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## LIFE, THOUGHT, AND MORALITY: OR, DOES MATTER REALLY MATTER?

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**ABSTRACT:** Modern, science-centered naturalisms can be charged with a certain moral laxity, according to S. T. Coleridge. This fault reflects a devitalizing, materialistic metaphysics informed by a narrow and self-serving conception of reason. Thus seeking a remedy that can bring justice to the spiritual as well as the physical aspects of experience, Coleridge envisages a ‘true naturalism’ that will not only address the question ‘What is Life?’ but also frame a ‘true realism’ that includes what might be called a ‘true moralism’. This calls, however, for a Heraclitean metaphysics capable of linking ‘goodness’ in both thinking and acting to a \*Logos\*—that is, an essentially nonmodern theory of actuality that can do justice at once to the quicknesses and the uniformities of both Life and Thought. Coleridge’s thus presents an outline of how one might respond to a challenge that can be best met, I argue, with the help of certain insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, A. N. Whitehead, Gilles Deleuze, and C. S. Peirce. By enlisting Hannah Arendt’s individual-centered conception of morality, which ties ethics to public concerns, it is also possible to sketch a metaphysically grounded response to Friedrich Nietzsche’s call for a ‘healthy morality’ capable of overturning the nihilistic values entrenched in modern thought.

**KEYWORDS:** naturalism, modernity, metaphysics, actuality, morality, imagination, reason, Heraclitus, Coleridge, Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty, Nietzsche, Deleuze, Peirce, Nietzsche, Arendt.

### I. ON HOW NOT TO APPROACH CERTAIN ‘LARGE’ TOPICS

To ask what seems a quintessentially philosophical question: ‘What is Life?’ is inevitably to ask a good deal more than one might wish. It is to step into a trackless swamp where questions keep springing up from roots that spread rapidly underground. This especially ‘large’ question evokes, for instance, the image of a wandering Self suddenly aware its own existence. Notoriously introduced into the very heart of modern philosophy by Descartes, who famously describes himself as a self that thinks, this perplexed figure prompts two more ‘large’ questions: ‘What is a Self?’ and ‘What is a Thought?’

But to speak of a ‘thinking thing’ is to prompt an even larger question inasmuch as such a ‘thing’ is first and foremost a creature of Nature. One might therefore have thought that every self-styled naturalist would at least note the presence of the looming figure of Nature, if only in passing. Yet most contemporary naturalists shun the question

'What is Nature?'. They strive instead to anchor their thinking in 'natural science'—as though this human artifact had somehow been granted a license not just to speak for but to stand in for Nature.

Self-consciously rational modern thinkers, it short, are not nearly as thoughtful and self-critical as they pretend to be. This is especially evident in science-centered treatments of Life and Thought. Consider the popularity of the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution which dominates most discussions that bear in any way on the meaning of existence. Some of the more fervent proponents of this theory even conflate Darwinian theory with evolution itself. Others maintain that one or another version of this theory is capable, at least in principle, of explaining the origins of life. Yet this sort of thinking presupposes that Life can be explained by Death since Darwinian theories of evolution are usually grounded, if only silently, in the metaphysics of mechanistic materialism—which reduces the 'quicknesses' of Nature to 'blind' adventurings of dead 'stuff'.

Thus the loudly touted but false opposition between Darwinism and Creationism has only generated a smokescreen that hides the real difficulties. For it is not that hard to believe that Nature is replete with vital or creative powers or forces which are intrinsically invisible to the scientific eye. Do not innovative scientists themselves bear witness to creative powers and/or instincts that are as much an aspect of Nature as they are themselves? Again, why think the spontaneous production of quality-laden phenomena, those harbingers of reality, are amenable to systematic explanation? One may suspect, in other words, that only a quasi-religious faith in a powerful myth (the myth of scientific superrationality) can explain the currently fashionable idea that conscious thought, and hence reason itself, is amenable to scientific explanation. As for the notion on which the idea of evolution pivots, namely emergence, although many branches of science afford abundant evidence that this word refers to a fact of Nature, none have been able to throw much light on its meaning.

The idea of evolution, in other words, forces into the foreground of natural philosophy the metaphysical question of how to deal justly with the factors of change and growth in worldly forms of organization. The tendency to dismiss out of hand the idea of a self-creative Nature is thus one of the more salient reasons for suspecting that the moderns are on the whole not really serious about doing justice to the 'mattering of matter'. It could be therefore that something darker than an acritical faith in the unlimited powers of scientific reasoning is at work in this knowledge-obsessed culture. Perhaps a deep-seated, neurotic hatred and/or fear of metaphysical thinking itself is behind the frequently hostile face that greets dissenters from mainstream thought who argue that science can only provide support for metaphysics, not act as its chief guide.

It is in any case hardly a sign of rational thinking when 'hard-headed' rational-empiricists suppress the empirical fact that experience has affective, instinctual, and imaginative as well as intellectual dimensions. The irony is that one of the most exact of all the 'exact' sciences, quantum physics, has forced into the open the possibility that the 'subjective', emotional dimension of thought is just as, if not more, important than the 'objective', dispassionate side. But attempts to come to terms with this exposure of the

anomalies at the heart of modern reason seldom entertain the possibility that subjectivity and objectivity refer to indissociable aspects of one integral experiential event.

This circumstance is but one indication of just how radical a rethinking of reason is needed in natural philosophy. So let us consider in this light the musings of the poet-philosopher S. T. Coleridge who, in seeking a “true naturalism” urges what might be termed a thoroughly nonmodern reason. He envisages a philosophical remedy for all the damage done to Life and Thought by modern naturalists who persist in separating knowers from known. To this end Coleridge proposes in effect a nonmodern principle of rationality that allows for conceptual distinctions (such as subjectivity-objectivity) but disallows the common tendency to reify them as disconnected opposites. The implication is that the would-be true naturalist must put aside Aristotelian logic in favour of an inherently unsystematic ‘polar logic’ which strives above all to keep both poles of every fundamental polarity in sight at all times.

Thus in regard to Life and Thought, Coleridge holds that what the true naturalist should seek is not an *explanation* but rather a *just account* of these important themes. One must begin by acknowledging that they refer in the first instance to ‘real’ aspects of Nature. Hence his vision of a true naturalism also includes a “true and original realism”—the doctrine that perception refers to acts in which we behold “nothing more nor less than... the real and very object.”<sup>1</sup> This view of perception not only amounts to a complete rejection of the common tendency to think that a natural philosopher is obliged to choose between realism or idealism. It also indicates that the hallmark of a true naturalist will be a sustained attempt to justly reconcile the dynamic aspects of *natura naturans* with the static or quasi-permanent features of *natura naturata*, such as those that common sense usually associates with the term ‘matter’. Indeed, it is an especially urgent task to become clear about the meaning of ‘matter’ since this term concentrates in one notion all the metaphysical problems posed by Life, which Coleridge sums up in the rhetorical question: ‘What is not life that really is?’

That is to say, Coleridge indicates that the would-be true naturalist is unlikely to get anywhere at all without first framing a satisfactory theory of reality, or better actuality; one that is capable of doing justice at once to the quicknesses and to the regularities or uniformities that infuse the ‘matterings’ of matter. Since the celebrated ‘laws of nature’ are capable of dealing only with the static or lifeless aspects of these ‘matterings’, it is not too surprising that his approach has received so little attention from law-obsessed contemporary naturalists.<sup>2</sup> But his invisibility may be even more due to his belief that a true naturalism ought to include what might be called a ‘true moralism’, or a truly naturalistic theory of morality. For he is also motivated by a desire to reverse not only the intellectual but also the moral and spiritual damage done by materialistic interpretations of salient aspects of Nature. Those who propagate this kind of thinking, he says, “need

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. George Watson (London: J. M. Dent, 1956, hereafter referred to as BL), 149.

2. A more detailed version of my reading of Coleridge, as well as that of other philosophers whose insights I will draw upon, is given in my *Process, Reality, and the Power of Symbols: Thinking with A. N. Whitehead* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), esp. Chapter 5.

discipline, not argument, they must be made better men before they can become wiser” (BL, 71). He does not, however, spell out what being ‘made better’ could mean, which is also not surprising since there appear to be few questions more controversial than ‘What is a Moral Self?’.

Indeed, many might object at this point that no form of “discipline” *could* engender morally better persons. But be that as it may, Coleridge arguably outlines certain minimal requirements for a truly naturalistic story of the relation between Life, Thought, and Morality. More specifically, his account of good reasoning evokes an overarching, cosmic Reason, or Heraclitean *Logos*, which suggests that it is an egregious error to look for the quality of ‘goodness’ in explicit rules of reasoning or behaviour. Insisting that a truly moral self is essentially a certain kind of Heraclitean self, he declares that one cannot “prescribe a law of moral action for any rational being, which does not flow immediately from that Reason, which is the fount of morality.”<sup>3</sup> That is, he presents the would-be true naturalist with an enormous challenge, not the least part of which is to show how to construct an essentially Heraclitean theory of actuality which can provide a home for an appropriately nonmodern Reason.

## 2. WHAT, THEN, IS PHILOSOPHY?

To respond to Coleridge’s call for a true naturalism is thus to be obliged to confront head-on the *ur*-question of philosophy: what is it, how should it to be done, and what can it hope to achieve? Assuming that the general aim in philosophy is to advance understanding, this *ur*-question indicates that the problem of reason is part and parcel of the problem of the meaning of good sense. One does not have to pursue the question about the meaning of Life very far, in other words, before one arrives at the question of how sense is made in the first place.

It is thus small wonder that Coleridge felt obliged to communicate his philosophical musings not in the form of a discursive treatise, complete with proofs and demonstrations (as he had first hoped to do), but rather in a literary, autobiographical style. That he had no alternative is confirmed by A. N. Whitehead who, in his independent attempt to construct a comprehensive naturalism capable of doing justice to every aspect of experience, proffers a theory of actuality of the sort that Coleridge lacks—for his quest for a true naturalism runs aground, like a good many modern naturalisms, on the reefs concealed in the little word ‘is’. Depicting the world as a Heraclitean flux of events, Whitehead not only upholds many of Coleridge’s basic assumptions, such as that Nature is shot through with struggles between opposing forces or powers that require for their expression indissociable conceptual contrasts. He also affirms the fundamental importance of the subject-object contrast.

Whitehead, in short, also calls for an essentially nonmodern reason while also upholding Coleridge’s firm conviction that it is a serious if not fatal mistake to think

3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Inquiring Spirit: A new presentation of Coleridge from his published and unpublished prose writings*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 411.

that Life can be justly dealt with in terms of abstract concepts. More specifically, in depicting the world as a Heraclitean flux of events, Whitehead turns his back on the popular interpretation of an event in terms of highly abstract, mathematized, point-particles. A natural or actual event needs to be conceived in the first instance as a blurry or extended human experience-event. This is a crucial step which bears directly on the question of how to assess Whitehead's approach to Life and Thought. On the face of it, his theory of organism as formally laid out in *Process and Reality* is reminiscent of a complex mathematical system; yet it is a mistake, I am suggesting, to read this work as a metaphysical treatise in 'the old style' where the goal is a systematically laid out, final and complete system of categories and concepts for dealing with philosophical problems. For Whitehead is aiming more modestly to connect using a coherent, consistent, and intelligible language the meanings of difficult ideas that are inescapably vague.<sup>4</sup>

It is far from incidental, in other words, that Whitehead describes his 'method' for doing metaphysics as "imaginative generalization," for this implies that an advance in understanding can be achieved only by imaginative movements of reason grounded in certain intuitions and/or in-sights. He thus implies that the doing of philosophy can be likened to poetic efforts to discern/recognize/utilize significant meanings that are hidden in commonly used words. But perhaps it would be better to speak of intuitive imaginings since the effectiveness of this 'method' arguably depends on there actually being ordinary words containing valuable metaphysical hints that can only be brought into the light by a well-cultivated philosophical imagination of the sort that Coleridge envisages.

So I will return later to the question of how to fit imagination into a nonmodern philosophy of nature. Let us merely assume for the moment that Whitehead's attempt to frame a comprehensive naturalism is grounded in a fairly explicit theory of actuality which must be inferred from his choice of an anthropomorphic metaphors (or metaphysical imaginary) as reason's chief guide. That is to say, the real difficulty in assessing Whitehead's treatment of the great themes of Life and Thought is one of deciding whether or not his particular choice of metaphors promises an enlightening account of the connections between Life, Thought, and Morality.<sup>5</sup> The trouble is, as the title of one of his books indicates, the natural philosopher cannot aspire to be much more than adventurer in a vast and open realm of ideas. Or perhaps better, an intrepid explorer in a murky and treacherous Problematic of Sense, as Gilles Deleuze suggests.<sup>6</sup> For although Whitehead does indeed acknowledge that there are risks attendant upon

4. See my *Process, Reality, and the Power of Symbols*, esp. Chapter 6.

5. Affirming the existence of such connections, Whitehead claims, for instance, that evolution includes the emergence of a "moral element," which is "derivative from the other factors in experience [such as beauty and intellectual distinction]." Closely associating morality with duty, he stresses the unavoidability of metaphysics, for there must be "content for duty to operate upon. There is no mere morality in a vacuum" (Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, New York: Free Press, 1967, 11) (hereafter cited as AI).

6. Gilles Deleuze (1968), *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, hereafter cited as DR). "[T]he use of the word 'problematic' as a substantive seems to us an indispensable neologism" (DR, 323).

venturing into the realm of ideas, Deleuze more explicitly argues that every attempt to elucidate actual events runs the risk of augmenting the human store of error and stupidity. Put yet another way, the would-be rational philosopher in search of good sense must be both an artful reasoner and a guerilla fighter at war with a self prone to “misadventures of thought” (e.g. the “terrible trinity” of madness, malevolence, and stupidity). Or perhaps even worse, to wishful thinking, for it is a mistake in Deleuze’s view to presuppose that philosophers are naturally endowed with either a good will or an upright thought.

Philosophy, in short, is more of an art than a science; indeed, it is an art of problems and questions, says Deleuze. Hence another of his images for philosophy may be even more apt: it is a kind of *collage*-forever-in-the making, he suggests, thus implying that the worth of any sort of philosophical story ultimately depends on how well it incorporates the best intuitive imaginings of all kinds of artful thinkers, both past and present. It would therefore be just as unreasonable to demand from the philosopher a definition of truth or wisdom (or good sense in general) as to demand from an artist a precise definition of good art. On the other hand, if there is such a thing as good art, there must surely be good philosophy; that is, if Whitehead is right and a truly artful reason is one imbued with a poetic sensitivity to the tropic powers of ordinary words. This does not imply that there is no significant difference between philosophy and poetry. The point is that when philosophers venture into the vast and open Problematic of Sense, their discoveries may be deemed ‘good’ just and only to the extent that their favorite tropes can be judged good; for it is the guiding imagery which ultimately supplies philosophic reason with the only kind of consistency and coherence it can reasonably demand.

### 3. BEGINNING “IN THE ROUGH”

That the above preliminary remarks are needed were indicated, by default as it were, by every modern attempt to resolve ‘large’ philosophical questions, such as ‘What is Life?’, on the basis of the tacit assumption that it is possible to map straight paths through the Problematic of Sense. That crooked paths may nonetheless lead to hidden treasures is an article of faith of both poets and philosophers, for otherwise their adventurings would make no sense at all. The trouble is, both types of seeker are obliged to begin (as Whitehead expressly states) “in the rough”—indeed, so very far in the rough that one might as well start with ‘things’ just-as-we-find-them. That is, with images, or phenomena, or appearances; for such ‘things’ provide us with our first, and perhaps only, unmediated contact with ‘reality’.

However, the adjective ‘unmediated’ requires an immediate qualification, as the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty reminds us:

We see the things themselves, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher—the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute ‘opinions’ implicated in our



lives. But what is strange about this faith is that if we seek to articulate it into theses or statements, if we ask ourselves what is this we, what seeing is, and what thing or world is, we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions.<sup>7</sup>

Coming before any inclination to construct theories about the nature of ‘things’ or ‘the world,’ such acts of ‘perceptual faith’ do not merely refer to a blind faith that some perceptions provide us with the truth. For “we would not know even what the false is, if there were not times when we had distinguished it from the true” (VI, 5). In other words, it would merely repeat a common error to center the problem of perception on questions of truth or falsity. At the heart of the issue, then, is what it might mean to see well, for Merleau-Ponty adds:

This is the way things are and nobody can do anything about it. It is at the same time true that the world is *what we see* and that, nonetheless, we must learn to see it (VI, 4, emphasis original).

But by thus indicating that good seeing is both impossible to pin down while being ultimately dependent upon prior stages of learning, he brings to mind one of Deleuze’s basic assumptions: that true learning takes place in the unconscious. Indeed, if learning does not begin in the womb, it at least starts when the helpless infant is thrust, willy-nilly, into the light. It seems moreover agreed on all sides that not all the sense-organs are completely developed and fully operational at birth. So perhaps every wailing infant is a salutary reminder that the most important thing about ‘good seeing’ is that it presupposes prior stages of ‘good learning’. Infants moreover attest to the fact that sense-making is no more immune from going astray at the outset of life than at later, mature stages wherein thought often slips into error not only from external causes but also from elusive internal ones. This seems reason enough for distinguishing, as Merleau-Ponty does, between ‘seeing’ and ‘looking’. The former refers to what one actually perceives in ‘ordinary’ moments of sensibility while the latter refers to those rare but significant moments of new “awakenings” to the world (VI, 8).

It is thus not incidental that when alluding to good learning Deleuze evinces a mysterious “complicity” between nature and minds. This trope is not only consonant with Merleau-Ponty’s idea of “perceptual faith” but also lends support to Coleridge’s claim that a true naturalism must incorporate a ‘true or original realism’—which is quite unlike a naive realism. But while noting that a perception “dawns” in the first instance “from the recesses of the body,” Merleau-Ponty insists that the body alone does not perceive. Yet if good seeing presupposes happy ‘dawnings’, which might also be called ‘perspicacious moments of looking’, some perceptions can be called veridical. But this observation by no means entails infallible seeings, especially if processes of learning (as Deleuze suggests) inevitably leave gaps or crevices into which errors can creep.

Hence the notion of ‘perceptual faith’, which can neither be denied nor explained away, ultimately opens wide the question what sort of truth is implicit in the belief that truly rational thinking can get things ‘right’, at least some of the time. So before attempting

7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 3 (hereafter cited as VI).

to go any further with this tricky matter, it is worth noting that the hidden powers which Merleau-Ponty alludes to are not solely or even mainly individual. Once one dispenses with “the illusion of a coinciding of my perception with the things themselves,” (VI, 8) the very idea of a separate, isolated Self begins to dissolve into an illusion. Or, in other words, a veridical perception implies a tacit acknowledgement that the ‘private worlds’ of different perceivers can overlap in many places, since each of them “is given to its incumbent as a variant of one common world.” (VI, 11).<sup>8</sup>

Thus one of the more important lesson that Merleau-Ponty teaches is that it would be a fatal error to assume that what is ‘given’ in a perception refers to some empirically identifiable source. Enlisting a figure of speech that recalls Deleuze’s trope of ‘complicity’, Merleau-Ponty notes that between “my perceptions and some things of this world” there is a “perceptual bond” (VI, 38). Both philosophers, in other words, lend support to the view that only through a cunning choice of imagery can the metaphysician hope to throw any light on the connections that link minds and world. It is thus not incidental that Merleau-Ponty also enlists a theatrical imagery when speaking of the role the body plays in perceiving (for the body is the “stage director of my perception”). And that Deleuze resorts to a similar imagery in his explorations of the production of sense using his own version of an event-metaphorics.<sup>9</sup>

This kind of imagery, it might be objected, is only conducive to a circular picture of good sense which does not preclude adventurers in the realm of ideas from ending up where they begin—mutely contemplating ineffable ‘things’. On the other hand, in so far as certain key metaphors are indeed apt, some sort of movement of mind and/or spirit in the direction of good sense or wisdom can be said to have taken place. What happens in a theatre can, after all, be well or badly performed.

The real difficulties raised by the issue of perception, in other words, revolve about the question of how to depict the activities of mind. Elsewhere I have argued that one of Whitehead’s most important insights is that mind is in its images, not the images in the mind. But perhaps it would be better to say that minding is in its imaging, especially if ‘thought’ refers at bottom to hidden powers that actively generate (if that is the right word) phenomena; that is, the very ‘stuff’ that thinking requires. As for philosophy’s perennial problem of how to account for the provenance of good concepts, does not ‘perceptual faith’ suggest that the best ones emerge from (and thus can sink back into) a forever shifting matrix of metaphoric image-symbols that prove useful for expressing and communicating novel meanings? In his theory of perception, Whitehead in fact traces the production of meaning to what he terms ‘organic functioning’ (or symbolic referencing), which evokes ‘inner’ processes whereby images are linked to word-symbols, and vice versa. Hence the most important aspect of Whitehead’s theory of actuality

8. “I can count on what I see, which is in close correspondence with what the other sees... and yet at the same time I never rejoin the other’s lived experience. It is *in the world* that we rejoin one another” (VI, 10n, my emphasis).

9. Deleuze speaks, for instance, of a “drama of Ideas” that takes place in a “theatre of problems and always open questions which draws spectator, setting and characters into the real movement of an apprenticeship of the entire unconscious” (DR, 192).



perhaps lies just here: he proposes a theory of perception that elicits a meaning-making agency or agencies capable of transforming primitive image-symbols into word-symbols, and vice versa. The burning question is, then, not *how* this is done but whether or not it is possible to find an enlightening way to *speak* about an ineluctably mysterious activity. For it would be an egregious error, I have been suggesting, if the philosopher were to look now for a basal layer of meanings. Inasmuch as the fundamental activity of perception depends on a hidden ‘organic functioning’, to use Whitehead’s phrase, the very nature of this functioning calls for a highly unorthodox approach to thinking about thinking in which the imaginal is given precedence over the conceptual. In which case, it would merely be a typically modern error to ask what *exactly* ‘the imaginal’ refers to.

#### 4. ON THE NEED FOR CULTURAL THERAPY

There is no help for it but to approach the relation between matter and mind indirectly. Assuming that Whitehead is insightfully right and minding is generally in its imaginings, his promise of a metaphysically enlightening account of good sense indicates that minding may be even more fundamentally in its imaginings. Contrary to those who teach that ‘serious’ philosophical thinking ought to emulate scientific inquiry, Whitehead is saying in effect that to begin thus is to begin already lost. Indeed, there would seem to be no more reasonable place to begin an investigation into the great themes of Life, Thought, or Morality than with the one he gestures towards: “Here we are!” he says, “[w]e don’t go behind that. We begin with it.” Supplementing this with Merleau-Ponty’s claim, that “it is this unjustifiable certitude of a sensible world common to us that is the seat of truth within us” (VI, 11), Whitehead can thus be read as saying it is indeed possible to elucidate “perceptual faith,” provided one can link this “seat of truth” to genuine insights or ‘direct intuitions’—or perhaps even better, ‘real’ intuitive imaginings.

However, since this view gives the lie, as it were, to currently dominant conceptions of rationality, and the concomitant faith in the necessity and sufficiency of a logic-centered reason wedded to a system of fundamental concepts and categories, yet another digression seems in order. As Coleridge intimates, the popularity of modern, science-centered approaches to the interpretation of the ‘naturing of nature’ may be a symptom of a debilitating disease of the spirit, for although Nature has manifestly endowed the human animal with remarkable capacities for thought, the self-designation *homo sapiens* can be suspected of perpetuating a pernicious lie.

Such a suspicion seems implicit in Whitehead’s summary conclusion (in *Modes of Thought*) that: “as we think, we live.” If the converse is true, and our modes of living are responsible for a steadily degrading global environment, not to mention a progressively devitalized and despiritualized conception of Nature, the celebrated rationality of Western thought is desperately in need of therapeutic attention. It may therefore be to Whitehead’s ever-lasting credit that, despite his great respect for some of their remarkable technical achievements, he accuses the early moderns of helping to poison

thought—by preparing in the name of reason for the usurpation of reason by the irrational, imperialistic doctrine of scientific materialism. This mode of thought not only encourages the quasi-religious dogma that science is a dispassionate, value-free inquiry, it also helps to promote what may be an even more egregious error—that facts can be sharply distinguished from values.

Maintaining to the contrary that a unprejudiced and open-minded inquiry into the nature of experience will show that ‘matter really matters’, Whitehead sets out to analyze the connection between actualization and valuation. That is, he proffers a theory of actuality in which each actual entity is conceived as an act of becoming imbued with an aim to achieve a certain value-in-and-for-itself. Being but one process among an interconnected plurality of like processes in Nature, an actual event in Nature thus essentially stands for an achievement of value while at the same time representing a value for other actual entities. This means that each act of becoming is invested with a telic dimension, or a “subjective aim.” However, this ‘aim’ refers only to a vague direction since no ‘final end’ is completely pre-determined.

It is thus highly significant that Whitehead notes (if only in passing) that “self-determination is always imaginative in its origin,” thereby indicating that imagination holds the key to understanding the indeterminate side of the becoming of values in Nature. So I will come back to this crucial but slippery thought later. It suffices at the moment to note that Whitehead outlines a naturalistic theory of the world replete with ‘real’ values which are constantly being precipitated, as it were, in the turmoil of events. He thus proffers a theory that might even have satisfied Friedrich Nietzsche whose critique of modern thought led him to demand a re-evaluation of all values. He too is especially concerned about the state of health of modern thought. Calling for a new philosophy that will produce “cultural physicians” who will work “for the benefit of a time to come,” Nietzsche maintains in particular that it is above all necessary to overcome a widespread, irrational fear and hatred of change and becoming, not to mention uncertainty, insecurity, vagueness, and mystery. He thus diagnoses in effect not only a sick and fragmented but also a deeply neurotic culture. That is, he indicates that modern philosophy’s main task at present is to produce cultural therapists who might be able to assist a self-destructive, and thus possibly psychotic, culture to find its way to more life-enhancing values.

This kind of therapy requires, however, a radically new conception of reason which will eschew the propensity of modern reason to lie; for reason is “the cause of our falsification of the evidence of the senses.”<sup>10</sup> Since our senses continually inform us that change and becoming are inescapable facts of Life, Nietzsche thus links the predominance of obfuscating and nihilistic belief-habits in modern thought with a science-centered conception of rationality that downgrades where it does not simply deny change and becoming. What is most urgently needed, he suggests, is a figurative means to rescue thought from its enslavement to ‘conceptual idolatry’—wherein highly

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10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ* (1881/1888), trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (London: Penguin, 1990), 46 (hereafter referred to as TI).

abstract concepts are placed ahead of concrete experiences in metaphysical reasoning—a pernicious habit that that Whitehead describes as a tendency to commit the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.

In thus needs to be emphasized that a rejection of the currently dominant conception of rationality does not imply that a more honest or less self-deceiving reason will have no need for concepts. The point, in short, is that Nietzsche like Whitehead is urging a radical rethinking of reason in order to help arrest, if not reverse, the decline of the civilization of the West. The implication for philosophy is that education ought generally to encourage people to concentrate on becoming as much, if not more, at home with image-symbols as with word-symbols.

Perhaps nowhere but in art can such an education be properly achieved. In any case, the would-be naturalist is at this point once again confronted by a disturbing consideration—one that Whitehead illustrates in his ‘formal’ exposition of his theory of organism wherein he shows by example that metaphysical thinking is essentially a kind of poetic thinking in images.<sup>11</sup> The implication for the nonmodern naturalist is that in order to tell an adequate story about Life and/or Thought it is first necessary to ‘let the dialectic go.’<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, if one acknowledges with Merleau-Ponty, Coleridge, and Whitehead that there are hidden powers behind the activity of sense-making, Whitehead in effect shows how to construct a metaphysical context for addressing the pivotal question of the nature of these powers. In his particular choice of anthropomorphic imagery he moreover provides at least the skeleton of a truly naturalistic theory of morality. For in keeping with his ‘method’ for doing metaphysics, he opens up a view of the entire cosmos of actual events that is quite compatible with ordinary human experience.

More specifically, the flux of Heraclitean events can be imaged as an immensely complicated web of intercommunicating occasions of sensibility connected by a great variety of modes of awareness. Whitehead thus chooses the idea of perception as the keystone of his metaphysical imaginary, since this fundamental activity provides the means to understand what holds everything together in a world that is always ‘moving on’, while indicating that an individual act of perception is intimately bound up with the notion of concern. This is because, as Whitehead puts it, when an actual occasion is analyzed in terms of the subject-object contrast, “[t]he occasion as subject has a ‘concern’ for the object.”<sup>13</sup>

11. See, e.g., Helen Vendler, *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, Yeats* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), who cites two poems of W. B. Yeats as evidence that philosophical musings are not necessarily “second-hand philosophical argument.” In other words, in some of his poems Yeats marshals “a montage of first-order images which supplement, or in some cases replace altogether, discursive statement” (8).

12. See my “On Letting the Dialectic Go,” in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2007), <[www.cosmosandhistory.org](http://www.cosmosandhistory.org)>

13. Whitehead explicitly assumes that the subject-object relation can be regarded as “the fundamental structure of experience,” where the “basis of experience is emotional.” “The ‘concern’ at once places the object as a component in the experience of the subject, with an affective tone drawn from this object and directed towards it” (AI, 176).

The importance of choosing perception as the keystone of a theory of actuality is partly borne out by the inherent tendency of ordinary human beings to think of themselves as actual or concrete centers of experiencing having an intrinsic value—a usually silent presupposition that seems a prerequisite for recognizing as a moral obligation the need to recognize similar values in others. It is thus not merely incidental that Whitehead's alternative name for the theory of organism is philosophy of concern. Nor is it irrelevant that when speaking of a new philosophy that might benefit a time to come, Nietzsche too alludes to a philosophy of concern. That is to say, both philosophers indicate that a satisfactory as well as a morally beneficial story about the nature of Life and Thought might well begin by imaging the world as a cosmos of interlinked occasions of sensibility connected by mutually influential valuations involving moral concerns.

When viewed in this light, one of Nietzsche's remarks about morality seems especially pertinent. He declares that "All naturalism in morality, that is all *healthy* morality, is dominated by an instinct of life" (II, 55). But if a healthy morality bespeaks an "instinct of life," why not bring in all the other kinds of instinct that living organisms manifestly possess, which at the human level of experiencing may include moral and/or ethical instincts? Does not Nietzsche's own attack on modern reason evidence of an instinctively moral disgust with common prejudices that is akin to Coleridge's charge of moral laxity? For Nietzsche is particularly harsh on those who deny that the bulk of conscious thought *depends* on instincts. Suggesting that a denial of the unconscious is not only irrational but perverse (for it is daily belied in ordinary life), he traces the nihilistic tendencies of modern thought to a degenerate 'European spirit' that *teaches* a kind of stupidity through a systematic narrowing of perspectives.

Now an intimation of morally informed disgust may be (but not necessarily is) evidence of a moral instinct. It is in accord anyway with ordinary human life which is shot through with judgments and valuations. It is also consonant with Whitehead's investment of an act of becoming with a telic dimension since every such act presupposes an 'end' that is like the intrinsically vague goal of justice. That is, he infuses an act of becoming with something very like a vague human concern to get something right in every sense of the word. The upshot is that his theory of actuality calls for a distinction between private and public concerns, where the former type of concern is involved with valuations of the 'objects' (or 'real' potentialities) that are supplied by the past; that is, by what has already become.

As for ethical concerns, these seem best associated with the public side of the perceptual awarenesses that hold everything together. Indeed, Whitehead is especially impressed by Locke's observation that perceptions generally involve both active and passive powers, an observation that elicits a Janus-faced image of perception—with one face turned inwards and backwards while the other is turned outwards and forwards. This image is not only compatible with but also warrants the sort of distinction between morality and ethics that I have mentioned above. That is to say, ethical concerns generally elicit the original meaning of 'ethics' which evokes an *ethos*—a communally established, more or less fixed, body of customs, habits, and mores. On the other hand,

the great interest that morality usually awakens even in those who deny moral or ethical instincts is often due in part to the fact that the private concerns of individuals are not always in tune with public concerns, for the latter (as Nietzsche was well aware) are not self-evidently reasonable.

##### 5. "WHAT IS A MORAL SELF?"

To sum up the story so far, all the philosophers I have named point up the possibility that good sense ultimately depends on moral and/or ethical as well as rational instincts. I have further suggested that moral concerns ought to be distinguished from ethical concerns, where the former allude to what an individual may feel in respect to his/her own actions and thoughts. For a certain freedom must be inherent in every act of becoming, as Whitehead points out, if morality is not completely meaningless. In other words, the core meaning of morality seems best elucidated partly in terms of how the individual exercises its active powers in the ongoing business of making sense of the world; which is an activity that is never completely predetermined.

But to take this thought any further, it is necessary to acquire a better understanding of a 'moral self'. For the modern naturalist might at this point object that my story has now reached an impasse, with the most important question scarcely touched. Yet it is merely time to turn away from nature and look to culture for hints as to how to proceed. Not only is this always feasible in a nonmodern metaphysical imaginary, such as Whitehead's wherein nature-culture is viewed as an indivisible polarity. One of the principal tropes in his imaginary is a vital society, which is a metaphor fully in keeping with the public-private contrast since a society can be viewed as the complement of an actual entity. So in so far as an actual entity can be modeled as a living, ensouled body (as I have argued elsewhere), and hence as a self with a personal identity, a vital society can also be conceived as an integral entity that is much more than a mere aggregation of essentially independent individuals who have banded together for purposes of convenience, safety, and so on.

That is to say, in brief, a culture can be invested with a more or less healthy soul, and hence a more or less healthy morality. However, since the tricky question of the meaning of morality now looms large, perhaps the best way to go on is with the help of a historical study of those moral/ethical crises where the health of soul of the whole culture as well as that of the souls of its individual members souls have been most dramatically put into jeopardy. Such anyway is the 'method' that Hannah Arendt effectively promotes in her quest to understand the kind of evil that the Nazis entrenched in the supposedly 'high' culture of Germany in the 1930s. For the very nature of this form of totalitarianism, which successfully subordinated politics to a poisonous ethics, indicates that the vexed question 'What is a moral self?' needs to be approached from the private perspective; that is, from the point of view of an individual faced with serious moral/ethical dilemmas that cannot be resolved by appealing to communally (i.e. politically) established values,

norms, rules for behaviour, formal laws, and so on. Or as Arendt sums up the matter:

The criterion of right and wrong, the answer to the question, what ought I to do? depends in the last analysis neither on habit and customs, which I share with those around me, nor on a command of either divine or human origin, but on what I decide with regard to myself.<sup>14</sup>

This claim implies that morality can be roughly distinguished from ethics in the manner I have sketched above, where a moral self alludes to a capacity for good ‘inward looking’ while an ethical self is more concerned with good ‘outward looking’. Hence Arendt’s response to the burning question of the would-be true naturalist in search of a true moralism (how might one conceive a truly moral Self?) seems highly pertinent to the quest for a Whiteheadian theory of morality.

According to Arendt, in those situations that cry out in vain for some “ultimate standard” upon which to base a moral decision, the best one can do is look to oneself (RJ, 76). This answer owes much to Socrates, for Arendt generally endorses his maxim, that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. She is moreover sympathetic to the view of Socrates that “men are not merely rational animals but thinking beings” (RJ, 72). The question is, then, whether the human animal with its manifestly unique capacity for thought has on that account a certain moral responsibility. The nature of this responsibility is, however, very hard to pin down, partly because thinking, while being a natural human activity, is far from being a highly valued activity; yet it seems one can no more stop thinking than one can stop breathing; that is, unless thinking is deliberately subverted, diverted, or blocked, either by internal or external means. Indeed, the best way to avoid thinking, according to Arendt, is to ensure that one is never alone with oneself, for when that happens one becomes a ‘two-in-one’ with a propensity to have discourse with oneself—as in trying to form an opinion, make up one’s mind, and so on.

Strictly speaking, then, in this sketch of a moral self, one is not referring to an independent or isolated entity but rather to a potentially multiple self, since a ‘two-in-one’ self may spring into existence whenever an individual self disengages from whatever it happens to be doing and becomes free to dwell in other places and other times. In such moments of withdrawal from the day-to-day business of life—that is, when one ‘stops to think’ (as the common phrase suggestively has it)—the arrested self is most likely to reflect on past actions or thoughts as though they belonged to another (RJ, 162).

This sort of self-examination presupposes, however, a will or desire to think, which includes remembering and/or anticipating. Hence inasmuch as Arendt is claiming that a moral self is one who is inclined under moments of stress to listen to an inner voice that says “I cannot do certain things because having done them I shall no longer be

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14. Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 97-98 (hereafter referred to as RJ). Arendt holds that the meanings of ‘morals’ and ‘ethics’ need to be stretched beyond their etymological origins—for both terms are used to refer to received mores; that is, customs, habits, manners, and so on. A distinction is required if the latter determine who and in what way persons shall be together with others, for then morals can be viewed as pertaining to how one shall be together with oneself.



able to live with myself,” such a self must also be one capable of recognizing the ‘certain things’ that may give rise to future psychic pain. This requires a capacity to imagine those feelings that could make life unbearable at some future time “when I speak with myself about whatever happens to concern me.” One may therefore wonder whether the psychic pain the moral self wishes to avoid is evidence, perhaps the only evidence that it is possible to have, of a moral instinct which is the germ of a moral/ethical faculty.<sup>15</sup>

Such a moral instinct must be exceedingly fragile, however, as is evident from the example of Adolf Eichmann. Arendt is especially struck by Eichmann’s apparent inability to feel anything at all even when reminded of his role in the monstrous crime of the ‘final solution’. This was not because he was a stupid, sadistic brute incapable of feeling anything. He was rather a fairly ordinary yet remarkably thoughtless functionary who was unable to proceed in his thinking beyond certain prescribed limits. That is, he was simply unable to imagine the actual plight of the victims of the killing machinery he so diligently helped to build. The irony is that his very diligence warrants crediting him with ethical standards since he was notably punctilious in observing the code of ethics of the state he so mindlessly served.

No doubt the question of Eichmann’s conscience is an especially tricky one, as Arendt notes, for one cannot say that he entirely lacked a conscience. Observing that the idea of a conscience stems from what we now call consciousness, she perhaps more significantly indicates that Eichmann possessed a stunted, or severely truncated, consciousness. In other words, his example is important just because he illustrates well the value of the lesson that Socrates teaches. For the chief aim of Socrates, in Arendt’s view, was to teach people “how to think, how to talk to themselves.” Having no particular doctrine to impart, he was intent upon showing that those who fail to learn the art of interrogating themselves are seriously at risk of losing themselves. Eichmann not only bears this lesson out, he also reveals that he was far from being alone in learning a kind of thoughtlessness; for countless of his law-abiding fellow citizens appear to have been taught by just the kind of teacher that Socrates is warning us against.

Arendt’s invention of the phrase ‘banality of evil’ is thus important just because it suggests that twentieth century European history illustrates what may be the most valuable Socratic lesson of them all—that the souls of entire collectivities can be induced to betray themselves through systems of education that render the souls of the majority of their members moribund. Addressing the puzzle of why Eichmann and thousands of his colleagues could so efficiently and coldly destroy the personalities of their victims, she notes that this was easy for them since they had already killed their own personalities, or souls. For the example of Eichmann also shows, by default as it were, that a would-be moral self would do well to reflect long and hard on the early Kant’s claim that the faculty of imagination is a “blind but indispensable function of the soul” without which

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15. Reflecting on the “very mysterious nature of human judgment,” Arendt conjectures that there is “a human faculty that enables us to judge rationally without being carried away by emotions or self-interest,” a faculty that “functions spontaneously”—that is, independently of explicit standards or rules (RJ, 27).

there can be no experiencing at all—which is to say no serious thinking, among other things. If remembering is essential to good representing (and even if memory is only re-representing), to lose the vital power of imagination is arguably to lose not only oneself but also the whole world. For it is not incidental that Eichmann and his peers typically could not remember what they had or had not done; by allowing or conspiring in the suppression of the most vital function of their souls, they had rendered themselves into virtually dead souls capable of limitless evil.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, then, Arendt's chilling account of the ease with which a hitherto civilized culture can destroy its own soul indicates that a moral self must not only be infused with an instinctive desire to avoid doing anything that might later give rise to feelings of self-disgust or self-hatred. A truly moral self must also be infused with a desire to learn how to preserve and extend its most vital powers, not the least of which may be the faculty of imagination. The lesson of Eichmann is that if one fails to accept any responsibility for nurturing this indispensable function of the soul, one will be at risk of joining those apparently inexhaustible legions of half-dead but ethically upright souls who, like self-propagating clones of Eichmann, are even now hard at work bringing the world ever closer to an abyss.

## 6. IMAGINATION AND THE ORGANS OF SPIRIT

To see that this line of thought helps vindicate Coleridge's provocative claim that those who promote materialistic views and values need to be made better before they can become wiser, it may therefore be useful at this point to sketch his theory of imagination. For him, thinking needs to be regarded first and last as an activity *in* Nature that is as much involved with influencing 'reality' as it is with being influenced by external circumstances.

Explicitly aiming to account for the genesis of phenomena in this light, Coleridge is perfectly clear about one thing: phenomena cannot be derived from phenomena. That is to say, one must face squarely the possibility that there are mysterious powers in Nature that are at bottom responsible for the production of phenomena: powers that the early Kant associated both with a creative imagination exercised by the soul. Following up on this key insight, if such it be, Coleridge distinguishes between three forms of imagination—primary, secondary, and fancy. Tracing the production of phenomena to the first form, he notes that it could just as well be called 'esemplastic' imagination since it has a 'reality-shaping' capacity. However, since this power works completely in the dark, as it were, it is necessary to posit a secondary, or poetic, form of imagination to lift its products into the light of consciousness in the form of symbols. As for fancy, this third form of imagination is in one sense just as worthy of study as the other two since it is the common or garden type deployed by common sense in its manipulations of the 'fixities and definites' that have already been established by the other two forms. That is to say,

16. "The greatest evil perpetrated is the evil committed by nobodies, that is, by human beings who refuse to be persons"—by people who have "renounced voluntarily all personal qualities" (RJ, 111).

fancy manipulates the systems of symbolism that thinking needs, although it usually skates over the surface of conscious thought and so is the least significant when it comes to the problem of elucidating good sense.<sup>17</sup> Yet it is the most commonly recognized form of imagination since it is usually evoked by those who tend to associate imagination with anarchic, irresponsible, and irrational thinking.

Coleridge's account of imagination thus suggests that the production of phenomena involves complicated and interleaved physical and mental processes that give rise not to pure phenomena, whatever that might mean, but interlinked images, ideas, and symbols. Perception thus turns out to refer to a highly complex business involving ongoing negotiations between the conscious and the unconscious dimensions of experiencing. The situation, in short, leads Coleridge to distinguish between a sensual and a moral or spiritual side of the production of sense:

all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it. All the organs of spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit: tho' the latter organs are not developed in all alike. But they exist in all, and their first appearance discloses itself in the moral being (BL, 139).

Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty indicates, to be alive is to be involuntarily, unaccountably, and ineluctably immersed in a world of sense: we have merely to open our eyes and we have it. But to pause to contemplate this strange situation is to find oneself floating, as it were, in an ever-shifting scene whose provenance is a mystery. Nonetheless, we have only to compare our own putatively private image-world with those of others around us to become convinced that we live in a common world. Or at least in semi-private worlds that overlap in many places, although probably never perfectly.

The general situation in perception indicates, in short, that the production of phenomena involves struggles to reconcile 'inner and outer' efforts to fasten onto significant symbols that may only coincide at various points with the symbolizing efforts of others. For however directly one's 'organs of sense' connect one to the 'things' of the material world, Coleridge's theory of imagination cannot dispense with the possibility that these connections are always mediated by only more or less efficacious symbolisms whose quality depends on how well the 'organs of spirit' have done their work. For if the early Kant is right and the faculty of imagination is a "blind but indispensable function of the soul," this faculty is a prime candidate for the chief organ of spirit whose health can make all the difference to whether the ongoing negotiations between the different organs gets anything right.

That this line of thought is not really new, but has only been systematically ignored by the majority of self-styled rational-empiricists, is thus not insignificant. As Heraclitus long ago reminded us, most souls are not only asleep most of time; the organs at their command may not even be functioning reliably when fully awake, since our "eyes and ears are bad witnesses, especially if we have souls that do not understand their

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17. This is why Deleuze is right to insist that common sense needs to be clearly distinguished from good sense, for the former reflects the current orthodoxy and so may be detrimental (as he argues is the case with modern thought) to the quest for the latter.

language.” As for the type of language that souls need to learn, both Coleridge and Whitehead indicate that this language is grounded in primordial image-symbols. Thus when Coleridge charges materialistic thinkers with a certain moral laxity, he can be understood as alluding to a culpable neglect of or studied indifference to the need to develop and nurture the most vital organs of spirit—that is to say, not only the hidden power of primary imagination but also secondary (or poetic) imagination.

## 7. OF POWERS AND PASSIONS

Now the idea of imagination as a natural power which is closely bound up with the quicknesses of Life and Thought suggests that only in the realm of the imaginal can one find the means to connect the intellectual, moral/ethical, material, and aesthetic aspects of living and thinking. This indication, that power holds the key to understanding the obscure relations between minds and world, is reinforced by both Whitehead and Deleuze whose mutually supportive event-ontologies elicit an image of the world as a complex and intricate dance of ensouled occasions of sensibility linked by perceptual perceptions. So if one assumes that such relationships bespeak mutually affecting concerns, and hence networks of moral selves, the question of what a moral self is can be postponed no longer.

One may ask, more particularly, concerns for what, exactly? As a first observation, concern is surely meaningless in the absence of centers of sensibility that have the capacity to affect or be affected by other such centers. Concern, in other words, refers to capacities to feel not the actual feelings of others but rather feelings that resonate with those feelings. However, the story I am attempting to sketch must undergo a quantum jump in complexity at this point. As I noted earlier, everyday acts of perception bear witness to both active and passive modes of influencing and being influenced. The connective relationships between actual events thus testify to a certain tension between two essential principles, one pertaining to conformity with and the other to alterations in predominant types of organization. Whitehead in fact explicitly holds that a principle of conformity must be posited to account for the continuities exhibited in the flux of experience-events—continuities that warrant investing certain sequences of acts of becoming with personal identity.

More generally, then, one can say that the past has a certain power to ensure that it always be given its due in every new act of becoming. This factor (of the immanence of the past) always exists in tension with a factor of indeterminacy. That is, one must also posit a principle of modification to account for novelty or change so that becoming generally takes place under the aegis of an overarching complementarity of immanence-transcendence. Thus a metaphysical difficulty arises in respect to Whitehead’s formal treatment of actual entities for the question now arises what to make of his Platonic assumption that there exists an other-worldly realm of abstract possibilities, or eternal objects. In his formal exposition of the theory of organism these objects are not presented as the complements of actual entities (as the law of polarity in a true naturalism would

seem to require). Hence for my purposes here it seems useful to turn for help to Deleuze's ontology of event-encounters. In other words, by conjoining Whitehead's metaphors of experience-events with Deleuze's metaphors of event-encounters—which links the production of sense to the dynamic tension between difference and repetition—it is possible to frame a semi-Platonic theory of actuality which is marked by a recognition of a transcendental-immanent tension between the passive and the active powers involved in the production of sense.

Now stability of form or content in Deleuze's ontology derives from mechanical repetitions of differences where the latter refer to a semi-Platonic realm of Ideas. Thus repetition accounts for the factor of permanence in worldly forms of organization, which always leaves plenty of room for change—since a repetition of differences is inherently open to displacements or alterations wherein novel differences are inserted into extant repetitive structures. One advantage of this approach is that it is consonant with a salient feature of matter as this is revealed by modern physics wherein periodicity figures centrally in the expression of the characters of elementary physical events. This feature confirms Whitehead's view that an ontology is required which can depict the various forms of organization exhibited by 'things' as capable of allowing continual change while remaining substantially the same.<sup>18</sup> This important consideration is consonant with Deleuze's basic belief that difference and repetition ought to be regarded as fundamental notions. The existence of what he calls repetition for-itself presupposes a differentiating power in nature that creates the differences that repeat, while allowing for a power of differentiation that can introduce novel differences into extant repetitions.

That is to say, in brief, Deleuze's ontology helps fill in a picture of Nature replete with multifarious powers. He in fact calls for the resurrection of the discredited doctrine of faculties which he claims is entirely necessary in philosophy. According to this view, a faculty refers to a transcendental capacity to make meaning. That is to say, a faculty generally refers to a potentially efficacious "transcendental operation" that can 'draw' meaning from the Idea (or Ideas). Hence Deleuze's rough picture of the world, in which sense is produced in an ongoing drama of "event-encounters" in which a plurality of transcendental-immanent powers may or may not lead to the production of good sense. For each faculty is 'given' only as a latent power which needs to be developed through an apprenticeship in learning where success bespeaks perspicacious "contemplations" capable of 'drawing' or 'contracting' meaning from the Idea.

It is thus important to stress that for Deleuze the Idea is immanent, for although he insists that some form of Platonism is unavoidable, he is not advocating a return to the traditional notion of an other-worldly realm of eternal verities, or ideas. In his use of the word Ideas (or "the Idea") he is alluding only to a repository of 'virtual' meanings. This resolves an especially tricky problem raised by Whitehead's ontology which bears on

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18. Modern physics more generally confirms Whitehead's basic ontological assumption, that the complete existence of a physical thing cannot be confined "to one part of space or to one moment of time. The physical thing is a certain coordination of spaces and times and of conditions in those spaces at those times" (AI, 158).

the problem of how to speak about the final stage of integration of all the contributions from all the faculties that may or may not be properly developed. It is highly significant (from a Whiteheadian point of view) that Deleuze's notion of a faculty not only ensures a complementarity between actuality and potentiality but also brings out the importance of the affective side in the production of sense. For each faculty has a 'passion' to 'draw' (or 'contract') those meanings from the Idea that concern itself alone.

The upshot is that if good sense is indeed produced on occasion, this happy result depends not only on well-developed faculties but also on 'good' integrations of their contributions. For even supposing that all the faculties are operating properly, a special faculty seems required; one with a passion to properly distribute the contributions from all the faculties. What else could such a passion be but a desire for justice? However, as it is agreed on all sides that justice is not an exact concept, it seems misguided to try to trace its provenance to the 'virtuality' of the Idea. Justice like Beauty would seem to refer rather to peculiarly human ideals, which means that a passion for justice may well be accompanied by a passion for wisdom. One is thus led in the end to wonder whether the very idea of good sense presupposes an instinctive wisdom in Nature, for nothing else may be able to account for acts of minding that can sort out the valuable from the irrelevant or disruptive contributions of ill-developed or corrupted faculties.

## 8. SOULS, SIGNS, AND FEELINGS

If an adequate treatment of morality must pay as much attention to the sources of bad sense as good sense, and if the making of sense evokes the picture of a cosmic dance of interconnected, ensouled selves, one cannot ignore the state of moral health of the participating selves. Although it makes sense to speak of each embodied self as having a personal identity, and hence a distinctive soul, the popular notion of a self-identical self is a misleading fiction. The notion of personal identity does not refer to an eternal, immutable soul, and ultimately a purely moral self, but rather only to a fleeting soul whose health can wax and wane in company with the mind-body it is intimately bound up with. Since a self can be conceived moreover as always in process of making and remaking itself, there is no reason to think that a soul traces a 'smooth' parabolic trajectory from helpless infancy to feeble dotage. This means there can be only more or less morally responsible selves—which is hardly surprising in a context which presumes that every human self exemplifies an actual entity.

For I am suggesting that a self alludes to the locus of a certain series of acts of becoming (Whitehead), or continuous streams of event-encounters (Deleuze) whose moral character (assuming this is not negligible) stems not from immutable 'laws of nature' but rather from attainments of equilibria in dynamic complexes of repetitions of differences. As noted above, the situation illustrates an unresolvable tension between a principle of conformity and a principle of modification. The latter principle indicates that the moral health of any self-soul is dependent on the state of cultivation of the powers of imagination at its command. And inasmuch as the power of imagination



holds the key to the production of good sense, the manifestly variable quality of the functionings of this faculty (a fact of ordinary experience that is familiar enough to everyone) means that any quest for a naturalistic theory of morality ought to jettison the hoary ideal of the Good. The existence of bad sense, indeed of limitless evil of the sort that Arendt depicts, must be taken into account.

While there may well be, as Deleuze puts it, something in the world that ‘forces’ us to think, this ‘something’ cannot tell us *when* or *what* or *how* to think. Nor can it tell the morally concerned thinker when it is high time to stop and think; that is, to step back and attempt to exercise properly developed powers of imagination wisely. All that one can assert with any degree of confidence is that the ‘something’ that forces us to think belongs to the order of signs. Yet as Deleuze himself points out, a sign “is not the given but that by which the given is given” (DR, 139-40).

At this point we once again are reminded of the importance of the topic of learning which is a lifetime activity that can neither be fully explained in scientific terms nor controlled by systematic methods. If good learning requires, as Deleuze maintains, a long apprenticeship in the interpretation of signs, interpretation must be an art that depends on all the relevant faculties having first been educated to an appropriate level. Nonetheless, it is still possible to pursue the matter a little further with the help of C. S. Peirce’s theory of semiotics, which is a distillation of many reflections on the nature of human thought and communication. In his view, the products of these activities are often (always?) shot through with vagueness and ambiguity, which is only to be expected since Peirce like Deleuze traces the genesis of thought to highly obscure interpretative processes. More specifically, Peirce depicts a semiotic transactions, or semiosis, as an irreducibly triadic process that involves communicative exchanges between objects, signs, and interpretants. These elements of a semiosis cannot, however, be dealt with independently of one another—which suggests that a semiosis generally involves a complex interplay of interacting powers. That is to say, objects betoken powers that issue in signs, interpretants powers to discern the meanings conveyed by signs, and signs themselves as powers capable inducing interpretants to respond to them.

It is thus worth stressing that in Peirce’s theory, signs do not convey ready-made meanings. Signs convey only abstract (but ‘real’) possibilities. An interpretant in a semiosis thus refers to a ‘real’ meaning that has somehow become precipitated or shaped under the guidance of powers that are bound up with feelings. For a Peircean semiosis invites comparison not only with a Deleuzian event-encounter but also with a Whiteheadian experience-event in which affectively guided percepts somehow result in a realization of meanings in the form of complexes of interrelated feelings. Furthermore, since Whitehead and Peirce both stress the ‘firstness’ of feelings in their metaphysics, it is not a big step to the conjecture that Peirce’s idea of an interpretant can itself be

interpreted as an embodied and ensouled organism with imaginative powers. For what else but the power of imagination could interpret an intrinsically vague sign? And what else but a soul capable of launching a reality-producing power of imagination could transform signs, which are mere possibilities or potential meanings, into definite qualities of feeling? And where else but in living, sentient bodies could those definite qualities of feelings actually be felt?<sup>19</sup>

### 9. MORAL INSTINCTS AND WISDOM

Now the above necessarily rough sketch conjures up a thoroughly nonmodern picture of Nature in which every organism is best viewed, as Deleuze if fact suggests, as a sign-interpreter. Hence its capacity to survive is best elucidated not in the light of a principle of natural selection but rather in the context of law-like habits of interpretation. These habits can be viewed, as Deleuze also suggests, as ‘solutions’ to the relentless flood of sign-problems posed by the environment. This allows for emergence to be understood in terms closely connected to an organism’s peculiar modes of experiencing and the special characteristics which determine its form of life; that is, its species-specific ways of making sense. It is also consonant with the centrality of the topic of learning, for learning how to make good sense surely includes an acquisition of good habits that ensure reliable ‘solutions’ to the endless problems posed by ‘external’ provocations.

Not good solutions testify to wise decisions in respect to how the organism responds to the flood of signs and symbols in which it swims. For it is not incidental that signs do not *force* meanings so much as *invite* interpretations. In other words, the Peircean view of semiosis opens up a space for the ghostly figure of Eros who is probably always accompanied by Thanatos inasmuch as bad sense can result from misguided, inadequate, or malicious decisions. Or to put this another way, if an organism’s capacity to survive bespeaks the predominance of good habits, these are always at risk of being subverted by internal factors for signs all by themselves cannot induce the good will and/or benevolent desires to interpret them well or responsibly.

The upshot is that if good sense attests to an overweening desire for a just distribution of the contributions of all the faculties, the notoriously vague ideal of justice may not only be indispensable to any story about the production of good sense. Every attainment of justice in this evolutionary world may also reflect something like a dynamic wisdom. In other words, the very idea of survival in an ever-changing and dangerous world indicates that every one of Nature’s creatures must be endowed with a certain measure of instinctive wisdom which guides its modes of responding to the endless challenges presented by the environment. Indeed, if there is an instinct of Life, as Nietzsche holds, it would be very odd indeed if an organism, which is forever at the mercy of unpredictable

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19. A body, in other words, bespeaks an immensely complicated process of inter-communicating habits that arise out the launchings of its special powers (one of which is a power of decision) that, transform abstract possibilities, or mere ‘virtualities’, into definite qualities of feeling. One can thus say, with Deleuze, that as “all is contemplation,” for habits stem at bottom from multiply interacting contemplations of the Idea.

contingencies, did not make frequent, instinctive contact with the 'real'—albeit perhaps only fitfully and always uncertainly. Especially in the case of the human organism which is endowed with an extraordinary range of faculties that can be betrayed as well as enlisted in the business of making sense.

This line of thought, in which the evocation of a natural instinct of any kind whatever ultimately elicits a Wisdom *in* Nature, is quite compatible with Whitehead's belief that the existence of order or organization in natural events bespeaks various degrees of sentience in every one of Nature's creatures. A window has been opened up, for example, on the remarkable achievements of supposedly 'brain-challenged' organisms which can nonetheless perform amazing feats of problem-solving (such as how to tell where to look for the newest sources of honey or how to repair torn spider-webs in a strong wind). Whitehead in fact holds that the 'mattering of matter' proceeds in general under the aegis of the indissociable physical-mental contrast, which suggests that instincts are the germs of the more sophisticated capacities that Deleuze alludes to when he insists on the necessity for a doctrine of faculties.

Hence if he and Merleau-Ponty are right and learning holds the key to understanding the growth of sensibility as well as the advance of understanding, good learning can be understood as grounded in an innate constellations of instincts that, assuming the conditions are right for good learning, may be developed into a variety of mature faculties. As for the provenance of instincts, if the secret springs of phenomena must be looked for in or behind the many lures provided by Eros, an invitation to interpret signs not only presupposes a multitudes of little wills and/or desires to respond. What else but an overarching Will could account for the work of Eros which results in an only a more or less vital and harmonious Cosmic Dance of occasions of sensibility? In so far as this dance has neither Choreographer nor Director, it can still be viewed as a drama moved ever onward by a Will to create ever more nuanced quicknesses in the movements of Life and Thought. Such a Will is moreover consonant with a picture of the world consisting of interconnected occasions of sensibility that can be imaged as more or less responsible actors immersed in an ongoing 'drama of ideas' (as Deleuze suggests).

Thus the story I am sketching can lead to no definite conclusion: it can only become ever more convoluted and contentious. What I have tried to show is that it is indeed possible to outline a picture of the world as a moral universe in which the vague ideals of both justice and wisdom bespeak instincts that may well include moral and ethical instincts. Nothing stands in the way of positing human moral and ethical faculties which have conceivably emerged with all the other faculties that ultimately distinguish the human animal from the 'lower' animals. But since the operations of faculties may not be properly developed or exercised, it is small wonder that human world-making proffers no end of examples of stubborn or clever or malicious stupidity as well as dynamic wisdom. Although incapable of being defined exactly, a moral or ethical instinct is no more or less hard to pin down than a rational instinct—which is surely evoked by every would-be true naturalist who believes in the power of reason to reveal aspects of the *Logos*.

That is to say, in sum, moral/ethical faculties have as completely a respectable a role to play in the production of good sense as any other faculty.<sup>20</sup> So it is important to note that while the moral and ethical faculties are distinguishable they are not entirely separable. Indeed, in a nonmodern theory of actuality such as the one Whitehead limns, if an actual entity can be modeled as a living ensouled body, so can the society or living culture in which it is embedded. Furthermore, if a moral self betokens a soul whose vitality can wax and wane in tandem with the functioning of the ethical faculty, the health of each individual soul may well reflect that of the soul of the surrounding culture; that is, the state of health of the enveloping collective imagination. Furthermore, if Nietzsche is right and the vitality of a culture (that is, the health of its soul) can be discerned in its ‘vital illusions’, a healthy culture must be one with a well-cultivated collective imagination. Hence while Nietzsche may well say that a healthy morality is bound up with an “instinct of Life,” such an instinct presupposes more fundamental instincts that are ultimately responsible for creating and preserving vital illusions.<sup>21</sup>

That many such illusions turn out to be delusions is only to be expected if the most commonly deployed form of the power of imagination is what Coleridge calls fancy. Having a distinct tendency toward anarchy, this form of imagination indicates that a well-developed imagination ultimately depends on a predominance of wise instincts. In any event, it seems that the worst place for the apprentice to try to learn the meaning and genesis of good sense is probably that which is at present the most popular one; namely, the biological, neurological, and cognitive sciences—where wisdom is notable for its absence from the curriculum. A better, if not the best, place of learning would seem to be the experimental arts which are only superficially anarchistic. Never mind that most artists are committed to producing they-know-not-what in the often vain hope that their productions may add ‘something of value’ to the world. The important fact is that the best works of art are those that somehow prompt new awakenings to the world. It is thus far from incidental that every work of art worthy of the name usually (always?) illustrates a just balance in whole constellations of values (e.g., those depicted in paintings by lines, colours and forms) with much help from visceral feelings of ‘rightness’.

Good art, in other words, confirms that good sense involves the achievement of affectively guided balancings of freedom and necessity—which is arguably what every quest for wisdom aims for. Finding such balances must in any case be the chief goal of a true naturalist. That is why Coleridge ought to be esteemed for coming close to the core meaning of quickness when he links this notion to struggles between opposing forces in

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20. It on the basis of a “crude three-fold division of human nature [Instinct, Intelligence, and Wisdom]” that one can understand social institutions, says Whitehead. The task of Intelligence is to tame thought, although individual minds always retain a certain freedom—for otherwise morality would be meaningless. This suggests that morality must be associated with the lowest or preconscious level of sensibility, which is Instinct (AI, 46-47).

21. Arendt in fact charges Nietzsche with question begging when he claims that life is the highest good, for this is manifestly not the case with both Christians and non-Christians who believe there is something more at stake in life than the sustenance and procreation of living organisms. (R), 51).

Nature: that is, when he associates good sense with reconciliations between “the Free Life and the Confining Form.” A version of this key idea can also be discerned in Deleuze’s image of the world as a drama of event-encounters which illustrate a dynamic tensions between difference and repetition. Whitehead’s theory of actuality likewise shows that actuality alludes to struggles between freedom and necessity. It is the intrinsic obscurity of such struggles that ultimately warrants Coleridge’s cryptic claim that ‘everything that is, lives’ and Whitehead’s puzzling assertion that an actual entity ‘never really is.’

Thus the last, albeit very far from final, word to which this story tends is that nothing could be less conducive to the education of ‘moral beings’ than disciplined forms of education that perpetuate the modern myth that good reasoning is a search for ‘absolute truths’ belonging to an ‘objective’ reality. For it is in the hidden powers of the faculty of imagination that need to be cultivated if thought is to exemplify the moral responsibility which Socrates (and Arendt) associate with good thinking. The implications for the future of this culture are far-reaching, for only if the young can learn more deeply than their teachers how to amalgamate imagination, feelings, and instincts can one be optimistic about Life in the time to come.

Murray Code