

Kant: the subject out of joint

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»I or he or it (the thing) which thinks«

What Kant's »transcendental turn« renders manifest is the impossibility of locating the subject into the »great chain of being«, into the universe as a harmonious Whole in which every element has its own place: the subject is in the most radical sense »out of joint«. In Descartes, this »out of joint« state is still concealed: he as it were patches up the wound he cut into the texture of reality. The Cartesian universe stays within the confines of what Foucault, in *Les mots et les choses*, called »classical episteme«, that epistemological field regulated by the problematic of representations – their causal enchainment, their clarity and evidence, the connection between representation and represented content, etc. Upon reaching the point of absolute certainty in *cogito ergo sum*, Descartes does not yet conceive of the *cogito* as correlative to the whole of reality, i.e. as the point external to reality, exempted from it, which delineates reality's horizon (in the sense of Wittgenstein's well-known *Tractatus* metaphor on the eye that can never be part of the seen reality). Rather than the autonomous agent which »spontaneously« constitutes the objective world opposed to itself, the Cartesian *cogito* is a representation which, by following the inherent notional enchainment, leads us to other, superior representations.

What, then, marks the break between Descartes' *cogito* and Kant's »I« of transcendental apperception? According to Kant, Descartes falls prey to the »subreption of the hypostasized consciousness«: he wrongly concludes that, in the empty »I think« which accompanies every representation of an object, we get hold of a positive phenomenal entity, *res cogitans*, (a »small piece of the world«, as Husserl put it) which thinks and is transparent to itself in its capacity to think. In other words, self-consciousness renders self-transparent the »thing« in me which thinks. What is lost thereby is the topological discord between the form »I think« and the substance which thinks, i.e. the distinction between the analytical proposition on the identity of the logical subject of thought, contained in »I think«, and the synthetical proposition on the identity of a *person qua* thinking thing-substance. (CPR, A 354-356¹)

The gap which separates the empirical I's self-experience from the I of transcendental apperception coincides with the distinction between existence

1. All quotes from *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) are from Norman Kemp Smith's translation, London: MacMillan 1992.

qua experiential reality and existence *qua* logical construction, i.e. existence in the mathematical sense (»there exists an X which...«). The status of Kant's I of transcendental apperception is that of a *necessary* and simultaneously *impossible* logical construction (»impossible« in the precise sense that its notion can never be filled out with intuited experiential reality): Descartes' error was precisely to confuse experiential reality with logical construction *qua* the real-impossible (in the Lacanian sense).²

The act of »I think« is trans-phenomenal, it is not an object of inner experience or intuition; yet for all that, it is not a noumenal Thing, but rather the void of its lack: it is not sufficient to say about the I of pure apperception that »of it, apart from them /the thoughts which are its predicates/, we cannot have any concept whatsoever«(CPR, A 346); one has to add that *this lack of intuited content is constitutive of the I – the inaccessibility to the I of its own »kernel of being« makes it an I*.³ (This is what Kant himself was not quite clear about, which is why he again and again yielded to the temptation of conceiving of the relationship between the I of pure apperception and the I of self-experience as the relationship between a Thing-in-itself and an experiential phenomenon.) The act of self-consciousness precludes the access to myself *qua* thinking substance: »Through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts = X. It is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever«(CPR, A 346). The paradox of self-consciousness is that *it is possible only against the background of its own impossibility*: I am conscious of myself only insofar as I am out of reach to myself *qua* the real kernel of my being (»I or he or it (the thing) which thinks«). I cannot acquire consciousness of myself in my capacity of the »Thing which thinks«. The very notion of self-consciousness implies the subject's self-decenterment which is far more radical than the opposition

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2. The same paradox could also be formulated by way of the ambiguous ontological status of possibility which, in its very opposition to actuality, possesses an actuality of its own: the Kantian transcendental apperception designates a pure possibility of self-consciousness which, *qua* possibility, determines the actual status of the subject. Once this possibility is actualized, we are not dealing anymore with the self-consciousness of the pure I, but with the empirical consciousness of the Self *qua* phenomenon, part of reality... – Another way to formulate this difference is *via* the gap that separates »I« from »me«: the Kantian transcendental apperception designates the I of »I think«, whereas Descartes surreptitiously substantializes the »je pense (I think)« into »moi qui pense (me who thinks)«.
 3. Which is why the expression »self-in-itself« used by some interpreters of Kant (J.N. Findlay, for example – see his *Kant and the Transcendental Object*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1981), seems inherently nonsensical: insofar as we conceive Self as an intelligible Thing, it loses the very feature that defines it, namely the transcendental »spontaneity« and autonomy which belong to it only within the horizon of finitude, i.e. of the split between intelligible and intuitive. (This is ultimately confirmed by Kant himself who always insisted on leaving open the possibility that free human activity is actually regulated by some inaccessible intelligible Nature – God's Providence, for example – which makes use of us for the realization of its unfathomable plan.)

between subject and object. This is what Kant's theory of metaphysics ultimately is about: metaphysics endeavours to heal the wound of the »primordial repression« (the inaccessibility of the »Thing which thinks«) by allocating to the subject a place in the »great chain of being«. What metaphysics fails to notice is the price to be paid for this allocation: the loss of the very capacity it wanted to account for, i.e. the human freedom. Kant himself commits an error when, in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, he conceives of freedom (the postulate of practical reason) as a noumenal Thing: what gets obfuscated thereby is his fundamental insight according to which I retain my capacity of a spontaneous-autonomous agent precisely and only insofar as I am not accessible to myself as a Thing.

On closer examination, what makes up the inconsistencies which emerge when the I of pure apperception is identified with the noumenal Self (the »Thing which thinks«)? As Henry Allison puts it in his perspicuous summary of Strawson's critique of Kant⁴, in the case of this identification, the phenomenal I (the empirical subject) has to be conceived of simultaneously as something which (in the guise of an object of experience) appears *to* the noumenal subject and as the appearance *of* the noumenal subject. That is to say, everything that appears as part of the constituted reality appears to the transcendental subject (which is here conceived as identical with the noumenal subject); on the other hand, the empirical subject is, as is the case with every intuited reality, a phenomenal appearance of some noumenal entity, in this case, of the noumenal subject. This doubling, however, is a nonsensical, self-cancelling short-circuit: if the noumenal subject appears *to itself*, the distance that separates appearance from noumena falls away. The agency which perceives something as an appearance cannot itself be an appearance. In such a case, we find ourselves in the nonsensical vicious circle described by Alphonse Allais, where two appearances mutually recognize themselves as appearances (Raoul and Marguerite make an appointment at a masked ball; in a secret corner, they both take off their masks and utter a cry of surprise – Raoul, since his partner is not Marguerite, and Marguerite, since her partner is not Raoul). Thus, the only way out of this impasse is to distinguish between the I of pure apperception and the Thing-which-thinks: what I experience, what is given to me phenomenally in my intuition, the content of my person (the object of empirical psychology), is, of course, as with every phenomenon, the appearing of a Thing (in this case of the Thing-which-thinks), *but this Thing cannot be the I of pure apperception, the transcendental subject to whom the »Thing which thinks« appears as the empirical I.*⁵

4. Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1986, p. 289.

5. In a supreme twist of irony, the title of the subdivision in which Kant articulates this unique status of the pure I of apperception as neither a phenomenon nor a noumenon is »Of the Ground of the Division of all Objects into Phenomena and Noumena«.

With this crucial point in mind, we can give a precise account of the difference between the inaccessibility of the noumenal Self and of any object of perception. When Kant says that the transcendental subject »is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever« (CPR, A 346), does not the same also hold true for the table in front of me, for example? The table is also known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever... However, due to the above-described self-referential doubling of the appearing in the case of the I, »*I think*« must also remain empty on the phenomenal level – the I's apperception is by definition devoid of any intuitional content, it is an empty representation which carves a hole into the field of representations. To put it concisely: Kant is compelled to define the I of transcendental apperception as neither phenomenal nor noumenal because of the paradox of *auto-affectio* – *if I were given to myself phenomenally, as an object of experience, I would simultaneously have to be given to myself noumenally.*

Another way to arrive at the same result is *via* the duality of discursive and intuitive intellect: on account of his finitude, the subject disposes only of discursive intellect. He is affected by things-in-themselves, and he makes use of the discursive intellect (the network of formal transcendental categories) to structure the multitude of formless affects into objective reality: this structuring is his own »spontaneous«, autonomous act. If the subject were to possess intuitive intellect, it would fill out the abyss which separates intellect from intuition and would thus gain access to things as they are in themselves. However, »while I can coherently, if vacuously, claim that if I had an intuitive *instead* of a discursive intellect, I could know *other* things (objects) as they are in themselves I cannot similarly claim that I could know myself as object in my capacity as a spontaneous, thinking subject.«⁶ Why not? If I were to possess an intuition of myself *qua* »Thing which thinks«, i.e. if I were to have an access to my noumenal Self, *I would thereby lose the very feature which makes me an I of pure apperception* – I would cease to be the spontaneous transcendental agent that constitutes reality.⁷

The crack in the universal

This constitutively empty character of the pure I thus opens up a crack in the universal »chain of being«. It may seem paradoxical to evoke a crack in the universal apropos of Kant: was Kant not obsessed by the Universal, was not his

6. Allison, op. cit., p. 289-290.

7. Towards the end of the Part One of *Critique of Practical Reason*, the same logic reemerges at the ethical level: if I were to have a direct insight into God's nature, this would abrogate the very notion of ethical activity. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, New York: MacMillan 1956, p. 151-153: »Of the Wise Adaptation of Man's Cognitive Faculties to His Practical Vocation«.

fundamental aim to establish the universal form (constitutive) of knowledge, does his ethics not propose the universal form of the rule which regulates our activity as the sole criterion of morality, etc.? Yet as soon as the Thing-in-itself is posited as unattainable, *every universal is potentially suspended*, every universal implies a point of exception at which its validity is cancelled; or, to put it in the language of contemporary physics, it implies a point of singularity. This »singularity« is ultimately *the Kantian subject himself*, namely the empty subject of the transcendental apperception. On account of this singularity, each of Kant's three critiques »stumbles« against universalization. In »pure reason«, antinomies emerge when, in the use of categories, we reach beyond our finite experience and endeavour to apply them to the *totality* of the universe: if we endeavour to conceive the universe as a *Whole*, it appears simultaneously as finite and infinite, as an all-embracing causal nexus and containing free beings... In »practical reason«, the »crack« is introduced by the possibility of »radical Evil«, of an Evil which, as to its form, *coincides with the Good* (the free will *qua* will which follows universal self-positing rules can choose to be »evil« out of principle, not on account of »pathological«, empirical impulses). In the »capacity of judging« *qua* »synthesis« of pure and practical reason, we have the opposition of aesthetics and teleology, the two poles which, together, do *not* form a harmonious Whole. Beauty is »purposefulness without purpose«: a product of man's conscious activity, it bears the mark of purposefulness, yet an object appears as »beautiful« only insofar as it is experienced as something which serves no definite purpose, which is here without reason or end. In other words, Beauty designates the paradoxical point at which human activity (which is otherwise instrumental, directed at realizing conscious aims) starts to function as a spontaneous natural force: a true work of art never proceeds from a conscious plan, it must »grow out spontaneously«... Teleology, on the other hand, deals with discerning hidden purposes at work in a nature submitted to blind mechanical laws, i.e. ontologically constituted as »objective reality« by means of transcendental categories among which there is no place for purposefulness.⁸

The sublime is to be conceived precisely as the index of the failed »synthesis« of Beauty and Purpose – or, to use elementary mathematical language, as the intersection of the two sets, the set of what is »beautiful« and the set of what is »purposeful« – a negative intersection, to be sure, i.e. an intersection containing elements which are neither beautiful nor purposeful. Sublime phenomena (more precisely, phenomena which arouse in the subject the sentiment of the Sublime) are in no way beautiful, they are chaotic, formless, the very opposite of a harmonious form, and they also serve no purpose, i.e. they are the very opposite of those features that bear witness to a hidden purposefulness in nature (they are monstrous in the sense of the

8. See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991.

inexpediently excessive, overblown, character of an organ or an object). As such, the Sublime is the site of the inscription of pure subjectivity whose abyss both Beauty and Teleology endeavour to conceal by way of the appearance of Harmony.

How then, on a closer look, is the sublime related to the two sets of Beauty and Teleology whose intersection it is? As to the relationship between the Beautiful and the Sublime, Kant, as is well known, conceives of beauty as the symbol of the Good; at the same time, he points out that what is truly sublime is not the object which arouses the feeling of sublimity but the moral law in us, our suprasensible nature. Are then beauty and sublimity simply to be conceived as two different symbols of the Good? Or is it not, on the contrary, that this duality points towards a certain chasm which must pertain to the moral Law itself? Lacan draws a line of demarcation between the two facets of law: on the one hand, law *qua* symbolic Ego-Ideal – i.e. Law in its pacifying function, Law *qua* guarantee of the social pact, *qua* the intermediating Third which dissolves the impasse of imaginary aggressivity; on the other hand, law in its superego dimension – i.e. law *qua* »irrational« pressure, the force of culpabilization totally incommensurable with our actual responsibility, the agency in whose eyes we are *a priori* guilty and which gives body to the impossible imperative of enjoyment. It is this distinction between Ego-Ideal and superego which enables us to specify how Beauty and Sublimity are differently related to the domain of ethics. Beauty is the symbol of the Good, i.e. of the moral Law as the pacifying agency which reins in our egotism and renders possible harmonious social co-existence. In contrast, the dynamical sublime – volcanic eruptions, stormy seas, mountain precipices, etc. – by its very failure to symbolize (to represent symbolically) the suprasensible moral Law evokes its superego dimension. The logic at work in the experience of the dynamical sublime is therefore: true, I may be a tiny particle of dust thrown around by wind and sea, powerless in face of the raging forces of nature, – yet all *this fury of nature pales in comparison with the absolute pressure exerted on me by the superego, which humiliates me and compels me to act against my fundamental interests!* (What we encounter here is the basic paradox of the Kantian autonomy: I am a free and autonomous subject, delivered from the constraints of my pathological nature, precisely and only insofar as my feeling of self-esteem is crushed down by the humiliating pressure of the moral Law.) Therein consists also the superego dimension of the Jewish God evoked by the high priest Abner in Racine's *Athaliah*: »Je crains Dieu et n'ai point d'autre crainte...« – the fear of raging nature and of the pain other men can inflict on me converts into sublime peace not simply by my becoming aware of the suprasensible nature in me beyond the reach of the forces of nature but by my realizing how the pressure of the moral law is stronger than even the mightiest of natural forces.

So, if Beauty is the symbol of the Good, the Sublime evokes – what? There is only one answer possible: the non-pathological, ethical, suprasensible dimension, for sure, but *the suprasensible, the ethical stance, insofar as it eludes the domain of the Good* – in short: radical Evil, Evil as an ethical attitude. In today's popular ideology, this paradox of the Kantian Sublime is what perhaps enables us to detect the roots of the public fascination with figures like Hannibal Lecter, the cannibal serial killer from Thomas Harris' novels: what this fascination ultimately bears witness to is a deep longing for a Lacanian psychoanalyst. That is to say, Hannibal Lecter is a sublime figure in the strict Kantian sense: a desperate, ultimately failed attempt of the popular imagination to represent to itself the idea of a Lacanian analyst. The correlation between Lecter and the Lacanian analyst corresponds perfectly to the relation which, according to Kant, defines the experience of the »dynamic sublime«: the relation between wild, chaotic, untamed, raging nature and the suprasensible Idea of Reason beyond any natural constraints. True, Lecter's evil – he not only kills his victims, but then goes on to eat parts of their entrails – strains to its limits our capacity to imagine the horrors we can inflict on our fellow-creatures; yet even the utmost effort to represent to ourselves Lecter's cruelty fails to capture the true dimension of the act of the analyst: by bringing about *la traversée du fantasme* (the crossing of our fundamental fantasy), he literally »steals the kernel of our being«, the *object small a*, the secret treasure, *agalma*, what we consider most precious in ourselves, denouncing it as a mere semblance. Lacan defines the *object small a* as the fantasmatic »stuff of the I«, as that which confers on the \$, on the fissure in the symbolic order, on the ontological void that we call »subject«, the ontological consistency of a »person«, the semblance of a fullness of being – and it is precisely this »stuff« that the analyst pulverizes, »swallows«. This is the reason for the unexpected »eucharistic« element at work in Lacan's definition of the analyst, namely his repeated ironic allusion to Heidegger: »Mange ton *Dasein!*« – »Eat your being-there!« Therein resides the power of fascination that pertains to the figure of Hannibal Lecter: by its very failure to attain the absolute limit of what Lacan calls »subjective destitution«, this figure enables us to get a presentiment of the Idea of the analyst. So, in *The Silence of the Lambs*, Lecter is truly cannibalistic not in relation to his victims but in relation to Clarice Sterling: their relationship is a mocking imitation of the analytic situation, since in exchange for his helping her to capture »Buffalo Bill«, he wants her to confide in him – what? Precisely what the analysand confides to the analyst, the kernel of her being, her fundamental fantasy (the crying of the lambs). The *quid pro quo* proposed by Lecter to Clarice is therefore: »I'll help you if you let me eat your *Dasein!*« The inversion of the proper analytic relation turns on the fact that Lecter compensates Clarice by helping her track down »Buffalo Bill«. Thus, he is not

cruel enough to be a Lacanian analyst, since in psychoanalysis, we must pay the analyst so that he allows us to offer him our *Dasein* on a plate...

If, consequently, the sublime is opposed to the Beautiful with regard to the two sides of the moral law (the pacifying Ego-Ideal versus the ferocious superego), how are we to distinguish it from its counterpole in the *Critique of Judgement*, from teleology in nature? The Sublime designates nature in its purposeless raging, in the expenditure of its forces which *does not serve anything* (Lacans's definition of enjoyment from the first pages of *Encore*), whereas the teleological observation discovers in nature a presupposed (merely reflexive, not constitutive) *knowledge*, i.e. the regulative hypothesis of teleology is that »nature knows« (the flow of events does not follow »blind« mechanic causality, it is guided by some conscious purposefulness). In the Sublime, nature does not know – and where »it doesn't know«, *it enjoys* (we are thereby again at the superego *qua* law which *enjoys, qua* the agency of law permeated with obscene enjoyment).⁹ The secret connection between such an outburst of the »enjoyment of nature« and the superego is the key to John Ford's *The Hurricane* (1937), the story of a sandbar, once an island paradise run by the French governor DeLaage (Raymond Massey) who denies mercy to Terangi, an aborigine condemned for hitting back at a Frenchman. When Terangi escapes from the prison to rejoin his wife, De Laage pursues him mercilessly until a hurricane destroys everything. De Laage, of course, is an irrational law-and-order extremist, infested with myopic arrogance – in short, a superego figure if there ever was one. From this perspective, the function of the hurricane should be to teach De Laage that there are things more important than the penal code: when de Laage is confronted by the ruination caused by the hurricane, he humbly grants Terangi his freedom. Yet the paradox is that the hurricane destroys the native dwellings and their island paradise, while De Laage is spared – so the hurricane must rather be conceived as a manifestation of *De Laage's* patriarchal-superego wrath! In other words, what sobers De Laage is his confrontation with the destructive nature of the fury which dwells in him – the hurricane makes him aware of the wild, untamed *enjoyment* that pertains to his fanatical devotion to the Law. He is able to grant amnesty to Terangi not because he gained an insight into the nullity of human laws in comparison with the immensity of the forces of nature as they manifest themselves in the hurricane, but because he realized that the hidden reverse of what he perceived as his moral rectitude is radical Evil whose destructive power overshadows even the ferocity of the hurricane...

The radical Evil

The problem of »radical Evil« was first articulated in Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*¹⁰. According to Kant, the ultimate proof of the

9. See Alenka Zupančič, »Sublimno«, in *Filozofski vestnik* 91/2, SAZU: Ljubljana, p. 108.

10. See Book One in Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, New York: Harper and Row 1960.

presence, in man, of a positive counterforce to his tendency towards Good is the fact that the subject experiences moral Law in himself as an unbearable traumatic pressure which humiliates his self-esteem and self-love – so there must be something in the very nature of the Self which resists the moral Law, i.e. which gives preference to the egotistical, »pathological« leanings over following the moral Law. Kant emphasizes the apriori character of this propensity towards Evil (the moment which was later developed by Schelling): insofar as I am a free being, I cannot simply objectify that which in me resists the Good (by saying, for example, that it is part of my nature for which I am not responsible). The very fact that I feel morally responsible for my evil bears witness to the fact that, in a timeless transcendental act, I had to choose freely my eternal character by giving preference to Evil over Good. This is how Kant conceives »radical Evil«: as an a priori, not just an empirical-contingent propensity of human nature towards Evil. However, by rejecting the hypothesis of »diabolical Evil«, Kant recoils from the ultimate paradox of radical Evil, from the uncanny domain of those acts which, although »evil« as to their content, thoroughly fulfill the formal criteria of an ethical act – they are not motivated by any pathological considerations, i.e. their sole motivating ground is Evil as a principle, which is why they can involve the radical abrogation of one's pathological interests, up to the sacrifice of one's life.

Let us recall Mozart's *Don Giovanni*: when, in the final confrontation with the statue of the *Commendatore*, don Giovanni refuses to repent, to renounce his sinful past, he accomplishes something the only proper designation of which is a radical ethical stance. It is as if his tenacity mockingly reverses Kant's own example from the *Critique of Practical Reason* where the libertine is quickly prepared to renounce the satisfaction of his passion as soon as he learns that the price to be paid for it is the gallows¹¹: don Giovanni persists in his libertine attitude at the very moment when he knows verywell that what awaits him is *only* the gallows and none of the satisfactions. That is to say, from the standpoint of pathological interests, the thing to do would be accomplish the formal gesture of penitence: don Giovanni knows that death is close, so that by atoning for his deeds he stands to lose nothing, only to gain (i.e. to save himself from posthumous torments), and yet »on principle« he chooses to persist in his defiant stance of the libertine. How can one avoid experiencing don Giovanni's unyielding »No!« to the statue, to this living dead, as the model of an intransigent *ethical* attitude, notwithstanding its »evil« content?

If we accept the possibility of such an »evil« ethical act, then it is not sufficient to conceive radical Evil as something that pertains to the very notion of subjectivity on a par with a disposition toward Good; one is compelled to accomplish a step further and to conceive radical Evil as something that ontologically precedes Good by way of opening up the space for it. That is to

11. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, New York: MacMillan 1956, p. 30.

say, in what, precisely, consists Evil? Evil is another name for the »death-drive«, for the fixation on some Thing which derails our customary life-circuit. By way of Evil, man wrests himself from the animal instinctual rhythm, i.e. Evil introduces the radical reversal of the »natural« relationship.¹² Here, therefore, Kant's and Schelling's standard formula (the possibility of Evil is founded in man's freedom of choice on account of which he can invert the »normal« relationship between universal principles of Reason and his pathological nature by way of subordinating his suprasensible nature to his egotistical inclinations) reveals its insufficiency; Hegel who, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, conceives the very act of becoming-human, of passage of animal into man, as the Fall into sin, is here more penetrating: the possible space for Good is opened up by the original choice of radical Evil which disrupts the pattern of the organic substantial Whole.¹³

The thesis according to which the possibility to choose Evil pertains to the very notion of subjectivity has therefore to be radicalized by a kind of self-reflective inversion: *the status of the subject as such is evil*, i.e. insofar as we are »human«, in a sense we *always-already have chosen Evil*. The choice between Good and Evil is not the true, original choice: the truly first choice is the choice between (what will later be perceived as) yielding to one's pathological leanings and radical Evil, an act of suicidal egoism which »makes place« for the Good, i.e. which overcomes the domination of pathological natural impulses, by way of a purely negative gesture of suspending the life-circuit. Or, to refer to Kierkegaard's terms, Evil is Good itself »in the mode of becoming«, it »becomes« as a radical disruption of the life-circuit; the difference between them concerns a purely formal conversion from the mode of »becoming« into the mode of »being«.¹⁴ This is how »only the spear that smote you can heal the wound«: the wound is healed when the place of Evil is filled out by a »good« content. Good *qua* »the mask of the Thing (i.e. of the radical Evil)« (Lacan) is thus an ontologically secondary, supplementary attempt to reestablish the lost balance – its ultimate paradigm in the social sphere is the corporatist endeavour to (re)construct society as a harmonious, organic, non-antagonistic edifice... Suffice it to recall Thomas More, the

12. In this sense, the *femme fatale* who, in the *film noir* universe, derails man's daily routine, is one of the personifications of Evil: the sexual relationship becomes impossible the moment woman is elevated to the dignity of the Thing.
13. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1987.
14. We must be careful here to avoid the trap of retroactive projection: Milton's Satan in his *Paradise Lost* is not yet the Kantian radical Evil – it appeared as such only to the Romantic gaze of Shelley and Blake. When Satan says »Evil, be thou my Good«, this is *not yet* the radical Evil, but remains simply a case of wrongly putting some Evil at the place of Good. The logic of radical Evil consists rather in its exact opposite, i.e. in saying »Good, be thou my Evil« – in filling out the place of Evil, of the Thing, of the traumatic element which derails the closed circuit of organic life, by some (secondary) Good.

Catholic saint who resisted the pressure of Henry VIII to approve of his divorce: it is easy for us today to eulogize him as a »man for all seasons«, to admire his inexorable sense of rectitude, his perseverance in his convictions although the price to be paid for it was his life. What is far more difficult to imagine is the way his stubborn perseverance must have struck the majority of his contemporaries: from a »communitarian« point of view, his rectitude was as an »irrational« self-destructive gesture which was »evil« in the sense that it cut into the texture of the social body, threatening the stability of the Crown and thereby of the entire social order. So, although the motivations of Thomas More were undoubtedly »good«, *the very formal structure of his act was »radically evil«*: his was an act of radical defiance which disregarded the Good of community.

Why, then, does Kant hold back from bringing out all the consequences of the thesis on radical Evil? The answer is here clear, albeit paradoxical: what prevents him is the very logic which compelled him to articulate the thesis on radical Evil in the first place, namely the logic of »real opposition« which, as suggested by Monique David-Ménard, constitutes a kind of ultimate fantasy-frame of Kant's thought¹⁵. By conceiving Good and Evil as contraries, as two opposed positive forces, Kant aims to undermine the traditional notion of Evil as something that lacks positive ontological consistency, i.e. as a mere absence of Good (the last great proponent of this notion was Leibniz). If Good and Evil are contraries, then what opposes Good must be some positive counterforce, not just our ignorance, our lack of insight into the true nature of Good; the proof of the existence of this counterforce is the fact that I experience the moral law in myself as a traumatic agency which exerts an unbearable pressure on the very kernel of my self-identity and thus utterly humiliates my self-esteem – so there must be in the very nature of the I something which resists moral law: the conceit which gives preference to »pathological« interests over the moral law. This »radical Evil« expresses itself in three forms, degrees, which all hinge on a kind of subject's self-deceit:

– The first, the mildest, form of Evil is to make an appeal to the »weakness of the human nature«: I know what my duty is, I fully acknowledge it, but I cannot gather enough strength to follow its call and not to succumb to »pathological« temptations... The falsity of it, of course, consists in the underlying gesture of self-objectivization: the feebleness of my character is not part of my given nature, I have no right to assume the position of metalanguage, of an objective observer of myself, and to ascertain what my nature allows. My »natural dispositions« determine my behaviour only insofar as I *qua* free, autonomous being acknowledge them, so I am fully responsible for them – it is this responsibility that the first form of Evil evades.

15. See Monique David-Ménard, *La folie dans la raison pure*, Paris: Vrin 1991.

– The second form, incomparably more dangerous, inverts the first one: in the first form of Evil, the subject, while retaining the adequate notion of what its duty is, professes its inability to act accordingly; here, it claims to act for the sake of duty, to be motivated solely by ethical concerns, whereas it is truly led by pathological motivations. An exemplary case of it is a severe teacher who believes that he torments the children in behalf of their own moral upbringing, whereas he is actually satisfying his sadistic impulses... the self-deception is here deeper than in the first case, since the subject misperceives the very contours of duty.

– The third form, the worst, is for the subject to totally lose the inner sense, the inner relationship towards duty *qua* specific moral agency, and to perceive morality as a simple external set of rules, of obstacles that society puts up in order to restrain the pursuit of my egotistical »pathological« interests. This way, the very notions of »right« and »wrong« lose their meaning, if I do follow moral rules, it is simply in order to avoid painful consequences, but if I can »bend the law« without getting caught, all the better for me... The standard excuse of the subject with this attitude, when it is reproached for doing something cruel or immoral, is »I didn't break any laws, so get off my back!«

There is, however, a fourth possibility, excluded by Kant, the possibility of what he refers to as »diabolical Evil«: the moment of the Hegelian contradiction when Evil assumes the form of its opposite, i.e. when it is not anymore externally opposed to Good but becomes the content of the latter's form. We must be careful here not to confuse this »diabolical Evil« with the second Kantian form: there, also, Evil assumes the form of Good; however, what we have to do with is a simple case of a pathological motivation which, by way of self-deceit, misperceives itself as fulfilling one's duty, whereas in the case of »diabolical Evil«, the impetus of my activity actually *is* »non-pathological« and runs against my egotistical interests. The example that comes to mind here is the difference between corrupted authoritarian regimes and totalitarian regimes: in the case of authoritarian regimes, nobody is duped, everybody knows that behind all the patriotic rhetorics there is a simple greed for power and wealth, whereas the problem with totalitarians is that it is wrong to dismiss them as a case of masking selfish interests in virtue's clothes – they really act for the sake of what they perceive as virtue, they are prepared to stake everything, inclusive of their life, for it. The irony, of course, is that the first exemplary case of it was the Jacobinical »dictature of virtue«; although Kant opposed them in politics, he laid the foundations for them in his moral philosophy (it was already Hegel who detected this terrorist potential of the Kantian ethics). Kant had therefore good reasons for excluding »diabolical Evil«: within the parameters of his philosophy, it is indistinguishable from the Good!

The proof that what Kant calls »diabolical Evil« (evil as an ethical principle) is a necessary consequence of Kant's notion of »radical Evil«, i.e. the proof that Kant, when he rejects the hypothesis of »diabolical Evil«, shirks the consequences of his own discovery, is provided by Kant himself. In his *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant points out how, apropos of some really evil person, we can see that Evil pertains to his very eternal character: this person did not yield to evil under the influence of bad circumstances, Evil lies in his very »nature«. At the same time, of course, he is – as every human being – radically *responsible* for his character. The necessary implication of it is that, in an »eternal«, timeless, transcendent act, he must have chosen Evil as the basic feature of his being. The transcendental, a priori, character of this act means that it could not have been motivated by pathological circumstances – the original choice of Evil had to be a purely ethical act, the act of elevating Evil into an ethical principle.

The object of the indefinite judgement

The diabolical Evil, the »unthought« of Kant, is *stricto sensu* irrepresentable: it entails the breakdown of the logic of representation, i.e. the radical incommensurability between the field of representation and the unrepresentable Thing. This space where such monstrous apparitions can emerge, is opened up already in the *Critique of Pure Reason* by the distinction between negative and indefinite judgement. The very example used by Kant to illustrate this distinction is tell-tale: the positive judgement by means of which a predicate is ascribed to the (logical) subject – »The soul is mortal«; the negative judgement by means of which a predicate is denied to the subject – »The soul is not mortal«; the indefinite judgement by means of which, instead of negating a predicate (i.e. the copula which ascribes it to the subject), we affirm a certain non-predicate – »The soul is not-mortal«. (In German also, the difference is solely a matter of punctuation: »Die Seele ist nicht sterbliche« – »Die Seele ist nichtsterbliche«; Kant enigmatically does not use the standard »unsterbliche«. See CPR, A 72-73.) – This distinction, hair-splitting as it may appear, nevertheless plays a crucial role in Kant's concept of the noumena. That is to say, in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant introduces the distinction between positive and negative meanings of »noumenon«: in the positive meaning of the term, noumenon is »an object of a nonsensible intuition«, whereas in the negative meaning, it is »a thing insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition« (CPR, B 307). The grammatical form should not deceive us here: the positive meaning is expressed by the negative judgement and the negative meaning by the indefinite judgement. In other words, when one determines the Thing as »an object of a nonsensible intuition«, one immediately negates the positive judgement which determines the Thing as »an object of a sensible intuition«: one accepts intuition as the unquestioned base or genus; against this background, one opposes its two

species, sensible and nonsensible intuition. Negative judgement is thus not only limiting, it also delineates a domain beyond phenomena where it locates the Thing – the domain of the nonsensible intuition –, whereas in the case of the negative determination, the Thing is excluded from the domain of our sensible intuition, without being posited in an implicit way as the object of a nonsensible intuition; by leaving in suspense the positive status of the Thing, negative determination saps the very genus common to affirmation and negation of the predicate.

Therein consists also the difference between »is not mortal« and »is not-mortal«: what we have in the first case is a simple negation, whereas in the second case, *a non-predicate is affirmed*. The only »legitimate« definition of the noumenon is that it is »not an object of our sensible intuition«, i.e. a wholly negative definition which excludes it from the phenomenal domain; this judgement is »infinite« since it does not imply any conclusions as to where, in the infinite space of what remains outside the phenomenal domain, the noumenon is located. What Kant calls »transcendental illusion« ultimately consists in the very (mis)reading of infinite judgement as negative judgement: when we conceive the noumenon as an »object of a nonsensible intuition«, the subject of the judgement remains the same (the »object of an intuition«), what changes is only the character (nonsensible instead of sensible) of this intuition, so that a minimal »commensurability« between the subject and the predicate (i.e., in this case, between the noumenon and its phenomenal determinations) is still maintained. »Suprasensible objects (objects of suprasensible intuition)« belong to the chimerical »topsy-turvy world«, they are nothing but an inverted presentation, projection, of the very content of sensible intuition in the form of another, nonsensible intuition – or, to recall Marx's ironic critique of Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy*: »Instead of the ordinary individual with his ordinary manner of speaking and thinking, we have nothing but this ordinary manner purely and simply – without the individual.«¹⁶ This is what the chimera of »nonsensible intuition« is about: instead of ordinary objects of sensible intuition, we get the same ordinary objects of intuition, without their sensible character.

This subtle difference between negative and indefinite judgement is at work in a certain type of witticism where the second part does not immediately invert the first part by negating its predicate but repeats it with the negation displaced onto the subject. The judgement »He is an individual full of idiotic features«, for example, can be negated in a standard mirror way, i.e. replaced by its contrary »He is an individual with no idiotic features«; yet its negation can also be given the form of »He is full of idiotic features without being an individual«. This displacement of the negation from the predicate onto the

16. Karl Marx, »The Poverty of Philosophy«, in Karl Marx / Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 6, New York: International Publishers 1976, p. 163.

subject provides the logical matrix of what is often the unforeseen result of our educational efforts to liberate the pupil from the constraint of prejudices and clichés: not a person capable of expressing himself in a relaxed, unconstrained way, but an automatized bundle of (new) clichés behind which we no longer sense the presence of a »real person«. Let us just recall the usual outcome of psychological training intended to deliver the individual from the constraints of his everyday frame of mind and to set free his »true self«, its authentic creative potentials (transcendental meditation, etc.): once he gets rid of the old clichés which were still able to sustain the dialectical tension between themselves and the »personality« behind them, what take their place are new clichés which abrogate the very »depth« of personality behind them... in short, he becomes a true monster, a kind of »living dead«. Samuel Goldwyn, the old Hollywood mogul, was right: what we need are indeed some new, original clichés...

The mention of the »living dead« is by no means accidental here: in our ordinary language, we resort to indefinite judgements precisely when we endeavour to comprehend those borderline phenomena which undermine established differences like that between living and being dead: in the texts of popular culture, the uncanny creatures which are neither alive nor dead, the »living dead« (vampires, etc.), are referred to as »the undead« – although they are not dead, they are clearly not alive like us, ordinary mortals. The judgement »he is undead« is therefore an indefinite-limiting judgement in the precise sense of a purely negative gesture of excluding vampires from the domain of the dead, without for that reason locating them in the domain of the living (as in the case of the simple negation »he is not dead«). The fact that vampires and other »living dead« are usually referred to as »things« has to be rendered with its full Kantian meaning: a vampire is a Thing which looks and acts like us, yet it is not one of us... In short, the difference between the vampire and the living person is that between indefinite and negative judgement: a dead person loses the predicates of a living being, yet he remains the same person; an undead, on the contrary, retains all the predicates of a living being without being one – as in the above-quoted Marxian joke, what we get with the vampire is »the ordinary manner of speaking and thinking purely and simply – without the individual«.

One is tempted to affirm that this logic of infinite judgement contains *in nuce* Kant's entire philosophical revolution: it delineates transcendently constituted *reality* from the uncanny, prohibited/impossible, *real*, domain of the Thing which had to remain unthought since in it Good overlaps with radical Evil. In short, Kant replaced the traditional philosophical opposition of appearance and essence with the opposition of phenomenal reality and the noumenal Thing which follows a radically different logic: what appears as »essential« (moral law in ourselves) is possible and thinkable only within

the horizon of our finitude, of our limitation to the domain of phenomenal reality – if it were possible for us to trespass this limitation and to gain a direct insight into noumenal Thing, we would lose the very capacity which enables us to transcend the limits of sensible experience (moral dignity and freedom).