven, indeed, by a heavy boredom with oneself. There would be a disgust with civilization, with the human in general, a nausea that seeks to dissipate itself either in petty pleasures or in the cruel gratifications of the anatomist operating a meticulous dissection of subjectivity. The new Racinian period would be a time of "hédonisme,"[153] then, when culture would seem done-with and all too rich; and it would also give rise, precisely within this context of over-bearing security and cultural surfeit, to a frenetic excavation of the "human phenomenon," a digging down into a suspended and gluttonous subjectivity.

In attempt to get to subjectivity's ugly underside, its "nature," analysis would expose the underlying domain where subjectivity ceased to be as heroic as the earlier epoch made it seem – indeed, where the self ceased to be or master itself –, all without reflecting too much on the ethical, moral, or political ramifications of this gesture. "Truth" would be displaced from the realm of subjectivity's intuitive self-understanding and heroic aspirations, to this dark domain of the a- or anti-subjective, which no person can intuitively know.[154] And such would be the case until, in a time of "barbarie" when civilization itself was again put on the line, a new ethical awakening would break the spell.

Schlumberger's analysis of the Racinian period reads like an oddly fitting description for the 1960s: of the commodity culture that emerged after World War II, and of the rise of robust new forms of antihumanism in 1960s France – a description, moreover, that has the merit of suggesting a link between the two phenomena by offering a speculative frame, a pattern, into which they might fit. Derived from his reading of the 17th-century theater and the fate of

[153] Ibid., p. 10.
[154] "On l'accuse [Corneille] de n'être pas 'vraie', parce que depuis cinquante ans l'on réserve le mot de 'vérité' aux mouvements instinctifs qui font craquer les conventions de l'homme civilisé" (273). Presumably, Schlumberger here has in mind – though of course not exclusively – Sartre's major adversary in *L'être et le néant*: psychoanalysis.

Corneille, Schlumberger's model schematically predicted what was to come: in the 1960s, the Sartrean "art héroïque" would be subject to a rigorous deconstruction, as new, incredibly refined forms of analysis dug deep into subjectivity with the same passionate will to endless dissection that had animated, long before, Pascal or La Rochefoucauld in the "demolition" of the heroic subject.[155]

[155] I am here invoking Bénichou's text, *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).

"Mais Spinoza, il faut le lire, et savoir qu'il existe: qu'il existe encore aujourd'hui."
— Althusser[1]

Ch. 5: A Case of Mystical Antihumanism: Louis Althusser — Onetime *Moraliste*, Crypto-Pascalian, Vibrant Spinozist

Foreword: Symptomatic Reading

On October 16th, 1943, in camp Stalag XA near Schleswig, Germany, a young French prisoner of war was reading "Le mystère de J. C." in Pascal's *Pensées*. Louis Althusser copied down into his journal Christ's words, as imagined by Pascal: "'C'est mon affaire que ta conversion; ne crains point et prie avec confiance, comme pour moi.'"[2] That Althusser noted this passage is striking. The phrase, attributed to Jesus, distills the whole of Pascal's theory of the "force of custom" and practice. Conversion comes with grace alone – "c'est mon affaire," Jesus says – but one can become receptive to faith through the labor and practice of prayer.[3] Althusser would remember this section of Pascal's *Pensées*: more than 25 years later, when undertaking the project from which the famous essay on "ideological state apparatuses" was excerpted, he selected another of Jesus's statements from Pascal's "mystère" to illustrate the theory that ideology interpolates individuals personally, that is, using a form of address that linguist Roman Jakobson would call *conative*:[4] "'C'est pour toi que j'ai versé telle goute de mon sang.'"[5]

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[1] Althusser, "Élements d'autocritique" (1972), in *Solitude de Machiavel* (Paris: PUF, 1998), 182.
[2] Althusser, *Journal de captivité: Stalag XA 1940-1945* (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1992), p. 130, cf. 140. Pascal, *Pensées*, L919/S751/B553 – I here note the Brunschwicq numbering since it is this edition that Althusser was reading, like most who read Pascal before Louis Lafuma's groundbreaking edition (1951-64).
[3] That Althusser likely read it in this way receives confirmation in his *Journal*, p. 140, and much later, in the autobiographical, "Les faits" (1976), in *L'avenir dure longtemps* (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1992), p. 299.
[4] Jakobson, "Closing Remarks: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, Sebeok, ed., (New York: Wiley, 1960), p. 355.
[5] Althusser, *Sur la reproduction* (Paris: PUF, 2011), pp. 227-8, 300; Pascal, *Pensées*, B553: "Je pensais à toi dans mon agonie; j'ai versé telles gouttes de sang pour toi."

Althusser's journals from his five years as a prisoner of war (1940-5) display his voracious reading, especially of great Catholic or spiritualist, even mystic authors: Claudel, Péguy, Rilke, Ramuz, Pascal, Saint John of the Cross, among others.

> 'Ô mon Dieu, je ne veux plus rien et je vous rends tout et rien n'a plus de prix pour moi, Et je ne vois plus que ma misère et mon néant et ma privation, et cela du moins est à moi ! […]'[6]

In 1944, Althusser delved into the "[g]rande lignée des moralistes français – Montaigne, Pascal, La Bruyère" noting their similarities and the efficacy of their short prose forms: "Dix lignes d'un seul sont une manière d'écrire pour dix siècles."[7] Later that year, he wrote that he was "plongé dans les eaux de Vauvenargues" – "un sacré moraliste encore" – from whom he extracted several short reflections ("quelques perles"): on the power of custom, the social nature of the passions, and the paradoxical appeal of submission, which so debases its victims that they end up loving the hand that holds them down.[8]

Althusser wrote some pseudo-moraliste *pensées* of his own in his cahiers: "Génie de l'homme qui se bat contre un moulin! […]"; "On hésite d'affronter l'homme: il vous révélerait vous-même! […] Il faut à l'homme pour se passer l'humeur une image à pourfendre, quand il n'est pas pour se venger de soi. Sans elle, face à l'homme, il se trouverait avec terreur en face de soi."[9] At one point, in September 1944, Althusser drew up an image of human vanity worthy of Pascal's fragment on "les deux infinis":

> Le monde, grosse pierre ronde qui tourne, et où pousse une étrange végétation de maisons, de murs, de jardins: une mousse qui ride la surface, un petit boursoufflement ridicule, et accrochés à leurs terres, à leurs demeures, à leurs morts, de minuscules petits hommes qui sans leur appuis seraient emportés par le mouvement.

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[6] Claudel, "L'Esprit et l'eau" (1906), cited in Althusser, *Journal*, 25 November 1942, p. 111.
[7] Althusser, *Journal*, 14 June 1944, p. 169. Cf. 188-9, and 310, where Althusser comments further on the moraliste style, and critiques Montaigne while lauding Pascal.
[8] Ibid., pp. 213-9.
[9] Ibid., 179-80.

> Luttant contre le mouvement du monde, qui est le temps, et tout à coup disparaissant, après les efforts derniers absorbés par le tourbillon de l'espace, dans la mort.[10]

If the *moraliste* and Pascalian Althusser is present in his published *Journal de captivité*, he is likewise visible in a cahier from the prison years accessible in Althusser's archive at the IMEC, in Caen, France. Somewhat mysteriously, this notebook seems to have been ignored, if not willfully excluded, when assembling the edition of Althusser's *Journal*. So far, its contents have remained unpublished.

The first page of the cahier exhibits Althusser's affinity for Pascal: he set the journal under the sign of a famous *pensée*, making Pascal's "je" his own. The epitaph, bearing no quotation marks, reads: "j'écrirai ici mes pensées sans ordre et non pas peut-être dans une confusion sans dessein: c'est le véritable ordre et qui marquera toujours mon objet par le désordre même. Je ferais trop d'honneur à mon sujet si je le traitais avec ordre, puisque je veux montrer qu'il en est incapable."[11] The cahier contains numerous religious and theological reflections, and notes on diverse philosophers – including Malebranche, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Saint Augustine –, as well as on the *Pensées*. Althusser notes his admiration for Pascal's lucid analysis of "force et opinion," writing that, given Pascal's untimely modern "réalisme,"[12] the latter didn't become a great political philosopher simply because "il avait d'autres soins dans le cœur, et Dieu suffit à remplir une vie." Althusser himself would become the political Pascal, as it were, a political realist and staunch materialist whose life was not "filled" by God.

At one point in the cahier, Althusser noted some of Pascal's reflections on the distinction between dream and waking life. Pascal collapsed the two into one; their difference is simply a

[10] Ibid., p. 195.
[11] Fonds Althusser/IMEC: 2ALT.A56-24.
[12] Ibid.: "ce bon sens de Pascal qui voit si loin, jusque bien en avant de son temps."

question of continuity, that is, of quantity (not quality) of experience or time: "Si nous rêvions toutes les nuits la même chose, elle nous affecterait autant que les objets que nous voyons tous les jours."[13] "'[L]a vie est un songe un peu moins inconstant,'" Althusser copied down, writing a note to himself to "en tirer une notion de la réalité comme habitude [/] le réel est ce à quoi je m'accoutume, par la constance de sa relation à mon esprit."[14]

Reality draws its familiarity, its self-evident natural quality, simply from its being what we are accustomed to. If it weren't for this imperceptible "force of custom," reality would still look back at us with the strange look of the dream. Althusser retained a longstanding interest in this Baroque theme.[15] Later, in his studies of Spinoza, he noted how the dream, a nightly "délire," is the "modèle du monde imaginaire"[16] which Althusser himself called "ideology" or "everyday life." Althusser followed Pascal in holding that the putative naturalness of reality was in fact a product of acculturation, habit. Belief in oneself as autonomous ego, like all self-evidences of spontaneous consciousness, was just an effect of the force of custom, spinning a pleasant dream. If, for Pascal, this was the madness of postlapsarian *amour-propre*, for Spinoza, it was likewise to "dream with open eyes," to live a delirium of freedom synonymous with pride.[17] In his career, Althusser would provide theoretical and political versions of these Baroque critiques of the folly of man.

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[13] Pascal, *Pensées*, B386; Althusser cited excerpts of this *pensée* in 2ALT.A56-24.
[14] Pascal, *Pensées*, B386; 2ALT.A56-24. All underlining in this chapter is Althusser's.
[15] See Jean-Claude Vuillemin, "*Theatrum mundi*: désenchantement et appropriation," *Poétique*, vol. 2, nº158 (2009), pp. 173-199. "Dans l'Europe baroque, l'assimilation du monde à un théâtre et, dans la foulée, de la vie à un songe – 'un songe, un peu moins inconstant' dira Pascal – est un axiome qui…relève en tout cas du lieu le plus commun" (173).
[16] Fonds Althusser/IMEC: undated notes on Spinoza: dossier "erreur" in ALT2. A60-08.
[17] Spinoza, Ehics, IIIP2S, and IIIP26S. Citations from the *Ethics* follow common norms for citing Spinoza: roman numerals = book; P + arabic numeral = proposition; S = scholium; C = corollary; D = either definition (if immediately following roman numerals) or demonstration; App = appendix; Exp = explanation. The English edition I cite is *Ethics*, Curley trans. (London: Penguin, 1996). Althusser's reading notes on Spinoza in ALT2. A60-08 display his interest in this theme in Spinoza's *Ethics* and *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*.

Chapter Introduction (I)

Thinkers like Jacques Lacan (1901-81), Louis Althusser (1918-90), and Michel Foucault (1926-84) reacted against the heresy of substituting man for God, in Sartre's attempt to realize Descartes's project, studied in the last chapter.[18] Like those Jansenists and Augustinians encountered in chapters 2 and 3, who, against the Neostoic and Cartesian hubris of asserting that "man" was free, assured him that he was simply indulging in a dangerous fantasy, the latter-day pessimists held that Sartrean existentialism was just an inflated form of a delusion that had its roots in certain "orders" (Lacan), "social-formations" (Althusser), or "epistemes" (Foucault), which radically transcended individuals and their putative freedom. The overtly *theological* transcendence Parain ascribed to language, discussed in chapter 4, became a cornerstone of self-styled *scientific* doctrines, often labeled *structuralism* but also *Spinozism*.

On their account, the spontaneous conviction people have of their freedom is per se *irrational*, but, when viewed *under the aspect of the order or structure* – or, as Spinoza would say, *sub specie aeternitatis*[19] –, the irrational can be seen as a grounded, logical irrationality. That is, these "structures" are *structures of delusion* (not delusional structures): orders in which the irrational serves crucial functions, ways in which life is necessarily structured like a dream, in true (Neo-)Baroque fashion. The name for this order of delusion could be various: the Imaginary, Ideology, Capitalism, or even, simply: "the world," "everyday life." Althusser at times thus sounded like Montaigne: "Intuition de la folie, mais rassurez-vous, Mesdames Messieurs, nous nous savons fous!"[20]

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[18] Vincent Descombes sees this replacement of God with "Man" as a signature of philosophical humanism:
Le même et l'autre: Quarante-cing ans de philosophie française (1933-1978) (Paris, 1979), p. 43.
[19] Ibid., IIP44C2D.
[20] Althusser, *Journal de captivité*, 2 March 1942, p. 87.

The premise of my thesis has been to exhume a latent analogy between, on the one hand, what I argue is a conflict between humanism and antihumanism in the 17th century, and, on the other, the more familiar battle between these two camps in the 20th. In the case of some of the protagonists in the second half of the story, however, like Sartre in the preceding chapter, the analogy, if not its depth and implications, hardly passed them by. Rather than remaining purely unconscious, the historical or structural analogy – which maintained a certain awareness of difference – could manifest itself in a consciously espoused *identification* with philosophical ancestors of the 17th century.

The diachronically disparate but formally similar could thus be subjected to a synchronic rapprochement, a collapse of distance, or *capture*, on the logic of what Lacan calls *identification*[21]: the modern thinker *recognized* himself in the image of a past philosopher, his project in the other's, his enemies in those contemporaries who performed the same role as the foes of his ancestor, etc. This was most strikingly the case with Althusser. While he posits imaginary or ideological processes at the basis of subjectivity, elements of these processes – especially the specular relation they presuppose – were at work in the formation of Althusser's own philosophical identity.

Further, Althusser promoted a view of the history of philosophy that rendered more plausible the idea that philosophers separated by some three centuries could occupy analogous positions in the contemporary philosophical domain or *conjuncture*. Philosophy was *perpetual war* between philosophies in which idealism is the dominant tendency, and those in which materialism is most pronounced.[22] Like some eternal theatrical production – to use a metaphor

[21] See Joël Dor, *Introduction à la lecture de Lacan* (Paris: Denoël, 2002), pp. 99-101.
[22] Althusser, *Sur la philosophie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 55: "J'ai montré qu'en philosophie, la lutte de classes prenait la forme de contradictions entre thèses et antithèses, entre positions de tendance idéaliste et matérialiste."

that, we will see, was dear to Althusser –, the philosophical conjuncture could thus recast thinkers in roles similar to those performed by philosophers of the past. Recognizing one's role was tantamount to occupying a tactical position against one's adversaries. As is well known, Althusser understood his position to be first and foremost that once occupied by Spinoza.[23]

Althusser would likely have stressed that this position was less espoused than prescribed, just as individuals as subjects in history do not script the roles they perform.[24] In a series of interviews Fernanda Navarro conducted with Althusser late in his life, she remarks that his conception, inspired by Kant, of philosophy as endless war recalls a famous 17th-century image, the Hobbesian notion of nature as a state of perpetual war. He agrees that the analogy is exact, on the condition that one sees that the scale is different:

> Encore que cette 'guerre philosophique' ne soit pas exactement 'la guerre de tous contre tous' dont parlait Hobbes dans l'Angleterre du XVIIe siècle. Ce n'est pas une guerre *entre individus*, mais entre conceptions philosophiques, donc entre stratégies philosophiques qui se disputent, dans les grandes conjonctures culturelles et politiques, l'hégémonie philosophique dans tel ou tel pays ou tel continent, à la limite – depuis que le monde est pratiquement une seule totalité économique – dans le monde entier.[25]

Althusser here evokes Marx, who refused individuals the status of veritable agents or centers of History, as Althusser liked to repeat.[26] Any philosopher is thus more a product than a cause of a transcendent conjuncture. For philosophy was, "in the last instance," class conflict in theory, and the strategic positions of materialisms and idealisms were, ultimately, shots fired from the bunkers of different classes engaged in war on all fronts.[27] It's clear which class idealism

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[23] See Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology* (2014), ch. 4 and ch. 5. Peden's title is itself suggestive regarding the anachronistic logic at work in the espousal of Spinoza's position, by Althusser and others, against their own contemporary enemies, phenomenology foremost among them.
[24] Althusser, "L'objet du *Capital*," in Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Lire le Capital* (Paris: Maspero, 1973 [1968]), 178-9.
[25] Althusser, *Sur la philosophie*, pp. 54-5.
[26] See e.g., Althusser, "Freud et Lacan," in *Écrits sur la psychanalyse* (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1993), p. 45; id., *L'avenir dure longtemps*, p. 177.
[27] Althusser ‚*Sur la philosophie*, p. 55.

'represented' in Althusser's conception. For him, Cartesian idealism was predicated on the transition from a feudalist to a capitalist state and on the arrival of modern Galilean science to go with it.[28] On the other hand, Pascal's position was reactionary: Pascal fought from the feudalist barracks of Catholicism against the bourgeois ideology that imbued the new philosophy of Descartes.[29] Spinoza surely didn't hold the same position as Pascal, but his anti-Cartesianism served a similar function in the philosophical battlefields of the 17th and 20th centuries.

Introduction (II) – Althusser and 17th-century Philosophy

The attention that Althusser's notorious admiration for Spinoza has earned from commentators – and from himself[30] – has done much to distract from his relation to other 17th-century philosophers.[31] A passage from his autobiography is enough to let us know that Althusser's story cannot be told simply by stressing the Spinozist "détour." Althusser describes his purportedly minimal philosophical expertise as he began to feel "de plus en plus philosophe" while teaching the subject at the *École normale supérieure*:

> Évidemment ma culture philosophique des textes était plutôt réduite. Je connaissais bien Descartes, Malebranche, un peu Spinoza, pas du tout Aristote, les sophistes, les stoïciens, assez bien Platon, Pascal, Kant pas du tout, Hegel un peu et enfin certains passages de Marx lus de très près.[32]

[28] Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, pp. 50-51.
[29] Althusser, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'état (Notes pour une recherche)" (1970), in Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, p. 293.
[30] See Althusser, "Élements d'autocritique," in *Solitude de Machiavel* (Paris: PUF, 1998), 181-9.
[31] Besides the French philosophers I will discuss, one might also mention Hobbes: Althusser's archive contains relevant notes and material related to a course on Hobbes, from 1971-2.
[32] Althusser, *L'avenir dure longtemps*, pp. 157-8; cf. 174: "un peu de Hegel, beaucoup de Descartes, peu de Kant, pas mal de Malebranche, un peu de Bachelard…, beaucoup de Pascal, un peu de Rousseau alors, un peu de Spinoza, un peu de Bergson… un peu puis pas mal de Marx."

While the autobiography is known to be "highly suspect in terms of details and interpretation,"[33] the Althusser archive contains numerous pieces of evidence to support this subtle hierarchy of familiarity in this particular statement, in which Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza and Pascal precede Hegel and Marx.

Althusser's notebook and related notes on Malebranche, likely dating, for the most part, from the late 1940s, is strikingly rich and dense, manifesting deep knowledge of the post-Cartesian occasionalist.[34] In general, the presence of Descartes, Malebranche, and Spinoza is marked in course notebooks from Althusser's time as a student, and his early years as a teacher, at the ENS. Althusser was highly familiar, for example, with their different metaphysics, epistemologies, and conceptions of God.[35] As for Pascal, also present in these early notes,[36] we

[33] Peden, *Spinoza contra Phenomenology*, p. 139.

[34] Fonds Althusser/IMEC: ALT2. A58-02.17. The notebook contains notes from a 1947-8 course given by Merleau-Ponty at the ENS on the mind-body problem in Malebranche, Biran, and Bergson, in preparation for the 1948 *agrégation*. Althusser appears to have re-read his notes on Merleau-Ponty's course at a later date, critiquing statements he had copied down. The differend with phenomenology that defined Althusser's career is here strikingly tangible. On the basis of the autobiography, Michael Moriarty has also noted that Althusser was a close reader of Malebranche (and Pascal): *Early Modern French Thought: The Age of Suspicion* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p.8, n.12 and p. 219 n.102.

[35] See Fonds Althusser/IMEC: ALT2. A60-09; ALT2. A58-02.17; ALT2.A56-13; ALT2. A5-01; ALT2. A56-01-5. Inserted into one of the cahiers in ALT2. A56-01 is a fascinating talk on Descartes that Althusser gave, perhaps around 1949. The talk's starting point was the way in which Descartes was too *present* to be really understood, that is, how he had become part and parcel of the French philosophical, literary and even existential *problématique*, to use a concept Althusser would later theorize: "Descartes est d'abord une présence contemporaine: nous pensons dans Descartes." Every quotidian gesture or action resonates with a thought or gesture of the great genius of the "French spirit." Althusser called for a study of Descartes that would purify his philosophy – which must be understood in its historical moment – of the ideological layers deposited by its modern reuses and tendentious interpretations. We need to "kill" the contemporary, ideological, and institutional Descartes – which distorts both Descartes and our true questions, questions related to our time but that remain unrecognizable under their Cartesian, ideological form – in order to find Descartes's life and thought, in his time. Althusser then proceeded to elucidate the contradictions in Descartes's philosophy as reflecting the tension between new objects and modes of thinking for discerning truth, on the one hand, and powerful conservative ideological forces, on the other. Descartes hence tried to think new contents in old, ideological forms or terms, and this equivocity itself reflected the ambiguous place occupied by a nascent mercantile bourgeoisie in a world still largely feudal and dominated by the aristocracy. One might thus see this talk, I think, as a prototype or schema for the similar, albeit more theoretically subtle, positions Althusser would later take on his return to Marx – e.g., in *Lire le Capital* (1965) – and the Lacanian return to Freud – e.g., in "Freud et Lacan" (1964). For earlier

have already seen the distinguished place he occupied in the prison notebooks, both published and unpublished. I will argue below that Althusser continued to perform his affinity for Pascal, theoretically, in his mature career.

In what follows, Spinoza will necessarily have a major part. I will explore Althusser's Spinozism in areas more known – for example, Althusser's theory of the imaginary – and less familiar – for instance, the role played by the parallelism of the two attributes in the materialist account of ideology. But much attention will also be given to situating Althusser with respect to Pascal.[37] In particular, I will show that Pascal's theory of "la force de la coutume," discussed in chapter 3, was absorbed into Althusser's theory that ideology is grounded in material and institutionalized *practices*. Further, I will argue that both thinkers ascribed to what I call an *antihumanist anthropology*, according to which man's nature is a lack of nature – a lack that encompasses, I should stress, the central aspect of Sartre's humanist concept of existence, freedom. The paradox of the famous "toujours-déjà" in Althusser's account of subject constitution – biological individuals are *always already* interpellated as cultural or ideological subjects – follows, I argue, the Augustinian logic of original sin. The origin is pushed back beyond the world, because empirical, historical man has always-already fallen, has always been

versions of this talk, see ALT2. A32-01.01-03. ALT2. A32-01.04-5 contains notes for a course on Descartes and Malebranche Althusser proposed for students preparing for the *agrégation*.

[36] See the first cahier in ALT2. A56-01. Dedicated largely to Descartes and method, it contains notes and what appear to be mini practice essays, perhaps in preparation for the *agrégation*, comparing Pascal to Descartes and elucidating their respective methods.

[37] For a preliminary attempt to compare the two, though one that does not draw on archival material, see ONAKA Kazuya, "Anti-Humanism as the Objectifying logic of Politics: A Pascalian Detour to Reread Althusser," *Ibunka* 16 (2015), pp. 73-92; see also Michael Moriarty, 'Žižek, Religion, and Ideology', *Paragraph*, 24/2 (July 2001), 125–39; Moriarty, *Early Modern French Thought: The Age of Suspicion*, 117, n. 29 and p. 219, n. 102.

*post*lapsarian. Or, as Althusser puts it, "l'idéologie est éternelle": "l'homme est par nature un animal idéologique."[38]

Introduction (III) – Althusser and Theology

Althusser's early contact with Pascal might in part be explained by the religiosity of his youth. The prison notebooks from 1940-5 are rife with theological *pensées* and manifest something of the "disposition pour l'éloquence ecclésiastique" that Althusser discovered in himself as a young Catholic and on a group getaway to the Trappist (Cistercian) monastery in La Dombes.[39] Recent scholarship has begun to shed light on the continuing influence of Catholicism in Althusser's mature career, after he had apparently stopped believing and had become a Communist.[40] The influence was latent: in Althusser's theoretical work, religion became a bad word, used to condemn others. A disparaging evaluation of phenomenology from 1966 – "la phénoménologie est la psychologie religieuse de notre temps"[41] –, especially when read in the context of Althusser's critique of spiritualism as the dominant trend in modern French philosophy,[42] indicates how much had changed since his days as a lyrically Catholic prisoner of war.

If "religious" became a slur in his mature thought, it is generally accepted that Marxism for Althusser was in some sense a substitute for Catholicism; and his activities in the PFC homologous to his activist participation in young Catholic groups.[43] The recently released

[38] Althusser, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'état" (1970), in *Sur la reproduction*, pp. 288, 295.
[39] Althusser, "Les faits," p. 299.
[40] See Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 107-162; id., "Althusser's Catholic Marxism," *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*, vol. 19, n. 4 (2007), pp. 469-486.
[41] Althusser, "Lettre à D[iatkine], nº1" (18 July 1966), in *Écrits sur la psychanalyse*, p. 67.
[42] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology*, p. 140.
[43] Ibid., p. 144. See *L'avenire dure longtemps*, p.197: "Je peux bien le dire, c'est en grande partie *par les organisations catholiques de l'Action catholique que je suis venu au contact de la lutte des classes et donc au marxisme*" (Althusser's italics).

documentary, *L'aventure Althusser* (2016), contains suggestive moments to this effect, in which Althusser says that he became a Communist since Communism was a better means than religion to bring about "la fraternité universelle." He names the Church as an example of sites where Communism has been successfully enacted. A loose sheet of notes "sur catholicisme et marxisme" that I found in Althusser's archive in a dossier of "diverse notes" thought to be from the 1940s, is even more explicit: "Le communisme a recueilli le mouvement qu'avait perdu le catholicisme," Althusser wrote, before expounding upon the "origines chrétiennes du marxisme dans maints aspects," and insisting, rather gnomically, that "[le] christianisme est 1er grand mouvement sans métaphysique… le 2ème est le communisme."[44]

Such remarks and unpublished notes invite further reflection on the tacit survival of religious or theological problematics in Althusser's career, which fly in the face of his conscious attack on existentialism and phenomenology. He portrayed the latter as the longstanding religious or spiritualist ideology of French philosophy, which his theoretically robust Marxism would have to battle. Besides focusing on how anti-humanist accounts of the constitution of subjects follows a logic similar to that of postlapsarian theology, I will also try to bring to light the arguably ascetic, mystical, and negative theological aspects of Althusser's mature thought. Both in Althusser's epistemology, inherited in large respect from Cavaillès and Spinoza, and in his account of ideology, these "theological" elements are striking. They are never stated outright, to be sure, but rather haunt his idiom and images, and can be seen as serving a generally mystical aspiration behind Althusser's manifestly materialist philosophy.

[44] Fonds Althusser/IMEC: ALT2.A56-23.

I. Epistemology – Purifying the Intellect of Empirical Corruption

Published, along with *Pour Marx*, in 1965, *Lire le capital* is considered the prime example of high theoreticism in Althusser's career. In his contributions to this work produced with his students at the ENS, Althusser made several famous gestures: he drew a stark line between ideology and science; he posited Marx's "coupure épistémologique" vis-à-vis the ideological bodies of knowledge that formed the "problématique" or epistemological horizon whence the new science of history – historical materialism – strove to rend itself free; he argued that it was Marx's own nascent philosophy – dialectical materialism – that serves to distinguish between science and ideology; and, in antihumanist and more or less structuralist fashion, he lowered the purportedly "constitutive subject" (à la phenomenology) to the status of being mere effect or "reflection" of the place or role assigned by the structure or structural transformations.[45]

But none of these well-known themes of Althusser scholarship is directly my concern. Instead, what will be studied here is less familiar: the ways in which Althusser expresses these themes, the words and images used to convey what is purportedly at the furthest remove from the rhetorical and the imaginary. In particular, scholars have neglected to scrutinize the term "purity" that Althusser predicates of "scientific" concepts as opposed to the "contaminated" ideas of "ideology" and empiricism, or to see how this term fits within a no less than *ascetic* critique of everyday life in the "world." As in the Christian idiom – "la vanité du monde," says Pascal[46] –, the "world" for Althusser is the site of temptations, seductive epistemological lures, from which the mind must be extracted if it is to escape generalized delusion.[47] True concepts are born via a

[45] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, I, p. 28.
[46] Pascal, *Pensées*, B161, 164. In Pascal, the term refers to the secular sphere *and* to the empirical world.
[47] On the passage from a religious to a more secular meaning of "monde," see Emmanuel Bury, "Monde," in *Dictionnaire raisonné de la politesse et du savoir-vivre du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, Alain Montandon, ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1995), pp. 639-52.

sanctifying rupture with profane life. Althusser's theoretical praxis is a technique of self-purification.[48]

The latent presence of these theological themes is all the more interesting given Althusser's explicit critique that empiricism or spontaneous epistemology – ideological epistemology[49] – is a profane version of a religious ideology. In the same vein, he states that empiricism unwittingly imported "original sin" into its conception of the relation between knowing subject and known object. On this account, empiricism implicitly understands the status of a bit of knowledge qua knowledge to stem from the fact that, at the remote origin of human thought, there was a real object or concrete practice that was taken up, as a stamp or impression, into the very first concepts. This mark vouched for the epistemological foundation of these concepts and of all their descendants, while also inscribing their distance and distinction from the origin. Althusser likens this logic to that of the transmission of sin in Christianity.[50]

Althusser's contributions to *Lire le Capital* return obsessively to the critique of empiricism. The goal of this critique is ultimately to extract science from ideology. Between these he places a "cut" or rupture that is analogous to the rift he posits between the "objet réel," which empiricism considers the basis of knowledge qua the real abstracted essence found deep

[48] Compare this and what follows to a the directives for combating empirically-related images written by one of the fathers of asceticism, Evagrius Ponticus: "On Thoughts," in *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, R. Sinkewicz, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 136-82.

[49] These are arguably synonymous in Althusser's texts. Even though empiricism is conceived as a historical phenomenon, it is essentially this sort of epistemology that stands for ideology itself, in particular as the spontaneous ideology of the modern sciences. And we should note that this hardly spares the "idealists" as one might think, for Althusser holds "l'idéalisme cartésien" to harbor an "empirisme dogmatique latent" that it was Spinoza's merit to have critiqued, before Marx: *Lire le Capital*, p. 46. Indeed, Althusser claims that the empiricist epistemology he has in mind – empiricism "dans son sens le plus large" – includes "aussi bien un empirisme rationaliste qu'un empirisme sensualiste, et qu'on le retrouve à l'œuvre dans la pensée hégélienne elle-même" (38). See also p. 62, where traditional epistemology in general is considered a "position idéologique du 'problème de la connaissance,'" and is claimed to be identical with the Western philosophical tradition, beginning with Descartes: "qui définit la tradition qui se confound avec la pholosophie idéaliste occidentale (de Descartes à Husserl, en passant par Kant et Hegel)." See also *Lire le Capital*, II (Paris: Maspero, 1968), p. 59.

[50] *Lire le Capital*, I., p.76. Cf. pp. 77, 99, 144. Cf. Malebranche,

within objects in the world, and the "objet de la connaissance" as *produced* by conceptual or theoretical practice.[51] Understanding this distinction, namely, that the produced object has no resemblance to the real object that it nevertheless "appropriates," is held to be the major revolution in epistemology accomplished by Spinoza, before Marx.[52] Empiricism lives off "le mythe spéculaire de la connaissance comme vision d'un objet donné, ou lecture d'un texte établi qui ne sont jamais que la transparence même."[53] In this, Althusser claims, empiricist epistemology is the unwitting "transcription profane" of "la lecture religieuse," in particular, of a religious vision of Scripture as the vessel of an essence, a voice: *Logos*.[54]

While Althusser critiques this way of equating knowledge with a process of extracting "l'essence pure" from the inessential in the real objects ("des procédés d'épuration"[55]), precisely the same image of purification haunts his description of the theoretical, anti-empiricist epistemology he claims to inherit from Spinoza and Marx. To recall, in Althusser's comparison between empiricism and the doctrine of original sin, what constituted "la marque indélébile" in every concept issued from the first ones was precisely its attachment to sensory objects – the fact of its being materially impressed upon by real, worldly objects and practices. This view of knowledge is not abandoned by Althusser, but simply displaced. Empiricism's reliance on the logic of original sin becomes, as it were, the original sin of empiricism per se, against which science proper must be hedged.

Althusser's evocation of original sin is clearly intended to be an open reference to a whole tradition. Still, one contributor to Althusser's notion of original sin was surely Malebranche, whose works he knew well. In *De la recherche de la vérité*, Malebranche

[51] Ibid., pp. 39, 38-45, 47, 65.
[52] Ibid., p. 46.
[53] Ibid., p. 17.
[54] Ibid., p. 38.
[55] Ibid.., p. 40.

conceives the transmission of original sin precisely as the passing down of "de si grands vestiges et des traces par l'impression des objets sensibles" that marked the brains of the "premiers parents" of mankind upon their transgression. Heredity, in animals as in postlapsarian humans, is theorized along the same lines, that is, as a phylogenetic sharing of original marks or impressions made in the brain by sensory objects. In humans, the survival of this original, physical trauma to the mind explains that life on earth has been and will be "le règne de la concupiscence": these marks determine "les pensées de l'âme" to remain attached to the sensible objects and worldly pleasures whence they arose.[56]

But Althusser hardly throws out this theological image of the constitution of ideas per se. In being unveiled as the theological truth of empiricism, it is rather degraded to the status of ideology, where it continues to live on, eternally triumphant. The underlying logic of this manner of including the excluded, or *ex*timacy,[57] is as follows: unwittingly, behind or in its putative scientific notions, empiricism posits a sort of original sin that explains the truth content of concepts as the trace of real objects. In fact, true scientific concepts are those that produce, in the order of thought, an "object of knowledge," which is purified of any trace or resemblance of the "real object." In other words, you can recognize an ideological concept by its recourse to "reality," by the way it gestures at its "origin" in the real world of "concrete" objects and practices—by its stamp of unabashed empiricism, which is nothing but the trace of a sinful attachment to the "world."

This logic of sin becomes evident on a close reading of Althusser's language. At one point, he ordains that "nous avons à purifier une nouvelle fois notre concept de théorie de

[56] Malebranche, *De a recherche de la vérité*, bk. II "De l'imagination" (Paris: Vrin, 2006), I, 7, v, pp. 126-34. Cf. *De la Recherche de le vérité*, VIIIème éclaircissement. Althusser's notes on Malebranche display an interest in the latter's "trace" theory and conception of original sin: Fonds Althusser/IMEC: ALT2. A58-02.17.
[57] See Lacan, *D'un Autre à l'autre*, 1968-9, séminaire XVI (Paris: Seuil, 2006), p. 249.

l'histoire, et radicalement, de toute contamination par les évidences de l'histoire empirique."[58] The task of remaining vigilant not to "retomber"[59] into ideology is immense. Like some latter-day anchorites striving to learn to dwell in the desert, we must constantly be on our guard against the empirical confusion of real and conceptual objects. This "prejudice" is not so much an external menace to be avoided as an inner drive to be constantly battled: "[n]ous ne devons pas nous faire d'illusions sur la force incroyable de ce préjugé, qui nous domine encore tous."[60]

Using a lengthy metaphor, in another passage Althusser equates life on earth per se with living and breathing in ideology. Empiricism cannot be circumscribed, since it is both the container and the condition of earthly life itself: "cette tentation empiriste dont le poids est immense, et pourtant n'est pas plus ressenti par le commun des hommes et même des historiens, que n'est ressenti par les humains de cette planète le poids de l'énorme couche d'air qui les écrase."[61] Traditional empiricism doesn't just harbor original sin in its concepts; it is itself the original sin of epistemology and of layman's thinking. It names the constant, impalpable "temptation" to grope after the apparently objective self-evidence of the world as "given." Marx's "philosophy," which Althusser labors to extract from *Capital* while making use of it to precisely this same end, and which directs the radical critique of empiricism or ideology, lays the

[58] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, I, p. 132. "Histoire empirique" is both history as commonly practiced by historians and "history" as the empirical, apparently continuous temporality of everyday life: that is, time as "visible," as understood in uncritical reflection. On this see ibid., I, p. 129.
[59] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, II, p. 65; I, 170. All concepts we inherit must be endlessly critiqued: I, p. 115.
[60] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, I, p. 132. On empiricism as "temptation": see I, 146, 178; II, 42, 58, 65.
[61] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, I, p. 132. Perhaps when reading this passage we should remember that it was Pascal who gained great fame for his experiments with air pressure, and that the unit for measuring pressure is named after him. In a treatise on the subject, published after his death, Pascal argued against sensory evidence of the apparent weightlessness of air. His words resonate in Althusser's atmospheric metaphor for ideology: "Comme les animaux qui sont dans l'eau n'en sentent pas le poids; ainsi nous ne sentons pas le poids de l'air, par la même raison: et comme on ne pourrait pas conclure que l'eau n'a point de poids, de ce qu'on ne le sent pas quand on y est enfoncé; ainsi on ne peut pas conclure que l'air n'a pas de pesanteur, de ce que nous ne la sentons pas." "Traité de la pesanteur de la masse de l'air," in *Œuvres*, Lafuma, ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1963), p. 244.

path away from the world of "*l'impureté empirique*" – "le royaume des préjugés qui nous gouvernent" – to "la *pureté du concept*"[62] in science. There, one is no longer rooted to empirical ground. In the *Capital* "nous ne sortons jamais de l'abstraction, c'est-à-dire de la connaissance, des 'produits du penser et du concevoir: *nous ne sortons jamais du concept*."[63]

With empiricism or ideology conceived as the very air we breathe, Althusser approaches a totalizing image of the "world" itself as the closed sphere of ideology. In other words, what one might take to be a historical condition or phenomenon – empiricism, philosophy or ideology since Descartes, etc. –, is expanded to subsume worldly life itself. It becomes one side of a division of two domains inherited from the theological dualism between the two cities or worlds, which we find in thinkers such as Saint Augustine and Pascal. One doesn't have to be a scientist to be an ideologue or empiricist: ideology is the product of "la pratique quotidienne"[64] We are all born sinners for Althusser; even children are ideologically contaminated. No wonder that philosophies like phenomenology or existentialism, with their hewing close to perception and experience, to "intuition" and life in the world, were the very stuff of ideology for Althusser.[65]

The inflation of the concept of ideology to the point of becoming synonymous with life per se, is fascinating from a thinker so acutely historical and so adamantly materialist as Althusser. How might it be understood? Likely, we should consider it the basis of the unspoken

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[62] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, II, p. 70. Italics are Althusser's; I, 137: "L'opposition souvent évoquée entre le caractère 'abstrait' du *Capital*, et le prétendu caractère 'concret' de l'histoire comme science est un pur et simple malentendu… [qui] tient une place de choix dans le royaume des préjugés qui nous gouvernent."

[63] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, II, pp. 66-7. Italics are Althusser's. We should note that this "purity" of the concept is clearly the sine qua non for science to escape from historicism, all the while being considered as a historical phenomena (i.e., as having a history and as emerging, from the backwaters of ideology, at certain moments and through the theoretical practice of certain figures: Marx, Freud, etc.). To utterly submit science to history, like Gramsci, amounts to "la chute" of science into the empirical, historical realm: I, 170. See similar language in "Freud et Lacan," pp. 23, 29.

[64] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, I, 126.

[65] See Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology*, ch. 4 and 5; Warren Montag, *Althusser and his Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), ch. 3.

presence of a materialist, antihumanist anthropology in Althusser's theory of ideology, which the second half of this chapter will strive to understand. Arguably, that is, this theory relied on what thinkers like Pascal, Spinoza, and Malebranche had foregrounded: a materialist and at times physiological explanation for the force of everyday experience in shaping beliefs and thoughts, and in solidifying custom into second nature. In Pascal and Malebranche, the primacy and recalcitrance of material life and practice had their origin in original sin, which granted the imagination an inordinately large place in human life. Althusser's theory of ideology both relied on and provided a historical materialist version of these early modern theories. "Detour" was a term he used to describe thinkers through which he had to pass on his way to Marx. In the case of these early modern philosophers, the detour was the main road.

II. Like God, the Structure Thinks (Itself in) Me –Althusser, Cavaillès, Spinoza

Before turning to the theory of ideology, one more aspect of Althusser's epistemology from the mid-1960s should be introduced, which reflects back more broadly on the divide between antihumanism and humanism in the 17th as well as in the 20th century. As I mentioned in chapter 4, Sartre attacked Parain's neo-Spinozist or proto-Structuralist view of language qua system or structure, in similar terms to those he used to critique the *psyche* as studied by psychology: language conceived as *transcendent* to consciousness is merely a reification or projection of consciousness itself, Sartre argued.

Whether Sartre was ultimately right is not my concern. I am instead interested in the suggestion that there is some sort of *specular* relation between two sides of the conflict, each claiming to theoretically vanquish the other: between consciousness, as Sartre, following Husserl and Descartes, described it, on the one hand; and, on the other, "system" or "structure" or

"order," as deployed in various structuralisms, theoreticism, or post-structuralisms against the humanism of phenomenology and the human sciences. If, for Sartre, Parain had things upside-down, from the more antihumanist side of things, a position like Sartre's simply had things backwards. Before becoming a theoretical set piece in the texts by Althusser, Lacan, and others, this critique of consciousness was present in the brilliant Spinozist mathematician and *résistant*, Jean Cavaillès (1903-44).

Cavaillès was one of Althusser's most important early influences and has been seen as prefiguring the sort of critiques of consciousness and subjectivity we later find in postwar structuralism and antihumanism.[66] In his challenging epistemological work, *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science* (1942), Cavaillès subjected philosophies of consciousness to a rigorous critique from the position of a philosophy and epistemology of science, for which mathematics provides the paradigm. It is at the end of this text that Cavaillès wrote his famous call to order, separating science from the realm of consciousness: to study the former, a "philosophie du concept" is needed, not another dreary "philosophie de la conscience."[67] In Cavaillès's text, the attributes philosophies of consciousness ascribe to consciousness are predicated of the structure of science itself.

Science is understood to be "un objet *sui generis*" with its own, internal necessity and movement – the necessity determining the production of concepts one from another,[68] similar to the order of God's ideas in Spinoza's *Ethics*.[69] "[P]rogrès autonome, dynamisme fermé sur lui-même, sans commencement ni terme, la science se meut hors du temps - si le temps signifie

[66] See Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology*, introduction and ch. 1; Nick Nesbitt, "Editor's introduction. Rereading *Reading Capital*," in *The Concept in Crisis:* Reading Capital *Today, 1965-2015*, Nesbitt, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
[67] Cavaillès*, Sur la logique et la théorie de la science* (Paris: Vrin, 2008), p. 90.
[68] Ibid., p. 36.
[69] See, e.g., *Ethics*, IIP9.

référence vécue d'une conscience,"[70] Cavaillès writes. His *Logique* opens with a critique of Kant, who attempted to locate logical rules in understanding and reason, ultimately in consciousness, which Kant accorded the status of logic's absolute origin or ground. Kant turned logic into the "auto-connaissance" of reason and understanding, two "pouvoirs de la conscience," which was thus endowed with "la propriété d'une auto-illumination intérieure."[71] Precisely this "property," accorded by Kant to consciousness as guarantor of logic, science, and its particular sort of rationality, is what Cavaillès accords to the structure of science. Structure replaces consciousness. This clearest in a section of the text on "la doctrine de la science."

If science is "sui generis," what about discourse on science, the "science de la science"? What is it and from where does it draw its authority, if not from consciousness? In order for the "science de la science" to have "validité," "intelligibilité," it must be a part of science itself, Cavaillès writes. It must be a discourse generated by science itself in its autonomous movement. The self-knowledge, self-transparency, and "la propriété d'une auto-illumination intérieure," which characterized the "structure" of consciousness and its faculties in Kant,[72] are transferred to the "structure de la science" itself, described in quasi-theological terms:

> Il faut alors que ses énoncés [de la 'science de la science'] ne soient pas constitutifs d'un développement particulier mais apparaissent immédiatement dans une auto-illumination du mouvement scientifique, se distinguant de lui par leur permanente émergence. Tel est le rôle de la structure. En définissant une structure de la science qui n'est que manifestation à elle-même de ce qu'elle est, on précise et justifie les caractères précédents, non par une explicitation qui aurait son lieu propre et serait, à son tour, objet de réflexion, mais par une révélation qui n'est pas distincte du révélé, présente dans son mouvement, principe de sa nécessité. La structure parle sur elle-même. Or il n'est qu'une façon de s'imposer par une autorité qui n'emprunte rien au dehors, la démonstration. La structure de la science, non seulement est démonstration, mais se confond avec la démonstration. En elle se retrouvent bien les traits essentiels: unité, progression

[70] Cavaillès, *Sur la logique*, p. 37.
[71] Ibid., p. 19
[72] Ibid., pp. 18-9.

> nécessaire et indéfinie, enfin fermeture sur soi. La règle interne qui la dirige pose chacune de ses étapes, toute en elles, et impossible à saisir *ne varietur* dans aucune.[73]

Between this passage and the earlier critique of Kant, there is a mirror resemblance, an almost one to one opposition: the "structure" of consciousness vs. the "structure of science." The reflexivity essential to consciousness or "transcendental subjectivity" considered in Husserl to be "the absolute existent,"[74] is now located precisely where consciousness is not, in what radically transcends any mind or subject. This reversal, it seems, is characteristic of both the modern and early modern wars between humanist and antihumanist positions, between systems beginning from a constitutive, self-reflective, autonomous subject or consciousness, and theories that posit the transcendence and autonomy of subject-constituting structures.[75] To be sure, one would have to survey vast swathes of intellectual history to confirm this hypothesis. But it is already born out in the analyses of four authors studied in the preceding chapters. Significantly, no author, on either side, seems to have recognized this logic of reversal while enacting it everywhere.

The same reversal of subject and structure is tangible in Althusser's contributions to *Lire le Capital.* For example, in one section of high structuralist antihumanism, he summarizes the general "résultats des autres études de cet ouvrage" thus:

> la structure des rapports de production détermine des *places* et des *fonctions* qui sont occupées et assumées par des agents de la production, qui ne sont jamais que les occupants de ces places, dans la mesure où ils sont des 'porteurs' (Träger) de ces fonctions. Les vrais 'sujets' (au sens de sujets constituants du procès) ne sont donc pas ces occupants ni ces fonctionnaires, ne sont donc pas, contrairement à toutes les apparences, les 'évidences' du 'donné' de l'anthropologie naïve, les 'individus concrets', les 'hommes réels', — mais *la définition et la distribution de ces places et de ces fonctions. Les vrais 'sujets' sont donc ces définisseurs et ces distributeurs : les rapports de production* (et les rapports sociaux politiques et idéologiques).[76]

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[73] Ibid., p. 39. Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), §25.
[74] Husserl, *Formale und Transzendentale Logik* (Halle: Max Niemer Verlag, 1929), §103.
[75] Cf. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. E. Jephcott (Stanford, 2002), p. 23.
[76] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, II, 53. Italics are Althusser's. Perhaps sensing the risk of reifying what is in fact a structure of "relations," he immediately adds: "Mais, comme ce sont des rapports, on ne saurait les

The use of quotation marks is typical in Althusser's theoretical practice. The marks signal that the word one is about to read is excerpted from common parlance or ideology, and is as such not to be taken as given, but suspected and critiqued. Here, the words are taken out of that profane, ideological domain of the "given," the "life world" of most, from which phenomenology – in Husserl, Sartre, or Merleau-Ponty – takes its departure.

Althusser seizes upon a term – "sujet," "liberté," "conscience," "égalité," "responsabilité," "pensée," "idées," to name a few choice targets – and suggests, under its apparent self-evidence, its semblance of naming an Absolute, its true, opaque ambiguity or ambivalence: the fact of it pointing beyond itself, of its meaning the contrary of what it seems to name.[77] In the sense of "constituting subject" (the sense of "subject" in phenomenology, that is), Althusser claims that the reference for the term cannot be an individual person or a consciousness, since these are in fact *constituted*. Rather, "sujet constituant" can only name the structures themselves, the relations of production and modes of reproduction, underlying a given social formation or "structure globale du tout social."[78] In his seminar on psychoanalysis at the ENS 1963-4*,* which I cited in chapter 1, Althusser more explicitly commented on the equivocity of the term "sujet." He pointed to the ironic ideological reversal whereby "sujet," "celui qui est

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penser sous la catégorie de *sujet*" (53). Cf. also *Lire le Capital*, I, pp. 25-6, 28, 47. "La vue n'est plus alors le fait d'un sujet individuel, doté d'une faculté du 'voir' qu'il exercerait soit dans l'attention, soit dans la distraction; la vue est le fait de ses conditions structurales, la vue est le rapport de réflexion immanent du champ de la problématique sur *ses* objets et *ses* problèmes. […] A la lettre ce n'est plus l'œil (l'œil de l'esprit) d'un sujet qui *voit* ce qui existe dans le champ défini par une problématique théorique: c'est le champ lui-même qui *se voit* dans les objets ou les problèmes qu'il définit, — la vue n'étant que la réflexion nécessaire du champ sur ses objets" (25; italics are Althusser's). "[C]ar la '*pensée*' dont il est ici question, n'est pas la faculté d'un sujet transcendantal ou d'une conscience absolue… cette pensée n'est pas non plus la faculté d'un sujet psychologique, bien que les individus humains en soient les agents. Cette pensée est le système historiquement constitué d'un *appareil de pensée*… Elle est définie par le système des conditions réelles…" (47).

[77] Equivocity of this sort seems to have been the hallmark of the ideological for Althusser. See for example "Freud et Lacan," p. 23, on the ambiguity of the borrowed concepts that Freud and Marx had to use in which to think their novel ideas.

[78] Ibid., p.52.

assujetti…désigne celui qui est actif."[79] Like La Rochefoucauld, with his evisceration of the heroic Virtues coded in 17th-century idealist philosophical and literary discourse, Althusser should be seen as performing a reversal, along the vectors of contrariety, of the keywords, "valeurs essentielles," or "Vertus," as he writes in one text,[80] of bourgeois capitalist ideology.

If, in Cavaillès, consciousness is not the ground or origin of concepts or science's development; if, in Althusser, the ego of the empirical individual is not the constitutive but rather the subjected subject; then the best consciousness can do is try to peer through its limited subjective position and bear witness to the self-unfolding of science and the transcendent agency of structures. In theoretical practice, that is, consciousness can participate in the pure life and dynamism of concepts and structures it does not contain. The mind becomes a wayfarer that sojourns with the concepts, after having once thought itself "la totalité de l'être" in which objects, concepts, and logical forms are constituted.[81]

Spinoza has often been associated with the understanding of science and structures found in Cavaillès and Althusser.[82] But commentators have arguably stopped short of drawing all conclusions from this striking resemblance, in particular as regards the end point of Althusserian theory, if its goal is not solely a critical or negative one.

After all, the journey Spinoza's *Ethics* describes ends in beatitude. Its starting point is the mind embedded in the swamp of chaotic, "vague experience" in which the imagination, with her minions the passions, rules dominant. The mind must ascend from this first level or kind of

[79] Althusser, *Psychanalyse et sciences humaines: Deux conférences (1963-1964)* (Paris: LGF, 1996), p. 107. See Montag*, Althusser and His Contemporaries*, p. 126.
[80] *Sur la reproduction*, pp. 171-2, 179, 284 (in the ISAs text).
[81] Cavaillès, commenting on Husserl's notion of consciousness, in *La logique*, p. 69. See Jan Sebestik's comment in his "Postface" to Cavaillès's book: "La conscience est le lieu où se révèlent, où surgissent les 'liens internes des idées' qui lient les consciences auxquelles celles-ci appartiennent. Les mathématiques ne font que réaliser des virtualités inscrites dans les concepts tissés par l'histoire" (141).
[82] See for example Nesbitt, "Editor's introduction," and Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology*, ch. 4.

knowledge, defined by immediate sense perception or experience, through abstract knowledge or Reason, the second, and on to the third sort of knowledge. At this last level, beatitude, a clear understanding of the "formal essence" of God, His necessity, and His infinite attributes – God here being the model or analogon for Cavaillès's science and Althusser's structure – allows adequate, intuitive knowledge of the "singular essences" of all things.[83] Later in this chapter I will return to Althusser's reading of Spinoza's types or kinds of knowledge, and to Althusser's antihumanism as a sort of profane theology, even a mysticism, whose goal is to overcome empirical subjectivity to commune with God.

Traces of this theological yearning can be found in Althusser's early studies of Spinoza from around 1948. To my knowledge, only Knox Peden has published on Althusser's notes from Desanti's lectures at the ENS, now held at the IMEC archive. "Althusser's notes from Desanti's lectures," Peden writes, "present a Spinoza with a firmly rationalist emphasis." Peden makes this point to justify his claim that Althusser's Spinozism progresses through four stages, following "a logic intrinsic to Spinoza's philosophy itself": it began with epistemology – hence the "rationalist" Spinoza of Althusser's early career –, before passing to historical ontology, and then to other stages.[84] Given this schema, we might be surprised to know that, in fact, Althusser's early notes on Spinoza contain a long development on beatitude or "bonheur absolu" as "adéquation à Dieu."[85] For Spinoza's "rationalism" is different and far more extreme than Descartes's, something Peden fails to mention. In Spinoza, reason is used to spring its own bounds. The mind's force strives to break through itself.

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[83] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP40S2; VP25, 29 ff. .

[84] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology*, pp.130-2, 138. Note that Peden mis- or poorly cites the *cahier* in the IMEC archive, providing only ALT2.A56 and ALT.A60, which are general headings for groups of notebooks or notes (not all of which relate to Desanti's lectures, and most of which contain other material).

[85] This citation and what follows are all from Althusser's cahier containing course and reading notes on Spinoza: Fonds Althusser/IMEC, ALT2. A60-09. All underlining is Althusser's. "[/]" marks a new line.

In one lecture Althusser attended, Desanti proceeded from distinguishing between the epistemologies of Descartes, where the problem concerns the relation of "sensible vs. intelligible," and of Spinoza, where the focus is on the relation of "individu au tout" (as in Pascal, one might add); to discussing Spinoza's conception of nature as an infinitely complex causal chain; and on to the problem of "salvation or "bonheur absolu comme le contraire de ce bonheur humain et modeste." This Happiness, that is, is the opposite of a worldly contentment grounded in Reason or in the knowledge of natural causes offered by the sciences—the eudemonic scheme contained in the "idée cartésienne d'une morale où on tire les fruits de la connaissance," which we encountered in chapter 1.

Instead of the meager wellbeing one might gain from the knowledge of empirical things, which supposes a certain distance and assures a degree of mastery over the known, absolute Happiness lies in the individual's merging with the "totality." Althusser writes: "Bonheur absolu - adéquation à Dieu. La connaissance de la nature (physique) n'est plus essentielle. L'essentiel est la coïncidence avec la totalité."[86] In other words, as Althusser would go on to note, the individual's "bonheur absolu," the endpoint of the *Ethics*, demands the dissolution of the individual per se:

> il n'y a plus d'individualité là où il n'y a pas de séparation d'avec la totalité […] l'individu disparaît [/] dans la totalité se trouve la garantie de l'être [/] alors l'individu concret est-il véritablement un être? […] [il] trouve sa mort dans ce qui montre son origine […] l'individu [n'est] pas compris; il n'y a pas de place […] l'individualité est détruit[e] par son salut.

If the telos in Spinoza is to have the mind coincide with the mind of God, the fate of the empirical, psychological subject in this scheme – Desanti construed the individual in Spinoza as *the bourgeois individual* emergent in the 17th century – is foregrounded in these passages from

[86] Here, Althusser inserted the following phrase, seemingly a gloss on what precedes ("coïncidence avec la totalité"): "connaissance de la nature dans sa source, son être éternel qui n'est pas durée (divisible) mais permanence d'essence."

Althusser's notes. The mind, that is, is blessed when it becomes a vessel for true ideas, for God's mind. This state coincides with knowing how God's necessity courses through all things, both bodies and ideas, and hence how "our" physical and mental events are rigorously determined.

In another part of the cahier, Althusser seems to be taking reading notes on Spinoza's unfinished *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, a work that contains a famous factual assessment of truth that Althusser often repeated. "We do have a true idea," Spinoza asserted, an idea whose truth is immanent to it, not measured by some external criterion as in traditional epistemology. In a passage that resonated in Cavaillès's "science de la science," Spinoza thus offered "the idea of the [true] idea" for a definition of the "method." Rather than with ourselves groping in the dark for truth, as in Descartes, in Spinoza one begins from the immanent certitude of the "true idea," which then serves as a norm by which to measure all other perceptions and ideas in the pursuit of knowledge.[87] In his reading notes, however, Althusser interpreted Spinoza's "méthode" or "la réflexivité de l'idée" in line with other notes on "salvation":

> la capacité qu'a l'idée <u>de se penser dans l'esprit qui la pense</u>: c'est l'idée qui prend l'esprit pour sujet de la pensée [/] productivité, efficacité de l'idée [ce qui] permet d'entendre que ce ne soit pas telle idée déterminée mais l'infini,[88] c'est-à-dire la loi de l'idée (= l'essence même de telle idée définie) qui se pense dans l'esprit qui la pense. Sous les espèces de telle idée c'est la totalité (Dieu) qui se pense dans la mesure où <u>idée</u> = <u>loi</u> = <u>totalité</u>.[89]

[87] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, in *Complete Works*, Shirley, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), §§33-9. "[M]ethod is nothing but reflexive knowledge, or the idea of an idea; and because there is no idea of an idea unless there is first an idea, there will be no method unless there is first an idea. So a good method will be one which shows how the mind is to be directed according to the standard of a given true idea" (§38).

[88] This could also be "infinité."

[89] It is fascinating to note that this reflection appears in the notebook as a correction of Althusser's own notes. The words are supposed to counter an earlier, more subjectivist (or Cartesian) interpretation of Spinoza's method: "la méthode n'est que la réflexivité de l'idée c'est-à-dire la capacité qu'a l'esprit de prendre l'idée pour objet de la pensée…" In replacing "esprit" with "idea," we find the same reversal as is found in Cavaillès or Althusser's texts *Lire le Capital*, between "subject" or "consciousness" and structure.

Whether Althusser recalled his notes on Spinoza when he became a famous theorist is of no concern. His texts in *Lire le Capital*, like his other published texts, bear no mention of this ex-static "bonheur absolu" which brings the individual *zum Grunde*, into God.

But it arguably remains an unspoken end of his antihumanism for the mind to "coincide with totality," in other words, to understand how its thoughts are not its own, but are thought inside it by an Other. The important thing, that is, was to understand this subjection, to cut short the wordplay of the term "subject" so as to grasp the literal sense of subjectivity: subjecthood. Only by understanding the measure of one's determination can one attain to the level at which empirical subjectivity goes under in ascending to God's perspective, the perspective that encompasses, as from a mountain top, what Althusser called "structural causality." The ascent to this height out of the prison of empirical subjectivity, where the conviction of individual freedom is the hallmark of subjection, is the goal of the theory of ideology.

III. Imagination, Imaginary, Ideology: Althusser with Spinoza and Pascal (I)

Althusser is perhaps most famous for his theory of ideology. For many, this theory amounts to what he wrote on the topic in a text from 1970 whose title is typically abbreviated: the text on ISAs (in French: "sur les AIE"), "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État (Notes pour une recherche)." As the full title suggests, however, it was provisional in nature. The French original printed a series of fragments, separated by ellipses, which were in fact excerpted from the first volume of a projected two-volume work: *Sur la reproduction des rapports de production*, a didactic "manual for militants," as Warren Montag calls it, which never appeared.[90]

As Montag has noted, the graphic elision of the marks of fracture in the English translation had the effect of encouraging "readers to ignore the cautionary statement contained in

[90] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, p. 104; see Balibar's preface and Bidet's introduction, in Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*.

an opening footnote and take the piece not as a collection of fragments but as a coherent and complete argument."[91] While I agree with Montag that (re)placing the fragments on ideology in their original context within *Sur la reproduction* hardly provides any "solution to the problem of reading the [ISAs] text,"[92] I think that *it does* shed light on at least two aspects of Althusser's theory of ideology: (1) the position that this theory assumes, namely, the "point de vue de la reproduction" of the relations of production peculiar to a given, historical "formation sociale" (e.g., capitalism); and (2) the essential role of Law and "l'idéologie juridique" in the reproduction of capitalism, its subjects, and their "valeurs." This later element was largely elided from the published article, where it is discernible only in cursory footnotes.[93] These two aspects are, further, crucial for understanding the theory's relation to Spinoza's conception of the imagination and to Pascal's notion of "la force de la coutume," a relation that is both explicit – announced by Althusser himself – and implicit, speaking in Althusser's silences, explaining certain unspoken grounds and ends of his theory.

To begin to understand this theory as Althusser presents it in *Sur la reproduction*, we should recall what we learned from his remarks on ideology in *Lire le Capital*: ideology's strict difference from "science," and hence its tending to refer to normal or everyday life itself, in which empiricism defines both the official outlook of the specialist (the philosopher, the scientist, the historian) and the spontaneous consciousness of the layman, which is embedded in all that is purported to be simply "given." In *Sur la reproduction*, Althusser repeats that ideology is the atmosphere of what is self-evident and imperceptible because taken for granted: "les notions immédiates que nous offrent les 'évidences' dans lesquelles nous vivons, puisque nous

[91] Montag*, Althusser and His Contemporaries*, pp. 103-4, 142-3.
[92] Ibid., p. 142.
[93] See Althusser, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'état," in *Sur la reproduction*, n. 9, n. 15.

vivons dans l'idéologie."[94] But his famous definitions of ideology are technical and harder to understand. I'll note a few:

> (1) "L'idéologie est une 'représentation' imaginaire du rapport imaginaire des individus à leurs conditions réelles d'existence"; (2) "l'idéologie représente le rapport imaginaire des individus à leurs conditions réelles d'existence"[95]; (3) "toute idéologie représente dans sa déformation nécessairement imaginaire non pas les rapports de production existants (et les autres rapports qui en dérivent), mais avant tout le rapport (imaginaire) des individus aux rapports de production et aux rapports qui en dérivent…le rapport imaginaire de ces individus aux rapports réels sous lesquels ils vivent." [96]

What is first apparent in these definitions is the presence of two terms: "imaginaire" and "rapport." To be sure, Althusser's stated intention is to surpass any theory – including Marx's – that would view ideology as pure "illusion," as a falsity or negativity whose ontological ground is outside it, namely, in the real word of which it is merely an "inversion."[97] We thus might be surprised by Althusser's choice of the term "imaginaire" to serve as the signature adjective for ideology, and by the idiom of being vs. appearance that recurs throughout *Sur la reproduction*.[98]

But what Althusser has done is displace the values of the traditional or "ideological" understanding of ideology, and the terms of which it is the "relation." From ideology referring to an inverted consciousness out of touch with concrete reality, it is now the putatively "real" world itself that becomes the domain of ideology, while the "real" is lost under a fold of relations: ideology is my imaginary relation, coterminous with my real world – my everyday life in society –, to real relations, structural conditions, of social existence. Consciousness is not *the* site of ideology, as if reality were there, outside of it, waiting to be grasped. Rather, consciousness *only* encounters ideology, which encircles it on all sides, for ideology is the world itself in all its self-

[94] Ibid., pp. 119-20.
[95] Ibid., p. 214.
[96] Ibid., p. 216.
[97] Ibid., p. 107.
[98] E.g., in ibid: "imposture" (71); "illusion" (71; **78**); "masque" (73; 202); "travestir" (79); "mystification" (78); "mirages" (142); "'théâtre'" (177); "rôle" (179); "dissimulés" (179), etc.

evidence. This is what is meant by the rather gnomic phrase from *Pour Marx*: "Ce rapport…n'apparaît '*conscient*' qu'à la condition d'être *inconscient*."[99] That is, to invoke the metaphor discussed earlier: consciousness breaths ideology like air, it thinks ideology in all its basic, most obvious thoughts. But it doesn't know that what it is breathing *is* ideology. It sees ideology everywhere; but what it sees is the nature of things, the given world in its apparent fixity.

The emphasis on "rapport" points in a direction that Althusser does not pursue. What might we make of an "imaginary relation" to "real relations," or an imaginary to "real conditions of existence"? In *Pour Marx*, Althusser offers this clue, but doesn't elaborate: "L'idéologie concerne…le rapport *vécu* des hommes à leur monde […] [c]e rapport imaginaire… *exprime* plus une *volonté* (conservatrice, conformiste, réformiste ou révolutionnaire) voire une espérance ou une nostalgie, qu'il ne décrit une réalité."[100] This "relation" is at once "lived" as we have seen, and also volitive or *affective*.

Also reading Althusser in this way, Terry Eagleton has claimed that one of Althusser's contributions to our understanding of ideology is to have replaced an often epistemological or "cognitive" emphasis – ideology as false ideas, beliefs, etc. – with an "*affective* theory."[101] The term "affective," to be sure, is nowhere to be found in Althusser's writings on ideology. Still, Eagleton is right in choosing this word to refer to what Althusser calls the "way" or "lived relation," synonymous with a will or wish, an emotion. We might take one step further, synthesizing Althusser's claims: *precisely as a lived and affective relation, ideology is*

[99] Althusser, "Marxisme et humanisme" (1964), in *Pour Marx* (Paris: Découverte, 1996), p. 240. See also "'Sur le jeune Marx' (Questions de théorie)" (1960) in *Pour Marx*, p. 66.
[100] Ibid., p. 240.
[101] Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 19. On Althusser, see pp. 136-52.

imaginary. To unpack this statement, we will need to understand the genealogy of Althusser's concepts.

Eagleton has tried this, reading Althusser's notion of the "imaginaire" as indicating a debt to Lacan.[102] In another famous thesis from the ISAs text, "l'idéologie interpelle les individus en sujets," Eagleton thus sees the combined influence of Lacan's notions of the Imaginary, which is the order of the ego, and of the Symbolic order, which constitutes the subject (of the unconscious). For Lacan, upon the introduction of language, the individual passes from the imaginary capture of alienating, specular identification with the mother to symbolic subjecthood to the Other. Althusser committed the error of mixing the two, Eagleton thinks: Althusser's theory "involves…crucial misreadings of the psychoanalytic writings of Jacques Lacan."[103] Eliding the subject (of the unconscious) entirely, Althusser would have thus offered only a theory of the "ego" ("an ideology of the ego, rather than one of the human subject"). Through this "misinterpretation," he produced a theory of untenable "political pessimism." For Lacan, the unconscious subject is the site of the "rebellious clamor" of desire, which doesn't accept the individual's position in society – the place of the ego – without constant tension and strife.[104] To elide *this* subject, to offer a "subject" that is merely the imaginary ego, is to offer an image of the social structure as a prison of dominant ideology from which escape is unthinkable.

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[102] As Montag writes (*Althusser and his Contemporaries*, p. 119), "Althusser is often said to have borrowed heavily from Lacan to construct his theory (or theories) of ideology." Montag might have Eagleton's book in mind, or, a text Montag actually cites, Pascale Gillot's *Althusser et la psychanalyse* (Paris: PUF, 2009). Montag himself highlights that Althusser's notion of specularity "is derived less from Lacan than from Ludwig Feuerbach" (135).

[103] Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 144. Like Eagleton, in his "preface" to *Sur la reproduction*, Balibar also critiques Althusser on this account: "[Althusser] ramène très brutalement le symbolique lacanien dans le champ de l'imaginaire et de la relation spéculaire que le caractérise, pour en faire une 'fonction' intérieure de l'imaginaire" (p. 17)

[104] Ibid., p. 144. See also pp. 145-7.

While there is some truth to Eagleton's assessment of the "political pessimism" in Althusser's theory of ideology, his reading is limited by the scope of texts he consulted for proof. In *Sur la reproduction*, which Eagleton didn't read, Althusser finds a place for resistance, something that the published ISAs article largely omitted to mention: even in the "ideological apparatuses" (e.g., the School) that, in the last instance, collectively serve to produce and reproduce the dominant (Capitalist, bourgeois) ideology, conflicting alternatives – remnant ideologies of the past, or new ones just being constituted – are produced.[105] Althusser's "pessimism" in fact lies in his assessment that the mass majority of people, even those exploited under the ruling ideology, are unwittingly submitted to it; and in his claim that ideology is "eternal," an essential part of human life, no less necessary to the Marxist militant than the bourgeois ideologue, though the former might have the insights of the science of historical materialism.[106] To be sure, both of these aspects of Althusser's theory do indeed involve the absence of a Lacanian subject that would be the locus of truth outside or against ideology.

But more importantly still, Althusser was perhaps the last person to misunderstand Lacan in the way Eagleton suggests. The mostly unpublished recordings and transcriptions from his 1963-4 course on Lacanian psychoanalysis and the human sciences confirm that he, like his students, had an extraordinary grasp of Lacanian concepts, which the published article on "Freud et Lacan"(1965) largely underplayed.[107] Further, Althusser *explicitly* critiqued Lacan's use of the term "subject," which he considered to be the essential "catégorie" of ideology per se.[108]

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[105] Ibid., p. 119.
[106] Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, p. 231; cf. "Notes sur les AIE," in ibid, p. 259.
[107] Fonds Althusser/IMEC: ALT2. V1 = 20ALT/AV (in this heading, several tapes). The question of the passage from the imaginary to the symbolic is omnipresent in Althusser's interventions.
[108] Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, p. 221; id., "Trois notes sur la théorie des discours" (1966), pp. 117, 165-6. One could perhaps contend that Althusser misconstrued the Lacanian "subject" in such attacks. But Lacan himself is rather equivocal as to whether the "subject" of science is the unconscious "subject" of the analysand or the "subject" of the analyst (he speaks to his listeners as "sujets de la science

Lacanian psychoanalysis had, in the "subject," an unthought ideological residue that threatened its entire claim to scientificity. If his theory of ideology did follow Lacan's ideas on the imaginary specularity and identification in its understanding of the constitution of the ego or "subject," Althusser's was not a misreading so much as a mixed-reading, which moved between Lacan's novel theory of "l'imaginaire" and much older theories of "l'imagination." Althusser's theory of ideology, precisely in its distance from Lacan, was in proximity to Spinoza and Pascal.

Althusser understood his theory of ideology as employing an inventive reading of what Spinoza called "imagination" and the first kind of knowledge, from the *Ethics*.[109] Spinoza defines this first, lowest kind – before reason and intuitive knowledge – as knowledge:

> "I. from singular things which have been represented to us through the senses in a way which is mutilated, confused, and without order for the intellect; for that reason I have been accustomed to call such perceptions knowledge from experience;
> II. from signs, for example, from the fact that, having hear or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them, like those through which we imagine things;
> these two ways of regarding things I shall henceforth call knowledge of the first kind, opinion and imagination"[110]

As one can begin to see from this passage, and as Althusser did not mistake,[111] in Spinoza's *Ethics*, sensory experience, along with what is mediated through (oral) hearsay or written signs, tends to be subsumed under the more general term, *imagination*.

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psychanalytique"), or both. See Lacan, "La science et la vérité" (1965), in *Écrits*, II (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 335-63. Also, note that, already in the 1963-4 seminar, *Psychanalyse et sciences humaines* (see Althusser's second talk), and in "Freud et Lacan" (34, 45), Althusser appears to use "sujet" in a way largely at odds with Lacan. Finally, note that in the seminar, Althusser was extremely sensitive to the distinctions Lacan made between "sujet" and "moi" – and was keen to himself distinguish both from one another (though again, not in Lacan's sense exactly), and both from another term – "individu" (pp. 104s).

[109] See, e.g., Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, II, p. 24; "Élements d'autocritique," in *Solitude de Machiavel*, pp. 184-5; "I. Spinoza," in "L'unique tradition matérialiste," *Lignes*, vol. 1, nº 18 (1993), p. 79; "Le courant souterrain du matérialisme de la rencontre" (1982), in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, I (Stock/IMEC, 1994), pp. 550-2; *Psychanalyse et sciences humaines*, II, p. 114.

[110] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP40S2.

[111] See Althusser's archival notes on "imagination" in Spinoza: ALT2. A60-08, where we find, for example, this phrase: "Spinoza oscille entre une théorie de l'hallucination générale et une théorie de la

In the *Ethics*, the distinction between what is commonly called sense "perception" and what is called "imagination" turns on the metaphysical question of whether or not the external body affecting the human body is present or not. In *both* cases – whether the external body is pressing upon one's arm, or is merely the figment of some wayward hallucination – the mind "imagines." In both cases, that is, there is a combination (or parallel simultaneity) between, in the order of corporeal extension, "the affections of the human body," which Spinoza also calls "images of things," and, in the order of thought, "ideas [that] present external bodies as present to us."[112]

Spinoza's first level of "knowledge," then, is a sort of living by and through the imagination. This is a basic level of life, experienced through the passive *relation* to a world of bodies as it *affects* our bodies, and in the ideas we have of these affections. Further, these ideas are hardly transparent vessels or representations of stimuli, as might be understood by a sensualist empiricism. Like their pendant "images," these ideas are obscure. In Spinoza's theory, the mind's ideas of the affections of its body "indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of external bodies"[113] They are "inadequate," thus equivalent, in Spinoza's system, to "passions," the sort of affects of the mind that arise passively.[114] This sort of mutilated "knowledge" is thus inherently imaginary *and* emotive. As the bodies "imagined" by the mind increase or decrease the body's power of acting, the mind's power of acting is likewise affected. And it is primarily this affective *relation* of the body and mind to the object imagined that predominates at the first level of "knowledge."

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perception actuelle comme modèle originel…ou plutôt c'est pour lui la même chose: indispensable pour sa théorie de l'imagination!!!"

[112] Ibid., IIP17S; IIP26S; IIIP12D. For confirmation of this, one could also look to another of Althusser's source texts on ideology and the imagination, Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 1-2.

[113] IIP16C2. Note that this "more" is unexplained by Spinoza; in II P28D, he says "as much as."

[114] See IIID3, IIIP1-3. Affects can be *active*: when the mind has adequate ideas, it is itself the adequate cause of its affects (thus distinct from *passions*).

The real world – a nexus of objective, causal relations known adequately only in God's mind – is lost under an imaginary relation of affectivity, of mutilated ideas. Far from being relegated to the dream, delusion is the basic nature of life. This collapse of experience and imagination, the positivity thus accorded to the latter: *this* is what so struck Althusser in Spinoza's theory of the three levels of knowledge: the first level is not "knowledge," Althusser concluded, but life itself as imaginary.[115] Knowledge, "science" in Althusser's idiom, could not start from one's empirical relation to the world; there is no continuous passage between imagination and intellect, ideology and science.[116]

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[115] See note 97, supra.

[116] This is what also might be concluded from Althusser's (mis)reading of Spinoza's second kind of knowledge, Reason or thinking in "common notions," like motion, extension, etc. (IIP13SL2; IIP38, IIP40S). For Spinoza, these ideas are always adequate insofar as they are ideas of what is shared by all things (and equally in the part and the whole), human bodies and the bodies that affect them. They are thus not obscured by the imagination. Without specifically evoking any of Spinoza's "common notions," Althusser removed the distinction between the first and second kind of knowledge (imagination and Reason) by lumping the "common notions" in with what Spinoza calls "transcendental and universal notions" – like "being," "thing," "man," "horse" (see Althusser, "I. Spinoza," in "L'unique tradition matérialiste," p. 78; and in the archives: ALT2. A32-01.10/20Alt/32/10). In Spinoza, transcendental and universal ideas are conglomerated from an excess of "images," and according to nothing but the fortuitous order of a person's experience. Precisely what they signify thus varies across people, "according to the disposition of [their] body" (IIP40). If Althusser wasn't simply misreading Spinoza – and this can be surmised from the earlier, correct elucidation of the gap between Spinoza's first and second kinds of knowledge Althusser gave in the 1960 text "'Sur le jeune Marx,'" n. 40, p.75 (see also ALT2. A32-01.12/20Alt/32/12) –, he was perhaps motivated to relegate "common notions" to the imaginary because, on a strictly materialist reading, common notions are equally related to bodies and thus, contra Spinoza, must be considered as empirical or imaginary in origin. But also because Althusser was reading Spinoza in analogy with his own separation of ideology and science: what Spinoza called Reason must be bogged down in the first level of knowledge such that it falls in line with Althusser's theory whereby the putative fields of knowledge forming the problematic whence science emerges can be called "ideological," their claim to being science qualified as illusion. Reason, associated with the "common" or *vulgar* – "common notions" in Spinoza (we might also think of Descartes's notion of common "bon sens") – is lowered by a level such that it cannot have the right to lead to the next step. Between the two is epistemological rupture. This leaves open the difficult question of what Althusser understood by the third kind of knowledge during his career. Despite a few allusions, Althusser seems to have not explicitly explained his reading. Still, it seems likely that on an analogy between Spinoza's sort of knowledge, grounded in an understanding of God, Althusser saw – perhaps on the distant horizon of what was impossible – a science of the structural causality and ontology of a given social formation, its relations of production, and all its structures and levels interacting in complex causal relations. Just as the third kind of knowledge proceeds from God to the singular essence of things, this science would allow us to grasp the determination and

If, in his philosophical works – distinct in this from the autobiographical texts[117] – Althusser avoided the affective aspect of the imaginary in Spinoza, the emphasis he placed on ideology as "rapport imaginaire" or volitive "rapport *vécu*" opened the door, and this before Deleuze, to the sort of neo-Spinozist work on the affective aspects of capitalism that has become so popular both in France and in the US.[118] In a sense, Althusser's theory was, among other things, a way of joining Spinoza and Freud. Like the Freudian dream, ideology expresses the realization of a wish or desire; it is utopian, and hence allows us to continue sleeping. But this sleep is life itself: that is, like Spinoza's "imagination," and in true Baroque fashion, the dream now covers the whole field of reality. Its cause is to be sought in the way in which the world is imagined, that is, in the way in which we relate to the world primarily as affected and hence affective beings.

Several other parallels between the Althusserian theory of ideology and the Spinozist philosophy of the imagination should be mentioned; some of these also intersect with Pascal's theory of "the force of custom," as we will see below. The most crucial and arguably least studied of these parallels include the illusion of free will, language as a key medium of the imaginary, and the materialism inherent to the parallelism of the attributes, which imbued Althusser's theory.

In the writings on ideology from and related to *Sur la reproduction*, Althusser describes the essential role played by the idea of freedom in bourgeois, that is, dominant ideology. In basic

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constitution of ideology and ideological subjects by the structure of structures that is an historical social formation.

[117] See *L'avenir dure longtemps*, pp. 129, 135, 207-8, 211, 234.

[118] To mention just two recent examples, see Antonio Negri, *Spinoza for Our Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Frédéric Lordon, *La société des affects* (Paris: Seuil, 2013). For a useful bibliography, see Alan D. Schrift**,** *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 78-80 and the footnotes on those pages.

terms, the illusion of freedom – understood as the indifference or *contingency* of one's will – assures the willful submission of individuals to their assigned places or roles, as subjects, in the given social formation. For Althusser, the notion that all are free to do as they choose – that a person, like Sartre's *pour-soi*, is the sole origin of his or her intentions and actions – is a product of modern, bourgeois juridical ideology, which naturalizes or universalizes what is in fact a technical, restricted status accorded by the Law. The law holds that all *juridical persons* – not real individuals – are free and equal. Bourgeois juridical ideology *naturalizes* this into an imaginary world, in which all people are *by nature* free and equal. This is "supplemented" by what Althusser calls "moral ideology," which naturalizes the imperative to obey and perform one's duty, resulting in the supposition that people are naturally responsible. Together, both ensure a displacement of attention from the ideology and apparatuses responsible for the illusion of freedom, to the individual or subject as a putative free agent, origin and center of desires and actions, on whom responsibility falls.[119] As Althusser said in the seminar on psychoanalysis, the "subject," referring literally to the submitted, becomes distorted into the free, deliberative master, of itself, of nature, of society, etc.[120] If he got rid of the Lacanian subject, it was to avoid that play on words. The Althusserian "subject" is an ideological effect.

In Spinoza's *Ethics*, the illusion of freedom and the distortions it entails form the heart of the basic level of life or knowledge under the imagination. In the Appendix to Book I, which Althusser often mentioned,[121] Spinoza describes the origin and consequences of this core prejudice, which causes no less than a total perversion of the real order of things.[122] Because humans are aware of their appetites or desires, on account of which they act, but not the true

[119] Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, pp. 78, 102.
[120] Althusser, *Psychanalyse et sciences humaines*, p. 107.
[121] See, for example, the little dossier of notes "Religion" in in Fonds Althusser/IMEC, ALT2. A60-08 (on Spinoza); "Élements d'autocritique," p.184; "Spinoza" in "L'unique tradition matérialiste," p. 88.
[122] *Ethics*, IApp.

causes of these, they consider themselves free and imagine what are in fact effects to be causes, and real causes to be effects. Further, they project this illusion of free, purposive action outward onto the world, imagining nature or God to act in view of an end, primarily for their sake. The true order of nature is hidden under this anthropocentrism and imaginary sovereignty. While we imagine that what occurs is contingent – a product of our free will, or of God's – we are unwittingly determined, and not in the least to believe ourselves unconditioned and free.

God Himself, Spinoza contended contra Descartes, is determined to act from the same necessity with which He exists; all that occurs flows with eternal necessity from His attributes and their modes.[123] In Spinoza's philosophy, then, the illusion of one's *libre arbitre* goes hand in hand with the illusion of God's arbitrary freedom. Althusser's reading notes show that he was intrigued by Spinoza's and Malebranche's attacks on the Cartesian image of God's freedom exercised in the Creation.[124] His theory of ideology would apply this to the bourgeois individual. While Sartre had found in Descartes's description of God the true image of radically free human consciousness, Althusser, following Spinoza and Malebranche, denounced this heresy as a perversion of the order of things. Rather than to intentional ends, causality should be traced back in time, to eternity, its complexity transcending human consciousness and intention. The idea that, at any moment, one could rupture from the given "situation," as Sartre called it, was itself a product of bourgeois ideology and the capitalist social formation whose reproduction it ensured. The rupture of "free choice" was itself not free. Like the snake in paradise, Capitalism wants and needs people to think themselves Gods. It is thus that they best perform their roles; when they imagine themselves kings they are the best lowly subjects.

[123] See *Ethics*, IP17S, P33S2. See also ch. 6, on miracles, in Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*.
[124] See for example the petit dossier of notes on "Descartes" and "Dieu" in Fonds Althusser/IMEC, ALT2.A60-08 (on Spinoza); and the cahier on Malebranche, ALT2. A58-02.17.

Another crucial point of intersection between Althusser's "ideology" and Spinoza's "imagination" concerns the status of language. As in La Rochefoucauld, for Spinoza, words are a medium of the imagination. Spinoza's definition of the first kind of "knowledge" accorded a place to "signs," either heard or spoken; and the *Ethics* discusses a number of key evaluative or qualitative words (good/bad, beautiful/ugly, etc.) that, though originating in the imagination, appear to clearly denote the world and oneself.[125] This theme, which appears in other Spinoza texts, is essential for understanding Althusser's purported confusion between Lacan's separate orders of the Symbolic, associated with language and the primacy of the signifier, and the Imaginary, associated with specular relations between others and one's self or ego, in identification and (mis)recognition. Althusser seems to have followed Spinoza, or La Rochefoucauld, in this respect.[126] Everyday language – the sort of language Althusser put in quotation marks – thus becomes the vehicle of common ideology.[127] And this in turn allows Althusser to draw a distinction between ideological and non-ideological discourse, between the imagination and its critique, rather than between the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

That Althusser's theory of ideology has to do not only with his contemporary, Lacan, but, perhaps unwittingly, with certain 17th-century theorists of the imagination, also reflects the fact that these distant ancestors were inherently superior to Lacanian psychoanalysis in one major respect: they tried to articulate the imagination with history or society, with social practices, rituals, and customs—what Althusser would call ideological state apparatuses.[128] In other words,

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[125] *Ethics*, IApp.

[126] Althusser's noted that language was subsumed under the imagination in Spinoza: see Fonds Althusser/IMEC, ALT2. A60-08 (on Spinoza).

[127] See for example a passage from Spinoza's *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* that Althusser cited in his reading notes (ALT2. A60-08), §§88-9.

[128] Cf. the celebration of Freud, against Lacan (and Reich), in "La découverte du docteur Freud," in *Écrits sur la psychanalyse*, p. 216: "C'est pourquoi, contrairement à Lacan qui en parle très peu, trop peu, contrairement à Reich qui ne parle *que* de cela, Freud tenait le plus grand compte de l'existence de la

their anthropologies were related to political theories. While the *Ethics* offers an anthropology of the imagination, the *Theological-Political Treatise* contains elements of a historical approach to the articulations between the imagination and society, which Althusser held as foundational.[129] But it is Pascal's theory of the "force of custom," a more explicit articulation between pessimist anthropology and a theory of society or politics, that arguably has the most relevance to Althusser's theory of ideological apparatuses.

For Pascal, as we saw in chapter 3, custom is what works viscerally on the "machine," his term for the body and the psyche. Custom bends the machine this way and that in everyday life, subliminally influencing action and mindset through a sort of violent yet imperceptible training. Imagination is the glue that then holds everything in place, both mind and world, which appears imbued with magical qualities: the king's person is inflated with the force of the soldiers he typically appears with, the arbitrary laws in effect glow with the halo of eternal Justice, etc.[130] Custom becomes nature. Practice is hence primary over ideas, as Pascal suggests in a strikingly materialist fragment – the famous "pari" or "Discours de la machine"[131] discussed in chapter 3 –, in which the nonbeliever is told to go through all the motions as the believer, as if the meaning would come from the motion, the end from the means, belief from ritual, sense from signs. Althusser seems to have been greatly impressed by Pascal's idea. He invokes it at a crucial point in his famous ISAs article, and would recall it in his late texts.[132]

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famille, de la morale, de la religion, etc. bref, de ce que j'appelle, dans mon langage, des effets sur le petit enfant, donc sur les désirs sexuels inconscients du petit enfant, et sur leur refoulement inconscient, de l'existence des appareils idéologiques d'État."

[129] See "Spinoza," in "L'unique tradition matérialiste," p. 78s; "Éléments d'autocritique," p. 184; *L'avenir dure longtemps*, pp. 209, 233; *Pschanalyse et sciences humaines*, pp. 114, 120.

[130] Pascal, *Pensées*, B82-3.

[131] Ibid., B233, 535, 89, 231, 477, 606, 542, 278, 277, 604.

[132] Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, p. 293; "I. Spinoza," in "L'unique tradition matérialiste," p. 75; "Les faits," p. 299. Althusser systematically distorts or misremembers Pascal's actual phrase. He splices together some indeed rather materialist lines from the "pari" (B233), on the one hand, and, on the other,

Pascal's emphasis on material practice functions, for Althusser, as a salutary reversal of the common, idealist hierarchy of ideas over materiality or corporeality, which Althusser calls "l'idéologie de l'idéologie." When Althusser refers to the materialist *pensée* in the ISAs text, Pascal, the Catholic reactionary pitted against the bourgeois humanism of a Descartes, becomes a proto-Marxist:

> Nous devons d'ailleurs à la 'dialectique' défensive de Pascal la merveilleuse formule qui va nous permettre de renverser l'ordre du schéma notionnel de l'idéologie de l'idéologie. Pascal dit à peu près : 'Mettez-vous à genoux, remuez les lèvres, et vous croirez.' Il renverse donc scandaleusement l'ordre des choses, apportant, comme le Christ, non la paix mais la division, et de surcroît ce qui est fort peu chrétien (car malheur à celui par qui le scandale vient au monde!) le scandale même. Bienheureux scandale qui lui fait, par défi janséniste, tenir un langage qui désigne la réalité en personne[, sans rien d'imaginaire]. [133]
>
> On nous permettra de laisser Pascal à ses arguments de lutte idéologique au sein de l'appareil idéologique d'État religieux de son temps. Et on voudra bien nous permettre de tenir un langage plus directement Marxiste […].[134]

Unlike in his prison journals, where the Catholic Althusser displayed a certain sensitivity to the question of grace – a problem that entails a crucial restriction to Pascal's materialism –, in the ISAs text Althusser suppressed the issue entirely.[135] This allowed him to find in Pascal his complete materialist predecessor or mirror image, not to mention to portray himself, indirectly, as a sort of Christ bearing upsetting news likely to fall on deaf ears. Pascal's Jansenism is here a Catholic, feudalist weapon in class warfare against the humanist bourgeoisie. The old ideology

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words from a different *pensée*, where Pascal calls "superstitious" any belief in the efficacy of "exterior," that is, practice and bodily training, in the acquisition of faith (B250). Grace is needed, too, for faith is ultimately a gift of God. The relevant lines from the "pari" are: "Suivez la manière par où ils ont commencé: c'est en faisant tout comme s'ils croyaient, en prenant de l'eau bénite, en faisant dire des messes, etc. Naturellement même cela vous fera croire et vous abêtira." The other, less materialist *pensée* that Althusser superimposed onto this one reads: "Il faut que l'extérieur soit joint à l'intérieur pour obtenir de Dieu; c'est-à-dire que l'on se mette à genoux, prie des lèvres, etc., afin que l'homme orgueilleux, qui n'a voulu se soumettre à Dieu, soit maintenant soumis à la créature. Attendre de cet extérieur le secours est être superstitieux, ne vouloir pas le rejoindre à l'intérieur est être superbe." Both *pensées* are discussed in chapter 3.

[133] The words in brackets were not included in the ISAs text, but figure in the manuscript: Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, p. 219.

[134] Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, p. 293.

[135] See, for example, *Journal de captivité*, pp. 88 140, 159, and note 110 , supra.

that capitalism came to dominate, that is, is an implicit ally of the new Marxist, minority ideology that now fights against it. This constitutes another profound affinity between communism and Christianity, between Marxist antihumanism and Augustinian pessimism, in Althusser. After all, his own life had spanned the gap between the two: it was precisely through his political activities in Catholic movements that he arrived at Marxism and an awareness of class struggle.[136]

In *Sur la reproduction*, Althusser situates the primacy that Pascal accorded to practice over ideas in a long section expounding another crucial "thesis": "L'idéologie a une existence matérielle." Against the idealist "ideology of ideology," which understands ideas as autonomous from the "acts" in which an individual chooses (and, for this ideology, should choose) to materialize them, Althusser posits a layering of material practices, a system wherein "ideas" as commonly understood are utterly dissolved. Pascale Gillot, an important French specialist on Althusser, has discussed the influence of Spinoza's theory of the imagination on Althusser's idea of the materiality of ideology.[137] While, as I have shown, this influence is unmistakeable, it is Pascal's "marvelous phrase" that prepares the "more directly Marxist" theory of the materiality of ideology in the ISAs text. The passage immediately following the one cited above reads:

> Nous dirons donc, à ne considérer qu'un sujet (tel individu) que l'existence des idées de sa croyance est matérielle, en ce que ses idées sont ses actes matériels insérés dans des pratiques matérielles, réglés par des rituels matériels, eux-mêmes définis par l'appareil idéologique matériel dont relèvent (comme par hasard!) les idées de ce sujet. […]
>
> Les idées ont disparu en tant que telles (en tant que dotées d'une existence idéale, spirituelle), dans la mesure même où il est apparu que leur existence était matérielle, inscrite dans les actes des pratiques réglées par les rituels définis en dernière instance par un appareil idéologique. Il apparaît donc que le sujet agit en tant qu'il est agi par le système suivant (énoncé dans son ordre de détermination réelle) : idéologie existant dans un appareil idéologique matériel, prescrivant des pratiques matérielles réglées par un

[136] Althusser, *L'avenire dure longtemps*, p. 197.
[137] Pascale Gillot, "Pour un matérialisme de l'imaginaire : Althusser lecteur de Freud et de Spinoza," conference talk, *Penser la transformation*, Université de Montpellier 3: 28 May 2013 (published online).

> rituel matériel, lesquelles pratiques existent dans des actes matériels d'un sujet agissant en tout conscience selon sa croyance![138]

The "scandalous" Jansenist reversal of idealist ideology is thus reworked into this monotonous credo of high antihumanism, which features an almost obsessive repetition of "material," and is fitted with Althusser's characteristic exclamation marks.

In the above citation, the words "ordre de détermination réelle" signal a statement about causality, while the whole passage might be considered a sort of social or historical ontology meant to set right a distorted, humanist, or anthropocentric order of things. Spinoza's and Pascal's theories of custom and imagination appealed to Althusser, but so did the metaphysics that seemed to underlie them. In particular, Spinoza's parallelism of the attributes, extension and thought, resurfaced in Althusser's materialist theory of ideology, and in the way Althusser read Pascal.

In Spinoza, the parallelism of the attributes entails that the "orders" of bodies and of thoughts are the same, without direct causality between them: a thought can only cause a thought, a bodily movement, another. Still, the two orders share only one substance: God or Nature. *Deus sive Natura* is all that there is, considered now under one attribute, now under another.[139] This equilibrium between the two orders is, however, only an illusion. On a close reading of the *Ethics*, it becomes clear that, since we are first and indeed typically on the level at which the imagination is queen, and since the idea that constitutes the mind is the idea of the body and of its affections,[140] the order of extension – of the body's endured affections – is dominant in most of life. Indeed, the path to reason and intuitive knowledge, by which one can rearrange one's thoughts to get as close as possible to the order of things as known by God,

[138] Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, p. 220.
[139] See Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP7.
[140] *Ethics*, IIP11-13, 15.

entails a mind not dominated by the affections of the body, and that can become the adequate cause of its own ideas.

Althusser might thus be seen as taking a pessimist view of the parallelism of the attributes. He uncovers its tacit materialism and simply states it outright. This is evident in his reading of Pascal, where the latter becomes a staunch materialist.[141] In positing the utter "primacy of practice" and a view of life as a suite of coded practices,[142] Althusser followed Pascal's theory of "la force de la coutume" and of life as a stable, repetitive "dream," which he had noted in his prison notebook: "la réalité comme habitude." Practice obeys or incarnates no "Truth," Althusser would say towards the end of his life. Rather, practices produce "*des* "vérités", ou *de la* vérité, disons des résultats ou connaissances à l'intérieur du champ de ses propres conditions d'existence."[143] This statement is striking in its proximity to Pascal's postlapsarian pessimism, which holds that Justice, Truth, or Meaning are nowhere behind or above legal, epistemic, or signifying practices and materialities. The latter *produce* their own justification, meaning, and truth-value within themselves by virtue of their very existence, by virtue of their being the codified practices that individuals enact en masse. If this theory of practice recalls the Augustinian Pascal, the ontology underlying it is perhaps closer to Spinoza.

In other words, Althusser's dissolution of "ideas" into practices, combined with the somewhat paradoxical maintaining of the terms "ideas" and "ideology," despite the "ideology of ideology" to which they manifestly belong, might be read as an attempt to think of Ideology and

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[141] In the interview from *Sur la philosophie*, Althusser depicted Pascal as manifesting "des traits profondément matérialistes" even when addressing more idealist or religious problems (52).

[142] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, I, p. 70: "Nous affirmons théoriquement le primat de la pratique en montrant que tous les niveaux de l'existence sociale sont les lieux de pratiques distinctes." See also *Sur la philosophie*, pp. 61-2; *L'avenir dure longtemps*, p. 208; and *Journal de captivité*, pp. 67-70.

[143] Althusser, *Sur la philosophie*, pp. 61-2.

Practice[144] along the same lines as Spinoza construed Thought and Extension. Hence when Althusser writes that "ideas" *are* "practices," we can think of him as invoking Spinoza's monism, which he also posited in Pascal; and when he nevertheless maintains the terms "ideas" and "ideology" (or "beliefs," etc.) as distinct from "practice" or "apparatus," we might think of him as presupposing Spinoza's parallelism of the attributes, which allows us to at once consider the orders of thought and extension as the same, and to consider the single substance – God, or the social formation, the real conditions of existence and all the practices they entail – under different and apparently opposed attributes.

Althusser enjoins his readers to make the difficult ascension to this ontological, even metaphysical perspective: up the ideological hills of "notre 'conscience' quotidienne," past the still ideological perspective of production, one must strive to "s'élever *au point de vue de la reproduction*,"[145] the height from which one can glimpse the necessity of ideology, which assures the endless reduplication of subjects destined to serve the "system" and guarantee the survival of a given social formation. From this lofty perspective, seemingly outside or above ideology, like the *moraliste* Pascal who was able to see "la réalité en personne" with his own eyes, individuals, like the notions dear to them, appear as unwitting actors in some colossal theatrical production.

Althusser probably was not very aware of his tendency to deploy the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi*, especially in *Lire le Capital*,[146] or at least of how it stemmed from a Baroque

[144] It's hard to define the precise terms of the analogy. Another would be Ideology and real conditions of existence or one's real place in the relations of production, if not these relations themselves. But "practice" seems more fitting because of its capacity, in Althusser, to subsume all social activities, that is, everything people do at all.

[145] Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, p. 82.

[146] See, e.g., *Lire le Capital*, I, pp. 28, 31, 39, 47-8, 61, 66, 77, 131, 139, 140, 143, 144, 170, 178-9, 182; *Lire le Capital*, II, pp. 18 n. 32, 30, 31, 37, 50, 71. See also *Sur la reproduction*, pp. 73, 79, 177, 179, 190; "Freud et Lacan," p. 43; "'Sur le jeune Marx,'" p. 61; *Psychologie et sciences humaines*, pp. 81, 108.

and *moraliste* conception of the vanity of human life and of society as a giant spectacle in which the performers do not know it is just a game.[147] The structuralist idiom, with its preference for terms like "roles" or "functions" is a (neo-)Baroque *vanitas* painting, showing life as an illusion; society, as but a stage. For Althusser, the theatrical metaphor was also a way to envision a solution to the metaphysical problem of the existence and immanent efficacy of the structure in and only in its effects: the play itself *is* only *as* enacted.[148] But unlike the *theatrum mundi*, for which God might be considered to hold the text in His hands, this fallen theater "est, par essence, *un théâtre sans auteur*."[149]

Precisely because social actors typically do not know why they do what they do – they did not write the play, but only act in it, Althusser says[150] – any appeal to "freedom" or choice is a priori suspected of being just another bit of humanist, bourgeois ideology. Thus does Althusser's reasoning often resemble Pascal's logic of the "raison des effets," which pointed up the rationalism of the "honnêtes gens" (philosophers and "demi-habiles") as so much superficial thinking. In order to be fully not "demi-" "habile," one had to go one step further, past the common illusions of the "people" and beyond the rationalism of those who, thinking themselves superior to those on the first level, have their feet firmly rooted on the ground. Like Pascal, Althusser explicitly critiqued the "*honnêtes gens*." Indeed, he uses the term in *Sur la reproduction*, in an obvious reference to Pascal: "[…] Les honnêtes gens ont raison; ils ont

[147] See Jean-Claude Vuillemin, "*Theatrum mundi*," op. cit., and idem, *Épistémè baroque: Le mot et la chose* (Paris: Hermann, 2013), pp. 263-336.
[148] See *Lire le Capital*, II, p. 65.
[149] *Lire le Capital*, II, p. 71.
[150] *Lire le Capital*, I, pp. 178-9; II, p. 71.

d'ailleurs toujours raison, quitte à comprendre quelles sont les raisons qui leur donnent raison. […]." [151]

Althusser's "honnêtes gens" are like Pascal's: the group includes the well-wishing humanists and technocrats, major figures in the dominant, capitalist ideology even if, or precisely because, they think themselves superior to it. Eulogists of "man" and progress, they refuse to admit the primacy of ideological apparatuses and the structural causality that determines, even constitutes, subjects from without. Their eyes are focused instead on the level of production, on the workplace and its inner logic, or on "individuals." They hew to the idea of the putative free choice of those who engage in the contractual relations of labor. Existentialists of the workplace, they believe people are always free. Rather than as a product of the ideological state apparatuses of the School and the Law, they consider the division of labor to be technicality, and responsibility or honesty to be a freely held, natural value. Instead of production, the level of "la raison des effets" is that of "reproduction," the view from which the minds or "consciousness" of individuals, all that seems to be the *given*, is seen as an effect of the larger, more complex processes ensuring the reproduction of the whole social formation. At this level, good-faith humanism, whether of professional philosophers or philosophers of professions, is unmasked as ideological delusion.

With this ascension, beyond imagination and reason, to the third level, where the determination, even ontological constitution, of subjects by orders that radically transcend them

[151] The passage, of which this is only an excerpt, serves to prepare for a long development on the "moral" ideology that ensures the inculcation of values of responsibility and honesty. These values ensure that, in the vast majority of cases, the juridical system works – people obey – without any recourse to violence being necessary. The "honnêtes gens" are thus "right" that they obey out of pure "honesty" rather than for fear of violent punishment; the policeman isn't on their minds when they obey the law. But they don't see the cause of this honesty; they take what is really an *effect* to be a cause. Like Pascal, Althusser demands to go one level more, to discern what Pascal called "la raison des effets." See also "L'unique tradition matérialiste," p. 75, where Althusser mentions Pascal's "théorie de l'habile et du demi-habile."

becomes visible, Althusser's theory of ideology has for its horizon Spinoza's third kind of knowledge. From an adequate knowledge of God's attributes, one could know the "singular essences" of things, Spinoza held. Similarly, in Althusser, with an adequate understanding of the ontology and reproduction of the social formation, and of the subject as an intersection of the two orders or "attributes" of ideology and practices or relations of production, one could analyze, and perhaps gain some power over, the apparently impenetrable and spontaneous prejudices of consciousness under capitalism.[152] The "honnêtes gens" accept the "given" and wield ideological common sense while calling it reason or philosophy. In the step back from what is apparently the natural bedrock of life, in the will to view it with suspicion against the good faith of the optimist humanists, Althusser becomes a latter-day *moraliste*, returning, now in a theoretical mode, to the same impulses that had animated his more lyric prison journals. An antihumanist in the Pascalian tradition, then, he cautioned his public not to mistake real subjection for imaginary freedom, radical determination for an unconditioned ego, life as a creature without a being of its own for the being of the Creator.

[152] This is one way of interpreting the way in which, in certain texts, Althusser considered Spinoza's third sort of knowledge as a method of thinking in cases: the "singular essence" is analyzed as a *case* of more general laws or processes. "[I]l n'est dans la vie individuelle et sociale que des singularités (nominalismes), réellement singulières — mais universelles car ces singularités sont comme traversées et comme hantées d'invariants répétitifs ou de constantes, non de généralités mais de constantes répétitives qu'on peut retrouver sous leurs variations singulières dans d'autres singularités de la même espèce et genre" ("Spinoza" in "L'unique tradition matérialiste," p. 83). This sort of procedure, which thinks in terms of "constants" rather than "laws," was best illustrated, Althusser thought, even invented, by Spinoza in his study of the history of the Jews from his *Theological-Political Treatise*. Althusser held this approach via cases to be foundational for Marxism and psychoanalysis, and opposed on this account Karl Popper's exclusion of history and psychoanalysis from the realm of science in *Conjectures and Refutations*, from 1963 (in ibid, pp. 82s.) See *L'avenir dure longtemps*, pp. 209, 233; his notes on "religion et politique," in IMEC/Fonds Althusser ALT2. A60-08; "Éléments d'autoctritique," p. 184). Althusser's claim was strikingly prescient: in 1996, the historian of science John Forrester would elaborate precisely this concept of "thinking in cases" as a "style of reasoning" (Hacking) ignored by epistemology and history of science, in his influential text on psychoanalysis: "If *p*, then what? Thinking in cases," *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 1, nº 3 (1996), pp. 1-25. For a different reading of the Althusserian equivalent of the third level or kind of knowledge, see Peden, *Spinoza contra Phenomenology*, pp. 147-8, 180-1.

If one can thus read Althusser's imaginary filiation through Spinoza and Pascal in his theory of ideology, it is also clear in the self-construed ancestry of his philosophical project. In a passage from *Lire le Capital*, to cite one example, Althusser describes the historical "refoulement" of Spinoza's philosophy in a way that recalls Sartre's claim, studied in chapter 4, that Descartes's "humanism" waited centuries – i.e., for Sartre, we are to assume – to be understood. Althusser writes: "La philosophie de Spinoza introduit une révolution sans précédent dans l'histoire de la philosophie, et sans doute la plus grande révolution philosophique de tous les temps, au point que nous pouvons tenir Spinoza du point de vue philosophique pour le seul ancêtre direct de Marx."[153] Only with, or *as*, Marx did Spinozism return from repression. But since Spinozism was efficient in Marx only in latent form, it was with Althusser himself, we are to understand, that Spinozism fully arrived into the light of self-consciousness. Althusser was Spinoza to Sartre's Descartes.[154]

The case of Pascal is more striking still, and mostly neglected by Althusser's commentators. Late in life, in a veritable attempt at self-mythologizing, Althusser made the blatantly false statement that Pascal's *Pensées* had been the only text he read during his five years as a prisoner of war.[155] After this precocious contact with Pascal, Althusser claimed, he had utterly forgotten the *Pensées*, which continued to exert a tacit yet utterly determinate influence on his thinking, especially as concerned ideology "Que ne dois-je à Pascal?" he exclaims.[156] Only after the fact, *après-coup*, did he become aware of the unconscious role Pascal played; or rather, that Althusser himself played, we might say.

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[153] Althusser, *Lire* le Capital, I, p. 128.
[154] This was Peden's observation as well, though not based on the same textual sources: *Spinoza contra Phenomenology*, p. 163. For one judgment Althusser passed on Sartre's Cartesianism, see *L'avenir dure longtemps*, p. 170.
[155] Althusser, *Sur la philosophie*, p. 52-3; "L'unique tradition matérialiste," p. 75. Cf. *L'avenir dure longtemps*, p. 210.
[156] L'unique tradition matérialiste," p. 75.

Althusser's claim regarding the *Pensées*, especially considering it was an obvious falsehood open for public viewing, is intriguing. Error or willful masquerade, lapse of memory or simple lie, it betrays a belatedly understood identification. Althusser, we might say, wanted people to think what he only now understood: he had been destined to act out Pascal in his own thinking. In the reflection of hindsight, he saw his reading of the *Pensées* as a primal experience that continued, subliminally, to inform his conscious thoughts. He was to reincarnate or perform Pascal. Not even Spinoza held this status in Althusser's *post factum* self-portrait. The identification with Spinoza had been conscious; with Pascal, things had remained on the more potent level of the unconscious. The Jansenist secretly inhabited the Marxist: Augustinianism reemerged in modern antihumanism. Althusser had been writing *pensées* all along, ever since, as a young man, his lonely Catholicism flowed into his prison notebooks.

IV. Anti-humanist Anthropology: Althusser with Spinoza and Pascal (II)

Thus far, I have tried to show that Althusser's theory of ideology should be seen as presupposing, and integrating, aspects of the 17th-century theories of imagination and society found in Spinoza and Pascal. I have suggested, further, that tracing this lineage is a way to understand Althusser's distance from, and even rivalry with, Lacan. The "imagination," the old faculty or power of classical psychology and epistemology, is not present per se in Althusser's theory; indeed, he self-consciously distances himself from any such psychology. But his concept of ideology as "imaginary relation," like his conception of the articulation between practice and ideology, presupposes an anthropological theory of the imagination as constant medium between self and world. The imagination is that by which repeated material practices, "custom," congeal into a world. This theory has less in common with Lacanian orders than with a Spinozist

epistemology and a post-Montaignian, Pascalian evaluation of the Imagination as lord over Reason.

In other words, the possibility of ideology relies – as in Spinoza's first level of knowledge, which Althusser equated with ideology as everyday life – on a basic *fact* of human existence: the imagination and the way it functions, like Freudian dream-work, to produce an imaginary world that is more affective and volitive, more distorted and illusionary, than objective. If Althusser renewed the Pascalian theory of the articulation between imagination and "custom," as I suggest he did, it was precisely in that he tacitly took for granted an older postlapsarian anthropology, which saw humans as creatures that primarily relate to the world through their "corporeal" halves: the senses and the imagination. The primacy of the imagination and of its relation to ideological practices, the fact of the malleability of the "machine" at the hands of "custom" (in Pascal's terms)—these ideas lay at the basis of a sort of negative anthropology. The task of this section will be to delineate this anthropology in Althusser.

The idea that Althusser's antihumanism is or contains an anthropology smacks of paradox.[157] Isn't anthropology, the discourse of the "nature" of "man," often considered the very core of the ideology called humanism, even – or *especially* – in a philosophy like Sartre's existentialism, which explicitly decries "human nature" as a phantom all the while construing consciousness or the *pour-soi* to be the essence of "l'homme" and essentially "free"?[158] Anthropological idealism betrays itself in *any* supposition of some "natural" bedrock, some ultimate level that constitutes the being of the human, be it, as in Sartre's *L'être et le néant*, the being of a non-being, the being of existence.

[157] Cf. Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, II, pp. 28-31.
[158] Ibid, p. 43: "l'anthropologie du sujet…prend chez Sartre la forme ouverte d'une philosophie de la liberté."

Althusser and other antihumanist thinkers of his time railed against the tradition of philosophical anthropology and against any science or philosophy of "man," especially ones emphasizing "freedom" or "consciousness." Sartre was hence far from being spared this critique, even if he himself attacked the human sciences just like the antihumanists of the next generation, Lacan, Foucault, or Althusser. In the latter's theory, "freedom" is the central anthropological illusion of bourgeois capitalism. In Sartre, there is no human nature, hence consciousness is free to do with its existence what it wishes. But the antihumanists saw "consciousness" itself as a subject constituted by structures, systems, customs, orders, etc. If Althusser was to remain antihumanist while not shying away from making statements regarding "l'animal" called "l'homme," his anthropology would have to be of a different sort. It would be what I call a *negative* or *antihumanist* anthropology, already practiced by the Augustinian Pascal. Such an anthropology would be dialectical: it does not define the "nature" of man, but posits man's connatural absence of "nature." In other words, ideology replaces "nature," and "nature" is decried as ideological.

In the late interview with Fernanda Navarro often cited above, Althusser reiterates a central tenet of the theory of ideology: "Les individus sont toujours déjà sujets, c'est-à-dire toujours-déjà-assujettis à une idéologie." Navarro asks: "De ce que vous venez d'affirmer découle que l'homme est, par nature, un être idéologique?" Althusser comments:

> Absolument, un animal idéologique. Je pense que l'idéologie possède un caractère transhistorique, qu'elle a existé et existera toujours. Elle pourra changer son 'contenu', mais *jamais elle ne changera de fonction*. Si nous remontons aux commencements des temps, nous pouvons constater que l'homme a toujours vécu sous des rapports sociaux idéologiques.[159]

Althusser's definition, "l'homme est, par nature, un animal idéologique," seems to have originated in a 1963 letter to Lacan, and was featured in the ISAs text after being penned, in a

[159] Althusser, *Sur la philosophie*, p. 70.

note, in the manuscript *Sur la reproduction*.[160] Likely given its invocation of "nature" and hence recourse to the language of anthropology, Althusser self-reflexively calls his own definition "ideological" and places it in quotation marks. He claims it is intended to "paraphrase" a long line of "illustrious definitions" of the human.[161] The definition is clearly also synonymous with Althusser's claim that ideology is "transhistorique" or, as in *Sur la reproduction*, "éternelle": there are different ideologies – feudalist, capitalist, Marxist, etc. –, but human existence itself always implies and moves within Ideology.[162]

There is no outside or *before* ideology. Indeed, the definition of man as "by nature" an ideological animal is also equivalent to the claim that individuals are "always-already" constituted as ideological subjects. We can imagine, as Althusser does in his "theoretical theater," the scene of interpolation, when a putatively non- or pre-ideological individual is "converted" into a subject.[163] But this transformation has always-already come to pass: "individuals" are abstracted from the "subjects" they are supposed to predate but in fact always-already are.[164] What is imagined as before, comes after.[165] The temporality of lived, everyday life is different from eternity, and this contraction, this contradiction, between lived time and a time beyond time, which we can imagine yet cannot grasp, produces the paradoxical "toujours-déjà."

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[160] Althusser, *Écrits sur la psychanalyse*, letter to Lacan from 4 December 1963, p. 284; *Sur la reproduction*, p. 295, 120, n. 9, p. 221.

[161] *Sur la reproduction*, p. 120, n. 9. Less than Socrates's definition ("featherless biped"), Althusser probably has in mind Aristotle's ("a political animal"), the scholastic definition ("a rational animal"), or the commonplace notion of man as a "speaking animal." But there is no reason to think he is not also making reference to Descartes's "res cogitans," or Sartre's definition of consciousness as "free," or Cassirer's idea of man as "symbolic animal," and so on. Perhaps he also has in mind Saint Paul, whom he cites in the manuscript and in the ISAs article: "Comme le disait admirablement Saint-Paul, c'est dans le '*Logos*', entendons dans l'idéologie, que nous avons 'l'être, le mouvement et la vie'" (221, 296). In fact, Paul's words, from *Acts* 17:28, are: "For in [God] we live and move and have our being." The phrase is used by Paul as a citation, usually attributed to Epimenides.

[162] *Sur la reproduction*, pp. 207-8, 286-8.

[163] Ibid., p. 224.

[164] Ibid., p. 225.

[165] See remarks on culture's always-already having progressed past nature, in *Pscyhanalyse et sciences humaines*, pp. 93s.

Making any invocation of before or after meaningless, the "always" of eternity clashes with the "already" of temporality.

In other words, the "toujours-déjà" is the very sign of a metaphysical view of the world, which posits the Origin before any temporal beginning, in an eternity that surrounds and founds the secular sphere of time. We need this eternity to think the present – it is a posited absolute, a hypo-thesis that, like an infinitely long path looked down from atop a mountain were we have just awoken, allows us to imagine how we got to where we are. In this, the structure of the "always-already," as a point of non-sense that gives sense to the now, an inaccessible outside that traces the inside, resembles the logic of the notion of original sin, which Pascal lauded precisely for its capacity to illuminate the present "miserable" condition of humans.[166] The idea that humans have fallen from some absolute, purer state allows the absence of absolutes to become intelligible. The reason that behind laws there is no Law, above truths no Truth, and that simply to cross the Alps means to change mores and clothes from head to toe, is that we have always-already fallen.[167] We are always-already subject to the whims of custom and history, bogged down in creaturely materiality. And this for as long as the City of Men has existed: History itself simply is the Fall.

If Althusser, like other antihumanists, was suspicious of definitions of "man" and the invocation of "nature," his definition avoids, perhaps, being merely ideological precisely because of the "eternity" of Ideology. His description of the "nature" of man explains why "man" has no nature at all, why the biological individual is "always-already" infused with and transformed by the cultural or symbolic order, by images and the imagination: by Ideology. Like the "toujours-

[166] Althusser himself writes, in *Lire le Capital*, I, p. 77: "Le concept d'origine a pour fonction, comme dans le péché originel, d'assumer dans un mot ce qu'il faut ne pas penser pour pouvoir penser ce qu'on veut penser."
[167] *Pensées*, B294.

déjà," the invocation of "nature" in Althusser's definition stands outside or beyond all empirical claims one might make regarding the "nature" of man, condemning them as ideological. "Man is *by nature* an ideological animal" amounts to saying that nature is always-already deformed, that nature is only thinkable as an eternal Origin outside of historical time. Down here, on earth, we only have ideologies, which form natures in the plural. "Nature" is always second nature; and though it seems eternal now, it will change tomorrow.

This had been Pascal's point, at his most skeptical. "Custom" is constitutive of our second nature, and even what seems to be our original nature "underneath" custom is just more custom, and so on, to infinity.[168] Postlapsarian man is a being whose true nature, whose true being, was lost as a consequence of the Fall. All that's left is a layering of customs, rendering everything putatively natural or pure complex and synthetic, a product of diverse artifices interwoven together. Given the ultimately arbitrary nature of everything, the illusion that allowed people to live without rising up at every moment against the status quo in life or politics, is that their way of life, their mores, etc., are exactly the inverse of what they are: "natural" or eternal, grounded in absolutes, and there since before the dawn of time. Custom is strongest where it is least visible. In one fragment Pascal went so far as to suggest that axioms on which all knowledge rests were nothing more than products of arbitrary custom.[169] As Derrida would latter say, the cultural produces what is imagined as natural, the representation the original.[170] Indeed, the postlapsarian "toujours-déjà" found great purchase in 1960s France.

Like Pascal with "custom" and "imagination," Althusser saw ideology as operating the miraculous transformation whereby the arbitrary could become "natural," even "eternal." In other words, people, living in ideology, imagine the *contents* of their ideology to be reality itself,

[168] Ibid., B93.
[169] Ibid., L125/S158/B92.
[170] See *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1966).

rather than knowing that it is Ideology per se, the abstract *form* and function shared by all ideologies, which constitutes a "transhistorical" element of human existence. In a passage from the ISAs article containing what might be read as a veiled attack on Sartre's claim that consciousness's self-relation is unmediated (by language or, here, by ideology), we read:

> C'est en effet le propre de l'idéologie que d'imposer (sans en avoir l'air, puisque ce sont des 'évidences') les évidences comme évidences, que nous ne pouvons pas ne pas *reconnaître,* et devant lesquelles nous avons l'inévitable et naturelle réaction de nous exclamer (à haute voix, ou dans le 'silence de la conscience'): 'c'est évident! c'est bien ça! c'est bien vrai!'[171]

Besides such examples of this idea found in Althusser's published texts, not to mention in Marx, who had also theorized "second nature" and "fetishist" illusions, an intriguing illustration is to be found in an undated and unpublished note, which one can find in the IMEC archive mixed in with a group of Althusser's papers from the 1940s on "Mathématique et méthodologie." In the note, Althusser describes the temporal illusions of the bourgeoisie: "[…] la bourgeoisie se pense comme universel dans l'univers, monde où son avenir est assuré par une nécessité naturelle: elle projette sa condition et sa nécessité dans l'univers et la pense comme une nécessité naturelle. […]."[172]

Ideology is "conscious" only insofar as it is "unconscious," Althusser wrote in 1964.[173] This means that it entails the "self-evident" notions that immediately present themselves to the mind, the simple stuff of "how things are," forming the world in which we live as "given" and endowed with just as apparently an objective existence as earth, wind, water, and fire. Or, as Althusser wrote regarding the imagination as described in the Appendix to Book one of the

[171] Althusser, *Sur la reproduction*, p. 222, 296. Cf. Sartre, "Aller et retour," p. 259: "l'efficacité, l'éternité du cogito, c'est précisément qu'il révèle un type d'existence définie comme présence à soi sans intermédiaire. […] C'est ce que j'appellerai le silence de la conscience."
[172] Fonds Althusser/IMEC: 20Alt/56/11. Underlines by Althusser.
[173] Althusser, "Marxisme et humanisme," in *Pour Marx*, p. 240.

Ethics, ideology is a "système lié, clos, monde sans dehors."[174] But what does it mean to be able *say* or *think* that there is no "outside" ideology? Does a statement like this, like all of Althusser's theory of ideology and of its recalcitrance, entail a transgression of the very limits it aims to describe? Hegel said as much with respect to Kant's doctrine of the limits of Reason.

Althusser's own attempt to exit out of the "monde sans dehors," his endless seeking to make it into the open, beyond ideology, has the character, I've suggested, of Spinozist beatitude or salvation, whereby understanding the causality of structures and one's determination through their interwoven agency, amounts to some sort of spiritual union with a secular God, which entails the dissolution of the psychological self. If ideology is life, the "world" itself, all that's left to do is to carry out its endless critique, an endless self-criticism or "autocrtique."[175] At best one can repeatedly denounce the illusions of bourgeois ideology, the dreams that inhabit waking life, but one cannot positively delineate a different mode of life. This difference will be simply "other," "outside" or "before," like Ideology or the Structure of all structures. In order to avoid mere *reversal* of ideology, the illusion of having exited the "monde clos" when one is simply captured by its mirror image, the "other" remains a negative entity, emerging only through the tireless critique of the positive, natural, present, or *status quo*. Althusser writes:

> Nous avons à sortir de l'espace idéologique… de cet espace *nécessairement clos*…pour ouvrir, en un autre lieu, un nouvel espace […] On ne sort pas d'un espace clos, en s'installant dans son simple *dehors*, que c'en soit l'extérieur ou la profondeur: tant que ce dehors ou cette profondeur restent *son* dehors et *sa* profondeur, ils appartiennent encore à *ce* cercle, à *cet* espace clos, comme sa 'répétition' dans *son* autre-que-soi. Ce n'est pas par la répétition, mais par la non-répétition qu'on parvient à échapper à ce cercle : par la seule fuite théoriquement fondée, — qui justement ne soit pas une *fuite*, toujours vouée à

[174] Notes on "imagination," in [174] Fonds Althusser/IMEC: ALT2. A60-08. Underlines by Althusser.
[175] See, e.g., *Lire le Capital*, I, 155, on Marx's self-critical period: "Pour que cesse d'être subjective la rétrospection de la conscience de soi d'un présent, il faut que ce présent soit capable de s'autocritiquer, pour atteindre à la *science de soi*. Or que voyons-nous, si nous considérons l'histoire de l'économie politique ? Nous voyons des penseurs qui n'ont rien fait d'autre que penser, enfermés *dans les limites de leur présent*, et ne pouvant sauter par-dessus leur temps" (italics are Althusser's). See also "Éléments d'autocritique" (1972), in Althusser, *Solitude de Machiavel*, pp. 159-95.

> ce qu'elle fuit, mais une fondation radicale d'un nouvel espace, d'une nouvelle problématique …[176]

A whole book should be written on the use in "French Theory" of the quasi-apocalyptic themes of the "closure" and the "overture," the ideological or purportedly metaphysical "closed space" of the same, and the "new space," the absolutely "other," which one can glimpse through critique or deconstruction. These images appear repeatedly in the early works of theorists like Althusser (*Lire le Capital*), Derrida (*De la grammatologie*, *L'écriture et la différence*), and Foucault (*Les mots et les choses*).[177] This "other" or "outside," a "new space" located in an apocalyptic *after* or *beyond* "man" or the "subject,"[178] is a production of theoretical, critical practice: its idea, or concept, is a product of writing, precisely along the lines of Althusser's Spinozist epistemology.[179] As this critical practice cannot be a simple reversal of the given, its quest and expression approximate a negative, apophatic mysticism: we never get to look the "other" in the face, for it resembles *nothing* in empirical reality.[180] This mystical or spiritual practice, a style of

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[176] Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, I, pp. 63-4. Italics are Althusser's. See also pp. 67, 155; *Lire le Capital*, II, p. 9: "les économistes classiques sont restés dans la nuit, prisonniers des mots qui n'étaient que les concepts idéologiques ou empiriques de la pratique économique." And see "'Sur le jeune Marx,'" p. 57.

[177] In "Être juste avec Freud" (1991), Derrida noted this tone in Foucault, and the theological circle in which it implicated him (e.g., in *Les mots et les choses*), without of course acknowledging how similar rhetoric had been used by Derrida himself in multiple early texts (e.g., "Les fins de l'homme," *De la grammatologie*, etc.). See "Être juste avec Freud: L'histoire de la folie à l'âge de la psychanalyse," in *Résistances: de la psychanalyse* (Paris, 1996), p. 139-40, n.1.

[178] We might recall that "apocalypse" meant "revelation" for the early Christians who used the term to describe a "direct immediate pre-mortem experience of God," writes April DeConick, "Mysticism before Mysticism," in *Teaching Mysticism*, Parsons, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), online.

[179] As repeatedly outlined in *Lire le Capital*, I, (e.g., p. 126), which might be read as a theory of writing (and of theory as always tied to the practice of writing) over against the oralist mode of life in the world, which can be called "ideology," "opinion," "doxa," etc. On the role of writing as spiritual practice in the service of mysticism, see Charles M. Stang, "Writing," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, Hollywood and Beckman, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 252-263.

[180] It might not be imprudent here to evoke the final stage of Althusser's career, "aleatory materialism" and the focus on the "vide," especially on philosophy as having no object or being itself a "vide" or nothingness. See for example "Le courant souterrain du matérialisme de la rencontre" (1982), which situates itself in a modern tradition that would include Spinoza, Heidegger, and Derrida: "une philosophie consciente de n'être rien" is destructive of illusions, morals, religions… In their place, it produces "*le vide qui est la philosophie même*. Et comme ce résultat est un résultat, il n'est atteint qu'au terme d'un

self-overcoming needed to shed an ideological husk, had as much to do with the philosopher of ideology as it did, I think, with the psychological subject named Louis Althusser. But he was not the only thinker of his generation to ascend a *via negativa*.

Conclusion – The Mystical Subject of Antihumanism

Biographism has no place in the analysis or history of ideas. My use of Althusser's prison journals, autobiographies, and archived notes, has aimed simply to shed light on crucial tendencies already legible in his theoretical works. These tendencies have been neglected and require interpretation to be fully grasped. The journals and archival material help to flesh out what is already there, just a bit harder to see.

But the case, in its entirety, of Louis Althusser – "le cas Althusser," one might say in French – is so astoundingly full of tensions, his exploration of ideas so profoundly incarnated in his existence, that the life of the person or "subject" Althusser, likely more than most, is already inextricably intertwined with the œuvre it both contradicts and helps us to understand (and *vice versa*). In the case of Louis Althusser, we are confronted, namely, with the glaring contrast between (1) a theory that tends to portray life itself, and all psychological subjectivity, as something to be transcended in "science," as a "dream" produced by and for the reproduction of exploitative relations of production, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, (2) an extremely, even *tragically* psychologically sensitive and embodied man. Althusser's every word in his "personal" texts – the journals he kept, the uncountable and oftentimes lyrically effuse letters he wrote – displays a "subjectivity" – in the old, "bourgeois" sense – that has been self-consciously

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gigantesque travail sur les concepts, qui fait tout l'intérêt de l'*Éthique*, travail 'critique' dirait-on couramment, travail de 'déconstruction' dirait Derrida après Heidegger, car ce qui est détruit est en même temps reconstruit, mais sur d'autres bases, et selon un tout autre plan, témoin cette inépuisable théorie de l'histoire, etc., mais dans ses fonctions effectives, politiques" (551; italics are Althusser's).

cultivated to a rare degree, along with, of course, a vulnerability to bipolar oscillations between melancholy and hypomania, which ultimately led to his murdering his wife, Hélène.

Perhaps it is not too far from the truth to say, then, that Althusser's notorious theoreticism was a way in which he strove, for people of his generation, and for himself – the empirical, ideological "ego" Louis Althusser – to overcome subjectivity per se. He was like the great mystics of the past, seeking self-transcendence and self-transformation, ascending the "three-fold path" and striving to lead readers there.[181] In other words, theoreticism was an attempt to bring the "guilty," impure, spontaneously empiricist and empirical individual to an end, by revealing its finitude and conditioning from without. Theory took aim at this individual's delirious pride, by showing its true nullity, vanity, or "miserable condition," as Pascal would say: the fact of its not possessing a being of its own, as the imaginary, humanist "moi" likes to think. "Comme le disait admirablement Saint-Paul, " we read in the ISAs text, "c'est dans le '*Logos*', entendons dans l'idéologie, que nous avons 'l'être, le mouvement et la vie.'"[182] But Althusser surely knew the actual words, from *Acts* (17:28) "For in Him we live and move and have our being."

In the rise above ideology, the individual "subject," in the idealist sense, sees itself as "subject," in the literal sense: its existence and world are epiphenomenona of processes set in place long before it came to the earth: structures whose modes of causality, determination, and control it would take well over a lifetime to understand, not to mention to escape. But this striving was not only a symptom; it was not only relevant to one Louis Althusser, who suffered

[181] In his introduction to *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Random House, 2006), Bernard McGinn writes: "One thing that stands out in the accounts of all the Christian mystics is that their encounter with God transforms their minds and their lives. God changes the mystics and invites, even compels, them to encourage others by their teaching to open themselves to a similar process of transformation. This is why the only test that Christianity has known for determining the authenticity of a mystic and her or his message has been that of personal transformation, both on the mystic's part and — especially — on the part of those whom the mystic has affected" (xvii).

[182] *Sur la reproduction*, pp. 221, 296.

immensely from his psyche, was constantly in psychoanalysis (professionally and self-enacted), and was obsessed with the ascetic ideal of a monastic "retraite" from "le monde" into silence and anonymity.[183] It not only reflected this monastic "dream," as he called it, a lifelong phantasm he acted out again and again, between the protective walls of psychiatric hospitals where he spent so much time fleeing his life, in the willfully cloistered decades at the ENS, and, I am suggesting, in his theoretical work.[184] The mystical striving for purification was not just the result of the way in which Althusser compulsively realized his mother's desire – the desire of the Other – for him to be the saintly, incorporeal intellectual she had loved and lost, and whose name he bore: Louis, Althusser's uncle.[185]

Rather than purely personal, this mystical antihumanism was, rather, an historical, indeed *an ideological phenomenon*. The yearning for the "outside" or the beyond, the *difference*, the desire to unmask the illusionary timelessness of bourgeois, humanist, rationalism, of liberalist individualism and the neoliberal, consumerist monster that was rearing its head in the 1950s and 60s: this was an *historical* phenomenon, in which Althusser was implicated along with a host of equally famous protagonists, like Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, or Deleuze.

In Althusser's late autobiographical text, *L'avenir dure longtemps*, we are struck by an almost obsessive emphasis on his solitude, and the self-conscious fashioning of the text in the tradition of psychological analysis à la Rousseau's *Confessions*.[186] Althusser even detailed his

[183] See *L'Avenir dure longtemps*, p. 88: "J'étais fasciné par la vie des moines, voués à la chasteté, au travail manuel et au silence. […] Il m'est souvent arrivé plus tard de penser à la retraire du couvent comme une solution de vie à tous mes problèmes insolubles. Disparaître dans l'anonymat, ma seule vérité: elle l'est toujours restée et maintenant encore, malgré et contre ma notoriété dont je souffre horriblement." See also "Les faits," p. 299.
[184] See *L'avenir dure longtemps*, p. 156: "Trente-deux ans de quais-réclusion monastique acétique (mon ancien rêve…) et de protection [i.e., à l'ENS]"; and pp. 202, 262-3, and 271.
[185] Ibid., pp. 34, 162.
[186] *L'avenir dure longtemps*, pp. 25, 212. Cf. 165: "Seul et naturellement entièrement responsable de mes actes et de leurs effets imprévisibles."

rather belated discovery of masturbation, which, given this framing, is likely another attempt to cast himself in the guise of Jean-Jacques.[187] Foucault's case is similar.

In Foucault, while less biographical, we find a similar (re)turn to "the subject" in the last period of his life. After having studied, in the first two decades of his career, impersonal systems of knowledge (*Les mots et les choses*), and theories of the institutional constitution or training of subjects in prisons, schools, hospitals, etc. (*Surveiller et punir*), Foucault's late work (e.g., in *L'histoire de la sexualité*, *L'herméneutique du sujet*), turned to ethics to explore "techniques de soi": the historical-material practices by which individuals carry out the "travail éthique" required to be constituted into types of subjects.[188] Foucault's ethical turn arguably centered on what he, and contemporaries, had once forcefully exorcised: the human *subject* as the ground of *experience*, *existence*, *truth*, and *criticality*, concepts evacuated by French antihumanism.

But the fact is that the person Michel Foucault had always been working away at or on himself, carrying out a spiritual exercise identical with the very act of writing his most antihumanist, anti-subjectivist texts. In "How an Experience-Book is Born," an interview published three years before his death, Foucault speaks of his writing practice as follows:

> the books I write constitute an experience for me that I'd like to be as rich as possible. An experience is something you come out of changed. If I had to write a book to communicate what I have already thought, I'd never have the courage to begin it. I write precisely because I don't yet know what to think about a subject that attracts my interest. In so doing, the book transforms me, changes what I think. […] In this sense I consider myself more an experimenter than a theorist; […] When I write, I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same thing as before.[189]

Here, at the end of his career, Foucault thus lauds the writers who were so present in its early years – Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot, Klossowski. For they were not builders of systems, he

[187] Ibid., p. 65.
[188] See Foucault, "Les techniques de soi,"in *Dits et Écrits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), IV, pp. 783-813.
[189] Foucault, "How an Experience-Book is Born" (1981), in *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, Goldstein and Cascaito, trans. (New York: Semiotexte(e), 1991), p. 27.

says, but sought "direct, personal experiences" of a quasi-ecstatic kind: "at the limit or extreme," on the margin of "impossibility of living" over against "daily, lived experience," which is the realm of phenomenology, Foucault claims. He continues:

> It is this de-subjectifying undertaking, the idea of a 'limit-experience' that tears the subject from itself, which is the fundamental lesson that I have learned from these authors. And no matter how boring or erudite my resulting books have been, this lesson has always allowed me to conceive them as direct experiences to 'tear' me from myself, to prevent me from being always the same.[190]

"Truth," historical or empirical factuality, is not the point, Foucault says in the interview. He thinks of his works as "fiction" aimed at transformative experience for himself and others: "an experience of what we are today, of what is not only our past but also our present… an experience of our modernity that might permit us to emerge transformed."[191] To use the very terms that, at the time, he was elaborating in his history of ethical practices, Foucault's writing aims not at history or philosophy, but *spirituality*.

Spirituality, or spiritual transformation, was inextricable from philosophy per se in Foucault's account, a name for the entire period of philosophy preceding the "moment cartésien." Then, with Descartes, truth becomes separated from what was, in spiritual practice, the precondition of transformative experience: self-alteration through laborious self-discipline, -purification, and -training.[192] In other words, the very writing of his texts is, for Foucault, an

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[190] Ibid., pp. 30-2.
[191] Ibid., pp. 33-4.
[192] See "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, pp. 251-2; *L'herméneutique du sujet* (Paris), pp. 19, 28-30, 182-4, 296. My first chapter explored how this account is disputable. This had been Pierre Hadot's point as well, at least when he critiqued Foucault (at other points he seemed to share the same judgment on Descartes): "Descartes, comme Spinoza, continue à se situer dans la problématique de la tradition antique de la philosophie comme exercice de la sagesse": *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p.311. Still, this understanding of modern philosophy as having evacuated the spiritual is essential to understand Foucault's own self-consciousness as thinker, and how, as I am suggesting here, anti-Cartesianism, in Spinozism, Structuralism, or other sorts of 20th-century antihumanism, could take on a sort of mystical or theological character, precisely consubstantial with its attack on the "subject," often reputed to be of Cartesian origin.

ascetic practice that opens onto a transformative truth. Antihumanism is hence a work of "de-subjectifying" meant to allow the empirical individual, author and reader, to shed subjectivity and to glimpse some otherness, outside, or limit of life. "Se déprendre de soi-même," as Foucault would later say of his work, a task or undertaking that, he says, coincides with "l'activité philosophique" as critique and self-critique, and whose mode is the essay, ascetic "exercice…d'un savoir qui lui est étranger."[193]

Foucault's transformative histories of the present – his genealogies of the constitution of subjectivity – are not dissimilar to Althusser's theory of ideology. The latter equally seeks a sort of alienation from the self-evident and apparently natural. But the goal, as is so emphatically the case in Foucault's interview, is always inescapably personal, as well as political: it is about "tearing" oneself from oneself and in so doing, to impel others to undergo the same "experience."[194] Yet at the height of the ascent, what is grasped can never be positively delineated. The act of tracing the "limit," the perception, like a vanishing point, of one's constitution by structures transcendent and immanent to the self, allows no real entry into a new life. God, ideology, structures, are like the conditions of possibility of experience, known only in the negation of what is.

Just so, though we can comprehend that all that is self-evident, even down to consciousness, is ideological through and through, we cannot for that reason get fully beyond that. Theoretical practice, this askesis in writing, provides the only means for us to think the "outside," as the Difference that at once constitutes the present and allows for us to think it as just one possible world among others, without really ever arriving there. For ideology is life

[193] Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité II: L'usage des plaisirs* (Gallimard, 1984), p. 15-16.
[194] Compare Sartre's perspective on Bataille in "Un nouveau mystique" (1943). At issue, ultimately, is the (Heideggerian) question of the being, or non-being, of Nothingness.

itself. An escape, the total rapturous departure from ideology, would entail the very death of the individual, as Althusser wrote in his course notes on Spinoza.

The modern antihumanists dream of liberation from the bounds of subjectivity, from the ever-same, the *taedium vitae* of bourgeois life in an increasingly capitalist world. They are like melancholics that long to commit suicide, imagining that they could be present after their death to feel the relief it would bring. They are the mystics who want to lose themselves, in an utter "union" with otherness, with an absent God. Indeed, what Foucault called "de-subjectifying" is an uncanny equivalent for what Evelyn Underhill's influential theory of mysticism describes as "unselfing," when the last dregs of selfhood separating the soul from God are removed.[195]

I should be clear that, given that there is no God per se mentioned in the sort of antihumanist mysticism at issue here, it might best be called a structural mysticism. In other words, just as this thesis has tried to suggest the historical-structural analogy between two moments of conflict between humanism (Descartes, Sartre) and antihumanism (La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, Althusser), I am here suggesting that antihumanism shows a homology, a structural similarity, with the "unselfing" ends of mysticism. Both sought a transformative experience in the revelation of the self as having its being only in the Transcendent. Both were anti-subjectivist and antihumanist.

The section of Underhill's book in which she discusses mystical "unselfing" is called "The Dark Night of the Soul," in reference to one of the masterpieces of 16th-century mysticism, "La noche oscura" by Saint John of the Cross (1542-91). Underhill describes "The Dark Night" as the last stage before the "unitive life" with God, adding it, along with a preliminary stage she calls "Awakening," to the typical tripartite structure of Western Christian mysticism: purgation,

[195] Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d., online: http://www.ccel.org), p. 367.

illumination, and contemplation (or union). After the active stages of "purgation," "The "Dark Night " occurs when the soul, still hewing to the empirical self and unable to bear the "direct contact of the Absolute," undergoes a nihilating "passive" purification. As Underhill describes it:

> the 'self-naughting' or 'purification of the will'… to purge away the somewhat which still sets itself up in the soul as separate from the Divine. […] This is the 'naughting of the soul,' the utter surrender to the great movement of the Absolute Life, which is insisted upon at such length by all writers upon mysticism. Here, as in purgation, the condition of access to higher levels of vitality is a death: a deprivation, a detachment, a clearing of the ground. […] [T]he self, deprived of 'perception, knowledge, will, work, self-seeking'—the I, the Me, the Mine—loses itself, denies itself, unforms itself, drawing 'ever nearer'to the One.[196]

This analogy between antihumanist or anti-subjectivist "de-subjectifying," in Foucault or Althusser, and mystical kenotic "unselfing," as described by Underhill and numerous mystic authors, finds a retrospective yet no less intriguing foreshadowing in one of Althusser's earliest texts, his journals as a prisoner of war, with which this chapter began.

Althusser spent the week of Christmas 1943 reading the words of the author of "La noche oscura," [197] Given Althusser's circumstances at the time, it is intriguing to note that John of the Cross was famous for composing his most spiritual poem alone in a prison cell. He exerted a massive influence on Christian spirituality, and his works were widely read in France in Pascal's epoch. Their readership waned over the next two hundred years, but experienced an explosion in popularity in Althusser's own century.[198]

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[196] Ibid., pp. 366-7.

[197] *Journal*, pp. 140-1. In a letter from 5 January 1944, he tells a friend that he has read "deux opuscules sur St J[ean] de la Croix," and asks to be sent "*La nuit obscure*" (323) On the basis of the translations it contains, I have been able to identify one of the texts Althusser read: *Saint Jean de la Croix* (Éditions de la vie spirituelle, 1927), a volume of texts mostly excerpted from the April-September issue of the journal *La vie spirituelle*. The volume, containing large amounts of text from the Saint's works, was co-written by a number of theologians, in the series "Les grand mystiques." Since, to my knowledge, Althusser does not cite from the other "opuscule" he mentions in the letter, it remains impossible to identify.

[198] See André Bord, *Saint Jean de la Croix en France* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1993). Cf. Bord, *Pascal et Jean de la Croix* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1987).

It was this Spanish saint who, along with Claudel, introduced Althusser to mysticism as a young man. On December 18, 1943, he wrote: "Saint Jean de la Croix que je découvre, et avec lui tout un monde mystique, phrases rencontrées et attendues – depuis longtemps. La rencontre enfin écrite de la nuit obscure, comme en l'autre du désert… Toute cette théologie négative, au fond seule théologie."[199] This mystical "negative theology" is doubly negative: it is only as utterly annihilated – as a nothingness possessing nothing, and not even knowledge of what it seeks, or how – that the self might join with God, the part one with the all.[200] Or, as Althusser wrote in the mid-1980s, "dans la mystique chrétienne médiévale: *totum* = *nihil*."[201]

The words Althusser cited from John of the Cross on December 26, 1943, are oddly consonant with the yearning behind his critique of the Imaginary or Ideology, the empiricism in which we live everyday life: "'Aussitôt que l'âme parvient à se purifier soigneusement des formes et des images saisissables, elle baignera dans cette pure et simple lumière, et en s'y transformant atteindra l'état de perfection […] Ce qui fait obstacle à son infusion, ce sont les formes, les voiles des créatures qui enveloppent et embarrassent l'âme.'"[202]

Antihumanism emerges on the basis of a desire, a nostalgia, a will—to evoke the very terms Althusser employed to describe ideology.[203] Antihumanism is a movement within "the

[199] *Journal*, 18 December 1943, p. 138.
[200] Cf. the discussion of Heidegger and Bataille in my introduction.
[201] *L'avenir dure longtemps*, p. 271. See also p. 199, where he describes his views on Christ as mediator of nothing, and how he learned that these ideas derive from "la théologie negative et la mystique".
[202] St. Jean de la Croix, *La Montée du Carmel*, cited in Althusser, *Journal*, p. 141, from *Saint Jean de la Croix*, p. 132.
[203] *"*Marxisme et humanisme," p. 240. This is one way, which Althusser would have virulently opposed, to understand the following phrase, which it will be the object of the conclusion to understand: "l'antihumanisme théorique était le seul à autoriser un réel humanisme pratique."

circle" of subjectivity from which it seeks, in the "Dark Night", to find a way outside.[204] The night is dark, for the path, and the destination, are unknowable:

> "26 décembre [1943]
>
> Dans St Jean de la Croix ces paroles:
>
> > 'Pour venir à ce qu'on ignore, il faut la route où l'on ignore ;
> > pour venir à ce qu'on n'a pas, il faut la route où l'on n'a pas ;
> > pour venir à ce qu'on n'est pas, il faut la route où l'on n'est pas ;
> > se prendre à quelque chose, c'est se déprendre du Tout.
> > pour obtenir pleinement le tout, il faut complètement quitter tout,
> > et quand tu posséderas le tout, tiens-le sans rien vouloir du tout,
> > car si tu cherches en tout quoi que ce soit, tu n'as plus du tout ton trésor en Dieu.'"[205]

[204] Cf. the intriguing phrase, from "Les faits," p. 313: "c'est au fond le problème de tous les problèmes philosophiques…que de savoir comment on peut bien sortir d'un cercle tout en y restant."
[205] St. Jean de la Croix, *La Montée du Carmel*, cited in Althusser, *Journal*, pp. 140-1, from *Saint Jean de la Croix*, p. 49, whose typography and punctuation I follow here, Althusser providing none.

Conclusion – Dialectics of (Anti)Humanism: Positive, Negative, and Otherwise

In one of the most famous moments in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel describes a bud's growth from blossom to fruit. The image must have impressed the "organic" development of the dialectic deep into the minds of Hegel's early-19th-century readers. Reading the passage, one notes how Hegel's notion of contradiction here displays its enduring potential to be more or less equivalent, simply, to difference. The life of the plant thus unfurls through the mutual negation of *contradictory* forms. But the mutual relation-in-difference between three moments or manifestations of the plant's "life" (or "truth"), which the image reveals, is also a warning to polemical philosophers and naive historians (or readers) of philosophy alike:

> These forms [bud, blossom, fruit] are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another [*sich verdrängen*] as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole. But he who rejects[1] a philosophical system does not usually comprehend what he is doing in this way; and he who grasps the contradiction between them does not, as a general rule, know how to free it from its one-sidedness, or maintain it in its freedom by recognizing the reciprocally necessary moments that take shape as a conflict and seeming incompatibility.[2]

There is no compulsion for us to *a priori* suscribe to Hegel's idealism or teleology – the necessary march towards Truth via positive sublation of contradiction – in order to see how this exposition of the dialectic might help us to understand the antagonistic relationship between French humanism and antihumanism.

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[1] Here the German reads: "Aber der Widerspruch gegen ein philosophisches System": not "he who rejects," but rather, "the contradiction of a [given] philosophical system." In other words, the perspective here is that of the contradicting philosophical system or philosopher (this is how it is here translated into English) and, simultaneously, that of the surveying eye that grasps or sees the contradiction between the new and extant systems, as we find in the next clause. But this clause also needs to be read in the German: "das auffassende Bewußtsein," meaning, not "he who grasps," but "the consciousness that understands…".

[2] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Miller, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), §3.

We can begin with the mutual dependence of contradictory or oppositional forms. Hegel here appears to understand this relation in terms of the contribution of opposing forms, over time, to a totality they constitute only together. But let's not let the organicist, Romantic expression of this idea overwhelm us: totality can be understood more simply, though still along Hegel's lines, as a description of the *view* that grasps the antagonism from without, for this is Hegel's perspective itself. As soon as one takes a step back (i.e., assumes the perspective of reader or historian, which never, of course, is *total*), the mutual dependence of contrary or contradictory terms becomes patent. Each arises, and is thinkable, only by negation of (the properties of) the other. Humanism and antihumanism, we learned, are both more or less polemical philosophical positions: when humanism emerged in 14th-century Europe, it did so against extant philosophies, theologies, and ideologies. Humanism is anti-antihumanism, as it were. And while humanism took traits from God and gave them to man, mind, soul, or consciousness, antihumanism, we found in Althusser, predicates the qualities once ascribed to consciousness to *passion*, *amour-propre*, *language*, *nature*, *structure*, and other similar forms and forces that "transcend" and determine selves as subjects and shape experience from without.

If we accept this view of humanism and antihumanism as true, as least to some extent, then now, when approaching the question of syntheses, we are faced with more possibilities than a dogmatic reading of Hegel might have us believe. For syntheses need not be *positive*: negativity can remain, even predominate. This, inflecting Hegel, was the task of some of the most interesting projects of 20th-century French and German thought.

In the 1930s, Kojève, "reading" Hegel, imagined the historical realization of what Hegel called "le savoir absolu" (*das absolute Wissen*):[3] a posthistorical world to come. Posthistory

[3] See Descombes, *Le même et l'autre: Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933-1978)* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p. 41.

emerges after the dissolution of all causes of strife, that is, the contradictions that drove human History, and the human Subject, into being and onward. A note that Kojève wrote for the first, 1947 edition of the *Lectures* offered a description: in posthistory, humans would become animals again and would be, simply, happy.[4] For the end of human History is the end of "Man" per se: the end of the "Individual" as "Subject," negativity, or "Action" over against the "Object."[5] An atemporal "harmony" would then reign between the anthropomorphic animal and "Nature or given Being" — at least in part, if not entirely, through the latter's having been "definitively mastered." First conceived in the 30s and fleshed out in the note written just after the War, the idea of the (non)time after Time and History was in part prophetic, not purely descriptive. Though well on its way, even partly arrived, the dialectic was not achieved: "savoir absolu" was an idea, not a pure state of actuality.

But Kojève quickly changed his mind. Before his death in 1968, in a note added for the second edition of the *Lectures*, he recounts how he realized (in 1948, he says) that the "Hegelian-Marxist end of History" had already taken place: "it was already a present, here and now." Hegel himself, the note suggests, had actually looked down the spiral of History from its *terminus ad quem*. In the 20th century, American society and its accruing global dominance was irrefutable confirmation that History was over and that Man, having been annihilated, had become Animal again.[6] 20th-century French theoretical antihumanism produced its critiques of "man," "subject,"

[4] Here I am indebted to the discussion in Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 5-12. The full text of the notes in question can be found in Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), n.1, pp. 158-62.
[5] Kojève, *Introduction*, pp. 158-9 (note).
[6] Kojève, *Introduction*, p. 161 (note): "I was led to conclude from this [i.e., numerous trips to the USA and the USSR] that the 'American way of life' was the type of life specific to the post-historical period, the actual presence of the United States in the World prefiguring the 'eternal present' future of all humanity. Thus, Man's return to animality appeared no longer as a possibility that was yet to come, but as a certainty that was already present." See, however, Kojève's ensuing remarks on the Japanese in the note, and Agamben, *The Open*, pp. 7-12.

and "individual" *after* the years Kojève had spent traveling and verifying his diagnosis. In the guise of Western and especially American culture, posthistory had already realized antihumanism's theoretical aims in actuality.

To this positive vision of dialectical resolution, itself perhaps tinged with cynicism,[7] Bataille retorted with what was for him incontrovertible proof: his own life as failure, a "blessure ouverte."[8] This excess, or "négativité sans emploi," the mangled residuum showing dialectical sublation to be either imperfect or a lie, is the embodied, existential form of the radical negativity or "tout autre" that would become, via Derrida, part of deconstruction's theoretical critique of Hegel.[9] Responding to posthistory's socio-economic equivalent, late capitalism and American commodity culture on its march to world dominance, Adorno offered a similar, albeit less personified objection to the closure of resolution: negative dialectics.[10] In this (non)system, a contradiction, once negated, does not produce a positive moment or totality, but only its semblance. What really obtains is "dialectic at a standstill" (Benjamin), the violence of tension without resolution. The political form of this stage, "the culture industry," hides inhumanity or barbarism under the semblance of a posthistorical, pluralist, humanist paradise, now produced as a serial commodity.[11]

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[7] Kojève's discussion of Man become Animal can be read as a utopian hymn or as a biting critique of postwar Western culture, depending on one's philosophical and political commitments.

[8] See Bataille's 1937 letter to Kojève, cited in Agamben, *The Open*, p. 7. The full letter can be found in Denis Hollier, ed. *Le collège de sociologie* (Paris, Gallimard, 1979), pp. 170-7. For the precise circumstances of Bataille's response to Kojève, see Hollier, *Le collège de sociologie*, pp. 164-5.

[9] See Derrida, "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale: un hégélianisme sans réserve," in *L'écriture et la différence*, pp. 369-407; and see the discussion of this text in my introduction.

[10] See Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008). It is difficult to imagine what Adorno would think of Bataille's conclusion regarding the remaining use to be made of "negativity without use," given the concept of "leisure" that Bataille employs: "ce qu'il a à 'faire' c'est donner à la part d'existence libérée du faire sa satisfaction: il s'agit bien d'utilisation des loisirs" (Bataille's letter, in Hollier, ed., *Collège de sociologie*, p. 175).

[11] See Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," in *The Dialectic of* Enlightenment (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 94-136; Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

For Kojève, the dialectic had functioned only all too well, albeit, perhaps, in irony and inversion, with the triumph of a community of Animals rather than the coming of communal Man; for Bataille, an excess or "negativity without use" remained as the very substance of life in posthistory; for Adorno, the dialectic produces the *semblance* of resolution, while philosophy must rather think the impossibility, here and now, of reconciliation. These and other fates of the dialectic in 20th-century philosophy – the various vicissitudes of negativity and synthesis – are clues for approaching the ways in which the conflict between humanism and antihumanism has been "resolved" or, perhaps, continues to pursue its oppositional logic still today.

One of these ways – this one a positive synthesis – has returned again and again in my thesis. It finds its philosophical paradigm in one of Sartre's favorite arguments against any philosophy, theory, or science that deals in what Sartre calls "mauvaise foi": that is, any discourse that subjects an irrevocably "free" consciousness to what belongs, instead, to the inert and calcified, i.e., to entities or objects (or to a consciousness viewed *from without* and reified). For Sartre, all versions of what this thesis sees as "antihumanism" would fall under this category and need to face judgment.[12] For, at the end of the day, we *know* in the "immanence" of consciousness that the forces proposed by such "transcendent" frameworks do not control or determine us, Sartre says. Rather than a product of sober theoreticism, antihumanism would then be the sign of a tormented soul groping for meaning and orientation in the dark. With the sky silent, and God absent or dead, the unhappy consciousness projects itself as otherness, and captures itself in its own inverted image.[13] But we wake up in the end – we have always already woken up. Sartre's lesson, the rule of consciousness and *cogito*, is that we cannot escape ourselves, and that we *know* it too. After the projection of the self into its other has been

[12] See chapter 4.
[13] Cf. Sartre, "Un nouveau mystique," in *Situations* I (Paris, Gallimard, 2010 [1947]), pp 172-213.

resolved, we are left the same as before. Consciousness finds that it had been dupe to its own creations. The dialectic of humanism marches on, ever triumphant, even despite itself. Another philosophical version of this can be seen in the *Nouveaux Philosophes* who reacted against French antihumanism.[14]

If Sartrean optimism prefigures, even distantly, Pinker's hymn to Enlightenment and humanism – despite the criticality of Sartre's concept of *pour-soi* and despite his Marxism – it is in its heroic self-assurance.[15] The battle was won in advance: with "Reason" humans master nature, with "Consciousness" all antihumanist, anti-phenomenological theories fall victim to the clear evidence that we are nothing but what we freely choose to be. The mind that thinks the powers of its subjection has thereby shown its freedom, and utter autonomy, from them: this is Sartre's dialectical sleight of hand. But the misery of this philosophy is its dogmatism, which it refuses to see: it holds fast to an *assumption* about the mind, and cries foul at anyone who disobeys its rules, or wants to change the whole game – that of metaphysics itself. Sartrean "freedom" is formal and in this it resembles the Stoic ethics of his model, Descartes—that is, the abstract, abstemious ethics Descartes offered when faced with Elisabeth's criticisms. "Freedom" now concerns the margin of interpretation, the varieties of disposition, that *the mind* is (ideally) able to assume in the face of forces and events that *in actuality* transcend and overwhelm the self on all sides. Thus Sartre's notorious dictum that under the Nazi occupation Frenchmen had never been more "free."[16]

This positive version of synthesis, then, leaves us with (1) a lesson, and (2) its discontents. (1) We must not neglect the individual mind, and our capacity to think and, *in this*

[14] See Thomas Pavel, "The Return of the Individual and the New Humanism," in *The Columbia History of 20th-century French Thought*, Kritzman,ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 323-6.
[15] On Pinker's humanism, see my introduction.
[16] Sartre, "La république du silence" (1944), in *Situations III* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), p. 11; Cf. Adorno, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," *New German Critique*, n.26 (Spring/Summer, 1982), p. 126.

way, transcend contradiction and predicament. One cannot pretend, that is, that there is no *subject*, or author, of antihumanism. Who is it? What desires does this subject express? What does this subject want? (2) But we might also wish to refuse as buffoonery Sartre's doctrine of an ever-free, divine, untouchable consciousness. Isn't its stubborn refusal of all "exteriority" unseemly, at least from our perspective? And isn't it already, even on its own terms, a contradiction? In order to describe and think itself, it must take itself as the object of language, thereby reifying itself. Descartes's science of "passions," we saw, risked making the soul into some *thing* that can be touched, and this in blatant contradiction of Cartesian metaphysics. Sartre's verbose treatise on non-being similarly accords a sort of substantive, subjective and biographical existence to what is, in fact, a purely negative or formal ontological mode: the "free" *pour-soi*. Only in "bad faith" (to riff on Sartre) can the psychological subject be the *pour-soi*. But humanism often avoided theoretical complexity, I have said above. This, part of its enduring appeal, is also surely related to its historical and ideological function. Sartre's philosophy, like Descartes's, was a response to the madness of war: perhaps their affirmations of heroic selfhood, if naïve, should be read amid this context as a polemical reaffirmation of the individual in the wake, or face, of terror. This would be another link to their ancestor, Stoicism.

But to many, Sartre's Stoic affirmation now might sound like the narcissism of a young man. Reading his philosophy of the 1940s, that is, might provoke the same reaction as Stoicism when viewed from what Nietzsche describes as our ultimately Christian and now modern, endlessly skeptical perspective:

> When we now, educated in this Christian school of skepticism, read the moral books of antiquity, e.g., those of Seneca or Epictetus, we feel an amusing superiority and are full of secret insights and overviews, as if a child were speaking before an old man or an overenthusiastic young beauty were speaking before La Rochefoucauld.[17]

[17] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Nauckhoff, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), §122.

Lest we see in this feeling of "superiority" the same positive triumph of the Hegelian-Sartrean consciousness I described above, we might recognize that the point is elsewhere: here we critique the naiveté of consciousness, our own included, and without thereby escaping it, at least not entirely. This new movement of critical reflection, which Sartre would surely call "bad faith," is similar to what I described in my introduction: if thinking qua thinking is the circular, recursive dimension of the *cogito* (à la Pinker, à la Arendt, à la Sartre), as soon as we begin to ask about language, writing, and their relation to thinking and subjectivity, the "certainties" of the cogito become more questionable. The omnipotent logic of self-implication comes up against its limit. This problem can be taken as a clue for considering other versions of the dialectic, that is, those alternatives and challenges to the positive, humanist synthesis.

I mentioned Adorno above and will return to him here. For him, one might say, the negative is triumphant: humanism is negated – historically and philosophically – but this critique refuses to transform itself into positivity, and instead embeds itself in the tension left behind. The positive moment is refused because humanism is purely abstract, an ontology only dreaming that it might realize itself in concrete, existential terms[18] But no more than humanism is antihumanism a position in which to take refuge: the individual, mainstay of humanism, is not annihilated, but *determinately negated* along Hegel's lines: it remains, but as absence, just like freedom or reconciliation. This is the affective force of Adorno's critique: it produces anger at what is and longing for what is not. But it is also part of what is called his Marxist humanism, one shared by other Frankfurt school thinkers. Theoretical antihumanism in France refused this mitigated form as ideologically corrupt. Today it might be in for a return.[19]

[18] See Adorno, "Trying to Understand Endgame," e.g., pp. 123-4, 129.
[19] Cf. Alderson and Spencer, eds., *For Humanism: Explorations in Theory and Politics* (London: Pluto, 2017). See also the discussion of Socialist or Marxist humanism in my introduction.

Radically different appears Heidegger's "solution." If humanism and the positions that contradict it are caught in an opposition from which each draws aspects of its being, they are both parts of Western metaphysics. Can't we find an alternative to these "alternatives" entirely? Heidegger's *Letter on 'Humanism'* tried to think this possibility, we saw: he there delineated a sort of thinking that would refuse and recuse those binaries (subject, object; theism, atheism; humanism, barbarism; logical, irrational; practical, theoretical; positivism, idealism; being, nothingness, *inter alia*) that seem always to have us at a deadlock.[20] Derrida and others in France followed suit. As Heidegger's laborious, poetical reworking of vocabulary and syntax shows, the task of overcoming "metaphysics" is the same, perhaps, as the very task of constructing a whole new language.

But meanwhile the everyday world follows its course. As Heidegger saw, modernity and its science and technology do not allow us an exit from, but continue to exacerbate the fate of Western metaphysics, a course set in place at least since Plato.[21] The critique of metaphysics – more or less equivalent, in Heidegger's *Letter*, to a thinking "gegen den Humanismus"[22] – might always have to remain at the level of critique or deconstruction. In other words, the *outside* or *other* of Western discourse – or of the dialectic – cannot be given form, even a negative one. For that would be to find our old conceptual friends and foes again. Instead of flipping negativity back into positive being, the very cunning of the dialectic, the best we can do is bear witness or gesture to the "tout autre."[23] We are left, then, with what amounts to an affirmation of our

[20] Heidegger, *Lettre sur l'humanisme.* Bilingual ed. by Munier (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1964), pp. 120s, 154.
[21] See, e.g., Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" (1938), in *Holzwege*. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1950), pp. 75-114; *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1989).
[22] See my discussion of Heidegger's *Letter* and his discussion of "humanism" in my introduction.
[23] See Derrida, "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale: un hégélianisme sans réserve," in *L'écriture et la différence*, pp. 369-407

finitude, an awareness of the horizon that divides what we know from the expanse of what we do not know, cannot say, or yet to come (the event). This approaches mysticism, be it "atheist" à la Bataille. But the term "atheism" here does not exclude the theological: we might recall that the anti-atheist Catholic and Jansenist Pascal admitted only an absent, radically unknowable, unthinkable God. For this "God," as for the negativity beyond the binaries of the negative and the positive (Bataille, Derrida), or "the sacred" in Heidegger's *Letter*, there is no presentative "experience" or positive ontic form – perhaps no "form," in the old sense, at all.

Of an entirely different sort is the more positive synthesis offered in Foucault's work on ancient ethics. To understand this project, it is crucial to see how it emerged after and at the intersection of his previous work: on knowledge—the impersonal *epistemes* that govern discourse at a certain time within "domaines de savoir" (*Les mots et les choses* [1966])—and on power—in institutionalized disciplinary regimes and "types de normativité" (*Surveiller et punir* [1975]).[24] For Foucault, we might say, ethics is where these come together and are, literally, embodied. Ethics studies the modes of "subjectivation" by which epistemes, power, and disciplinary norms and regimes *produce subjects* by infusing selves in the very core of their self-relation.[25] Ethics concerns self-conceptions and the *power* that selves *take over themselves*, as we say.

But one of the guiding concepts from this project, *techniques de soi*, a more critical version of Hadot's *exercices spirituels*,[26] still preserves some of the latter's ambiguity: in *techniques* (or *pratiques*, or *exercices*), selves participate in, rather than passively endure, subjection. The dimension of what Foucault named the "care of the self" or "aesthetics of

[24] See Foucault's own description of his project in *Histoire de la sexualité II: L'usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 10-13.
[25] On this concept, see my Chapter One.
[26] Pierre Hadot, *Exercises spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002).

existence"[27] thus emerges as a perhaps unstable mix of humanist and antihumanist perspectives. Foucault *willingly* espouses the tension that Descartes, in the *Passions de l'âme*, unwittingly encountered, and that undermined the coherence of metaphysical, humanist ethics. In Foucault, the tension instead undermines his earlier, theoretical antihumanism. This was in some ways the logical outcome, I think, of the type of reflection on his relation to his own work that we find in the late comments on the "essai" and "experience books," which I discussed at the end of chapter 5.

If Foucault has recently been so associated with neoliberalism,[28] it must in part be because of the way in which he seems to straddle, and offers us an apparent way to not have to choose within, the humanism-antihumanism divide. No doubt the modish idea of *philosophy as a way of life* appeals to our culture for similar reasons: for mixing old-school philosophy with new-school anthropotechnics, more or less abstract perspectives with a notion of *practice* or *exercise* that seems congenial to contemporary obsessions with yoga, body alteration, and physical fitness in general.[29] Regimes of knowledge and types of normativity exceed and determine selves from without, to be sure. But while ignorant subjects (the masses) are unaware of the process, we enlightened ones can *choose* which regimes will be ours. Subjects can pick their masters to some extent. The sphere is bounded but the possibilities of combination and recombination within are endless. This is the message of the "aesthetics of existence." In some ways, it resembles – admittedly in a more postmodern, ant-idealist, pluralistic form – the anti-postmodern idealism and optimism of Badiou. In his still to be completed masterwork, *L'être et l'événement*, Badiou

[27] See Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité III: Le souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 55-94.
[28] See, e.g., Zamora and Behrent, eds. *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).
[29] See Peter Sloterdijk, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009).

opened a space for his Sartean commitments within a theory of the constitution of subjects via events and truth procedures, and across a plurality of *vérités* and *mondes*.[30]

If Foucault's project is ambiguous, even cynical, ambiguity need not be counted against syntheses in general. An ambiguous (non)synthesis might even be a merit, especially today. At the level of theory, this sort of thing might recall Ciceronian Academism, an eclectic philosophy whose name portends something essential about Academia today: its incoherence (or "openness"), which might be counted as a plus, and its complicity with neoliberalism: arguably not so much of a plus. But skepticism – the other name for Cicero's academic philosophy – can take non-academic forms. Montaigne's *Essays*, for example, presented its own version of a (non)solution to the humanism-antihumanism divide.

Montaigne offered skepticism towards humanism mixed with an epicurean sensitivity, a humored tenderness for the shortcomings of the creaturely human self. The academic treatise or book (*academic* in all senses of the term) is replaced with the short form with its resistance to stability and totality.[31] The Montaignian essay, avoiding ends or closure, constantly written and rewritten, settles and unsettles knowledge and selves. Some have seen Montaigne's essay as a precursor of "theory" understood, schematically, as a sort of relentless unsettling of knowledge, binaries, and so forth, recalling Derrida.[32] How congenial *this* position might be to neoliberalism is another question. But Montaigne's essay, even if it might undermine conventional notions of "self" or "person," is always somewhat *personal*. The essay measures ideas and philosophies

[30] See Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988); *Logique des mondes: L'être et l'événement II* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).
[31] On early modern antihumanism and short forms, see chapter 2.
[32] See Zalloua, ed., *Montaigne after Theory, Theory after Montaigne* (U. Washington Press, 2009); Kritzman, *The Fabulous Imagination: On Montaigne's Essais* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

against the claims of a personal, embodied reason. This is an "existentialist" outlook, as it were, one that "theory" never has been able to conscience, at least not explicitly.

Unsurprisingly, Hegel said *no* to the question of Montaigne's belonging to the realm of "eigentliche Philosophie."[33] And today Montaigne's status as a philosopher or a more literary writer is still up for debate. The title of a recent article by Timothy Hampton can be said to (implicitly) express an aspect of this dilemma: "Montaigne: Philosophy before Philosophy."[34] As mentioned in my introduction, this "before" refers more or less to Cartesian philosophy, when "modern philosophy" as we know it supposedly begins. But the "before" also designates a type of writing that seems sympathetic to aspects of "post-" modern thought: the pre-Cartesian resonates in the post- or anti-Cartesian.[35]

But the question of the essay's status also points to something implicit in the study of 17th-century antihumanism I began in chapters 2 and 3. Antihumanism, that is, often took shape in forms of writing that were antagonistic to the systematicity of philosophical thought and to the treatise qua medium of philosophical knowledge-making and subjectivity. The *Maxims* of La Rochefoucauld and *Pensées* of Pascal, for example, were like the *Essays* in this respect. But they did not emerge "before philosophy," like Montaigne's texts, but were written as critical responses to Cartesian and Neo-Stoic humanism. In other words, perhaps it is not only in philosophy per se, but in forms of writing close (in letter and spirit) to what we might now call

[33] Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in *Werke*, vol. 20 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 17.
[34] Timothy Hampton, "Montaigne: Philosophy before Philosophy," in C. Prendergast, ed., *A History of Modern French Literature* (Princeton: 2017), pp. 155-70.
[35] See Zachary Sayre Schiffman, "Montaigne: Early Modern, Modern, Postmodern" in Desan, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2016), pp. 269-83.

literature, that antihumanism – or *non-humanism*, to invoke Sartre's Roquentin[36] – took on one of its most enduring manifestations.

This already might be concluded from the fiction of Madame de Lafayette, who, as discussed in chapter 2, moved in Augustinian circles close to La Rochefoucauld. But it becomes more patent as fiction and styles of anti- or non-philosophy develop: like the early modern essay or maxim, it is in fluid, open-ended forms of literature that normative idealisms and the binaries of "metaphysics" are measured against and lost within the flux of history and the murky realm of human experience. This was the problem with the *Passions de l'âme*: affectivity is inherently troubling for idealism. Not coincidentally it was and remained the stuff of poetry and fiction. Literature is the sort of writing where Writing comes up against the worldliness which it, and like the ego or the subject, emerged. Heroes of antiquity (of books) are reincarnated in impure, comical, tragi-comical garb. Their fate is only *tragic* for the idealist, romantic, and credulous.

If this is right, then a thesis on humanism and antihumanism should end with *Endgame*.[37] Beckett's play offers a strikingly complex (non)synthesis, which might be understood in relation, again, to Hegel's dialectic. In the passage from the *Phenomenology* cited above, we read that "mutually incompatible" (*unverträglich*) forms "supplant one another." "Sich verdrängen" reads the German original: the verbal form of what, in Freud, will become the nominal term of *repression*, "Die Verdrängung."[38] The dialectic's successful resolution of contradiction – the fruition of the fruit – requires that the flower *repress* the bud with which it was in conflict. Sublation means, however, that aspects of the two "mutually incompatible" forms are negated

[36] See my discussion of Sartre's *La nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938) in the introduction for Sartre's protagonist's quip: "Je *ne suis pas humaniste*, voilà tout" (p. 152). Rather than the "anti-" of opposition, then, the "non-," marking a more implicit yet still important distinction, might be more befitting of the literary critique of humanism I have in mind here.
[37] Beckett, *Fin de partie* (1957) in *Théâtre I* (Paris, Minuit, 1971), pp. 139-217.
[38] See, e.g., Freud, "Die Verdrängung," in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10 (London: Imago, 1991), pp. 248-61.

but preserved in the resolution, albeit on a new level. But what if, as we have been exploring, the process fails? What if dialectic provides no resolution, and the one form, in conflict with the other, even having murdered its other, cannot repress or overcome it? Amidst this failure, it would remain in ambivalence, conflicted but unable to let go, attached to what it opposes.

For Freud *ambivalence* is the very stuff of love and, if failed repression means *neurosis*, the incapacity to let go of what is lost is *melancholia*.[39] Despite what Adorno thought, in other words, Beckett's *Endgame* is difficult to align with any *philosophical* critique of existential humanism.[40] It is no straightforward attack on existentialism or humanism, and not a hymn to it either. Rather, Beckett's characters entertain a sort of mournful, ironic attitude towards existential humanism: as Adorno said, they are as it were literal incarnations of what, in existentialism, was an ontological or idealist perspective only masquerading as concrete. In the flesh, now, madness and misery ensues. Existentialism is not wrong as uplifting theory, but what it requires of us, the divinity it seeks to place in our hands, is too much to bear.

When Stanley Cavell deals with *this* aspect of the play, he gets things right, I think. The work of shedding our old beliefs – in God, in Meaning –, of taking over the task of making meaning ourselves, and of shaping and "justifying" existence: this work is beyond our capacities. "[T]o accomplish that it seems we will have to become gods. For mere men will go on hoping, go on waiting for redemption, for justification, for meaning."[41] This is the dilemma of Beckett's play, Cavell says. Yet the tone he uses, I suspect, might seem too humanist, or existentialist, to readers of Beckett (something similar is true of the words I wrote above: "what it requires of us…is too much to bear"). But this, if true, might be an effect of the *form* of Cavell's writing: the

[39] See Freud, "Trauer und Melancholie," in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10, pp. 428-46.
[40] Cf. Adorno, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," passim.
[41] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," in *Must We Mean What We Say* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 140. See also pp. 122, 149, 162.

straightforward affirmation of discourse – an aspect of *interpreting* the play, of *saying* what it *means* – seems to do violence to the ambiguous, repetitive, unsettling irony with which Beckett annuls whatever we might wish to attach to as if it were a (or Beckett's) position.

Yet non-positions are still positions (there's the damned dialectic again). Products of a failed dialectic, remnants of aborted repression, they might be better described with Freud than only with Hegel. What I am suggesting, that is, is that ironic, self-distrusting, or ambivalent *melancholia*[42] might be one albeit imperfect way in which to put words on Beckett's mood and the sort of attitude and *feeling* towards existentialism and humanism that imbues his play. This affect, in other words, is different from that which characterizes theoretical antihumanism's more confident critique. While closer to the acerbic "traurige Wissenschaft" of the Marxist (anti)humanist Adorno,[43] it also stands apart from negative dialectics. This unique quality is due to the play's status as paratactic theater or literature, not philosophy, criticism, history, or theory. It is, as it were, a self-destructive piece of writing, refusing straight affirmation (Cavell) and negation (Adorno) alike.

But its mood also has to do with the ironic, mournful critique of humanism *Endgame* presents. Its style is not cathartic tragedy but uncomfortable tragicomedy, recalling the sad buffoonery and self-harming poet to which Baudelaire lends a voice in his lyrics. Returning to

[42] This emphasis on a more hesitant, ironic melancholy distinguishes my reading from the extant (and in my mind somewhat naive) scholarship on the question of Beckett and melancholy: see Giuseppina Restivo, "Melencolias and Scientific Ironies in *Endgame*: Beckett, Walther, Dürer, Musil," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, vol. 11 (2011), pp. 101-111; Restivo, "The Iconic Core of Beckett's *Endgame*: Eliot, Dürer, Duchamp," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, vol. 6 (1997), pp. 111-24; Yann Mével, "Beckett et le terrain vague de la mélancolie," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, vol 11 (2011), pp. 469-77; Mével, "Une mélancolie des temps modernes? Beckett entre monstrueux et obscène," *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, vol. 17 (2006), pp. 295-312. These studies fail to wonder whether "melancholy" might belong to the civilization after whose destruction *Endgame* seems to begin.

[43] See Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Version, 2005), p. 15 (the translator chose "melancholy science"); Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London: Verso, 2014).

Freud, we might situate this sort of mood within a schematic, and provisional, typology (not a psychology). Each position would refer to different positions within oppositions of affirmation and loss, assertion and critique, in which the humanist ego – the "subject" of Western "metaphysics" and writing – is always at stake. If the theoretical conjuncture here might be designated by names like Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, the historical context would be something like *posthistory*, if not as utopian reconciliation or positive synthesis, then as a globalizing "culture industry" that threatens to evacuate the form of the individual of any individuality it once may have had. The postwar French critique of the heroic "intellectual"[44] – which proceeded along the lines of critiques of the "subject" – was produced within a culture that seems to have no place for intellectuals anymore.

One might thus describe something like antihumanism's *mourning* for the sovereign ego, traceable even in its conceptual antagonism to "subject," "ego," and "individual." This ambivalent relation would be unconscious: acted out in Oedipal conflict and overcome, to some extent, in the patient labor, or manic eruptions, of critique. Sartre, after all, was the *pater familias* of 20th-century French thought. The critical negation of his philosophy, which became *de jure* and appears to be ideologically dominant in academia still today, led to our neglecting the existential dimensions and subjective claims of theory.

In turn, the recent humanisms of Pinker and the *Nouveaux Philosophes* resemble barefaced affirmations of scientism and neoliberal ideology. New versions of old things, they lack the political edge, and anti-scientism, of Sartrean humanism. Their ignorance of the negative, their cheery egoism, seems regressive, even inhuman. Repression, conducive to health,

[44] See Lawrence D. Kritzman, "The Intellectual," in *The Columbia History of 20th-century French Thought*, Kritzman, ed., pp. 363-374.

here brings moral decrepitude and psychotic disavowal. Holding fast to the ego, these *narcissistic* humanisms ignore the critical lessons of history and antihumanism.

But before these humanisms arose, and when the 20th-century moment of French antihumanism was largely still to come, in 1957, Beckett diagnosed the intellectual climate with a *melancholy* fully of irony and self-mockery. *Endgame* does not supply an end to the conundrum so much as put its finger on how none might be available. We are denied the closure of dialectical resolution or the relief of a critique that would fully break from its object. Repression is impossible, leaving ambivalence in its wake.

To be sure, outside the window of our world there is, on the horizon, the ocean we cannot hear.[45] There is, in some unthinkable future, the silence of death bespeaking the beyond of our language and the deliverance from our selfhood.[46] But barring death, salvation, or historical catastrophe – and lest one finds footing in some position on the intellectual market – suspension obtains. This is a melancholy place, and self, to be – one mired in being and non-being. But if Montaigne and Beckett are right, suspension does not exclude the immanent transcendence of humor.

[45] See *Fin de partie*, p. 198.
[46] Cf. Beckett, *Stirrings still* (New York: North Star Line, 1991): "…oh to end. No matter how no matter where. Time and grief and self so-called. Oh all to end" (n.p.).

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