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Perceiving Truth and Value

Interdisciplinary Discussions on Perception  
as the Foundation of Ethics

Edited by Markus Mühling

in community with

David A. Gilliland and Yvonne Förster

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Philipp Stoellger

## The Interpreting of Perception and the Perception of Interpreting – On the Relation between Interpretive Patterns and Perception, or on the Interpretativity of Perception

### 1. Introduction: Thesis and Problems<sup>1</sup>

If we characterize perception as a perception of value [*wertnehmend*], then the fundamental question arises whether perception is *interpretative* [interpretativ] or whether it is *interpretive* [*deutend*]. If and insofar one distinguishes between interpretation and interpreting [*Interpretation und Deutung*], we can put forward the following thesis: Perception is both. Interpreting (*deutend*) and interpreted [*gedeutet*].

Perception is interpretive in two ways: it is directed by and it is formative for interpretive patterns. Thus, on the one hand it is directed by these patterns (like friend-foe, familiar-strange, figure-ground); but on the other hand, it is also formative for these very patterns itself. Interpretive Patterns (cultural, religious, etc.) lie *behind* an actual event of perception. And events of perception can form diachronic and social series or sequences, which become habitual ways of perceiving (similar to Cavell's concept of a concept as a "habitual way of thinking").

'That's how we interpret [*deuten*] it' would be to say in recalling Wittgenstein, and this means in view of perception: 'That's how we perceive the matter'. There is a scaling and grading of patterns of explanation here: from the highly general (such as programs of affects) up to the very specific (based on individual biography, phobias and preferences).

Perception *in vivo* is thus to be distinguished from perception *in vitro*, that is, from work on the concept of perception. What one interprets [*deutet*] as perception thus involves a conceptual question about how theories (or models) are formed.<sup>2</sup>

Among other things, it is debatable in all this just *how active or passive perception actually is*.

Today – *contra* Aristotle and Descartes – it is mainstream *not* to conceive of perception as being 'solely passive'.

This is a question of definition and therefore at the same time of the power to define [*Definitionsmacht*].

<sup>1</sup> Translated by David A. Gilland.

<sup>2</sup> A conceptual determination that precedes every empirical moment? We would then already be within the scheme of the Kantian doctrine of the two stems of cognition.

In line with the modern anti-Cartesians, Vico and Leibniz were representative of prominent positions in advocating for and explaining perception in active terms (as Leibniz depicts perception with appetite, with *appetitus*, the proclivity of perception).

The fact that the anti-Cartesian or anti-Leibnizian Immanuel Kant sees this differently and shows this with his doctrine of the two stems<sup>3</sup> ought to be understood against this backdrop.

Understanding perception as *perception of value* [*Wert-nehmen*] is directed (as far as I can tell) against the theory of perception as a *positing of values* [*Wert-setzung*], that is, against neo-Kantianism (Rickert, cf. Weber).

Thus, the fact that 'perception' is 'the perception of value' poses a challenge to the doctrine of the two stems of cognition.<sup>4</sup>

But by what right, with what intention and what consequences? We will discuss this in what follows in connection with Leibniz, Husserl, Cassirer and the interpretationism of Günter Abel.

First, however, there are a few problems and possible objections:

1. If perception is conceived as being pre-predicative-synthetic (and passively synthetic), then it is fallible, that is, susceptible to error. This means that it is not merely a conceptual judgment, but rather the synthetic perception that can already err or even lie.

2. If perception is already synthetic, then this is because it is already medially constituted. This much has been clear since Aristotle's deliberations on the *diaphane* [*to diaphanês*] in his *De anima*: that we can only perceive when there is a medium 'in-between', such as air, the ether or other various media that provide both distance and mediation at the same time. Such *media* of perception are then to be analysed on the basis of their patterns and functions of synthesis: *metaxy*, *meta*, *dia*, etc. As is well known, these patterns of perception are essential to 'advertising strategies', which then more or less occupy our capacity for attentional reflexivity and cultivate it. But – religions also rely on this in seeking to shape our perception through ritual, space, sound and atmosphere, in order to have and cause those practicing religion to perceive in an appropriate manner.

3. If perception is interpretive, synthetic, forming, figuring –, then this raises the question of the extent to which it perceives value, that is, the extent to which it is *evaluative* perception. However, the hermeneutical question arises in response: Who wants to know and why and when?

– in contrast to the neutralization of perception (i. e. as a neutral entity or instance),

3 Cf. KANT, I., Critique of Pure Reason, 152: 'There are two stems of human cognition, which may perhaps arise from a common but to us unknown root, namely sensibility and understanding, through the first of which objects are given to us, but through the second of which they are thought.'

4 KANT, I., Critique of Pure Reason, B29.

- in the context of a dominant *activity* of perception,
- in contrast to an all-too dominant *activity of perception* with a *passivity* of perception to be qualified,
- which is relevant to distinguish perception from hallucination or imagination, and
- which is normatively relevant in order not to misjudge 'standards' [*Vorgaben*] (memorial, normative) as an arbitrarily positing.

However, to define perception as being perception of value is situated in the horizon of times of omnipresent evaluation. The obvious *danger* lies in internalizing the *morbus evaluitis* in a way that perceiving is already evaluating. *This kind* of internalization can occur *in vivo* (as self-censure) as *in vitro*, that is, in grasping perception as intrinsically evaluative.

A concrete example showing just how far this manner of internalization is already thriving is the suicide in high age. One who is able 'to perceive' him or herself evaluatively in such a way as to actually measure the social or societal value of his or her own life, – is also able to hold him or herself to be without value, or worthless. We must certainly tag *this kind* of perception as being problematic. Evaluative perception can indeed have its dark side:

'9571 people committed suicide in Germany in 2009, of which 2398 were men and 961 were women over 65. The share of those over 65 was 35 %, although their respective share in the population was only 25 %.'<sup>5</sup>

In ways that are altogether different in a structural sense, but nonetheless analogous, perception can also be understood as being evaluative. This occurs not just in the sense that 'the understanding is bewitched' (in Wittgenstein's sense), but rather that the perception itself is already affected. This can be the case, for example, when anyone who looks 'Islamic' or 'Arabic' is suspected of being a 'sleeping agent'. In times of the renewed production of friend-enemy dichotomies, the evaluative character of perception is also a highly political topic.

The 'war against terror' is also a war over perception: a war about interpretive power, in which various actors in the public sphere are fighting over the interpretive power over the interpretive patterns of our perception.

The so-called 'refugee problem' is a similar area of conflict over interpretive power on the character of perception by means of specific judgments which are always value-judgments.

'Whoever commands the airwaves is sovereign', according to C. Schmitt (criticizing the press?)

Whoever commands perception is sovereign: Who or what is it that perception directs, structures, evaluates, that is, imbues with value?

5 <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/weltspiegel/gesundheit/alterssuizid-das-vergessene-drama/3589942.html>?



And yet, this is not simply a matter of 'having command over' perception, if we understand it to be impregnated with culture, saturated with history and perspectively idiosyncratic. The perception of value in perception is a constellation of highly differentiated factors that form the basis for how our perception of value is determined or encoded.

We can clarify this by means of an example: If a theologian or philosopher were to maintain that love of neighbour (in accordance with the Thomistic *ordo amoris*) actually means that it is to be directed primarily at the neighbour (as one who is local, present to perception, territorial, familial), but not however (equally or primarily) to those further away such as refugees – then how we perceive the alien will be characterized by at least two agonal interpretive patterns: one characterized by the privileging of one's own, those who are closest, ultimately in the sense of an extension of self-preservation, and the other by the love of one's neighbour, which is added to the first interpretive pattern and directed interpretatively to it in a corresponding sense.

## 2. Leibniz's Perception with Appetition

In the horizon of his hypothesis, Leibniz discovered in the *Petites Perceptions*, the subliminal perceptions, the *pregnance* present in them.

'They constitute that je ne sais quoi, those flavours, those images of sensible qualities, vivid in the aggregate but confused as to the parts; those impressions which are made on us by the bodies around us and which involve the infinite; that connection that each being has with all the rest of the universe. It can even be said that by virtue of these minute perceptions the present is big with the future and burdened with the past [...]. These insensible perceptions also indicate and constitute the same individual, who is characterized by the vestiges or expressions which the perceptions preserve from the individual's former states, thereby connecting these with his present state.'<sup>6</sup>

'*Praeteritum est praegnans futurum*', wrote Leibniz in 1711, the past is pregnant with the future because '*omnia in rebus quadammodo praestabilia sunt*'.<sup>7</sup> Therefore Adam was created with an '*inclinatio ad bonum*', but nonetheless already bore in himself the '*semina futurae inclinationis ad malum*'. This thesis about the conceptual pregnancy of perception is an implication of Leibniz's monadology: Monads bear within themselves all of the individual factors that determine them, and the same goes for the ultimate monad, whose initial and final determination is the pre-established harmony.

<sup>6</sup> LEIBNIZ, G.W., *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Preface 55.

<sup>7</sup> LEIBNIZ, G.W., *Die philosophischen Schriften*, 424, which was written on 7.9.1711 to Bartholomew des Bosses (originally in the preterite).

Nothing, therefore, occurs through blind chance, and all sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*] is always already encompassed by the one larger sense [*Sinn*] that converges with every individual sensation. Every individual develops its rule of the series, which determines it as an individual, and all of these series integrate the integral of the one great series, of the world, in which we live.

'Everything is full of meaning', this was Leibniz's great hypothesis, which despite every doubt continues to remain attractive to teleological philosophies of history, just as '*praeteritum est praegnans futurum*' is for the history of philosophy. It is unquestionably difficult to renounce, and its absence always involves replacements that attempt to make many out of the one, to constantly envelop the manifoldness of meaningfulness as such with 'the meaning'.

## 3. Cassirer: Perception as Pre-predicative Synthesis – Pregnance

Cassirer understood perception's pregnancy and therefore its pre-predicative synthesis of sensibility and sense [*Sinnlichkeit und Sinn*] as the ground of the formation of symbols. As the essential *definiens* of symbolical form, what is paradigmatic in perception serves the consummate pre-predicative synthesis of sensibility and sense and thereby the basic determination of symbolic pregnancy.<sup>8</sup>

'By "symbolic pregnancy" we mean the way in which a perception as a sensory experience contains at the same time a certain non-intuitive meaning which it immediately and concretely represents [...]. Rather it is the perception itself which by virtue of its own immanent organization, takes on a kind of spiritual articulation – which, being ordered in itself, also belongs to a determinate order of meaning. In its full actuality, it's living totality, it is at the same time a life "in" meaning [...]. It is this ideal interwovenness, this relatedness of the single perceptive phenomenon, given here and now, to a characteristic total meaning that the term "pregnance" is meant to designate.'<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Cf. PsF II, 117; ET 94 [In the following, PsF I–IV refers to the German original of Cassirer's four volume work, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*; further, ET and PSF I–IV refer to the corresponding published English translations. The bibliographical information for both the originals and the translations is given in the bibliography. –Tr.]: 'On sharper analysis even the apparently "given" proves to have passed through certain acts of linguistic, mythical or logical-theoretical apperception. Only what is *made* in these acts "is"; even in its seemingly simple and immediate nature, what is thus made proves to be conditioned and determined by some primary meaning giving function. And it is this primary, not the secondary, formation which contains the true secret of all symbolic form, which must forever arouse new philosophical amazement'. The mystery, the primary formation, is the pre-predicative synthesis, respectively, Lotze's 'first universal'.

<sup>9</sup> PsF III, 235; ET 202 and ECW XIII, 231 (my italics) [ECW refers to the Hamburg edition of Ernst Cassirer's collected works with the corresponding volume number, here: *Gesammelte Werke*].

The regulative ideal of the cultural life is articulated in Cassirer's explication of this *locus classicus* of the definition of symbolic pregnance, and indeed in remarkable pregnance as 'life "in" sense'. Critically this appears as an imprinting of 'entelechy' of this 'more' in the name of 'sense' – without having clarified whence this *telos* comes, if it is not to be attributed extrinsically. The model of pregnance posits that this goal is already present and effective in every experience of expression and every perception, but that is a large and risky bet on the future, something along the lines of: Culture does not only have but is the future of life (in distinction from a kind of abysmal barbarism, which the later Cassirer had in mind).

'Rather, the future presents itself as a wholly distinct mode of vision: it is anticipated from the standpoint of the present. The now is filled and saturated with the future: praegnans futuri, as Leibniz called it.<sup>[10]</sup> We have everywhere seen that this kind of pregnance is distinguished by unmistakable characteristics from any purely quantitative accumulation or associative combination of perceptive images, and that it cannot be explained by reduction to purely discursive acts of judgment and inference. The symbolic process is like a single stream of life and thought which flows through consciousness and which by this flowing movement produces the diversity and cohesion, the richness, the continuity, and constancy, of consciousness.'<sup>11</sup>

As if the symbolic process was what held the world of culture together in its innermost, it is envisaged as a 'current' that not only carries everything along with it, but is also always directed – only where to?

In all this are we wagering, hoping or even maintaining that everything is always already 'in order'?<sup>12</sup> This *telos* of symbolic forming has an unarticulated, latent antithesis. The antonym of the symbolic would be the diabolic: over against the symbolic order is diabolical chaos. Its unsettling relevance is still to be located in the context of 'The Myth of the State', that is, in Cassirer's late philosophy.

The foundational concept of Cassirer's philosophy – symbolic pregnance<sup>13</sup> – names the *forma formans* of cultural life, proceeding from the *forma formatae* of the symbolic forms of culture. As *forma formans*, pregnance is potency:

Hamburger Ausgabe, vol. XIII: *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Dritter Teil: Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2002) –Tr.]. Cf. PsF III, 18; ET 14–15; WWS 212, 214 [WWS refers to Cassirer's, *Wesen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994. –Tr.)]

10 Cf., STOELLGER, P., Die Metapher als Modell symbolischer Prägnanz. Zur Bearbeitung eines Problems von Ernst Cassirers Prägnanzthese.

11 PSF III 202; for the original, see ECW XIII, 231.

12 STOELLGER, P., Alles in Ordnung? Die Ordnung des Übels – und das Übel der Ordnung. Ordnung und Außerordentliches in theologischer Perspektive.

13 Cf. on this STOELLGER, P., Die Metapher als Modell symbolischer Prägnanz, 100 ff.

'So the philosophy of symbolic forms must distinguish between *forma formans* and *forma formata*. The interplay between both is what constitutes the swing of the pendulum of intellectual life itself. The *forma formans* that becomes the *forma formata*, which it must become for the sake of its own preservation without ever becoming reduced to it, retains the power to regain itself from it, to be born again as *forma formans* – this is what is distinctive of the development of *geist* [sic] and culture.'<sup>14</sup>

If sensory perceptions, as Cassirer alleges, are symbolically pregnant – thus, that they feel and even mean what according to Kant first comes to them from the side of the understanding – then, by making recourse to Leibniz, the Kantian dualism will be circumvented.<sup>15</sup>

What Kant critically gained in the form of a distinction was at the same time a loss in terms of a certain lack of uncertainty, as had been discovered in Leibniz's *Petites Perceptions*.<sup>16</sup> It circumvents the dualism of the doctrine of the two stems which Kant had designed against Leibniz. The quality and modality of the world as the sense and taste for the infinite was considered by Leibniz as pre-predicatively perceived and primarily as a function of the concept. If this 'way of begetting the world' is dismantled by virtue of living perception, or goes missing, then it must first be retrieved along the horizon of the aesthetic. Leibniz, however, by means of his thesis of an uncircumventable enmeshment of sensibility and sense avoided an epistemic dualism and the need for having to account for mediation after the fact.

Cassirer's theory of perception is therefore delimited over against a sensualistic or rationalistic reduction and is by contrast intended to develop the sovereignty and synthetic function of perception both epistemically and in terms of a phenomenology of culture.<sup>17</sup> In being critical of phenomenology and/or Husserl, Cassirer holds that perception is not split apart by the

14 PSF IV, 18–19; cf. ECN 1, 18. [ECN refers to the 18 vols of the Hamburg edition of Ernst Cassirer's *Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, here: vol. 1: *Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen* (ed. Jörg Fingerhut, Gerald Hartung and Rüdiger Kramme; Hamburg: Meiner, 1995).–Tr.]

15 In Cassirer's edition of and commentary on Leibniz there is tellingly an earlier, if not even the very first instance of the concept of symbolic form. Cf. LEIBNIZ, G.W., *Hauptschriften zur Grundlegung der Philosophie*, 173 in the commentary on the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence.

16 These comments on Kant are rather reductive, for the sake of elucidating the difference. If one wanted to pursue the pre-predicative synthesis of perception in Kant it would essentially be necessary to discuss the theory of the power of the imagination [*Einbildungskraft*]. Cf. KANT, I., *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 211 (A 78): 'Synthesis in general is [...] the mere effect of the imagination'; and 239 (A 120): 'No psychologist has yet thought that the imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception itself'. Cf. KANT, I., *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 140/B 179 f.; Cf. KANT, I., *Critique of Judgement*, § 59. Cf. HEIDEGGER, M., *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*, 374: 'Schema ist die Weise eines allgemeinen Verfahrens der figürlichen Synthesis, d. h. der Bildgebung nach einer Regel, welche Regel vorgezeichnet ist durch den darzustellenden Begriff.' But the imagination is a *function of conceptual knowledge*, and this functional allocation and subordination is problematic.

17 See, among others, PsF III, 224; ET 192–193.



difference between *noesis* and *noema*, that is, it does not strictly distinguish a meaning-laden noetic [*sinnhaft-noetisches*] moment from a noematic-material moment, but rather – and this is the point of the matter – both have to be understood as the *pre-predicative identity*<sup>18</sup> of a relation.<sup>19</sup>

As examples and evidence for his thesis he always brings forth the perceptual-dependent variance of meaning in the perception of the drawing of a line and the perception of color hue.<sup>20</sup> Traditionally speaking, substances only appear as formed in a meaningful way<sup>21</sup>, so that there is no hylomorphic difference, but only the distinction of originally un-separated moments of perception. The perception of colour phenomena for instance is dependent on an antecedent co-positing (linear) structure, which already forms things in a meaningful [*sinnhaft*] manner.<sup>22</sup>

There is no sensibility without sense, but this is not yet saying that all sense is necessarily sensible (i. e. perceptible to the senses)<sup>23</sup>. The leading function of the mathematical function model, like that of Cassirer's evolutionary idealism<sup>24</sup>, could allow one to expect that sensibility would be 'overcome' in the final pure function of meaning. But when no symbolic form – and not even that of the pure function of meaning – is free of perception, that is, if every symbolic form is impregnated by perception, then the thesis must be also be valid when stated in the reverse: *there is no sense without sensibility*. Cassirer's thesis of the remaining co-positing character of the phenomena of expression in every symbolic form speaks for this. The example of the line<sup>25</sup>, for instance,

18 On the 'difference in identity', cf. PsF III, 109; ET 93. 'The pure phenomenon of expression has as yet no such form of dichotomy [*Ent-Zweiung*]. In it a mode of understanding is given which is not attached to the condition of conceptual interpretation: the simple baring of the phenomenon is at the same time its interpretation, the only one of which is susceptible and needful' (PsF III, 110; ET 93–94).

19 PsF III, 230 ff.; ET 197 ff.

20 See e. g., PsF III, 232 ff.; ET 199 ff.

21 Cf. WWS 209 f.: There is no mere stuff.

22 Cf. PsF III, 235. Although, it is precisely this transition to representation [*Darstellung*] in particular that still appears to be problematic. Cf. URBAN, W.M., Cassirer's Philosophy of Language, 413: 'Intuition is inseparable from expression, but in expression there is always an element of re-presentation'.

23 Thus Phillip Dubach's specifying limitation, DUBACH, P., 'Symbolische Prägnanz' – Schlüsselbegriff in Ernst Cassirers Philosophie der symbolischen Formen?, 51.

24 Be it marginal or central, a remainder or the core. Cassirer's theorem of the 'spirit' is under no circumstances marginal: 'Every energy of the mind should be understood under a "symbolical form", through which a mental content of meaning is attached to a concrete sensible sign and inwardly appropriated to it' (WWS, 175).

25 On lines, see WWS 211 ff. On Cassirer's critique of Konrad Marc-Woga (WWS 201–230): There has never been a real separation between presence and representation (WWS 210 f.); 'I emphasize as strongly as possible, that the "mere", the as it were naked perception that would be free from every function of time, is not a phenomenon that is given to us immediately in our "natural attitude". What we experience and undergo at this point – this is not the raw material of simple qualities, but it is always already interspersed by and animated by particular acts of giving meaning' (WWS 214; on perspectivity, see WWS 213).

necessarily demands the sensibility of the sense of the pure function of meaning<sup>26</sup>. In this regard we can affirm Orth's stronger paraphrase that symbolical pregnance entails the following: 'Sensibility always features sense [*sinnhaft*] and sense always sensibility.'<sup>27</sup> To the extent that one of Cassirer's main points is 'no content of the consciousness is itself merely "present", or in itself merely representative; rather, every actual experience indissolubly embraces both factors'<sup>28</sup>, then every perception is pre-predicatively synthetic, that is, symbolically pregnant.<sup>29</sup>

A denial of this 'original symbolic character of expression would cut off all our knowledge of reality at the root'.<sup>30</sup>

The impression itself is already 'enmeshed in series', meaning what is present is always also contained within the horizon of the antecedent representation, which is series forming. Every impression like every representation, which is series forming. Every impression like every perception is therefore a pre-predicative synthesis, because the series-forming representation already structures the perception or forms the horizon. This synthesis can also be called a pre-conceptual synthesis<sup>31</sup>, in which the question arises of whether it is only to represent in a pre-conceptual and therefore final conceptual sense or irreducibly in a non-conceptual sense and is therefore 'absolute' with respect to the concept. This means the decisive question is whether the pre-conceptual in Cassirer begins in the formation of the concept as the formation of a series, and is only pre-conceptual as a result, or whether by contrast it is to insist not on the autonomy and otherness of the irreducible non-conceptuality – as Blumenberg intended in his metaphorology.<sup>32</sup>

26 Does this also apply to entirely non-eidetic functions of meaning such as algebraic formulas and symbolic logic? Even at this point synthetic perception is unavoidable for providing form.

27 ORTH, E.W., Operative Begriffe in Ernst Cassirers Philosophie der symbolischen Formen, 59; or cf. DUBACH, P., 'Symbolische Prägnanz' – Schlüsselbegriff in Ernst Cassirers Philosophie der symbolischen Formen?, 51 f.

28 PsF III 232; ET 199.

29 Of course, it then becomes doubtful whether it is meaningful at all to speak of a 'pure' significative function, since there still cannot be any sense or meaning without sensibility. Even 'number' or symbolic logic and mathematics or even a theory of transcendental subjectivity cannot come to stand beyond the correlation of sensibility and sense. A platonic or idealistic drive, which leaves sensibility behind it finally as mere finitude would thwart Cassirer's point. It is therefore necessary in view of the theory of the subjectivity of a considerable alteration of the idealistic conception of the problem, perhaps beginning with one's relation to one's own body as a basal relation or of the age that precedes my ego and initially and continuously directs its externally along ambiguous ways, without pejoratively qualifying it in the name of absolute autonomy.

30 PsF III, 108; ET 92

31 Whereby its pre-predicative function and thereby the function of conceptual formation, of the setup (*Aufbau*) of the symbolic form and basally the setup of the first universals would be underexposed.

32 Cf. BLUMENBERG, H., Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer, 75 ff. Cf. STOELLGER, P., Metapher und Lebenswelt. Hans Blumenbergs Metaphorologie als hermeneutische Phänomenologie geschichtlicher Lebenswelten und ihr religionsphänomenologischer Horizont, 202 ff.

In any case, Cassirer formulated it programmatically that the philosophy of symbolic forms 'must ask whether the intellectual symbols [...] are not diverse manifestations of the same basic human function', and that means seeking 'after a rule' which determines the structure of symbolic forms.<sup>33</sup> Sensible impressions implicate 'a spontaneity of combination, a rule of formation'.<sup>34</sup> Such a rule is always formulated semiotically as the result of an abduction, and in this case a meta-abduction<sup>35</sup>, but also has the status of a basal hypothesis. Cassirer's question about the rule of symbolic forming operates with the *model of the rule of series*. Through Cassirer's 'concept of the concept' of the rule of series there appears a dynamic 'of sensible impression to symbolic expression' and from the perception of the expression to the depiction finally to pure meaning, which leads to a series forming depiction in the philosophy of symbolic forms, that is, indeed intended to be a modally differentiated, but series forming representation.

Expressive perception and thing perception are according to Cassirer two forms of perception that are independent and not reducible to one another<sup>36</sup>, whose difference emerges in the context of his development of the concept of symbolic pregnance and the problems it poses.<sup>37</sup> Both of these forms of expression can correspondingly be seen for instance as 'the world' under reciprocally irreducible aspects, object-objectifying or 'like ourselves'<sup>38</sup>, through which the world has a 'face'<sup>39</sup>. This variant of the 'readability' of the world is plausible to the extent that at this point the social world is leading, in which inter-subjective relation is basal, *without* already presupposing a reflexive distinction (e.g. the relation between mother and child).<sup>40</sup>

Expressive perception is the leading basic figure of the pre-predicative unity of sensibility and sense. The expressive function therefore has a 'mode of certainty': 'Its certainty and its truth are, in a manner of speaking, premythical, prelogical and pre-aesthetic; it forms the common ground from which all these formations

33 PsF I, 8; ET 77. On this, see the comments below on the 'radical metaphor'.

34 PsF III, 225; ET 193.

35 Cf. Eco, U., *Semiotik. Entwurf einer Theorie der Zeichen*, 356 ff., 359 ff.; Eco, U., *Die Grenzen der Interpretation*, 301 ff., 332 ff.

36 PsF III, VIII; ET XVf. Cf. CASSIRER, E., *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies*, 39: 'If we attempt to describe perception in its simple phenomenal state, it shows us, to some extent, a double face. It contains two elements that are intimately fused in it, but neither can be reduced to the other. They remain distinct from each other in their signification, even though it is not possible in actual fact to separate them.' But then the question arises, which is still to be shown, of whether there can be a 'pure' perception of expression and vice-versa, of whether or not every perception of a thing and its depiction is conditioned by qualities of expression.

37 A mapping of the distinction between non-/pre-conceptual and conceptual onto that of the distinction between expressive perception and thing perception must be avoided.

38 CASSIRER, E., *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies*, 39.

39 PsF III, 80; ET 68.

40 On expressive, thing and significative perception: 'And thus it is the spiritual triad – the functions of pure expression, representation and meaning – which first makes possible the intuition of an articulated reality.' (PsF III, 118; ET 101)

have in some way sprung and to which they remain attached.<sup>41</sup> The form of the expression is undefined in a peculiar way: the expression is found on this side of the stabilizing through the distinction in subject-object, inner-outer, I-Thou and on this side of language. The sense of the sensibility of the expression is oddly 'liquid', flowing and diffuse<sup>42</sup>. 'Only in the medium of language do the infinite diversity, the surging multiformity of expressive experiences begin to be fixated; only in language do they take on "name and shape"'.<sup>43</sup>

Life does not simply live like plants or animals, but rather it wants to know, form and shape – and is therefore always also self-enhancement – only not with the will to power but rather the will to culture. And this difference is marked in a pregnant way from religion:

'But the highest religious conceptions are able in one and the same act to enter into this bond and also to overcome it. They both destroy and create forms; they enter into the conditioned language of religious forms by internally breaking away from it and exposing its contingent nature [...]. They break up the *forma formata*, but by their readiness to destroy by the act of destruction itself they open up again the way to the *forma formans*.'<sup>44</sup>

If 'perceptive experience' already subsumes 'non-eidetic "sense"' [*nicht-anschaulichen Sinn*] into its sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*], then meaningful [*sinnvolles*] life would be indistinguishable from meaningless [*sinnlosem*] or nonsensical [*sinnwidrigem*] life. The *telos* of life is not encapsulated in sense or meaning [*Sinn*] alone, but precisely the co-emergence of sensibility and sense. In this, a classical teleology will be circumvented or transcended: the one from natural sensibility to cultural sense or meaning [*Sinn*] – so that the 'sensible certainty' falls by the wayside of the emergence of culture as expired finitude. Such a popular Hegelianism is unattainable and obsolete if sense or meaning is grounded in sensibility and conversely if sensibility is therefore itself always meaningful [*sinnvoll*] or is at least directed towards a meaning [*Sinn*]. This is a culture-hermeneutical *wager*, or a not altogether '*nouvelle hypothèse*', which indicates the positing of, if not confidence in, the sense of every sensibility. This is indicative on another place on the 'thesis of the pregnancy of sensibility', '*praegnans futuri*, as Leibniz called it'.<sup>45</sup> In this confidence in the

41 PsF III, 95; ET 81.

42 PsF III, 83 ff., 89 ff.; ET 71 ff., 76 ff.

43 PsF III, 90; ET 77.

44 PSF IV, 20; cf. ECN I, 19.

45 ECW XIII, 231; ET 202. Cf. ECW XIV, 339 ff. Cf. ECW IV, 221 in this sense with respect to Schelling: 'In every imprinted form that develops vitality, the power of a pure formative principle emerges beyond that of the mere stuff, the power of a 'spiritual' unity beyond the multiplicity of material formations. We cannot look at what has life as having been formed from the outside, but we must rather think of an individual power effective in it, which re-embosses all external stimulus in a definite particular manner.'



abundance of meaning [*Sinnfülle*] in the future and 'anticipation' of it in the present become apparent.<sup>46</sup>

Decisive for this post-metaphysical teleology of life for Cassirer is the phenomenon of meaning [*Bedeutung*] – in that the function of meaning brings a new form to life, the genuine human form of linguistic meaning:

'Linguistic symbolism opens up a new phase of the mental-spiritual life. A life in "meanings" supplants the life of mere impulses, of being absorbed by the immediate impression and into the various needs. These meanings are repeatable and recurring; something that does not cling to the bare here-and-now but is meant and understood in countless life-moments and in the appropriation and use by countless different subjects as being the self-same something, identical with itself. By virtue of this identity of intention, which rises above the multifariousness and diversity of momentary impressions, there emerges, gradually, and by stages, a determined "continued existence" [Bestand], a "common cosmos".'<sup>47</sup>

More is shown at this point than is directly said, likewise the fact that for Cassirer the symbolic form of speech engenders a communicative cosmos, as if speech were endowed with the power of a demiurge.<sup>48</sup> Although this statement is not without a degree of excess – it is precisely this power that unfolds the pregnancy in *its* being spoken in the symbols (to be discussed below) of the bow and lyre, the battle with primordial chaos and *coincidentia oppositorum* as constituting the basic elements in the tense unity of life.

46 ECW I, 374: 'Herder's "ideas" are the comprehensive and coherent development of this motive. "The rule which preserves world systems and forms and has formed every crystal, every worm, every snowflake and even preserves my race (human): it made its own nature into the reason of the persistence and development of the same, as long as humans come to be [...] With this guideline I wander through the labyrinth of history and see harmonious divine order everywhere: because whatever can happen, happens; what can come to effect, comes to effect." In this way immortality is the universal basic law and organic life. "No power can die out; because what does it mean for a power to die out. We have no such example in nature, not even a single concept in our soul. Is it contradictory that something is or becomes nothing: as such it is no longer a contradiction that a living, functioning something, in which the creator is present, in which his indwelling divine power is revealed, changes into a nothing [...] what that which gives all life calls to life, lives: what comes to effect, comes to effect in its eternal eternally."

47 CASSIRER, E., *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies*, 15 (cf. ECW XXIV, 371).

48 In CASSIRER, E., *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, 109, Cassirer discovered a version of the problem of alienation between determining meaning and meaning, saying and what is said [*Bedeuten und Bedeutung, Sagen und Gesagtem*]: 'The further the cultural process develops, the more the creations prove themselves to be the enemy of the creator. Not only can the subject not find his fulfillment in his work, but in the end his work threatens to destroy him. For what life truly and intrinsically wants is nothing other than its own movement and its flowing abundance' (cf. ECW 24, 468). If this were really the case would we not then expect (or at best hope) that the symbolic forms of life move apart and then against each other again, not least against the spirit forming in them. Would this be a way to approach a philosophical 'harmartiology'? 'The living proves of culture consists in the very fact that it is inexhaustible in its creation of such mediations and passages' (ibid. 110).

#### 4. An Interlude with Husserl

Husserl said receptivity is the minimal form of I-activity.<sup>49</sup> But he also discovered another passivity that he called 'pure' or 'primal', located roughly in the affections, associations and connotations.<sup>50</sup> These forms of passivity, which stand obliquely or crossways to receptivity lead him back to Kant's 'productive synthesis of the power of imagination'.<sup>51</sup> 'It is the genesis in which the I and correlatively the environment of the I are constituted. It is a passive genesis'<sup>52</sup>, for example, in the emergence of the experience of time, which in view of its internal dynamics is called 'passive genesis', since it is not synthesized from the I, but rather *something befalls it without the involvement of its own I*.<sup>53</sup> The point of this is not an (unwanted) occurrence or suffering, but rather a (pre- and not intentional) *happening or 'befalling' without the active involvement of the I*.<sup>54</sup>

'Comparing' is not merely a habitual way of thinking, it is more than that: It is a *habitual way of perceiving*. Husserl labelled this a 'correlating observation' in order to indicate the fact that a form of *relating* is already being co-positing in perception:

49 HUSSERL, E., *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, 104. Cf. HUSSERL, E., *Erfahrung und Urteil. Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*, 114, which was first published in German in 1939. On this see the important studies by HOLENSTEIN from 1971 and HOLENSTEIN, E., *Phänomenologie der Assoziation: Zu Struktur und Funktion eines Grundprinzips der passiven Genesis bei E. Husserl*.

50 See HOLENSTEIN, E., *Passive Genesis*, 117.

51 HUSSERL, E., *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*, 275 f.: 'When Kant speaks of an analytical synthesis in his great work, he means an unfolding knowledge in explicit forms of the concept and thesis, and according to him this points back to a productive synthesis. But according to our judgment, and according to him this points back to a productive synthesis. But according to our understanding that is nothing other than what we call passive constitution, as that revealable interplay according to our phenomenological method steady higher developed intentionality of the passive consciousness, in which a greatly varied immanent and transcendent interpretation occurs and organizes itself into comprehensive forms of meaning and being [*Sinn gestalten und Seins gestalten*], as it is the immanent unity of the stream of experience and with respect to transcendence the unity of the world with its universal forms.'

52 Cited from HOLENSTEIN, E., *Passive Genesis*, 119.

53 Cf. HOLENSTEIN, E., *Passive Genesis*, 130: 'For the experiences of constitution, in which the accent is placed less on the sustaining as on the I's state of not be actively engaged, on the absence of "intervention of activity of the I" [*Ingerenz der Ichaktivität*], Husserl supplements or replaces the concept of passivity occasionally via that of inactivity [*Inaktivität*]. – Let it be noted that HOLENSTEIN's recourse to the concept of experience is problematic because the passive genesis must not be experienced. KAMLAH's suggestion that the concept of experience [*Widerfahrnis*] be applied in a more comprehensive manner is helpful at this point. Cf. KAMLAH, W., *Philosophische Anthropologie: Sprachkritische Grundlegung und Ethik*, 38 f.

54 Not without the *involvement* of the I, especially not without 'my being affected [*Getroffenheit*]' Husserl's discussion of passivity was solidified around 1920, but he revised and critiqued it in the 1930s with respect to its foundation in a form of passivity without an I (quote taken from HOLENSTEIN, E., *Passive Genesis*, 139). HOLENSTEIN shows that the I's lack of involvement was 'only ever understood by Husserl relatively' (ibid). In any case, even when the involvement of the I is relative, this passive genesis is nonetheless not a form of receptivity, but rather antecedent.

'One almost never stops at contemplation concerned only with entering into the object. For the most part, the object is from the very first immediately put into relation with other coaffecting objectivities given with in the field of experience'.<sup>55</sup>

If one is playing pensively with sand moulds in the sandbox, it may remain with such an 'ingoing observation' of the sand pies and of one's own mould without any comparisons. However, as soon as someone else shows up with their *own* moulds – there are 'coaffecting objectivities' in the field of perception – and comparison is stirred up automatically.

'Why' that is the case, whether it is a matter of an instinct, a reflex or a spontaneous reaction, does not appear to me to have been clarified in any way. But what 'occurs' in this can be analysed phenomenologically: the gaze turns from oneself to the Other; the horizon of perception stretches out to the sensory actuality of another.

'The contemplative regard can go back and forth from what is given in itself to what is presentified [*sic*], in connection with which the relations of likeness and similarity in the true sense of the term are first actively pre-constituted'.<sup>56</sup>

It is in this, according to Husserl, that an affection is operative.

This is a moment of passive synthesis: an involuntary (i. e. without an act of the I) and spontaneous synthesis in which a relation comes about. It can be directed variously, according to the affection. It could result in play together with another, 'baking sand pies' together and thereby in no way attending to the difference between the sand moulds themselves. But against such attracting an affection runs the adversative or competitive attraction: if the size of another sand mould causes interruption and wakes desire.

The way the relationship between his sand moulds and mine is set up has sublime conditions: They consist first, in one's own memories (the horizon of experience, Husserl speaks of 'obscure' recollections<sup>57</sup>), and second, in what is perceptible in the 'co-given background'<sup>58</sup>. Thus, the sand moulds in focus are in the foreground, and in the background is the horizon of perception, memory and experience. Whoever happens to have experienced being disadvantaged from the beginning will be affected differently than the one who already had the larger sand mould. And if the Other goes on gesturing as if he is the superior one in the sandbox, then he will provoke an envious glance sooner than the one who as a result stumbles cautiously.

What is co-given in the background, like in the context of perception, are the contingencies and facticities that determine the selection of the perception and the contrasts. The 'frame' conditions the 'focus' – and thus also every putative neutrality in making comparisons.

55 HUSSERL, E., *Experience and Judgment*, 149. Cf. HUSSERL, E., *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 171.

56 HUSSERL, E., *Experience and Judgment*, 150. Cf. HUSSERL, E., *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 172.

57 HUSSERL, E., *Experience and Judgment*, 150. Cf. HUSSERL, E., *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 172.

58 Cf. HUSSERL, E., *Experience and Judgment*, 149. HUSSERL, E., *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 172.

In the imaginary sandbox, the Other's sand mould will be compared involuntarily with one's own. And woe to the one whose sand mould is larger than one's own. This excites – to make use of René Girard – 'mimetic desire': the simple 'I wanna!' with all its cultural and barbaric results. A comparison driven in this way is permeated by the desire for self-enhancement and aims at acquisition by nearly every possible means.

Whoever gets on in the world this way will be driven by the insatiable desire to assimilate everything for which there is an appetite, be it either in friendly or inimical acquisition. It is an economic model of expansion (taken to the extreme: either incorporation of everything or collapse; in any case, it is competitive according to the rule of self-enhancement and of the displacement or annihilation of the Other).<sup>59</sup>

## 5. Günter Abel's Interpretationism

Abel's *interpretations*' are the 'original productive and the self-manifesting construct building categorializing functions of signs, which are already presupposed by every organization of experience'.<sup>60</sup> This basal synthesis is not something one can freely choose<sup>61</sup> and 'cannot be bracketed'<sup>62</sup> because it already stands behind everything<sup>63</sup> and cannot be dismantled analytically but in this way is a 'first thing'<sup>64</sup>. This basal interpretivity is not to be understood as either essentialist or relativist. Every form scepticism unavoidably utilizes this practice itself and cannot therefore go back behind it.

Expressed in terms of Cassirer's concept of representation, it is this background horizon of representation which is behind the concrete experience or sensory impression whose horizons form the conditioning representationality of presence. Put differently: every presence is preceded by representations. In this regard, any seeming arbitrariness in the pre-predicative synthesis is strictly debarred, since we have always already perceived when we perceive. In certain respects, the question is always *too late*. If one tries to think about the beginning of perception or the perception of

59 For the new German edition of HUSSERL, E., *Experience and Judgment*: <http://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/273726507>.

60 ABEL, G., *Interpretationswelten: Gegenwartsphilosophie jenseits von Essentialismus und Relativismus*, 14 f.

61 ABEL, G., *Interpretationswelten: Gegenwartsphilosophie jenseits von Essentialismus und Relativismus*, 158, 356, 391.

62 ABEL, G., *Interpretationswelten: Gegenwartsphilosophie jenseits von Essentialismus und Relativismus*, 160.

63 ABEL, G., *Interpretationswelten: Gegenwartsphilosophie jenseits von Essentialismus und Relativismus*, 120.

64 ABEL, G., *Interpretationswelten: Gegenwartsphilosophie jenseits von Essentialismus und Relativismus*, 420, 286.



something new, then this is also to point to those stabile elements which necessarily precedes the perception, be they pragmatic, neurophysiological or social.

How is one to assess the status of this condition? If we go with Lenk, then the answer is quasi-transcendentally or methodically:

Goethe:

'Because merely looking at a thing cannot stimulate us. Every glance transfers into observation, every observation into contemplation, every contemplation into associations, and so one can say that we are already theorizing with every attentive glance into the world.'<sup>65</sup>

This theorizing in perception implies a holistic model of perception, according to which every perception is already ineluctably interpretive, that is, it is done 'as' something done 'by someone'.

It is precisely this problem that Cassirer repeatedly sees and discusses<sup>66</sup>. There is no 'innocent perception' or no naïve relationship to the phenomenon.

Lenk's arguments are, on the contrary, neurobiological or neuropsychological<sup>67</sup>: light stimuli induce neuronal activity and are processed according to specific patterns, which make it possible in the first place for what is pictured on the retina to be "construed [*konstruiert*]" as something like constant optic image reproduction'.<sup>68</sup> Constancy and continuity are elementary benefits of the optical apparatus. Stimuli are constructed by means of highly complex processing into optical perceptions, and pathological phenomena show these diverse benefits *e negativo*.

'Put briefly: all neuroscientific results of recent decades confirm the statement that visual perception – and correspondingly also the perception of the other sensory channels – is a differentiated dismantling-synthesizing process of "construction", schematization or interpretation'<sup>69</sup>

This construction proceeds according to various tiered rules, the selection of stimuli proceeding perhaps based on danger, usefulness or irrelevance. According to this *seeing is itself already kinaesthesia*<sup>70</sup>, which is dependent on standpoint and movement, and this applies to all five modalities of sense. In our perception, variance and constancy are the elementary structural products of kinaesthesia, and metaphors as patterns of expression are

65 LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft, 110.

66 PSF III, 84 ff. passim; ET 73 ff. passim.

67 Cf. in this sense Cassirer himself, PSF III 69; ET 59: 'Here, consequently, the psychology of perception will inevitably culminate in physiology and physics. Psychology becomes psychophysics, whose first task is to establish a dependency between the world of perceptions and that of objective stimuli.'

68 LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft, 116.

69 LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft, 116.

70 Cf. LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft, 118.

therefore also not an expression of mere momentary perceptions and not merely fleeting, but as linguistic representations are already a comparatively late and stabile pattern. The interpretive character of sensory perception follows basal, elementary rules, which are observed involuntarily<sup>71</sup>. The spontaneity of synthesis therefore means that there is neither arbitrariness nor any relativism, but physiological, sociocultural and onto- and phylogenetic conditions 'undergirding' this constructivity.

'Perception is the process and the result of a series of steps of processing between the stimulus and the selective processes of constitution and construction which are based on it, as well as the cognitive processing'<sup>72</sup>.

At this point Lenk gestures towards the 'principle of pregnant form'<sup>73</sup>. In conscious (intentional?) perceptions the interpretive character becomes even more clear since they proceed according to models or schemes. Perception is accordingly tiered and follows additional rules according to its respective level,

'starting from unconscious schemas that are partially in the genetic predispositions of preformed utilization all the way up to conscious construal in the sense of the constructs of interpretation of social cultural or even of a conventional, and thus consciously constituted kind'<sup>74</sup>.

It is in this regard that the kind of synthesis in the perception must also be diversified.<sup>75</sup> However, this progressive cognitivization of perception will all the more strongly result in selection and therefore reduce contingency, but only so that 'categorization, comparison, generalization, recognition and similar things' are possible.<sup>76</sup>

If, therefore, all perception is already interpretive, the question arises of how these interpretive perceptions, which already precede representations, can themselves be represented. If Cassirer distinguishes mimetic, analogical and symbolic representations here and structures these forms of representation as a series, a moment of expectation, of inevitable prescription (if not even of normativity) occurs in the description, even if one understands this series not as a sequence, but as a successive co-presence of these formations. First, the pure function of meaning is then the completed form of knowledge and

71 Rules that are followed involuntarily do not allow any possibility of deviation, as a result they also have no prescriptive moment so that one can even raise the topic of whether rules are. If one speaks of laws, then what is meant are laws of nature by means of which stimulus is processed. It is pathological deviations that first show the content of expectation, which lies in what are above all descriptive rules or laws.

72 LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft, 124.

73 LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft, 126.

74 LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft, 128.

75 LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft, 128.

76 LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft, 128.

everything ultimately aims towards knowledge and indeed in this form. This sense of direction means – whether one understands it either in the sense of entelechy or teleologically, or ‘only’ onto- and phylogenetically or descriptively in terms of the history of science – a strict tendency towards reduction: *The representation is ultimately homogenized as conceptual knowledge* according to the model of the formation of series as a relational concept of the concept. Even if the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* wants to preserve the multi-dimensionality of the world, the symbolic logic and the conceptual sequencing and systematizing of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* itself is the model of scientific knowledge, in which or for which this multi-dimensionality is no longer preserved. And it is for this reason, namely, that the metaphoricity of scientific representation will be obscured just as expressive perception is ‘brought into line’ by it through a concept of depiction [*Darstellung*] which is led by the perception of things.

Interpretationism unfolds a concept of multi-dimensional representation, which makes the imaginative [*vorstellungsförmige*] representation as a pictorial or verbally imaginative conception [*Vorstellung*] understandable not only as being independent, but as being co-positing with every interpretation. Images as imaginative representations ‘display forms and show neighbourhood relations as well as whole-part relationships, which can be grasped in instantaneous representations’<sup>77</sup>. For precision Lenk refers back to Goodman’s theory of symbol and the syntactic and semantic ‘thickness’ of pictorial representations. This shows the difference between analogue and digital depictions and the peculiarity of irreducible analogicity of particular ways of perceiving and depicting, which cannot be schematized ‘digitally’, such as through the series model. Thus, taken as insight from symbol theory, we can say in connection to Goodman that

‘the mind [*Geist*] can have command over multiple various systems of symbols, which will sometimes be divided according to the specific task and sometimes applied to one another in a complementary way.’<sup>78</sup>

Pictorial analogue representations are syntactically and semantically thick, like images, and are ineluctably dependent in their function and meaning on perspective and interpretation.

Abel distinguishes interpretations<sup>1</sup> from interpretations<sup>2</sup> ‘through habit and habitually established patterns of uniformity’<sup>79</sup>.

And it is interpretations<sup>3</sup> that first alludes to the ‘appropriative construals of meaning’, which reach from sensory perception through to scientific theory. It is only here the case that there

77 LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft, 133.

78 SCHOLZ, O., Bild, Darstellung, Zeichen: Philosophische Theorien bildhafter Darstellung, 137.

79 ABEL, G., Interpretationswelten: Gegenwartsphilosophie jenseits von Essentialismus und Relativismus, 15.

‘are objects independent of these interpretations and that an object can be recognized and grasped as the same object in the transition from one Interpretation<sup>3</sup> into another Interpretation<sup>3</sup>’<sup>80</sup>.

On the level of Interpretation<sup>1</sup>, by contrast, because

‘categorizations first stipulate what can count as an object as such and what does not, there are no objects for us that are independent of the horizon of the categorizing of interpretation<sup>1</sup>.’

## 6. Phenomenality and Perspective: *Self-Disclosure and Perception as*

Cassirer distinguishes the epistemological question of perception from the psychological one, which ‘moves not from things to phenomena, but from phenomena to things [lit. ‘from this to that’-Tr.]’<sup>81</sup>, which do not move causally from outer and allegedly external ‘things’, but from the conditioned character of perception through its pre-predicative power of synthesis, which understands the phenomena and not things as being ‘first’.

What appears [*was sich zeigt*] is already a ‘liminal’ event of interpreting. This is to differentiate in order to avoid the short circuit of every ‘as’ already being hermeneutical. As such, the phenomenological widening of the horizon is foreshortened as if interpreting was solely about ‘understanding’ or ‘self-understanding’, or as if that ‘self-understanding’ was the Whence and For-the-sake-of of all interpretation/construal [*Deutung*]. Interpreting is multidimensionally present in various aspects and to be differentiated.

1. Appearing [*Sichzeigen*] is a liminal manifestation [*Erscheinen*] of something, in one way or another, here or there, and is therefore never free of interpreting. This is perhaps surprising, because one would commonly expect that the plain appearing – the epitome of phenomenality – is unbroken or still on this side of any interpreting grasp of meaning. This can be seen in one way or another – only that the way of seeing is already in play at this point. Since perception cannot be anything other than continually ‘interpretive’, – as with Leibniz’ *Petites Perceptions* through Baumgarten’s *cognitio sensitiva* and onwards to gestalt psychology, to Nietzsche and Cassirer up to Interpretationism<sup>82</sup> – and unfolded many times and differentiated, appearing [*Sichzeigen*] is

80 ABEL, G., Interpretationswelten: Gegenwartsphilosophie jenseits von Essentialismus und Relativismus, 272.

81 PsF III, 69; ET 59.

82 Cf. LENK, H., Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft; LENK, H., Interpretation und Realität. Vorlesungen über Realismus in der Philosophie der Interpretationskonstrukte; LENK, H., Philosophie und Interpretation. Vorlesung zur Entwicklung konktionistischer Interpretationsansätze; LENK, H., Welterfassung als Interpretationskonstrukt.



never free of interpreting. This counts in two ways: on the one hand, perception of what appears is already composed and orientated in one way or another, thus it is interpretive in the way of seeing. On the other hand, what appears is never (seen) without context, but rather it is where what appears, when, to whom and how, that stipulates the interpretive impregnation of the showing of itself.

Here it is possible to differentiate this further into the aspect of perception, which already interprets [deuten] something in one way or another; from the aspect of the perceived [Wahrgenommenen], which as an artefact is (at a minimum) already shaped; from the aspect of the *situation and the context* of the appearance [Sichzeigen], which puts it in a context, and from the aspect of *history*, on the basis of which something already emerges in a (particular) tradition of interpreting, diachronically 'enmeshed in stories'. Here further differentiations are possible, but it is nonetheless the case that what appears is situated liminally in a *mélange* of interpretive impregnation, which does not let it appear 'naked and bare' but rather composed in one way or another without having the character of being the definitive activity of an interpretive subject [Deutungssubjekt]. Just as every perception is already interpretive [deutend], so every showing is also an appearance in *this way* [Sichsozeigen] and in no other.

If appearing [Sichzeigen] is always already a kind of appearance in one way or another in *this or that way* [ein sich so oder so zeigen], then it is embedded or enmeshed in connections, phenomenal interferences and situative contexts. On this basis appearing is also oriented and closely determined and more closely determinable. Appearing is an appearance *as something*. It is in this regard that the *phenomenal as* ought not be confused with others:

2. This is because it is possible to distinguish a *perceptive as* [perzeptives Als] from the 'phenomenal as' we have already indicated. Something appears in this or that way, appears to someone who understands it in one way or another, who stresses one set of connections or another. The *perceptive as* names the interpretive form of perception [Deutungsform der Perzeption]. One who only knows of intuition without concepts 'in the beginning', which could not perceive anything at all if not for the sake of concepts, would see this completely differently. If, however, one sets out with Leibniz, Baumgarten or Cassirer and the consequences of the notion of the pregnancy of perception, then perception (pre-predicative) is synthetic, and therefore interpretive [deutend].

Something is shown [Zeigen] to someone in one way or another, and he or she perceives it in this context as something. It is from this showing [Zeigen] as appearance [Sichzeigen], to someone, in one way or another, that more precise

Bemerkungen zum methodologischen und transzendentalen Interpretationismus; ABEL, G., Interpretationswelten. Gegenwartsphilosophie jenseits von Essentialismus und Relativismus; ABEL, G., Zeichen der Wirklichkeit.

specifications of the interpretive process [Deutungsprozesses] emerge. This still remains within the horizon of *appearance*: It, something or someone appears. This can be grasped *either consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or non-intentionally*, especially when it is not a personal appearance, but rather more elementarily about everything possible and actual. When 'something' appears, then neither consciousness nor intentionality is implied. But when 'someone' appears, then this always is significant – with the uncomfortable drawback that more is always being shown than known or intended.

3. The register and the interpretive form [Deutungsform] of appearance changes when something *is shown* as something, that is, transitively active, conscious and intentional. Something can appear in one way or another and thereby make itself an object. This occurs in another way, when something or an aspect of something appears, in that what appears *appears as something*: the stone as a tool, or the rock on the side of the path as a way marker. This can be called the '*deictic as*', in the narrower sense of something appearing as something.

4. Whereas up to this point this appearing allows something to be seen, the intentional, transitive active appearing aims at making something to be seen *as something* or having it appear in one way or another, up to the point that in the *demonstrative as* something appears in order that it is to be seen in this way and not another, in order to have others look at it and to have it be seen or appear in this way. Whether that ought to be called the *demonstrative as* or the *ostentatious as* would have to be discussed separately. In any case it is engaged with a further reaching 'will to power of interpreting' [Deutungsmacht], that is, the will to power in the designation and stipulation of meaning.

5. A differentiation of forms and functions of 'as' require differences in media. Both the appearing [Sichzeigen] and showing [Zeigen] something as something have *material, iconic, symbolic* and *imaginary* dimensions, which imply the various ways this 'as' can function. For example, an image of something is shown in which it is depicted in a particular way, perhaps as a caricature. This would be a *visible*, or with respect to the imagery, a more closely specified *iconic as*. The additional version would be a *medial as*, as an interpretive form [Deutungsform] for all possible medialities.

6. When it has the form of artificial demanding images, which G. Boehm called 'strong images', it would be even more specifically the *pictorial as*, perhaps when a portrait of 'the Chancellor' not only represents in a particular way, but also *presents*. In a strong image so many of these kinds of things appear that it would be eminently complex to try and explain them. Making semantic density and iconic pregnancy explicit is well known to be an infinite task. But there is one thing in this that is worth mentioning: the medium of showing [das Medium des Zeigens], the image as image, has in one way its own internal dynamics that manifests the medium of interpretive power [Deutungsmacht]. It is not, or at least never *only* a means of showing [Mittel des

*Zeigens*], but a goal, at the threshold of being an 'end in itself', according to the rule of aesthetics. According to media theory this means the interpretive power [*Deutungsmacht*] is not merely in structures, producers, recipients or interpreters, but rather in no small part (which is always to be sounded out more closely) in media and the dynamics of mediality. The fact that 'speech speaks' is the hermeneutically proper term for this. The fact that the typewriter writes with is the version of this which accords to media theory.<sup>83</sup>

This cascade of as-specifications is capable of further differentiation. But the indications we have given are capable of making one thing clear: the transitions from appearance to showing something as something to someone are distinguishable as various forms and specifications of showing or appearing [*des Zeigens*], which can be just as well consistently understood starting from the point of their being shown, that is, they are *interpretive forms* [*Deutungsformen*]. Interpretationism speaks at this point of ways of interpretation: but this is counterintuitive because what appears is not instantaneously interpreting and being instantaneously interpreted. It appears and in doing so it suggests [anduten] itself in this way or that and discloses these construals/interpretations [*Deutungen*], which go along with the appearance as it becomes visible or perceptible.

## 7. Human Dignity as the Paradigm of the Perception or Awareness of Others [*Fremdwahrnehmung*].

### a) *The Dignity of the Other*

The innate, untouchable dignity of every individual comes to him or her *ab extra* and *per alteram* – from other humans *through* their perception or awareness of others (through a form of perception as a medium). This is the hermeneutical hypothesis.

The open question then is to what extent the 'experience of the Other' [*Fremderfahrung*] is a passive synthesis, in which one becomes aware of the dignity of the Other. This coming to awareness of the dignity of the others could be plausible as the whence of an *other* self: Instead of starting with the self-preservation (and propagation) of the species, the dignity of the Other would be the driving force of the preservation of the Other and as the case may be also the withdrawal of the self for its own sake. The antagonism in this to the rigorism of 'humane' self-preservation could be the starting point for taking on the usual critiques of 'human dignity' under the banner of the dignity of the Other – and for rejecting the destructive tendency of these critiques.

83 Cf. MERSCH, D., *Meta/Dia. Zwei unterschiedliche Zugänge zum Medialen*; cf. KITTNER, F., *Grammophon/Film/Typewriter*; KITTNER, F., *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*.

The dignity 'of' humans is not attributed to them intentionally, but is rather – in a non-intentional way – the epitome of self-understanding with which we encounter the alien<sup>84</sup> and the alien encounters us: The experience of the alien (in the objective genitive), which more precisely said is something that befalls us [*Widerfahren*], forms the *Sitz im Leben* and the primal impression of human dignity in a questionlessness, which is not able to be justified if one does not want it to be in need of justification. Human dignity, to the extent that it is made binding by an Other, is to be distinguished from the dignity of God, which alone can be thought to be 'binding, but not made binding by anyone else'. This is what Kant meant in any case, as cited above.

From the standpoint of a 'genealogy of human dignity from the perspective of the perception of the Other' it is remarkable that in Kant it means:

'The respect that I have for others or that another can require from me is therefore recognition of a dignity in other human beings, that is, of a worth that has no price, no equivalent for which the object evaluated could be exchanged.'<sup>85</sup>

What is remarkable is particularly the fact that this 'respect [*Achtung*] for the Other' is adduced as a basal phenomenon. It starts off with a 'factum of respect', which is set as given and not 'justified' but is open to being further interpreted: What is as untouchable as it is innate cannot proceed from an 'exchange'. Human dignity is neither exchanged nor exchangeable, neither bought nor alienable, and is not at the disposal of any form of 'commerce'. In this regard it would be plausible from the standpoint of cultural anthropology to understand it as the facilitation and opening of the symmetric communication between humans, that is, as gift, which is received and is imparted to others, which is divided and therefore increased, instead of decreased.<sup>86</sup> The *Whence* of this dignity, even that it is imputed 'to' others, remains enigmatic at this point – and is possibly accessible to myths and metaphors, the more or less subdued imagination, as it is formed in primal impressions and is narrated in stories.

Kant's distinction of the price from the inner value refines his notion of the innate, even the non-economic or extraordinary character of human dignity.

'In the kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. What has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; what on the other hand is raised above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity. [...] What is related to general human inclinations and needs has a market price; that which, even without presupposing a need, conforms with a certain taste, that is, with a delight in the mere purposeless play of our mental powers, has a fancy price; but that which

84 Here 'alien' stands for the 'radical Other', which is not only alter ego.

85 KANT, I., *The Metaphysics of Morals*; cf. AA VI, 462 [AA refers to the Akademieausgabe of Immanuel Kant's *Gesammelte Werke*, which can be found online at: <https://korpora.zim.uni-duisburg-essen.de/kant/>. –Tr.]

86 Cf. STOELLGER, P., *Gabe und Tausch als Antinomie religiöser Kommunikation*, 185 ff.



constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself has not merely a relative worth, that is, a price, but an inner worth, that is, dignity.<sup>87</sup>

What is innate cannot also be 'acquired'. No exchange can constitute its own conditions, or no one becomes capable of exchange via the act of exchanging something – as if something could emerge from a symmetrical exchange which first made its own self possible. This would mean that the genesis of human dignity cannot be understood as deriving from an economy of relationships of reciprocal recognition. Their order regulates them (hopefully) and is presupposed in, but not constituted by this economy itself. Acknowledgement of the other is therefore an essential expression of human dignity, but not what constitutes it – which is why it is not to be understood as a function of recognition. To speak of a 'reciprocal claim' to this dignity is to already presuppose its questionability, a conflict with the needs and duties of justification<sup>88</sup>. To the extent that it can be a problem at all, it is a delayed problem for the understanding of human dignity.<sup>89</sup> But from where do we take human dignity if one cannot procure it by means of reciprocal exchange – not even by means of a 'symbolic exchange' in the logic of reciprocal recognition?

Kant was able to derive it anthropologically *ex natura* by speaking of 'the innate dignity of humanity'.<sup>90</sup> But the awareness of the dignity of other humans is in any case, in the narrow sense, *not* innate. This is because it must first be painstakingly taught to a child with the corresponding 'right of humanity', as Kant's *sandwich-argument* demonstrates:

'Reverence and respect for the rights of humanity must be taught to children very early, and one has to see to it that it comes to the same thing in exercising it; for example, when a child encounters another, poor child, and proudly pushes him out of the way or against him, or hits him, and so on, the one has to say: "Don't do that, that will hurt him; be compassionate, he is a poor child", and so on. One must respond to him with just as palpably and with pride, because this behaviour is contrary to the rights of humanity. But children are not yet really capable of magnanimity. This can

87 KANT, I., *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 84; cf. AA IV, 434. (Italics by author.) Cf. KANT, I., *Metaphysics of Morals*, 579: 'Humanity itself is a dignity; for a human being cannot be used merely as a means by any human being (either by others or even by himself) but must always be used at the same time as an end. It is just in this that his dignity (personality) consists, by which he raises himself above all other beings in the world that are not human beings and yet can be used, and so over all things. But just as he cannot give himself away for any price (this would conflict with his duty of self-esteem), so neither can he act contrary to the equally necessary self-esteem of others, as human beings, that is, he is under obligation to acknowledge, in a practical way, the dignity of humanity in every other human being. Hence there rests on him a duty regarding the respect that must be shown to every other human being.' Cf. AA VI, 462.

88 The most provocative thing to do in philosophy – in precarious equivalence – is to attribute an 'absolute value'.

89 KANT, I., *Metaphysics of Morals*, 579: 'Every human being has a legitimate claim to respect from his fellow human beings and is *in turn* bound to respect every other.' Cf. AA VI, 462.

90 KANT, I., *Metaphysics of Morals*, 545; cf. AA VI, 420; cf. AA XXIII, 258.

be seen, for example, in the fact that when parents command their child to give up half of her sandwich to someone else, but without later receiving what they have given up in recompense: the child either will not do it at all, or very unwillingly.<sup>91</sup>

The sense of the right of the other and his or her dignity is obviously *not* 'innate', even if one wants to attribute both to human nature. But this is only naturalizing what is not given by nature, but rather what first comes about in the cultivation of nature. Kant therefore justifies dignity in the critical perspective – incompatible with what is given in nature – transcendently in recourse to autonomy: 'Autonomy is therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature.'<sup>92</sup> The 'duty' of the preservation of the same arises from this. 'The duty we have with respect to ourselves consists, as we have said, in the fact that the individual human retains human dignity in his own person.'<sup>93</sup>

The justification of dignity by means of autonomy means in any case certainly only a relocation of the problem. For, why and how does one justify the notion of autonomy? Moreover, this recourse creates the problem of whether this justification can or ought to be 'absolute' and 'infallible'. The 'factum of freedom' itself is in any case not capable of any further justification, even if it needs the same thing in conflict. But with the *breaking apart* of justification in recourse to a 'factum' an end of the 'justification given' has been reached.

The instances of *speech* in Kant's examples show for example that autonomy is no infallible fact, but rather a vulnerable and fallible 'intention' [*Vorsatz*]. This is because human dignity is – in the abuse of autonomy – according to Kant surprisingly easy 'to touch' if not even 'alienable', be this by means of lying or even suicide.<sup>94</sup> The lie as dishonour 'violates the dignity of his own person [...]. By a lie a human being throws away and, as it were, annihilates his dignity as a human being.'<sup>95</sup> The same thing applies to stealing: 'Certainly no human being in the state can be without dignity, since he at least has the dignity of a citizen. The exception is someone who lost it by his *crime*, because of which, though he is kept alive, he is made a mere tool of another's choice

91 AA IX, 489.

92 KANT, I., *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 85; cf. AA IV, 436. Cf. AA XV, 788: 'Freedom alone is the dignity of human nature'.

93 AA IX, 489; cf. AA XI, 216.

94 Cf. AA XIX, 165. Cf. XIX, 103. In Kant's estimation even humility jeopardizes dignity, cf. XXIII, 437; cf. KANT, I., *Metaphysics of Morals*, 558; AA VI, 436.

95 KANT, I., *Metaphysics of Morals*, 552 f.; AA VI, 429. Cf. AA IX, 489; cf. KANT, I., *Metaphysics of Morals*, 558: 'True humility follows unavoidably from our sincere and exact comparison of ourselves with the moral law (its holiness and strictness). But from our capacity for internal lawgiving and from the (natural) human being's feeling himself compelled to revere the (moral) human being within his own person, at the time there comes *exaltation* of the highest self-esteem, the feeling of his inner worth (*valor*), in terms of which he is above any price (*pretium*) and possesses and inalienable dignity (*dignitas interna*), which instills in him respect for himself (*reverentia*).' Cf. AA VI, 436.

(either of the state or of another citizen).<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Kant finds the preservation of dignity difficult to reconcile with the 'intermingling of the flesh' of the two sexes.<sup>97</sup> For this reason the virgin birth of Jesus is the kind of conception that most corresponds to his dignity<sup>98</sup> – as if were possible to correct one grotesque thing by means of another.

Whereas Kant seems to proceed so manifestly absolute in his justification of human dignity, what he manages to establish is just as irritatingly vulnerable. If human dignity were really so easily lost (or even at all), then this would have to awaken doubt about the entire enterprise of attempting to find a foundation for human dignity as such. It almost seems as if the conjuring of autonomy as the ground of human dignity was an apotropaic wand being waved against its own permanent endangerment. But does not the meaning of the *topos* lie precisely in being unquestionable and innate, no matter how humans abuse their freedom?

It appears possible at this point to read or make use of Kant in entirely different ways: under the banner of an 'absolutism' of grounding and under the banner of a phenomenological view of the life world; in pure or impure reason. The 'absolute' sense of human dignity as absolutely inalienable (since it is grounded in autonomy) is a *noumenon*, similar to the *imago dei* of the soul and the corresponding determination of humanity by virtue of the divine will. By contrast, the 'relative' sense is a *phainomenon*, thoroughly fallible and touchable, like the body is to the soul. The fact that Kant shows a sense and taste for phenomena, like the finitude of a specific action, problematizes a dogmatic use of his critical 'intention' as seen in the cited example. In the sense of the twofold way of reading Kant, it is necessary to distinguish between human dignity as a critical regulative that always remains an intention (untouchable, not at one's disposition and 'established as not established'), and the precarious dignity of an individual who can first and foremost contradict it. It is not the regulative of dignity that is touched on with, say, the telling of a lie, but rather 'only' an unworthy use of one's own freedom.

#### b) Absolute Justification or Orienting Topos

To harden the critical regulative would mean using it *dogmatically* (i.e. no longer critically, but rather metaphysically). Grounding human dignity in an *absolute* sense under the banner of autonomy – if Kant is to be interpreted in this way – proceeds 'from the inside out'. It is 'as if there were' something 'in' humanity on which it would be possible 'to ground' something infallibly and irreducibly, which is then understood to be a right and duty. Thus what is

96 KANT, I., *Metaphysics of Morals*, 471; AA VI, 329 ff.

97 Cf. AA XX, 463.

98 Cf. AA XXXIII, 106.

'posited as absolute' is no longer able to be called into question. It is hermeneutically possible to see a 'exuberant' presentation of human dignity 'as self-evident' and 'as indisputable' – what certainly feeds off the corresponding pretension of grounding. By virtue of those who declare the 'value of the person' absolute, we can invoke Tugendhat's notion of a 'misleading metaphor'<sup>99</sup>, or put differently, a *metabasis eis allo genos*, in this case, the dogmatic use of a critical regulative. This is misleading because the genesis ought to be undergirded by the (theoretically induced) 'belief in the absolute value' – which would only latently hold what would also count without it: the inner worth of humanity and its *entitlement* to self-respect and deference by the environment.<sup>100</sup>

If (at this point<sup>101</sup>) we set the question of recognition and deference aside, then 'dignity' [*Würde*], according to its linguistic history, is a relational predicate. In the late middle ages as in early modern times (e.g. in Luther) it signified social rank or class and the prestige and honour touching them<sup>102</sup>. To this corresponds the derivative *active* meaning of honouring and valuing. To this can be added the meaning of 'merit' [*Verdienst*] according to a dignity (*nach Würden*) as descended from *meritum*, on which the relation to value [*Wert* and *Wertung*] rests. The shift in meaning dates to the late Enlightenment with Kant and Schiller, which is determinative today for the employment of the concept of dignity as a *singulare tantum* (in distinction to dignities [*Würden*] etc.). The origin from its role in designating the higher classes or estates (in the sense of a courtly predicate) recalls the transfer of the anthropologically 'democratized' royal predicates *zelem* and *demut* from Gen. 1.26 f to all humanity.

These brief reminiscences on the relational character of human dignity already indicate that what Tugendhat rejects is not self-evident, the notion of providing an 'absolute ground'. Tugendhat's whole argumentation is directed towards 'the fact that, first, there is no such thing as this kind of reason [*Vernunft*], and that, second [...] there cannot be any absolute form of must. This naturally means that the idea of an absolute ground as such is to be rejected.'<sup>103</sup> Natural, transcendental or traditional, etc., provide neither absolutes nor grounds for what is self-evident in human dignity, though they could still preserve the desired regulative unquestionability on such grounds. It is understood that this matter of course is not to be grounded

99 TUGENDHAT, E., *Vorlesung über die Ethik*, 345.

100 TUGENDHAT, E., *Vorlesung über die Ethik*, 345.

101 Cf. RICOEUR, P., *Parcours de la reconnaissance*. If one attempts to ground human rights in human dignity it will be conveyed as a matter of course in this particular way of understanding the matter, but it will be dependent on explicit acts such as recognition. This is done as if this kind of grounding were capable of producing something that was not pre-theoretically plausible. Moreover, if this is foreshortened to the negative determining factors (untouchable, inviolable etc.) then we will be saying too little.

102 GRIMM, J./W., *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 2061.

103 TUGENDHAT, E., *Vorlesung über die Ethik*, 70.



opaquely on its 'own' or an 'absolute ground', on which its own or others' claims are to be grounded.

The tone and the meaning of the same word change completely if it is to be hardened argumentatively in order to sustain a hard grounding – or to be sustained by one. Conceptualizing human dignity as a universal figure of integration and furnishing it with an 'absolute claim to validity' is potentially 'absolutistic'. In this sense human dignity can become an absolute when it is to be enforced as 'irresistible'. However, the rightful assertion of the rights and duties deduced from this absolute claim are as derivative and belated to the very same extent that this absolute claim is a highly necessary response to its respective infringements (such as 'Yugoslavia' and 'Guantanamo').

It is not an 'absolute', even 'substantial' resource for the establishment of measures of punishment and protection, but rather primarily a *meta-ethical, anthropological topos*. As such it also serves secondarily as viewpoint for arguments in political as well as legal regards, somewhat like a *rule for traffic along the border*. But it is primarily of another kind and symbolic function: an evident *topos* as figure of orientation, from the *to* to the *fro* of all human beings, as even aliens, are those we can address. It is on this side of good and evil, thus essentially pre-moral or meta-ethical that the topical metaphor of human dignity brings to expression what can count as the 'primal impression' of anthropology: the fact that is (even or precisely because) the alien is unquestionably of worth and dignity that wakes and keeps alive the memory of one's own.

### c) Preservation of the self versus preservation of the alien

In the logic of the primacy of the self lies the dynamic of self-preservation and self-enhancement: It is self-evident (at least contemporarily) on its own terms, with the corresponding exclusion with respect to 'transitive laws of conservation'.<sup>104</sup> However, following Tugendhat, self-preservation is not a 'semantic principle', above all not that of an ethics. Blumenberg spoke even more clearly of the 'senselessness of self-assertion'.<sup>105</sup> Regarding the critical state of the self-assertion scheme, it may be considered appropriate – on theological as well as on extra-theological grounds – to ask about their other, which has been excluded in modern times. Imaginations live from such *memoria*, from the lingering sound of what is allegedly in the past. The search undertaken here for the overlooked, laterally intermediately linked members and figures of a third-party is a kind of answer – about ways of handling our

104 BLUMENBERG, H., *Selbsterhaltung und Beharrung*, 333 ff.; cf. also EBELING, H. (ED.), *Subjektivität und Selbsterhaltung*, 144 ff.

105 BLUMENBERG, H., *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 149.

contact with the alien – which do not seek to delete, but rather preserve difference, holding it to be culturally 'productive'.

Preservation of the alien would mean the critical rule opposite what is self-evident: against the expansion of what is one's own in the name of self-preservation. To speak of preservation of the alien is certainly precarious to the extent that it appears to make the alien the 'object' of a transitive activity. At first, however, it would be a useful critical regulator towards it. Going a step further is the not-quite-self-evident thesis of understanding one's own self as an answer to the alien and thus the alien as essential in opening up what is one's own. This symmetry means a contrast in the hope for productive reciprocity. Although this indeed is still defined by a model of exchange, it is as plausible as it is helpful in keeping us from being fooled by a notion based on the crude primacy of one's own self. This contrasting is certainly difficult to understand as a symmetrical relation because of the antecedent and paradoxical inaccessibility of the alien.

This is because preservation of the alien entails a double genitive with a particular asymmetry. The hermeneutical task and virtue would be to safeguard the alien in understanding (*Verstehen*), in the sense of a 'hermeneutics of difference'. This necessitates limiting the understanding by its '*termini*' *a quo* and *ad quem*. Understanding in *this* sense takes its beginning in the non-understanding of the alien, and it is not directed towards its emergence in the understanding, but rather towards understanding the other in his or her own light. In this horizon a reversal of thrust can occur, in which a meeting of equals takes place. Then preservation of the alien shifts from being a transitive hermeneutical 'act' to something one experiences: the alien now becomes effective as 'preserver' if not even as 'founder' of what is one's own. *Preservation of the alien* in this case would then not only be an *actio Dei*, which would have to assert the modern notion of self-preservation over-against itself, but also a determination of hermeneutical perception.

'Being a stranger is indicative of something extra-ordinary, which, being a matter of excess, goes beyond everything ordinary'<sup>106</sup>, suggests Waldenfels. In this case order would then be – also that of rights, especially of guest, asylum and aliens to be understood as answers to what is experienced as extra-ordinary, not as an antecedent 'absolutely grounded' order of exclusion with specific exceptions. 'Making room' is not originally a transitive act, but a *non-intentional event between the alien and oneself*.

106 WALDENFELS, B., *Topographie des Fremden: Studien zur Phänomenologie der Fremden*, 111.

## 8. Christologically understood: Perceiving the Alien as an Event of Pathos

### a) Ethos with Pathos: Aristotle

Aristotle suggests in his ethics that 'moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains'.<sup>107</sup> This is because 'it is on account of pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of pain that we abstain from noble ones'.<sup>108</sup> Education is therefore concerned with forming the affects, and ultimately, the formation of pleasure [*Lust*] in doing good. This is because an ethics bereft of pleasure would be unpleasant [*lustlos*] – and therefore also neither good nor gratifying.

The same thing goes for higher education, or better, formation [*Bildung*]: studying as 'work to rule' would be bereft of desire. The fact that one studies and teaches with (and because of) passion, is manifestly more desirable than doing it solely out of duty. Passion – in Greek *pathos* – enlivens and encourages movement. But here the question arises: How are desire and aversion to be cultivated, but without getting stuck at some point along the pathway of formation? This is underpinned in the Greek tradition not least by poetry. Tragedy for Aristotle, contra Plato, is a formational situation which constitutes the city-state: *it transforms pathos (affects) into ethos, and it does so through the logos of poetry.*

Fear and compassion (or better, fear and pity: *phobos* and *eleos*) are engendered, and this not only for amusement, but in order that these affects can be actively cultivated. It is for this reason that neither the poet nor these affects are to be expelled from the city-state, but are instead politically and ethically meaningful.<sup>109</sup> This is certainly not everything there is to say about the theory of tragedy. However, it is nonetheless worth mentioning: a *logos* awakens various *pathe* which are then ethically and politically formed: on the one hand, dread with respect to danger and calamity; on the other hand, pity or compassion with respect to the unjust suffering of the 'tragic hero'.

107 ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* (II, 3; 1104 b 8 f).

108 Further, ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, (II, 3; 1104 b 9–13): 'Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education'.

109 See Book 6 of ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*, 2320 f and Book 8 of ARISTOTLE, *Politics* (cf. BERNAYS, J., *Zwei Abhandlungen über die aristotelische Theorie des Drama*, 7 ff.); Ecstasy as background (cf. BERNAYS, J., *Zwei Abhandlungen über die aristotelische Theorie des Drama*, 64 ff.); In contrast: AUGUSTINE, *The Confessions*, 76 (III,2).

### b) Ethos and Pathos: Jesus' guts

Now, the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels is not a tragic hero and the Gospels are not tragedies. But they do orchestrate and visualize *what moves them* – and indeed in order to move the reader, be it to awaken faith, be it to help form an ethos. Accordingly, they tell of Jesus' *own* passions.

The writers of the Synoptic Gospels ascribe to him a particularly offensive affect – when the story turns to Jesus' guts. This does not sound worthy of a god.

In the feeding of the 5000 Jesus sees the large crowd – and it pains him his guts, in his bowels. Luther translates this as '*sie jammerten ihn*' (Mark 6.34), more literally, 'they caused him to have sorrow for them'.<sup>110</sup> Jesus' compassion (*ἐσπλαγχνίσθη*) is derived from *σπλάγχνον*, which means the bowels or the guts, and in which the seat of feeling was understood to be located at the time. Somewhat more acceptable in polite society is 'compassion and mercy'.<sup>111</sup>

Similarly, in the feeding of the 4000 Jesus says, 'I have compassion for the crowd', or more literally, 'the crowd causes me to have compassion for them'.<sup>112</sup> And in the healing of the two blind men in Matthew 20, they 'moved him with compassion'.<sup>113</sup>

This metaphor of compassion is also found in Luke. As the young man in Nain is being carried to the grave, Jesus sees his mother and 'he has compassion for her'.<sup>114</sup>

In all these cases, the original meaning is that pain or sorrow in one's bowels is caused by someone alien.

110 Mark 6.34: Καὶ ἐξελθὼν εἶδεν πολλὸν ὄχλον καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτούς, ὅτι ἦσαν ὡς πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα, καὶ ἤρξατο διδάσκειν αὐτοὺς πολλά; NRSV: As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things; VUL: et exiens vidit multam turbam Iesus et misertus est super eos quia erant sicut oves non habentes pastorem et coepit docere illos multa. Cf. also Matthew 9.36: Ἴδὼν δὲ τοὺς ὄχλους ἐσπλαγχνίσθη περὶ αὐτῶν.

111 In the catalog of preferable attributes found in Col. 3.12 ff., it is compassion (*σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρμοῦ*) that is mentioned first.

112 Mark 8.2: σπλαγχνίζομαι ἐπὶ τὸν ὄχλον, ὅτι ἤδη ἡμέραι τρεῖς προσμένουσίν μοι καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν τί φάγωσιν; NRSV: 'I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat'; VUL: misereor super turba quia ecce iam triduo sustinent me nec habent quod manducant.

113 Matt 20.34: σπλαγχνισθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἤψατο τῶν ὀμμάτων αὐτῶν, καὶ εὐθέως ἀνέβλεψαν καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ; NRSV: Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him; VUL: misertus autem eorum Iesus tetigit oculos eorum et confestim viderunt et secuti sunt eum.

114 Luke 7.13: καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὴν ὁ κύριος ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτὴν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· μὴ κλαίε; NRSV: When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep'; VUL: quam cum vidisset Dominus misericordia motus super ea dixit illi noli flere.



'Sorrow' [*jammer*] sounds somewhat disconcerting, indeed – sorrowful. But the metaphor is eerily disconcerting, the insides, Jesus' bowels, a pulling and tearing in the stomach, which excites knowing and willing above all. It is important not to smooth over this metaphor too quickly, because it shows in a carnal and drastic way Jesus' bodiliness: his affectivity, which moves him to intervene. This is passion as a communicative attribute, an affect with effect. The guts or bowels help us to visualize in a phenomenally pregnant way what is meant by the notion of compassion. His 'gut feeling' arises spontaneously with respect to his neighbour. It motivates and moves him to turn to his neighbour, be it in feeding, healing or in the raising of the young man in Nain.

How indecent it seemed to speak of Jesus' insides or guts would be seen soon. In the early church it was indisputable that the incarnate logos had suffered (*impassibilis passibilis factus est*).<sup>115</sup> But in the Neo-Platonic as well as in the Stoic tradition the *moral* ideal of the passionless wise man gains acceptance: Even if one is affected by something, it is nonetheless to be mastered with sovereignty. Clement of Alexandria went so far as to maintain that Jesus was not capable of experiencing the lower needs such as hunger and thirst.<sup>116</sup> If one does not want to go that far, then his affects are at the very least ascribed exclusively to his *human* nature.<sup>117</sup> But ascribing the 'lower' affects in the gut to the whole person of Jesus remains an objectionable task.<sup>118</sup>

In a second passage, Jesus' bodily 'compassion' is even predicated of the father:

- a) In the parable of the Prodigal Son the father's guts are stirred as he turns back: 'But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him' (Luke 15.20).<sup>119</sup>
- b) In the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18.23 ff.) the king is moved to compassion in his gut<sup>120</sup> and forgives the pleading servant his debt. To speak of the father in this way has a background in the Old Testament – which I regretfully have to pass over.<sup>121</sup>

115 IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies*, III.16.6; III.12.2; POHLENZ, *Vom Zorne Gottes*, 58; cf. HARNACK, A., *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 516 f., 553.

116 CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *The Stromata*, VI.71; cf. POHLENZ, *Vom Zorne Gottes*, 60.

117 POHLENZ, *Vom Zorne Gottes*, 63, 73.

118 POHLENZ, *Vom Zorne Gottes*, 87.

119 Luke 15.20: Ἐτι δὲ αὐτοῦ μακρὰν ἀπέχοντος εἶδεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη καὶ δραμῶν ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν.

120 Matt. 18.27: Σπλαγχνισθεὶς δὲ ὁ κύριος τοῦ δούλου ἐκείνου ἀπέλυσεν αὐτὸν καὶ τὸ δάνειον ἀφῆκεν αὐτῷ.

121 Cf. Jer. 31.20: 'Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD' (italics added). Cf. Georg Fischer's more literal German translation:

- c) *The Samaritan's* gut is moved just like that of *Jesus*. In the dispute in Luke about the interpretation of the twofold love commandment, the issue is 'who is my neighbour'. In a nutshell, the answer is: the alien and the enemy, the Samaritan is the neighbour – with respect to the other neighbour, the one who was beaten and lying on the side of the road, who fell among thieves.<sup>122</sup>

For the Priest as for the Levite: 'and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side' (Lk. 10:31).<sup>123</sup> The Samaritan by contrast: 'and when he saw him, he was moved with pity' (Lk. 10:33).<sup>124</sup>

All three of them see the one who has been beaten and left for dead. This demonstrates the power of what is visible: one cannot fail to see what catches the eye. This involuntariness is manifest with every accident and its "onlookers". The usage of pictures in media rests on this power (as in politics and advertising).

But – even if we cannot *not* see what catches our eye – how we will be affected by it is open. Repulsion and attraction, desire and aversion, in an antagonism, like "fear and pity" in tragedy. The priest and the Levite appear to turn away with horror (if not equanimity). The Samaritan by contrast does not deliberate for very long, but intervenes without question, in letting himself be led by his affects. No hesitation, no weighing the pros and cons, but spontaneous affect leads him to spontaneous intervention.<sup>125</sup> I would call this *ethos from pathos*.<sup>126</sup>

The difference, which is worlds apart, lies in the fine distinction of bodily perception. *How* he sees and *how* he is affected by the sight of his neighbour – this is where the decisive thing occurs. His perception is moved bodily; encroached upon by the one who has been beaten and left for dead, not indifferently, but by an involuntary lack of detached equanimity and devotion.

At this point two comments are necessary for the phenomenological-hermeneutical perspective: Perception is *not* neutral reception, but also not 'pure construction'. And affects are not an arbitrary accessory to this. Perception is the sensory, bodily openness for others, for claims and events. Being physical it is the sense for space, for social space, which is opened up by

'Deswegen haben rumort meine Eingeweide für ihn, ich muß mich seiner erbarmen, Spruch Jahwes.'

122 Who is my neighbor? In the command (Luke 10.27) it is the receiver, in the parable (Luke 10.36) it is the sender. Cf. BOVON, F., *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 99.

123 Lk. 10:31: ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ἀντιπαρήλθεν.

124 Lk. 10:33: ἰδὼν ἐσπλαγχνίσθη.

125 Lk. 10.34: 'He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.'

126 Cf. BOVON, F., *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 90: 'Der verletzte Leib des einen weckt das aufmerksame Herz des andern. Die sichtbaren Zeichen der Not bewegen buchstäblich die Eingeweide, erfüllen den Samariter mit Fürsorglichkeit.'

affected perception. This space is constantly tinted, characterized and sounds a certain way, in spaces are atmospheres. And the affect is the bodily sense for the tinting, for the tone of these atmospheres. A room filled by music would be an example of this.<sup>127</sup>

The first words of the Samaritan pericope (Luke 10.25) are 'And behold' (KJV). I see here – in metaphorical compression – the origins of the Christian ethos – an ethos out of pathos, out of being affected by one's neighbour. Jesus' compassion, like that of the Samaritan – as seen in this manner – is noticeably more than an exegetical detail: *it is exemplary for the transition from Christology into ethics.*

This affect in the gut is a communicative attribute of Jesus – not a legal standard, but a communicative imposition on the reader 'to feel along with' him. To put it dogmatically: what communicative attributes are is demonstrated in a phenomenal, pregnant way in recounting this affect. This is because it moves one to turn to another. It established a community and shares it with others. It forms the origin of desire, to share and overcome the sorrow of the other – above all knowing and willing.

Wolfhart Pannenberg suggested that the affects are the self-transcendence of human life. In them we are with others as an Other.<sup>128</sup> If one – with Johannes Fischer – sees the work of the Spirit at work in this affect, then the transition from Christology to ethics can be pneumatologically qualified – wherein the Spirit is understood as a spatial and social atmosphere. Shared sorrow like shared joys are communicative 'communal spaces'.<sup>129</sup>

### c) The Parable as sacramentum and exemplum

Is the parable of the good Samaritan only an exemplum, a story for the purposes of providing an example? A pattern for emulation?

It is a *logos* with *pathos* – with effect for the ethos. A word that speaks passionately about passion – that communicates and makes what it speaks about become present. Thus, it is an efficacious word – *signum efficax gratiae* – a sacramental sign.

In the gestalt of the Samaritan the *sacramentum* is efficacious: the Samaritan is the transference in person of Jesus' affects into the horizon of a Christian way of life. For this reason it is right that Christ is understood to be the Samaritan in the history of the exegesis of this passage.

127 PICT, G., *Kunst und Mythos*, 435 ff. Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, 2124 ff. (VIII, 5). Cf. BERNAYS, J., *Zwei Abhandlungen über die aristotelische Theorie des Drama*, 7 ff.

\* Καὶ ἰδοὺ is how the parable begins in the Greek, although the phrase is missing in the NRSV. – Tr. 128 PANNENBERG, W., *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive*, 253 f., 257 f.

129 Paul, for example, is able to locate his longing for the Philippians ἐν πλάγγῃ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, that is, 'in Jesus' guts' – though for polite society the translation runs 'with the compassion of Christ Jesus' (Phil. 1:8).

If one wanted to underpin this result with authority, we can recall Jüngel on this point: 'The kingdom of God arrives in the parable as the parable comes to speech' is the guiding maxim of his theory of parable.<sup>130</sup> This means concretely that compassion is awakened and made effective in the parable as parable. It is not only being spoken of, but it is evoked in the hearer and passed on to the hearer and asked of the hearer – in irresistible evidence. Irresistible? Not in the narrow sense. In distinction from magic, the narrative *logos* of the parable allows space for it to be resisted: one can hear and be affected, or one can hear and pass on by. But having to relate oneself to what one has been heard is inescapable – that is because this *logos* works *one way or another*. This is also what pertains to the sacrament: It is consumed in one way or another, to salvation or to judgement.

Thus, the parable puts one in the position of responsibility – though without one having chosen it. It is striking, like the sight of one beaten and left for dead. Whichever way one responds, it is nonetheless an answer. As such there is no neutrality or indifference with respect to the efficacious word. This shows its *critical* effect. If you walk on by, then you have missed the point of the story. One would only be one's own neighbour – and would evade the claim of the alien. *How* to respond remains open. But the answer will demonstrate by what passion one is led: by *phobos* or *eleos*. Pannenberg suggests 'passion' could be an 'answer to a call [...] of God in the concrete situations of the human lifeworld.'<sup>131</sup>

### d) Epilogue: Of the critical use of the Samaritan

It is unfortunately only seldom that this is as clear as it is in the parable. This archetypal scene with the Samaritan has long been one of the foundational figures of our culture. It is 'repeated' on a daily basis and varies in how it depicts victims and those who have been beaten down. When they catch our eye, they are burned into the retina and our visual memory. We cannot *not* see such scenes.

Considering the fact that the parable is such an effective word, then it is no wonder that this archetypal scene is also intentionally inserted and used in images. We certainly cannot in any way avoid that fact that we are affected by the affects. (We should not even do that, otherwise we would lose the sensibility of perception.) But the spontaneous transition from *pathos* to ethos – as with the Samaritan – is a risky model.

That 'he saw and had compassion on him' demonstrates human affectivity, but therein also its vulnerability and its corruptibility. The human can be

130 JÜNGEL, E., *Paulus und Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zur Präzisierung der Frage nach dem Ursprung der Christologie*, 135, 173.

131 PANNENBERG, W., *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive*, 258.



touched and is not unreachable. Many images produce concern and compassion in the battle for attention and money. The gestalt of one who has been beaten down is *used* in order to steer human affectivity. Those of us who sees these images can be pierced to the core. We can be beaten down ourselves by them – when the images are brutal enough.

In any case, the parable of the good Samaritan (in Jesus' dispute with the Scribes and the Pharisees) also had a *critical* function: to dissolve the limits of compassion and to expose prejudices. We ought to deliver a corresponding critique to how images are used (with respect to the *politics* of imagery). The use of images can be a *misuse* – of what is being depicted as well as of the observer. It is therefore necessary to pose the critical question: Who is actually being served by the usage of such imagery? Do they serve one's own interest or that of the one who has been beaten down?

Here I can see – the origin of critique, the necessity of the critical question in order not to submit oneself uncritically to all claims (in all openness of perception and ethical sensibility). The narrative *logos* of the parable opens up a space for *reflectiveness*. But the politics of imagery in advertisement and media builds on drastic effects. It makes highly effective use of our affects, of the fact that we cannot *not* see. These attention-grabbing techniques are often just as forceful as what happens before our eyes. Such forceful imagery makes critical distance necessary so that we can open up space for reflection.

As inalienable as the claim of the one beaten down is, it is nonetheless *not* the claim of the images that are being used and certainly not the claim of those who want to compel our attention with them. As a result, the *misuse* of [*Vernutzung*] of such ethically archetypal scenes provokes the *logos*, the decisive question: Who makes use of such scenes and to what end? Do the images of those who have been beaten down serve *other interests*, or is it those itself, what is of interest?

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