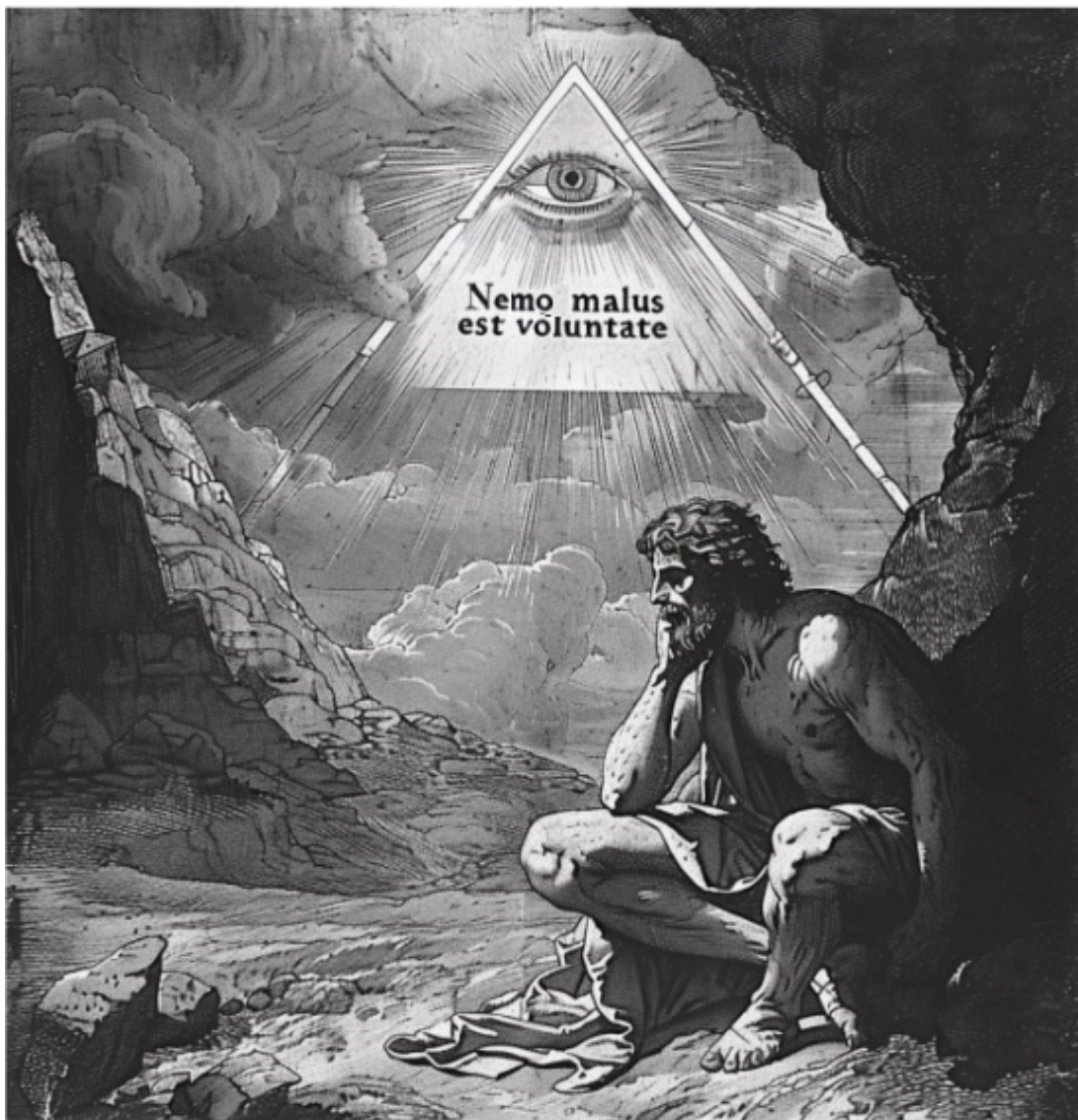


Phenomenology of Evil



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I. Introduction

A. Presentation of the Subject and Plato's Allegory of the Cave

The excerpt from Plato's dialogue "Protagoras," where Socrates asserts that "No one is wicked voluntarily," has deeply fascinated me. This revolutionary statement, which can also be understood as "No one commits evil knowingly," has simultaneously caused cognitive dissonance and emotional shock within me, sparking an obsessive interest in understanding the origin of evil and violence, as well as unraveling the apprehension of aggression engendered by cultural prejudices and primary impulses. Setting aside my own inclinations, I have delved into a rational exploration, adopting both an idealistic and phenomenological approach alongside a transference methodology developed in humanistic psychology.

After embarking on this initial reflection, I was inspired to examine Plato's Allegory of the Cave, a powerful metaphor shedding light on the nature of ideas or phenomena and their relationship with consciousness. This comparison provides fertile ground for understanding how perceptions, representations, and conflicts can cloud perception, leading to a distorted comprehension of evil. By gaining a deeper understanding of the essence of good and using it as a reference point, it becomes possible to divert attention from the illusions created by psychological factors that may lead to aggression, thereby enabling the transfer of thought contents toward wiser perspectives.

Summary of the Allegory¹

In the Allegory of the Cave, Plato describes a group of slaves who have been chained since childhood inside a dark cave, seeing only the shadows of objects projected onto the wall in front of them by a light source behind them. These prisoners perceive these shadows as the ultimate reality, entirely ignorant of the outside world. One day, one of the prisoners manages to free himself from his chains. Initially

¹ [514], [516e] The Republic, Book 7, Plato

dazzled by the fire casting the shadows, he eventually succeeds in leaving the cave. He is then blinded by the sunlight but gradually begins to see the true reality, understanding that the shadows in the cave are mere illusions. He decides to return to the cave to share his discovery with the other prisoners, but they refuse to believe him, considering him insane.

The Allegory of the Cave represents the quest for knowledge and the distinction between the sensory world and the world of ideas. The chained prisoners symbolize individuals captive to their sensory perceptions, unable to grasp ultimate reality. The freed prisoner represents one who gains access to truth and philosophical knowledge but often encounters skepticism or rejection from those still chained by their ignorance.

B. Definition of Ideas, Forms, or Phenomena

In Platonic philosophy, the real world is that of Forms or Ideas, also called the "intelligible world." For Plato, this world consists of abstract and eternal entities representing true reality. These Forms are the perfect and immutable essences of things perceived in the sensory world. The sensory world, perceived through the senses, is merely an imperfect imitation of the real world of Forms (abstract). For instance, in the sensory world, one can see numerous imperfect circles, but in the world of Forms, there would exist a perfect and eternal Form of the circle, embodying the true essence of a circle.

Plato believed the real world of Forms was accessible through reason and intellect rather than through the senses. Thus, for Plato, ultimate reality lies in the world of Forms, while the sensory world is somewhat an illusion or an imperfect copy of this ultimate reality.

According to Kant, phenomena refer to intuitive objects or events perceived or experienced through the senses. They represent the sensible or perceptible manifestations of reality, accessible to empirical consciousness. Kant distinguishes the phenomenon, the object of consciousness, from the noumenon, which represents the supposed reality in itself, independent of perception. Phenomena constitute the objects of sensible experience, while the noumenon remains inaccessible to empirical knowledge or intuition (experience). Kant argues that experience resides in phenomena, which are internal constructions of the human mind, particularly of the understanding and reason. This perspective questions the concrete existence of the noumenon, which lies beyond the domain of phenomena and is not accessible to perception.

For Husserl, phenomena refer to objects or events as they appear to consciousness (intuited). They form the basis of lived experience and are studied through phenomenology, a philosophical method developed by Husserl. From this perspective, phenomena are not considered external objects in themselves but rather contents of consciousness that can be rigorously and systematically analyzed and described. Phenomenology seeks to explore the structure and meaning of phenomena as they appear to consciousness, emphasizing the precise description of subjective experience. Through phenomenological reduction, it aims to uncover the essence of phenomena to reveal what universally structures them.

C. Statement of the Problem

The issue we address explores the nature of evil as a phenomenon perceptible and experienced within human consciousness. It focuses on the question of how evil, often manifested violently in the form of harm, is rationalized and moralized, in order to examine the impact of traditional moral condemnation on the understanding and experience of evil.

We thus analyze the mechanisms through which evil manifests in subjective reality, taking into account the paradox presented by the collective moralization of evil. This study explores the various dimensions of evil, examining its origins through philosophical, psychological, and sociological approaches. By exploring the phenomenology of evil, the objective is to better understand how it is constructed, interpreted, and experienced by individuals and societies. In doing so, we aim to break the pathetic cycle of violent responses by deconstructing the rationalization and moralization that affect the essence of the individual.

II. Propaedeutics

A. Ideas and Phenomena through Plato's Allegory of the Cave

Explanation of the Allegory of the Cave

In these excerpts from *The Republic*, Socrates attempts to explain his vision of reality to Glaucon, Plato's brother, with the goal of convincing him that those in power should be wise individuals.

"I was saying, then, that the objects of this kind belong to the intelligible realm, but that, to know them, the soul must rely on hypotheses: it does not proceed toward a principle—since it cannot move beyond these hypotheses—but uses as images the originals of the visible world, which have their copies in the lower section and which, in relation to these copies, are regarded and estimated as clear and distinct." (450)

Excerpt from the Allegory in *The Republic*, Book 7

514a

"Next, then," I [Socrates] said, "make an image of our nature in its education and want of education, likening it to a condition of the following kind. See human beings as though they were in an underground cave-like dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the whole width of the cave. They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a road above, along which see a wall, built like the partitions puppet-handlers set in front of the human beings and over which they show the puppets."

b

"I see," he [Glaucon] said.

"Then also see along this wall human beings carrying all sorts of artifacts, which project above the wall, and statues of men and other animals wrought from stone, wood, and every kind of material; as is to be expected, some of the carriers utter sounds while others are silent."

515a

"It's a strange image," he said, "and strange prisoners you're telling of."

"They're like us," I said. "For in the first place, do you suppose such men would have seen anything of themselves and one another other than the shadows cast by the fire on the side of the cave facing them?"

"How could they," he said, "if they had been compelled to keep their heads motionless throughout life?"

"And what about the things that are carried by? Isn't it the same with them?"

"Of course."

b

"If they were able to discuss things with one another, don't you believe they would hold that they are naming these things going by before them that they see?"

"Necessarily."

"And what if the prison also had an echo from the side facing them? Whenever one of the men passing by happens to utter a sound, do you suppose they would believe that anything other than the passing shadow was uttering the sound?"

"No, by Zeus," he said. "I don't."

"Then most certainly," I said, "such men would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things."

"Most necessarily," he said.

c

"Now consider," I said, "what their release and healing from bonds and folly would be like if something of this sort were by nature to happen to them. Take a man who is released and suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the light; and who, moreover, in doing all this is in pain and, because he is dazzled, is unable to make out those things whose shadows he saw before. What do you suppose he'd say if someone were to tell him that before he saw silly things, while now, because he is somewhat nearer to what is and turned toward beings, he sees more correctly; and, in particular, showing him each of the things that pass by, were to compel the man to answer his questions about what they are? Don't you suppose he'd be at a loss and believe that what was seen before is truer than what is now shown?"

"Yes," he said, "by far."

d

"And if he compelled him to look at the light itself, would his eyes hurt and would he flee, turning away to those things that he is able to make out and hold them to be really clearer than what is being shown?"

e

"Certainly," he said.

Interpretation of the Allegory

Socrates questions the reliability of perception. The cave symbolizes the workings of consciousness and the process of liberation from illusion to access reality. He explains that the shadows in the cave represent appearances perceived by our senses, which are not the reality itself. True reality, he argues, resides in the realm of ideas. Because of the contingency and heterogeneity of appearances, humans are forced to conceptualize, while ideas, immutable, provide stable knowledge and science.

For example, a tree, subject to temporal changes, remains identifiable as a unit thanks to its conceptualization as the *idea* of a tree. The slave, representing humanity, clings to appearances, believing they represent reality, unaware that true reality lies in the ideas, symbolized by the interplay of silhouettes and fire behind him.

This concept echoes contemporary situations such as debates on complex issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In these debates, factual reality is often simplified and conceptualized for ease of understanding, even though this simplification may distort or misrepresent the true nature of the situation. According to Plato, individuals, like the cave's slaves, are unaware of the distortion of their ideas and believe their projections correspond to reality. Thus, for the wrong reasons, individuals may engage in harmful actions, even war, being hypnotized and misled by their own contradictory (dialectical) ideas, which are merely the reflection of their dogmatic imagination.

In the second stage of this allegorical ascent, we will explore the journey toward the absolute realities of the Good.

516a

"And if," I continued, "he were forcibly dragged out of the cave, made to climb the steep and rugged ascent, and not released until he had been brought into the sunlight, would he not suffer greatly and complain about such treatment? And once he reached the light, with his eyes dazzled by its brightness, would he be able to distinguish any of the

things we now call real?"

"He would not," he replied, "at least not at first."

"I think he would need time to grow accustomed to seeing the objects in the upper world. At first, he would most easily discern shadows, then the reflections of people and other objects in water, and later the objects themselves. After that, he would be able to gaze more easily at the light of the stars and the moon at night than at the sun and its light during the day."

"Certainly."

516b

"Finally, I suppose, he would be able to see the sun—not its reflections in water or any other medium—but the sun itself in its true place, and contemplate it as it is."

"Necessarily," he said.

516c

"Then he would come to the conclusion that the sun is the source of the seasons and the years, that it governs everything in the visible world, and, in some way, is the cause of all that he and his companions used to see in the cave."

"Obviously, that would be his conclusion."

"Now, recalling his former dwelling, the supposed wisdom there, and his fellow prisoners, do you not think he would be glad for the change and feel pity for them?"

"Certainly."

516d

"And if they were to confer honors and praises among themselves, awarding prizes to the one who was best at observing the passing shadows, remembering which usually came first, last, or together, and who was most skilled at predicting their appearances, do you think our man would envy those who were honored and held power among the prisoners? Or would he feel, like Homer's hero, that he would far prefer to be a servant of a poor laborer, enduring anything, rather than return to his former illusions and live as he did before?"

516e

"I agree," he said. "He would prefer to endure anything rather than live that way again."

When he evokes the act of dragging the individual out of the cave toward the light of the sun, Socrates illustrates the difficult path toward the pursuit of knowledge and truth. This path requires rejecting all beliefs, illusions, and tendencies that have kept consciousness imprisoned for so long. This passage also describes the individual's evolution in their ability to perceive reality. They begin by observing the shadows, which can be interpreted as artistic, political, or scientific representations. Then, they

progress to reflected images, which are objective and descriptive representations. Finally, they achieve the direct perception of the objects themselves, a form of objective observation without bias. This journey ultimately leads to the direct contemplation of the sun, probably symbolizing the universal cognitive structures that guide one toward the perfect forms of the Good, considered as models or, in more common language, archetypes. This process illustrates an ascent toward a deeper understanding of the reality of the Good.

Interpretation of Shadows as Representations of Phenomena in Consciousness

Plato's Allegory of the Cave illustrates how human perceptions are often hindered and distorted by our representations of reality. In this metaphor, the prisoners chained inside the cave perceive only the shadows of objects projected onto the wall before them by a light source behind them. These shadows, although lacking any substance or real existence, constitute their entire reality. Plato uses this image to symbolize phenomena perceived through the senses, which are often imperfect and misleading representations of reality because they remain *subjective* as opposed to objective representations.

For idealists like Plato, reality has an intelligible nature: an abstraction with a distinctly subjective essence. However, there exists a distinction between individual subjectivity and *demiurgic* subjectivity. This specific subjectivity, or this unified perspective of consciousness that Leibniz calls a "monad," rationalizes based on its limited perspective within the given empirical space it occupies. The horizon of perception is inherently limited, strikingly illustrated by the example of a cube: if a cube is placed before an individual, they can only immediately perceive three of its faces through sensory experience. To conceive of the remaining three faces, they must rely on reasoning and imagination to mentally complete the image of the cube in its entirety.

To this cognitive complementarity are added the needs, desires, and deficiencies unique to the monad, as well as the memory of aversions and emotional impacts inherited from past experiences. This particularity acts as a *distorting* and limiting filter between consciousness and empirical reality or its universal essence.

Thus, the shadows in the cave symbolize sensory perceptions confined to superficial, limited, and distorting appearances, without access to the true nature of what they

obscure. From this perspective, shadows are interpreted as representations of the phenomena of human consciousness. They demonstrate how perceptions are conditioned by the environment of sensory experiences, preventing individuals from seeing beyond appearances and understanding the essence of reality.

This interpretation of shadows as representations of phenomena in consciousness highlights the importance of questioning perceptions and representations of the world. It invites us to become aware of the limits of ordinary understanding and to seek a deeper truth beyond deceptive appearances. By better understanding the nature of the shadows in the cave, it becomes possible to explore the mechanisms that condition perceptions to determinisms, thereby opening the path toward a more profound understanding of reality and the freedom of choice implied by lucidity.

Discussion on the Diversity of Phenomena and Their Subjective Reality

The challenge posed by the variety of phenomena lies in the fact that perceived objects reveal neither certainty nor reality because of their contingency and diversity. Each tree is unique and ever-changing, composed of countless equally contingent and varied phenomena. Similarly, for the same tree, each monad's intuition will conceive of it differently, influenced by factors such as earthly experience, moods, and the variations of sensory capacities. Thus, the tree will appear differently to each observer.

For human social phenomena, the diversity becomes even more complex due to the cultural implications added to the subject's biographical experience. This diversity complicates cognition because if it is in constant flux, it becomes impossible to know things definitively, while only that which is permanent in its unity would allow for profound study and understanding.

The challenge of the variety of phenomena is exacerbated by the diversity of viewpoints specific to each human, making certainty even more difficult to determine. Indeed, each individual perceives and interprets phenomena subjectively, shaped by their own set of experiences, beliefs, values, and social or cultural contexts. The impact of memory on perception is a crucial aspect to consider. In the context of the diversity of phenomena and human perception, memory plays a significant role in determining the objects of consciousness. Since memory is not a universal cognitive tool, past recollections tied to similar experiences will particularly color the perception of new works, events, or situations. These memories can influence emotions, reactions, and interpretations, thereby shaping the current perception of observed phenomena.

Thus, memory acts as a filter—either an obstruction or an inclination—through which the world is interpreted. It contributes to the diversity of perspectives and interpretations of phenomena because memory itself arises from the experience of perceiving phenomena.

Needs and desires play a crucial role in how phenomena are conceptualized and perceived, particularly regarding projections toward the future. Desires, whether conscious or unconscious, profoundly influence the vision of things and individuals. For example, in the context of romantic desire, there is a tendency to idealize the other person, attributing to them qualities and characteristics that correspond both to unconscious aspirations and imagined expectations. This psychological idealization can affect both physical and personality aspects of the other, creating an embellished and romanticized image that is as illusory as it is authentic.

On the other hand, when consciousness is confronted with emotions such as fear or irritation, the perception of the other can also be significantly altered. In such moments, the tendency is to focus on flaws or negative aspects, perhaps even imagining them, thereby amplifying feelings of dissatisfaction or discomfort. For example, someone feeling fear toward another person may exaggerate threatening characteristics or behaviors, even if they are not as severe as they seem. Conversely, for another idealized person, these flaws may be minimized.

In short, needs and desires function as filters through which individuals perceive and conceptualize phenomena, projecting their own expectations and emotions onto their environment. This movement of consciousness can significantly impact interactions and relationships with others, shaping the individual's experience and understanding of the world.

This diversity of perspectives creates a multitude of possible interpretations for the same empirical phenomenon. Take the example of a work of art. For some, it may evoke profound emotions and be perceived as a powerful artistic expression. For others, it may seem banal or even incomprehensible. These variations in perception result from individual differences in aesthetic sensitivity, life experiences, and cultural references.

Similarly, in the context of interactions between different interpretations of phenomena, the diversity of human perception leads to a multitude of perspectives on how these interpretations interact with one another. What may seem obvious or logical to one individual may be perceived differently by another, depending on their conceptual filters. Thus, the diversity of perception makes understanding the interactions between the various interpretations of phenomena even more complex, as it requires not only considering the multiple factors at play but also recognizing and understanding the different possible interpretations of these interactions. This

highlights the importance of an inclusive and open approach to discussion, where the diversity of perspectives is valued and integrated into the quest for understanding the community of phenomena.

Interdisciplinary studies of phenomena can provide a valuable opportunity to explore the multiple aspects and interrelations of phenomena from various angles. By examining how different disciplines—such as philosophy, empirical psychology, sociology, and natural sciences—approach the study of phenomena, it becomes possible, through meta-analysis, to achieve a more synthetic vision of their complexity. However, the true completeness of understanding will be attained through the cognitive process ascending toward essences, thus through the exercise of philosophy as the "mother discipline" of all sciences.

Philosophy adopts a deductive method, ascending to the essence of the phenomenon to uncover the intelligible structures to which it is subsumed. It offers a metaphysical and epistemological reflection for all other sciences on the nature of phenomena, questioning perceptions, interpretations, and scientific perspectives to achieve a deeper understanding of reality.

Empirical psychology², on the other hand, limits itself to exploring how mental processes and individual experiences influence the perception and interpretation of phenomena, emphasizing the subjective aspect of understanding the world. Based on empirical data about behaviors³ and scientific methods, it seeks to understand the underlying psychological mechanisms that shape the determinisms of perceptions and behaviors.

Sociology takes an even more inductive approach, focused on observable data revealed by phenomena themselves. It examines social interactions and structures that also shape the determinisms of collective perceptions and experiences of phenomena, highlighting the impact of culture, decorum, and dialectical⁴ power dynamics.

Finally, natural sciences are reduced to providing an empirical and observational (inductive) perspective on natural phenomena. From these observations, they seek to deduce the laws and processes that govern the physical world, sometimes subject to debate, such as the theory of evolution.

By combining these different disciplinary perspectives, a more unified understanding of the diversity of phenomena and their subjective reality becomes accessible. For example, by intersecting philosophical and psychological approaches, it is possible to explore how individual perceptions are influenced by mental constructs and

² The scientific study of behaviors and mental phenomena.

³ In reference to Franz Brentano's work "Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint"

⁴ In the sense of Marxist materialist dialectics

cognitive representations. Similarly, by integrating sociological and scientific perspectives, one can analyze how social structures and cultural contexts shape collective interpretations of natural and social phenomena.

In summary, interdisciplinary studies of phenomena, unified by the framework of philosophy, offer a holistic and integrated perspective on the world. This approach allows us to grasp the world's complexity more clearly. By exploring the multiple facets of phenomena from various angles, understanding is enriched through their subjective reality and interconnections. This, in turn, prepares us to address contemporary challenges with a more nuanced, discerning, and complete approach.

Conclusion: The Existence of Phenomena – Between Consciousness and Objectivity

Since the cognitive horizon of reality is delineated by the mediation of phenomena within consciousness, the question arises whether perceived objects possess their own existence independently of perception. Kant, cautious, remains reserved on this topic, referring to this speculative object as the *noumenon*. For him, the issue is not merely to define the boundaries of our understanding of phenomena but also to question the very existence of what we call tangible reality. Two passages from *The Critique of Pure Reason* illustrate his emphasis on this point:

- *By idealist, we must understand not someone who denies the existence of external objects of the senses, but someone who simply does not admit that this existence can be known through immediate perception and concludes that we can never acquire, through any possible experience, complete certainty of their reality. (A 369)*
- *Therefore, regarding the relationship between perception and its cause, it always remains uncertain whether this cause is internal or external, and thus whether all so-called external perceptions are merely a play of our internal sense or relate to real external objects as their cause. (A 368)*

This topic is one of intense intellectual tension, which has sparked numerous philosophical debates and reflections over the centuries. On one hand, idealist philosophers have argued that objects exist only within consciousness, asserting that external reality is, in a way, constructed by the mind. For them, perception and phenomena are fundamentally of a subjective substance, resulting from complex mental processes that shape the world.

On the other hand, realist philosophers have claimed that phenomena originate in the external world, as is generally assumed intuitively. According to their perspective, consciousness interprets a persistent world that exists whether it is perceived or not. For them, reality is objective and exists independently of the human mind, with our perceptions merely reflecting this pre-existing reality. However, despite appearances, this widely accepted position remains absurd because, as worldly objects are constantly changing, their objective determination and study would therefore be impossible.

In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant deftly highlights the error and performative contradiction inherent to the skepticism of sensualists like Hume. In a few striking lines, Hume's doubt about universal principles of understanding collapses:

"That said, the skeptical errors of this otherwise insightful man arose primarily from a shortcoming he shared with all dogmatists: that he did not systematically consider all the types of a priori synthesis of understanding. For in that case—without mentioning other principles—he would have found, for example, that the principle of permanence is a principle which, just as much as that of causality, anticipates experience. Thus, he could also have assigned the understanding, as it unfolds a priori, and pure reason certain definite limits. However, insofar as he merely restricts our understanding without imposing determined limits upon it, and insofar as he establishes a generalized distrust but produces no determined knowledge of the ignorance that is inevitable for us; insofar as he subjects certain principles of understanding to criticism without testing understanding in its entirety through critique, and, by denying what understanding cannot provide, goes further and contests its right to extend knowledge a priori—without evaluating its full power—he suffers the fate that always topples skepticism: namely, that it itself comes into doubt, because its objections rest merely on contingent facts and not on principles that would necessarily compel us to renounce dogmatic assertions." (B 796)

Relativism, though not a philosophy per se, but rather a doctrine based on the observation of phenomena's contingent manifestations, draws from the premise that, since everything is subject to change, it is impossible to establish absolute truth. Thus, truth becomes essentially a matter of language, as conceived by Protagoras:

*"Man is the measure of all things—of those that are, that they exist, and of those that are not, that they do not exist."*⁵

When Protagoras refers to "man," he alludes to his subjectivity and individuality, suggesting that things are evaluated according to individual perception and

⁵ [DK 80b1]Sextus Empiricus (Adversus Mathematicos VII 60)

judgment. Thus, the persuasion of truth depends on the eloquence of language, leading to the relativization of truth, which loses its universal character. However, it is evident that truth exists in an absolute sense, as easily demonstrated by apagogic reasoning. To claim that "truth does not exist" is a performative contradiction, just as asserting that man is the measure of all things is itself a measure.

For dualism, although mind and God are predominant, matter and subjectivity are considered as two distinct substances. For my part, attempting to explain a perspective that seems to me paralogical is a difficult exercise because it would imply that God is an entity external to consciousness, with its own properties unknown to us. This performative assertion reveals its obvious contradiction since consciousness can only access what exists within its own sphere of representation.

In *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes attempts to resolve this paradox by proposing, in my opinion, an explanation that is more monist than dualist:

[49]"And consequently, it must necessarily be concluded from all that I have said before, that God exists. For although the idea of substance is in me, since I am a substance, I would not, however, have the idea of an infinite substance, I who am a finite being, if it had not been placed in me by some substance that was truly infinite."

This excerpt from Descartes rather reinforces my monist view of reality because it underlines that even if our mind is limited and cannot comprehend infinity or totality, these concepts have been introduced in us by an external source. Thus, even if we cannot fully grasp infinity, it manifests through us and can be expressed in language. In other words, God, as part of the ALL, is included in this manifestation of infinity to which we have access through our ideas. This reasoning strengthens my conviction that consciousness embraces the entirety of existence, including God, who is ultimately just a phenomenon of consciousness. In this sense, Descartes affirms that God exists because of His consciousness, forged through the experience of His meditations. This ambivalence of a totalizing consciousness unaware of all its own content finds an echo in Platonic philosophy, particularly in the *Meno*, where Plato discusses metempsychosis and reminiscence to explain, through amnesia, the paradox of what consciousness ignores within its own phenomenal sphere. More recently, analytical psychology has explored this notion through the oxymoronic concept of the unconscious of consciousness, highlighting that consciousness encompasses elements that elude it but still influence the experience and understanding of the world, including the existence of God.

From the perspective of transcendental idealism, Kant, while remaining undecided on the question, builds his definition of transcendental idealism on doubt regarding the existence of a world external to the internal sense of understanding. Comparable to a computer that constructs a pixelated three-dimensional virtual reality on the

monitor, it is the experience of the internal sense of understanding and its categories that synthesize the real.

Passages from The Critique of Pure Reason:

(B XVIII) In regard to objects, insofar as they can simply be thought by reason, and necessarily so, but cannot in any way be given in experience (at least as reason thinks them), the attempts to think them (for they must indeed be thinkable) will constitute an excellent touchstone of what we accept as the revolution in the method of thinking: namely, that we know things a priori only insofar as we ourselves contribute to them.

- I On the synthesis of apprehension in intuition: Therefore, there must be something that makes this reproduction of phenomena possible by constituting the foundation a priori of their necessary synthetic unity. A conviction that arises very quickly when one reflects that phenomena are not things in themselves, but merely the play of our representations, which ultimately reduce to determinations of the internal sense.

In phenomenology, there is neither affirmation nor denial but only an apagogic reasoning regarding the supposed existence of objects-in-themselves, independent of phenomena. Phenomenology generally holds that knowledge of the world is mediated by phenomenal experiences—that is, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. From this perspective, there is no object-in-itself separate from the experience of it. For phenomenology, reality is constituted by the interaction between the perceiving subject and the perceived object. Objects do not exist independently of this relationship. They are revealed through conscious experience, and their meaning is founded on this experience.

Thus, phenomenology implicitly suggests that objects do not exist independently of consciousness and perceptions. Instead, it prioritizes exploring how the world is constructed and given meaning through intentional activities. This approach questions the conception of an absolute and objective reality, preferring to focus on reality as it is lived and interpreted by individuals.

Husserl writes on this controversy:

"The evidence for the existence of the world is not apodictic. This evidence is included in the Cartesian revolution. The problem concerning first evidence in itself seems to be easily resolved. Is not the existence of a world given as such evidence? The activity of daily life refers to the world, as does the entire body of science—immediately the sciences of fact, and indirectly the a priori sciences, as instruments of method. The existence of the world is self-evident; it is so natural that no one thinks of explicitly stating it in a proposition. Do we not have the continuity of experience, where the world is continuously present before our eyes in an unquestionable manner? This evidence is itself prior to both the everyday evidence referring to the world and that of

*all the sciences concerning the world, sciences whose life is, moreover, their foundation and permanent support. Nevertheless, we can ask whether, in this function of priority, it can claim an apodictic character. Pursuing this doubt, we find that it cannot even claim the privilege of being the first and absolute evidence."*⁶

B. The Conceptualization of the Tree and Its Relationship with Consciousness

Analysis of the Constituent Elements of the Tree

In this exploration of the true nature of the tree and its perception, it has become evident that the tree's existence resides within consciousness—either as an intuition resulting from sensory necessity, akin to the perception of the world by animals, or as a discursive construction shaped by learning, memory, and culture. We have observed that our understanding of the tree is the product of mediation between sensory perception and its conceptualization, rather than a hypothetical objective reality independent of consciousness, to which it cannot have direct access.

The tree appears as an internal construct of the mind, emerging from how sensory intuitions are organized and interpreted. We have noted how consciousness synthesizes this data into a coherent and universal concept while remaining subject to individual variations and characteristics common to all trees.

This conclusion highlights the importance of recognizing that consciousness is intrinsically linked to the objects it perceives. Without consciousness, objects lose their existence, and without objects, consciousness as an act cannot justify its own existence. At the beginning of its noetic-noematic structure, its first object of consciousness is itself. From this self-awareness, it turns toward being other than itself, which it distinguishes from itself. Thus, it marks another point of consciousness that traces a line and a distance. This process repeats, giving rise to other points of consciousness where the first form appears as a surface, then

⁶ In french - Husserl, page 14, Méditations Cartésiennes - Editions Vrin

another as a volume, thereby creating a tetrahedron. In this way, space emerges, while time manifests through the succession of transformations that consciousness performs to create reality.

This perspective challenges the notion of an objective reality independent of the observer. It invites us to acknowledge that the experience of the world is intrinsically tied to consciousness and the way it imparts meaning to worldly phenomena. Ultimately, the tree's existence within consciousness underscores the origin of subjective substance in the construction of reality.

Exploration of the Permanence of the Conceptual Structure in Consciousness

In the previous reflection on the nature of the tree, I highlighted how the understanding of this object is shaped by a series of observable characteristics, such as its roots, trunk, and leaves. However, a deeper analysis reveals that this apparent unity is deceptive, as the tree is, in fact, composed of a multitude of changing forms.

This observation leads to the recognition that the true essence of the tree does not reside in the object itself but rather in consciousness. In other words, the tree, as a perceptible phenomenon, is an internal concept whose permanence does not depend on its intuitive observation but on the cognitive structure that conceptualizes the tree.

This notion raises a fundamental question: What is the nature of this conceptual structure in consciousness, and in what way is it permanent?

To answer this question, it is necessary to examine more closely the nature of consciousness and how it forms and maintains concepts such as that of the tree. Human consciousness is a complex and dynamic realm, where sensory perceptions, past experiences, mental associations, and cognitive processes interact to construct a representation of the phenomenal world. In the case of the tree, consciousness does not passively perceive its physical characteristics. On the contrary, it organizes these perceptions into a coherent and recognizable concept, considering both the

characteristics common to all trees and the specific variations of each individual tree.

The form of this empirical conceptual structure is more stable than its phenomenon but not fixed in the absolute sense. For example, the concept of a dog is an internal cognitive structure that has not always existed, as evidenced by the theory of evolution. Its concept had another form millions of years ago and will likely be different millions of years from now. However, this structure obeys universal permanent laws, such as the external laws of physics or the internal laws of consciousness that synthesize concepts, as I mentioned earlier. And these laws themselves are definitively structured by rational universal principles. The universe I perceive is rational, and I conceive of this predicate through the rational internal sense that allows me to grasp its shared essence within my consciousness.

Ultimately, like a complex celestial clockwork mechanism to which both consciousness and the phenomenal world are aligned, it is through the abstraction of the fundamental principle of logic—whether formal or philosophical—that the absolute is conceived. It is this subjective substance that enables the universe's existence.

Conclusion: The Existence of the Tree in Consciousness Rather than as an External Noumenon

In this exploration of the true nature of the tree and its perception, it has become evident that the existence of the tree resides in consciousness, either as an intuition resulting from sensory necessity—such as the perception of the world by animals—or as a discursive construction shaped by learning, memory, and culture. We have observed that our understanding of the tree is the result of the mediation between sensory perception and its conceptualization, rather than an objective hypothetical reality independent of consciousness, to which it cannot have direct access.

The tree presents itself as an internal construction of the mind, emerging from how sensory intuitions are organized and interpreted. We have seen how consciousness synthesizes this data into a coherent and universal concept while remaining subject to individual variations and the common characteristics shared by all trees.

This conclusion highlights the importance of recognizing that consciousness is intrinsically linked to the objects it perceives, for without consciousness, objects lose their existence, and without objects, consciousness as an act cannot justify its own

existence. At the origin of its noetic-noematic structure, its first object of consciousness is itself, and from this awareness of self, it turns toward the being *other* than itself, distinguishing it from itself. Thus, it marks another point of consciousness, which will trace a line and distance. This process repeats itself, giving rise to other points of consciousness where the first form appears as a surface, then another as volume, thus creating a tetrahedron. In this way, space emerges, while time manifests through the succession of transformations that consciousness performs to create reality.

This perspective questions the notion of an objective reality independent of the observer. It invites us to recognize that the experience of the world is intrinsically tied to consciousness and to the way meaning is given to mundane phenomena. Ultimately, the existence of the tree in consciousness underscores the origin of subjective substance in the construction of reality.

C. The Problem of Subjective Perception

Explanation of the Nature of the Empirical World

In this chapter, we address the nature of the demiurgic world by starting with a definition of this concept. The world, or the universe, in this perspective, can be considered as the space of shared representation among all individual entities of consciousness, also known as monads. It is a space where the intuitions of time and space are common, allowing monads to interact with one another. Furthermore, the world constitutes the framework within which phenomena, such as the existence of a tree, are commonly shared. This is where the community of objects is determined, facilitating interactions among individual consciousnesses.

The reality of this world, in this perspective, is characterized by a collective consensus that allows objects to be designated for common use. Comparable to the rules of a game, this consensus reflects a shared agreement among individuals regarding the nature and existence of things. Thus, what is true for me is also true for you and others, establishing a common foundation for understanding and interaction within this shared world.

It is important to emphasize that this shared reality is not simply subjective, as in individual dreams or fantasies, but rather *intersubjective*. This means that the universe is the place where individual subjectivities converge to experience a shared dream—a common frame of reference that transcends individual perceptions to form a collective consensus.

In summary, reality represents a shared space of experience and interaction where individual perceptions converge to form a coherent framework for understanding and action. This concept of an intersubjective reality is essential to understanding the fundamental nature of existence and the relationship of monads with the world.

A Shared World Diversified by Subjective Perspectives

As highlighted in previous chapters, individuals, based on their personal experiences, tend to perceive and interpret the objects of the shared world in particular ways. Despite the existence of dictionaries and encyclopedias to define concepts and objects, these definitions may be subject to various interpretations due to their polysemous nature, difficulty of access, or simply a lack of sufficient consensus about their definition.

To this intrinsic variability is added an additional dimension: the individual perspective, charged with emotions and inclinations. This subjective viewpoint compensates for gaps in consensus or addresses individual ignorance of established consensuses. Indeed, each individual brings their own perspective, colored by their emotions, preferences, and unique experiences, which enriches the diversity of interpretations and meanings attributed to the objects of the shared world but also contributes to misunderstandings and sharpens divergences when consciousness rationalizes an object for personal interest.

While individual subjectivity can enrich the diversity of interpretations and meanings attributed to the objects of the shared world, it is equally essential to recognize the need to arrive at a shared truth for collective life in certain contexts, such as law, justice, and science. In these domains, it is necessary to seek strong consensuses founded on rational and universal evidence to ensure fairness, coherence, and reliability in decisions and knowledge production. However, even in these contexts, it is important to remain aware of the limits of any overly hasty attempt to capture reality in its entirety, recognizing that the heuristic quality of doubt enables progress in knowledge.

The Dialectical Necessity of Rational Principles

The dialectical necessity of rational principles to unify the diversity of perspectives into a single truth finds its foundation in epistemology, which recognizes that the sensible world itself is rational. Indeed, the idea that the shared phenomenal world follows observable laws and regularities implies that the approach to understanding it must also be rational.

In this context, rational principles serve as an epistemological foundation by providing objective criteria for evaluating differing perspectives. Since the given sensible world is governed by rational principles, it is logical and appropriate that the pursuit of truth should also be guided internally by the structures of reason and rationality. By suspending psychological inclinations, these principles act as intellectual norms that guide reasoning and judgment, allowing, to the extent possible, the distinction between correct and incorrect ideas.

By adopting a dialectical approach—which involves the critical examination and confrontation of ideas—a dynamic epistemological process is set in motion. This dialectical process allows differing perspectives to be tested against one another, advancing toward a deeper and more coherent understanding of reality.

Externally, dialectics configure by putting perspectives to the test through dialogue with other monads. Internally, it operates through a thesis-antithesis process within oneself, aiming to reconcile internal divergences. Thus, epistemology emphasizes the importance of a methodical, rigorous, and rational approach in the quest for truth⁷, while also acknowledging the richness and limitations of diverse perspectives. By integrating these epistemological principles into the reflection on the problem of subjective perception, the understanding becomes better equipped to overcome individual differences and achieve a more objective and unified comprehension of the world.

⁷ Intellectual honesty in opposition to bad faith.

Synthesis: Between Subjective Perception and the Quest for Shared Truth in the Empirical World

This chapter has explored the challenge posed by subjective perception and its implications for the conception of the empirical world. We first examined the nature of this world, considering it as an intersubjective space where individual monads share a common representation. This shared reality is characterized by a collective consensus, transcending individual perceptions to form a coherent framework for understanding and action.

Next, we highlighted the diversity introduced by individual subjectivity, which enriches the variety of interpretations but can also lead to misunderstandings. We acknowledged the importance of this diversity while emphasizing the necessity of shared truth in areas such as law, justice, and science.

Finally, we addressed the dialectical necessity of rational principles to unify this diversity of perspectives. Grounded in epistemology, these principles offer an objective framework for evaluating differing perspectives and advancing toward a deeper understanding of reality. Through dialogue and debate, ideas can be tested and more robust consensuses achieved, while recognizing the limits of any attempt to fully capture reality.

By integrating these epistemological principles into our reflection on the problem of subjective perception, the understanding becomes better equipped to transcend individual differences and achieve a more objective and unified comprehension of the world. It is in this dialectic between the diversity of perspectives and the pursuit of shared truth that the heart of the quest for harmony, knowledge, and understanding of reality resides.

III. Evil and Its Phenomenology

A. Discussion on Compulsive and Unreflective Reactions to Appearances

Analysis of Compulsive Behaviors in Response to Appearances

Compulsive behaviors in response to appearances often manifest as instinctive and immediate reactions, stemming from prior perceptions and judgments. These automatic responses are largely influenced by past experiences, preexisting beliefs, as well as societal thought patterns conditioned by notions such as the systematic response of violence without alternatives.

For example, when encountering someone who aligns with a particular stereotype, the mind may instantly associate this appearance with certain characteristics or intentions, without consciously reflecting on them. These impulsive reactions are often rooted in prejudices and superficial judgments rather than a rational and objective evaluation of the situation.

Moreover, compulsive behaviors in response to appearances can also be driven by survival instincts and innate emotional responses. For instance, a person may react compulsively and instinctively to an appearance that seems threatening or unfamiliar, adopting fight-or-flight behaviors without fully considering the consequences. Such compulsive reactions may also be exacerbated by emotional states such as fear, anxiety, or anger, which can distort judgment and lead to irrational actions.

During intense emotional states, it is often difficult to exhibit rationality and step back to properly evaluate the situation. In such a hypnotic state of reverie, doubt and reflection are evicted, and a doctrinal stance is imposed, amplifying compulsive reactions and preventing an objective assessment of the situation.

The Liberation of Consciousness: Reflection on the Influence of Prejudices and Stereotypes on Perceptions

Prejudices and stereotypes exert a total hold over perceptions and understanding of the world. When integrated into thought without being questioned, they can obscure the ability to perceive reality objectively. This influence can be so powerful that subjective opinions are confused with apodictic truths, thus restricting the capacity to adopt a critical viewpoint and challenge beliefs.

The rigidity of prejudices and stereotypes constitutes a significant obstacle to the pursuit of truth. It prevents exploration of new perspectives and challenges to false certainties. This rigidity also subjects truth to doubt due to the poor experience of imposture in opinions, which may be based on simplistic generalizations or erroneous judgments.

Plato illustrates this condition of rigid consciousness by comparing it to a slave, thereby symbolizing the imprisonment of the mind by prejudices and stereotypes. However, the liberation of reason can be achieved through the exercise of methodical doubt, as advocated by Descartes. This process of liberation begins with questioning perceptions and beliefs and involves deep introspection aimed at deconstructing pre-established thought patterns.

This approach to the liberation of reason can be compared to the ascent in Plato's cave allegory, where the individual leaves the world of appearances to access ultimate reality. However, this transformation of consciousness does not occur instantaneously; it requires time, reflection, and a constant commitment to truth. Paradoxically, the answers to the most profound questions do not always arise discursively but also through a state of suspension of psychology, where the mind is freed from its habitual constraints and can reconnect with the forgotten knowledge of consciousness⁸. This may occur during moments of rest, such as a nap or upon waking, or through practices like meditation and relaxation, which allow consciousness to open up to new perspectives.

In conclusion, it is undeniable that evil finds its roots in this hypnotic state induced by the rigidity of prejudices and stereotypes. When consciousness is trapped in this vicious cycle of rigid certainties, it becomes susceptible to being influenced and manipulated by harmful forces of animality.

⁸ Plato's Reminiscence in Meno

This mental captivity makes one vulnerable to ignorance, hatred, and intolerance, leading to harmful and destructive behaviors. By allowing oneself to be blinded by subjective perceptions, the risk is to perpetuate injustices and discrimination against others. It is therefore imperative to recognize the importance of questioning beliefs and cultivating a critical mind that allows consciousness to be freed from this hypnotic state.

By realizing the devastating impact of this mental captivity, it becomes possible to embark on the path of liberation of the mind. By embracing truth with courage and open-mindedness, it is possible to help eradicate the roots of evil and build a fairer and more harmonious future for all.

B. Evil and the Will

Freedom

After meticulously analyzing the various manifestations of evil and their roots, it becomes imperative to delve into the heart of the question of freedom, a necessary prerequisite for any in-depth exploration of the concepts of evil and will. The preceding chapters highlighted the psychological origin of evil, which is rooted in an inherent determinism within empirical consciousness, the latter being the product of its animal ancestors. Functioning like a mechanism, consciousness reacts to external and internal stimuli according to a pre-established logic of cause and effect. Thus, to achieve true freedom, consciousness must undertake an introspective journey, tracing the causal chains back to the first source, free of any cause. Without necessarily invoking a divinity as its foundation, it must rediscover its own essence. Consciousness must find its way back home and, no matter what happens, rediscover the key to reason⁹, thereby freeing itself from the constraints of the

⁹Inspired by the lyrics of the song "Corps" by Yseult:

"Où est le chemin de ma maison ?
Quoi qu'il advienne,
Je retrouverai les clés d'la raison."

"Where is the path to my home?
No matter what happens,

sensible world that keep it captive. This allows it to reconnect with its own internal laws, dictated by the structure of its reason.

By turning away from the sensible world, which constitutes the source of its captivity, consciousness gradually frees itself, recalling its own forgotten laws, those transmitted by its reason.

This process of self-withdrawal and emancipation from the sensible world is crucial for ascetic practice. It reveals itself to be a process of profound philosophical depth, drawing upon eidetic thought, wherein consciousness turns inward to discover its own fundamental truths. It is a process that requires radical questioning, as suggested by Husserl's emblematic statement: *"Whoever seeks true philosophy must, at least once in their life, retreat into themselves and attempt to overturn all established sciences, in order to reconstruct them anew."*

This process of introspection and reconstruction¹⁰ is essential for attaining a deeper understanding of the nature of freedom and the role of consciousness in constructing reality.

The Distinction Between Will and Intentionality

As a preliminary step in analyzing the concept of will, it is imperative to disentangle it from the concept of intentionality. Intentionality refers to the intuitive world presented to consciousness, rigidly imposed upon it. It appears to all consciousnesses as the pure intuitions of space and time. At its core, intentionality evokes the act of consciousness directed toward an object or a thought content—that is, the fact of having an intention directed toward something. In other words, thoughts, perceptions, and actions are always intentional, oriented toward or related to something specific.

For instance, when one's gaze falls upon an apple, this intentionality relates to the apple itself as the object of perception. From a metaphysical standpoint, the intentionality of consciousness encompasses the totality of existence, for it does not merely aim at the object but also bestows meaning and rules upon it, enabling it to exist within the shared space of perception held by the monads¹¹. Intentionality shapes experience in its entirety through the senses, determining all that is lived and felt in the world, for everything that is potentially conscious through intentionality

I will find the keys to reason again."

¹⁰ Edmund Husserl- éditions Vrin- page 18

¹¹ Intersubjectivity of monads - Consciousnesses co-create a shared universe of meaning

becomes an object of consciousness—including the divine and consciousness itself. There is no exterior to consciousness because it is the “All.”

Plato, in his work *Timaeus*, addresses the concept of the intentionality of consciousness through the metaphor of the Demiurge, a cosmological and metaphysical figure. According to Plato, the Demiurge is a divine artisan or creator, often described as a superior being or a god, who shapes the physical universe from preexisting materials. In *Timaeus*, the Demiurge is presented as the creator of the universe, responsible for the order and harmony of the visible and invisible worlds. He shapes the universe by imitating the eternal and perfect model of the ideal Forms or Ideas, thereby creating an ordered and rational cosmos. Consequently, the Demiurge is considered the intelligent cause that imposes order and structure upon the universe.

From the perspective of the will, it is important to grasp its distinction from intentionality. The will, in fact, is characterized by its dynamic aspect and its power of movement within the conscious world. Unlike intentionality, which primarily manifests in perception and cognition, the will unfolds in action and interaction with the external and internal empirical world. It operates by navigating the dimensions of space and time, influencing empirical phenomena such as material objects and observable events.

However, despite this apparent difference in their manifestations, the will and intentionality remain subject to the same rules of rationality. This means that their actions are guided by intelligible motives and logical principles, inscribed within the very fabric of human consciousness. Thus, even though the will acts within the material and tangible world, it remains rooted in the sphere of thought and consciousness, where the concepts of truth, morality, and purpose play a central role.

Consequently, the will relies on intentionality as an essential foundation for navigating the complexities of the given world. Intentionality provides the conceptual framework from which the will develops its plans and objectives. Furthermore, it also serves as a basis for evaluating the relevance and legitimacy of the will's choices and decisions.

Thus, the will, while it is the driving force of action, depends closely on intentionality to interpret and give meaning to lived experiences, aspirations, and ideals that guide existence.

The Will

In the chapter on freedom, we concluded that its act emerges not as a reaction to external causes but rather as a coherent expression of the intrinsic laws of consciousness. These laws, or archetypes, define the relevance of behavior, both toward oneself and others, that aligns appropriately with reality, as exemplified by the well-known golden rules. It is from these principles that practical consciousness deploys its will and the coherence of valid action, discerned through emotional feeling and Reason. It is the latter that serves as both the intermediary and the safeguard between the sacred and the profane, for it enables the realization that, behind all the confusing turmoil of the profane world, there lies the supreme, pure, and sacred Logic. Moreover, it allows for the marvelous awareness that Logic is not sacred as an idol that crushes, but sacred in the manner of an intimate friend of freedom, guiding thought and action toward good everywhere.

For example, reason allows us to understand that, based on these rational principles, the good one wishes for oneself is inseparable from the good of others. Factually, we are connected to others through internal sensitivity, as well-being depends on the experience of affection and suffering from the absence of it. The fact that the connection with others is an absolute necessity is demonstrated by the impossibility of achieving happiness in solitude, even with all imaginable material wealth.

However, the mere presence of others is not sufficient; for well-being to be complete, universal principles of coherence in mutual treatment must also be present.

This analysis reveals an evident truth: harmful action is neither equivalent to good nor the antagonist of valid action, but rather its pitfall, a consequence of ignorance of the fundamental principles of consciousness. Thus, authentic will manifests itself only in valid action, as it draws its source from these principles, which are in harmony with the fundamental structures of the universe.

In summary, this exploration leads to the recognition that true freedom resides in alignment with the laws of consciousness, guided by reason toward actions that promote collective well-being and respect universal moral principles. Harmful action is not its antagonistic equivalent but rather an error resulting from ignorance of the foundations of consciousness. Thus, a person who knows nothing of the science of the soul cannot truly commit evil voluntarily, as authentic will expresses itself in harmony with these principles, offering a path toward a more enlightened existence aligned with the essential laws of the universe.

From this coherence of consciousness, a dissociation arises between the being and their harmful behavior; resentment, hatred, and violence are thereby disarmed. When consciousness is illuminated in this way, these problematic sentiments fall into the

void of meaninglessness and become obsolete. Benefiting from this leap in consciousness, they are replaced—like a transfer of universal emotional charge—by compassion, understanding, and a profound sense of humanity toward the slave of evil.