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Forms of Life and Subjectivity

Rethinking Sartre's Philosophy



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Conclusion

The purpose of this book has been to provide a holistic concept that overcomes the separation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, between subjective identity or 'Self' and community identity or 'We'; when I say community I am referring mainly not to the social group but to the subjects with whom one shares a way of being and acting. Why seek to overcome this separation? The answer is that this separation, besides being unreal, seems to reflect a division between the sciences. On the one hand, the phenomenological tradition as well as the cognitive tradition and psychiatry have focused on the subject, his or her subjective world and his or her capacity to understand reality.¹ On the other hand, the social sciences by means of the empirical method have concentrated on the collective, that is, society, its uses and cultural traditions. The constitutive relationship between the subject and its collectivity has, however, received certain important contributions in the fields of anthropology and cultural phenomenology. Nonetheless, the relationship between the two has tended to be based on a blurred concept of culture with ill-defined limits, which is either reduced to individual experience without reference to a constitutive intersubjectivity, let alone a delimited community, or is understood as an abstract entity through

1 This affirmation can be qualified with the dialogue that I maintain in this final section with some authors attached to the phenomenological tradition, which proves that from Edmund Husserl onwards there is an effort to join subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Some authors consider the solipsism attributed to phenomenology as a prejudice. See Timothy Burns, 'Moran, Dermot and Szanto, Thomas (eds), *Phenomenology of Sociality: Discovering the "We"*, *Husserl Studies*, 32 (2016), 271–78 (p. 271). The latter does not detract from my statement that intersubjectivity is found in the subject's own consciousness. I clarify this in the following pages and conclude that the approach from the notion of the form of life as an ontological unit solves this problem, serving as a bridge between the subject and the world, consciousness and action.

which the subject is absorbed, constrained or blindly manipulated (see the Introduction to this book).

Pursuing this line of research, the question reached a conception that would allow us to understand the subjects as fundamentally free with respect to their collectivity (so that they are not mere products of it, to which they would transfer all responsibility), while at the same time understanding the latter to be in an intrinsic relationship with the subjects, to the point of constituting them in their being and subjective identity. To do this, it was essential to submit the concepts of society and culture to criticism. Both are concepts that are so broad and ambiguous that they end up having no specific meaning. That is why they had to be redefined. And their redefinition had to be called by a different name so as not to be confused with the other. I believe that the notion of the form of life as an ontological unit solves this problem. Not only does it allow us to understand society as a conjunction of various forms of life under a predominant one, and culture as that form of life that becomes institutionalized, but it also serves as a bridge between the subject and the world, individual consciousness and shared actions. Therefore, the main task I have set myself in this book is to ground an ontology of forms of life in the phenomenological experience of our intersubjective self as a shared mode of being and acting in the world.

In Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy we find the term 'form of life' used as the totality of possible uses of language or as a set of possible language games for a community.² This concept of a form of life, in dialogue with the phenomenological tradition and in particular with Edmund Husserl's life-world,³ has been defined, at first, as the totality of possible experiences for a subject in a particular community. With this definition of a form of life, I have come closer to Sartre's philosophy. From his phenomenological ontology and especially from his notion of the principle of the series, I have updated the definition of a form of life as the totality of the possible actions for a subject, taking into account that this totality constitutes the pre-reflective consciousness of the subject from which the series of possible actions emerge. Such a consciousness,

2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 226; David Kishik, *Wittgenstein's Form of Life* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 39.

3 Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970 [1936]), p. 142.

since following Martin Heidegger would be 'in the midst of the world',⁴ would share with that world its principle or essence, taking into account that *world* here I take as facts and actions of a form of life, the facticity of the subject: 'The concept of "facticity" implies that an entity "within-the-world" has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its "destiny" with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world.'⁵ So the subject takes from the world the essence of his consciousness or principle of being. Thus, according to Dan Zahavi, interpreting Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, that would be 'a world that moreover shouldn't be understood as the mere totality of positioned objects, or as the sum total of causal relations, but rather as the context of meaning that we are constantly situated within'.⁶

This has also been put in relation to Sartre's late notion of the universal singular, whereby each subject would be an incarnation of his world, in a historical and cultural sense. The notion of a form of life that I have arrived at in my preliminary research has allowed me to fuse the subject and his world into a single entity. The subject can be understood as the incarnation of a totalization defined by the series of its possible actions (or habits). This notion has allowed me to suggest a way to overcome the Sartrean dichotomy between consciousness and facticity,⁷ reinterpreting them as meaning and action, and the form of life as the totality of possible meaningful actions. So, in a third element, that is, in the form of life, both elements find a synthesis that contains them, assumes them and defines them, while they constitute and express the former. The concept of the form of life as an onto-phenomenological unit has allowed me to rethink Sartre's philosophy, and in dialogue with him to draw the consequences for the study of subjectivity.

4 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001 [1927]). For the 'fundamental structure in Dasein: Being-in-the-world' (*In der Welt Sein*), see pp. 65, 78, 79, 154.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

6 Dan Zahavi, 'Phenomenology', in *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy*, ed. by Dermot Moran (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 661–93 (p. 665).

7 For an analysis of Sartre's persistent dualism in *Being and Nothingness* and beyond in comparison with Merleau-Ponty's monism, see Mark Meyers, 'Liminality and the Problem of Being-in-the-World: Reflections on Sartre and Merleau-Ponty', *Sartre Studies International*, 14:1 (2008), 78–105.

1. With Sartre beyond Sartre

My rethinking of Sartre starts from the consideration of facticity or being-in-itself as human actions and deeds. The latter emerge from a consciousness, and therefore, do so with a meaning. They are meaningful actions. In other words, they are members of a series of possible actions and constitute part of a form of life. Thus, human facticity is never independent of consciousness and meaning, or what Sartre calls being-for-itself. The form of life as an enveloping totalization can only be being-in-itself-for-itself (see Chapter 1). In this way, every action stems from a form of life, and this implies that it is done with a meaning, even if it is pre-reflective. That is, actions are taken for granted, as the normal or natural way of behaving, by means of an attitude to which the actuality feature of what Husserl calls the natural attitude [*der natürlichen Einstellung*] can be extended:⁸ ‘As what confronts me, I continually find the one spatiotemporal actuality [*eine räumlich-zeitliche Wirklichkeit*] to which I belong like all other human beings who are to be found in it and who are related to it as I am. I find the “actuality” [*Wirklichkeit*] [...] as a factually existent actuality [*finde ich als daseiende*] and also accept it as it presents itself to me as factually existent [*wie sie sich mir gibt, auch als daseiende hin*].’⁹ In this sense, the actions we do and perceive are all meaningful actions—as they arise from a subject identified with a form of life—and as habitual actions or habits are shared by a community. It is its ‘general positing’ [*der General thesis*].¹⁰ This does not mean that we understand and identify with all the actions of our environment, but with all those that constitute our form of life, taking into account that, in our environment, there are subjects that incarnate other forms of life. That we understand them implies that we perform them normally or that we *feel* it is possible for us to perform them. But also, those actions that we experience confirm us in our form of life, that is, in our way of being and acting. On the contrary, if the actions are principled by a different form of life, we experience them as a threat to the way of being and acting with which we identify. This makes us consider them

8 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction*, Vol. II (The Hague, Boston and Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), §§ 27–33.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

as something incorrect or absurd. The 'actuality' [*Wirklichkeit*] that characterizes the natural attitude is therefore relative to a form of life.

To consider facticity to be always governed by an ontological principle, as part of a form of life, and therefore, as being-in-itself-for-itself, has proven to be an important turning point in the discussion on other aspects and themes of Sartrean philosophy. This shift, on the other hand, has been suggested in an incipient way in some of Sartre's texts, in which it is suggested that facticity can open up new possibilities for the subject, which implies an influence on the latter by facticity. However, this idea is questioned by his own philosophical conception of consciousness as freedom.

The turning point has been to put into brackets that, as Sartre argues, consciousness or being-for-itself surpasses reality or being-in-itself—which is based on the for-itself emerging from the in-itself, which is its foundation¹¹—to emphasize that in the world of human affairs, the in-itself emerges from the for-itself (when the in-itself is understood in terms of action and habits) and is sustained by the latter. That is, the daily actions and behaviours of a community emerge from the pre-reflective consciousness of a totalization whose principle defines a way of being and acting. Or, in other words, a particular image of what it is to be human.

I have suggested that this turning point can be considered as such when it is understood under the notion of a form of life. Regarding the opening up of possibilities through the creation of facticity,¹² I have analyzed it within the paradigm of ontological conversion. For the creation of facticity means exposing the subject to actions whose governing principle is different or opposite to that with which the subject identifies. The latter deny the subject in his being, and it is the condition of possibility of change through doubt and the eventual understanding of the impossibility of his being, which triggers the conversion. I have studied the latter under the aspects of social conditioning and imitation. To do so, I have explored the way in which imitation works to unite

11 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956 [1943]): 'A being which contingent as being-in-itself, would be the foundation of its own nothingness' (p. 80).

12 Juliette Simont, 'Sartrean Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. by Christina Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 178–212 (p. 193).

and confirm in their identity the subjects of a community that shares a form of life or anthropological image. I have tried to show that subjects only imitate those behaviours with which they identify. And that if the latter does not occur, neither does imitation. In imitation, the subjects merely reproduce or play out the behaviour imposed on them. The consideration of the form of life as an ontological unit is what has allowed me to analyze these aspects in dialogue with Sartre. It has been the window from which this book has looked at the relationship between individuals and their human environment, as well as their subjectivity.

The consideration of the form of life as in-itself-for-itself, or the totality of actions with meaning for a subject/community, puts us in the position of questioning whether facticity is something merely exterior that constrains us or some inner element from which we depart, such as character.¹³ Facticity as part of a form of life, can either affirm and sustain the integration of the subjects into their form of life, in a gradual process of greater identification with their principle, or it can, on the contrary, deny and prevent the subjects from realizing themselves by integrating into their form of life. The latter happens when the facticity that surrounds them—in the middle of which are the subjects—is principled by an opposite form of life. In this last case, the constriction of movements, or even the imposition of behaviours with which the subjects do not identify themselves, means the denial and rejection of their ontological principle. That is, if their freedom is not denied, the product of their freedom is denied, which implies the negation of the subjects themselves. This has been exemplified by the Jewish form of life, that of intellectuals, peasants, artists, and so on. Such a denial is, in a word, the denial of one's own subjectivity.

The discussion with Sartre on this aspect has involved other authors such as Simone de Beauvoir, and other issues such as freedom and authenticity. Understanding the world of the subject as a form of life also sheds light on these issues. Because the actions of the subjects arise from their consciousness, they are performed freely and spontaneously. Authenticity is not acting as if one is nothing, that is, detached from any ontological foundation and deterministic attitude, which, according to Sartre, leads to bad faith. Authenticity would be acting freely and

13 For a discussion of character as facticity, see Jonathan Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 16–29.

spontaneously in relation to the being that the subjects have given to themselves. And, for the same reason, authenticity is to change behaviour if the subjects experience a crisis in which they apprehend their previous form of life as impossible or undesirable. This seems a small twist, but its consequences are quite significant. First of all, according to this, the subjects, although free, impose on themselves a way of being and acting, which from that moment on determines their habits, feelings and values, that is, their subjectivity. Secondly, such self-determination is authentic, because otherwise we would be calling 'inauthentic' the way of being and acting with which the subjects identify themselves, and therefore, with which they freely express their being. Thirdly, subjects, if essentially free and therefore without a specific human nature, endow themselves with a particular being. And with that endowment, a new world appears before them. An individual who does not give himself being pre-reflectively cannot be a subject, because without totality there are no parts. Being is the totality of meaningful actions that are made dependent on a particular image of human being. Every subject, in order to be, identifies with an image of human being or anthropical image. Therefore, it cannot be said with Sartre, that we are not what we are, and we are, what we are not.¹⁴ The latter implies an essentiality of non-being, something that goes against his own philosophy: 'despite his desire to accord nothingness a kind of unreal purity or negativity, it nonetheless functions as a "something"'.¹⁵ From this ontology of forms of life, we must rectify this thought by stating instead that, in any case, we are what we are, and while we are, we cannot be otherwise. But we must not forget that our being is what we have imposed ourselves to be, because we have identified with the form of life that was possibly incarnated by the individuals in our environment, or perhaps only one of the individuals, of whom we say that he left his mark on us. This does not mean that we are not the being that we freely have self-imposed. It only means that we self-imposed a different one before—and between then and now we simply are the possibility to be something else. As

14 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. The quote is specifically about for-itself as the consciousness of the subject: 'Yet the for-itself is. It is, we may say, even if it is a being which is not what it is and which is what it is not' (p. 79). In *L'être et le néant*: 'le pour-soi est. Il est, dira-t-on, fût-ce à titre d'être qui n'est pas ce qu'il est et qui est ce qu'il n'est pas' (p. 115).

15 Meyers, 'Liminality and the Problem of Being-in-the-World', p. 82.

being is to incarnate a form of life, to be different is to have incarnated a different form through ontological conversion. It does not mean that essentially we are *nothing*, in the Sartrean sense. It means that our being is always at the same time the possibility of being another. In fact, it is only because we are *something* that we can be different.

Thus the ontological notion of the form of life has made possible a new understanding. We are always *someone* with a particular way of being and acting.¹⁶ As an incarnation of a form of life, we are always a shared consciousness; that is, a totalization shared by all the subjects of the community or co-subjects with whom we equally identify. And furthermore, a shared way of acting emerged out of that consciousness in its totalization. Therefore, our consciousness has content, namely, the series of possible actions determined by the ontological principle that drives the totalization. Conversion, as some religious theorists and mystics have asserted, for example J. Krishnamurti, means an elimination of the previous consciousness as a whole and the creation of a new—for them, higher—consciousness,¹⁷ the beginning of a new totalization. Krishnamurti put it as follows: ‘The content makes consciousness. Therefore, when there is total transformation of the content there is a different kind of—I won’t call it consciousness—a different level altogether.’¹⁸

One might ask, however, whether this anthropical image that constitutes consciousness as a whole might not be a kind of recovery of Husserl’s transcendental ego, but extended to the community. This is an aspect that I have not examined throughout this book, and which deserves separate study. If, in the first instance, it could be said that both aspire to reveal the foundation of subjectivity, certainly it would not be a mere restitution of the transcendental ego. The latter responds to Husserl’s attempt, at least in his *The Crisis of European Sciences*

16 Thus, we cannot be *nothing* and, in fact, we are always *something*. Our nothingness, in any case, is our possibility of being and being as possibility. Its negation as a possibility of being determines our particular being, although its negation as a mere possibility (being as possibility) would result in our impossibility of being at all, our ceasing to exist. We are necessary possibilities or, to put it another way, possibilities that we have made necessary for us.

17 Gretchen Siegler, ‘The Process of Conversion: A Transformation of Consciousness’, *Anthropology of Consciousness* 4:3 (1993), 10–13.

18 J. Krishnamurti, *Total Freedom: The Essential Krishnamurti* (Krishnamurti Foundation of America, 1996), p. 232.

and *Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), to base the life-world on a transcendental totality. That totality would be the condition of possibility of all subjective experiences and even of science itself:

It is the motif of enquiring back [*das Motiv des Rückfragens*] into the ultimate source of all the formations of knowledge, the motif of the knower's reflecting upon himself and his knowing life [*des Sichbesinnens des Erkennenden auf sich selbst und sein erkennendes Leben*] in which all the scientific structures that are valid for him occur purposefully, are stored up as acquisitions.¹⁹

Therefore, this transcendental ego would constitute the origin and possibility of human knowledge, because 'Husserl's (transcendental) phenomenology [...] has often been seen as an attempt to thematize the pure and invariant conditions of cognition.'²⁰ In this last sense, the anthropical image is at a remarkable distance from the transcendental ego. To begin with, the foundation is not knowledge but practice. However, in the sense of being the condition of possibility of human experiences, or of the life-world, one must recognize their similarities to each other. Some commentators discuss whether Husserl contemplated the possibility of different life-worlds and not just one,²¹ and in his last writings, of course, he referred to a transcendental intersubjectivity. However, 'despite Husserl's emphasis in the *Crisis* on the communal, intersubjective life-world, he never abandons his commitment to the *ontological priority of the transcendental ego* as that which constitutes world and hence has primacy over the world'.²² In the latter case, the anthropical image would have a similar function as an enabler of the experiences of particular forms of life. But, for that very reason, the transcendental ego would be above the anthropical image insofar as it would determine the latter as the hard core or essence of the human being. The anthropical image would not be a transcendental ego, but one of the possible transcendental egos, that is, one of the possible

19 Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, p. 98.

20 Zahavi, 'Phenomenology', p. 664.

21 Dermot Moran, *Husserl's Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 201–03.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 230. For a discussion on this topic, see also, Julia Jansen, 'Transcendental Philosophy and the Problem of Necessity in a Contingent World', *Metodo: International Studies in Phenomenology and Philosophy*, Special Issue, 1 (2015), 47–80.

images of human beings, which implies determining their ontological principle and constitutive habits.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the anthropical image is not strictly a transcendental ego. The former is an image of what is conceived as proper to human beings by a community, and therefore, the sum of the possibilities of human behaviour. For this reason, it is aligned with Sartre's criticism of Husserl.²³ The ego emerges in the reflective consciousness. In contrast, the anthropical image constitutes the pre-reflective consciousness, as a whole from which the 'I' or ego emerges. That is, the first is the condition of possibility of the second. For the recognition of oneself ('I') presupposes that totalization which one incarnates. Thus, in 'I am I', the second 'I' is the concreteness of what in the first is a set of possibilities on which one reflects. These possibilities are a particular framework in which the 'I' appears to stand out, as the one who acts in the world in a particular way. I become aware of myself as an actualization of a shared way of being and acting with which there has been a pre-reflective identification. Without the latter, there would be no 'I' acting in the world. The 'I' is an actualization of what I take as belonging to human beings in terms of praxis—from which attitudes, emotions and values derive. And for this reason, it implies a reflective consciousness about that whole.

What I said above and discussed during the book leads me to admit two presumably contradictory propositions. On the one hand, consciousness is free, in Sartre's sense, and has no content of its own. On the other hand, consciousness has contents that it gives to itself and that come from its being in the world. The contents are the series of possible actions governed by a unitary principle. These contents shape consciousness, but they are not exclusive contents of consciousness because they are in the world, i.e., the behaviours of the community. The anthropical image, as a totalization, principles the behaviours and therefore it is inside and outside; it is consciousness and it is *its* world. The freedom of consciousness, as it has been said throughout the book, is committed to an anthropical image, which is constituted as the subject's way of being and acting and, therefore, determines the praxical

23 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness* [*La transcendance de l'Ego: Esquisse d'une description phénoménologique*], trans. by Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Hill & Wang, 1991 [1957]). The original French version appeared in *Recherches Philosophiques*, VI (1936–37).

images that emerge from it and those that it recognizes with meaning in the world (genuine experiences, or *Erfahrung*). These remarks on the anthropical image definitely move it away from Husserl's transcendental ego. And on the other hand, its constitution as subjectivity, that is, as the ensemble of possible contents of consciousness, separates me from Sartre. The anthropical image is both identity—possible contents regarding human behaviour in the world—and unity—ensemble or totalization regarding a constitutive principle.²⁴ For consciousness and *our* world, that which we share with a community—as created by our actions—are one and the same thing: a form of life. And this is why changes in one affect the other.

These last lines show how the notion of a form of life also suggests the possibility of overcoming the Sartrean dichotomy of the individual and the other or the social group. It is no longer an intuition of intersubjectivity through the individual's own consciousness—as in the example of the jealousy-motivated peep-hole observer, which implies something to see behind the door and the object of someone's jealousy—but that intersubjectivity is based on a shared way of being and acting.²⁵ This makes the Sartrean notion of life projects exclusively an individual phenomenon. In contrast, the form of life as a totalization is based on an ontological principle that guides the series of actions. And while this principle is that of a particular way of being human, it has an intersubjective foundation. In other words, my being human depends on the fact that others are also human, and being human implies being and acting in that particular way.

The totalization in which the subject is integrated is the same as that in which the other co-subjects are integrated. And therefore, the actions, feelings and values that emerge from it are equally shared. In fact, it is in the actions and expressions of the subjects that totalization is apprehended. Subjects identify with it, but at the same time they separate themselves from the subjects of the other totalizations. The latter was hardly analyzed by Sartre, who thought that totalization was historical and in it all individuals from all social groups were

24 For an accurate analysis of similarities and differences between Sartre's and Husserl's conceptions of the Ego, see Roland Breeur, 'Bergson's and Sartre's Account of the Self in Relation to the Transcendental Ego', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 9:2 (2001), 177–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672550110035899>.

25 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 259–60.

integrated. By separating communities according to their form of life, as a series of actions governed by a unitary principle, the subjectivity of each community stands out above that amorphous mass that is culture and historical epoch, which Sartre makes incarnate in each individual. Thus, the form of life opens up the way not only for the analysis of limited communities within society or culture, but also allows us to see the struggle between forms of life to persist in their being and become universal, which affects one's own subjectivity. The latter enters into a situation of resistance-assimilation with those around it, which once again shows the plurality of ways of being and acting. The latter distances itself from notions such as Hannah Arendt's 'actualized plurality', in which social life is considered a plurality of perspectives on a common world:

Actualized plurality, explicated phenomenologically, means the plurality of irreducible perspectives on a common world as the interacting articulation and disclosure of each one's being-a-perspective, and at the same time, the constant actualization and establishment of a space of appearance and, thus, of a common world, which is the medium and background of this disclosure.²⁶

This description loses sight of the character of struggle between forms of life, which are not mere perspectives on a shared world, but rather irreconcilable positions that create and impose a world of their own by assimilating other forms. Moreover, the influence of the dialectical relationship between subjectivities seems to be lost sight of, since my subjectivity is also the way I persist in my own being and resist other forms. The common world would in any case be a common boundary, within which communities persist and seek to universalize themselves. It is the form of life that triumphs that creates a common subjectivity, from which individual idiosyncrasies emerge as variations. It is this common subjectivity that becomes universal as a human being's way of being and acting. All empathy is strictly reduced to that between co-subjects, contrary to Edith Stein's broader concept of empathy, which 'is for her an experience of foreign consciousness in general'.²⁷ If this

26 Sophie Loidolt, 'Hannah Arendt's Conception of Actualized Plurality', in *Phenomenology of Sociality: Discovering the 'We'*, ed. by Thomas Szanto and Dermot Moran (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 42–55 (p. 53).

27 James Risser, 'Locating Shared Life in the "Thou": Some Historical and Thematic Considerations', in *The Phenomenology of Sociality: Discovering the We*, ed. by

seems unreal to us at first, it is because we think from a universalized subjectivity such as capitalism. The lack of empathy with other forms of life on the part of the hegemonic form throughout history, from the expansion of the great empires and the colonizations of past centuries to the contemporary perspectives on immigrants and refugees, is proof of this insight. There is no empathy for the Other (who is outside of our anthropical image), there is denial and assimilation.²⁸ That is, there would only be empathy when there is assimilation. As a consequence, the broadening of empathy seems to require the universalization of a form of life, making those on the margins integrate as subjects, ceasing to be what they were, that is, seeking their ontological conversion.²⁹

Thomas Szanto and Dermot Moran (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 29–41. See also Edith Stein, *The Collected Works*, Vol. III: *On the Problem of Empathy* (Washington: ICS Publications, 1989). Empathy, for her, includes the notion of socio-communicative or social acts (*soziale Akte, soziale Stellungnahmen*), such as promises, orders or requests; see Thomas Szanto and Dermot Moran, 'Introduction: Empathy and Collective Intentionality: The Social Philosophy of Edith Stein', *Human Studies*, 38:4 (2015), 445–61. However, the latter can only have an effect between subjects, i.e., between members of a community, with whose form of life they identify and in which they are integrated. An effective promise is not extended to/required from members whose form of life is different, because their values, feelings and habits are ignored: unless it is assumed that they are subjects, without being subjects. The latter I have shown to be an attempt at assimilation to one's own form of life, putting both forms in a situation of assimilation-resistance.

- 28 This is even more evident in the case of emotions. The subjectivity of one form of life is different from that of another and that means that its feelings and emotional expression are different. This issue has been explored by the historians of emotions. See Peter Stearns and Susan Matt, eds, *Doing Emotions History* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014). A paradigmatic case has been for decades the form of emotional expression of the Chinese people, who, precisely because they do not express their emotions like Westerners, have been considered as emotionless: see Norman Kutcher, 'The Skein of Chinese Emotions History', in *Doing Emotions History*, ed. by Stearns and Matt, pp. 57–73. Emotions such as Japanese *amae* are also difficult to translate into the hegemonic Western form of life. *Amae* is 'a propensity to 'depend or presume upon another's love'. See Robert C. Solomon, ed., *Thinking About Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 39.
- 29 In this regard, the bibliography on the conquest of America is interesting, especially Enrique Dussel's book, *1492: El encubrimiento del otro: Hacia el origen del mito de la modernidad* (Madrid: Nueva Utopía, 1992), in which he explains precisely how the conquering Europeans assimilated to their own form of life what was foreign and 'inhuman' to them, facilitating the conversion of the natives (here 'assimilation' is used in the sense given to that term in this book, that is, the negation of a different form and the posit of it as part of the way it enters into a situation of resistance). Dussel calls this the 'encubrimiento' ('concealment'), which is opposed to the recognition and acceptance of a different form of life. This recognition, from the ontological phenomenology presented in this book, would imply a conversion of

2. Phenomenological Ontology and Subjectivity

The essentialist and universalist study of the human being proper to philosophical anthropology and, for some, to transcendental phenomenology,³⁰ takes for ‘form’ what corresponds to ‘life’, and for ‘life’ what corresponds to ‘form’. Life refers to the vital conditions shared by all human beings, such as that we are born, die, feel, act, value, identify with a group, etc. Form refers to when and how we are born and die, what we feel, how we act, what we value, with which group we identify, and so on. The anthropological philosophy with its Enlightenment roots takes the form of the human being as universal, and life as something particular in relation to diverse peoples. Thus Kantian anthropology can attribute to the subject the hypostatic traits of rationality, morality, freedom, emotions, and so on. Such traits would constitute the form of every human being, so morality, freedom, emotions and rationality are univocal attributes. That is, there is only one way of being moral, free, rational, and so on. On the contrary, the phenomenological ontology takes life as universal, what Sartre calls the ‘condition of human beings’: ‘What men have in common is not a “nature” but a condition, that is, an ensemble of limits and restrictions: the inevitability of death, the necessity of working for a living, of living in a world already inhabited by other men.’³¹ And it takes the form as particular, insofar as it is only the universal form of a particular community. A philosophical anthropology such as the Enlightenment that reverses the terms can only lead to a homogenization of the life of the various communities. Such homogenization is proper to a form of life that has become hegemonic and imposes its image of human being, that is, its form, on all others.

Therefore, I have defended throughout this book that subjectivity, i.e., the attitudes, habits, feelings and values of the subjects, is relative to a form of life—which is not simply interchangeable with culture or

the subject, not a situation of acceptance and coexistence, because every attempt at denial is followed by one of resistance, and every form of life is a denial of the others as a posited way of being human.

30 For a qualification to this common claim, on the other hand, see Zahavi, ‘Phenomenology’, p. 663.

31 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. by George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1976 [1944]), pp. 42–43.

society. This, on the one hand, rules out its extension to a universal human being, since subjectivity is rather specific to each community. But, on the other hand, it also rejects that subjectivity is an essentially individual and differentiating phenomenon, for the subject shares with his community the form of life that he incarnates. This has led me to analyze forms of life both through a single subject, as in the case of Charles Baudelaire's, and through a whole community, even a social class, such as the middle class or the aristocracy. However, I have not stopped to examine the idiosyncratic differences that the form of life incarnated in one subject might exhibit with respect to another subject. The reason for not having pursued such a procedure is that the time was not right. In this book, as I said above, I have set out to define, show and characterize the forms of life that the subjects incarnate and share. Making a comparison between different individuals in order to detect idiosyncratic variations requires another space, and indeed another motivation. The current book is not about the study of an individual subject but about the form of life incarnated. The variations on the form are understood a priori as proof of the existence of the form. However, as I say, a further approach could (and should) show these variations. The advantage of a later study is that the variations are not diluted as isolated individual characteristics or, worse, as individual entities outside the form of life they share and incarnate. The latter would be their condition of possibility, and therefore can be considered a transcendental notion proper to phenomenology, for

this move from a straightforward metaphysical or empirical investigation of objects to an investigation of the very dimension of manifestation, i.e. to an exploration of the very framework of meaning and intelligibility that makes any such straightforward investigation possible in the first place, calls for a transcendental stance quite unlike the one needed in the positive sciences.³²

But at the same time, as long as the form of life is constituted as the facticity that surrounds the subject and to which he is exposed, it would also be an existential notion, that is, verifiable in observable facts. And this in the sense that Maurice Merleau-Ponty affirmed: 'inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly

³² Zahavi, 'Phenomenology', p. 671.

outside myself [*le monde est tout au dedans et je suis tout hors de moi*].³³ Therefore, the form of life as a notion reveals the indissoluble connection that exists between our actions and the anthropical image or ontological principle with which we identify. Both require parallel studies, from what we do to what we are (to what we have become), which is to reveal its framework and structure as a condition of possibility; and from what we are to what we do (to what we aspire to be), which is to ratify the unity and meaning of the actions that constitute the world in which we are (the form of life as meaningful facticity).

What I have dealt with in part in this book is to show not the internal variations but the oppositions with respect to other forms of life, especially with the hegemonic form of life, and how the relationship between them is given in situations of assimilation-resistance. This relationship seems very exclusive, and I could be asked if there is not another possible relationship between the forms of life, for example, a relationship of cooperation.

If by cooperation we mean resisting the same hegemonic form together, then we could grant some cooperation. But it must be borne in mind that such cooperation would already be absorbed in a relationship of resistance-assimilation. And therefore, the opposing forms of life would have their own ends, even if they coincide in resisting. In fact, to resist is for each one to insist on its own ends, to persist in its being. On the other hand, cooperation takes place between co-subjects of the same form of life; such cooperation must be understood as a free and spontaneous activity with respect to a common end. Co-subjects cooperate in persisting in their being. If their aim is to live austere in a collective life where goods are distributed in common, cooperation will be both to prevent individualistic behaviour and to escape from the maximization and accumulation of goods. And if the aim is individual economic maximization, to cooperate will be to maintain the possibilities of individual maximization through rules, norms and referees. The subject or community that is driven by a principle of maximization that is not individual, but collective or individual of state, will not cooperate with respect to the end of individual economic maximization. On the contrary, they will enter into a situation of resistance-assimilation.

33 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002 [1945]), p. 474. In *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 467.

The latter is consistent with the line of research carried out in this book. I have shown that the subjectivities of the forms of life analyzed are not only diverse among them but also opposite. Thus, they deny each other in their ontological principles, and therefore in their being. The subjects of the artistic form of life experience themselves as being deprived by a world where the hegemonic form of life does not allow them to express their being. That deprivation translates into existential anguish or *Spleen*, and possibly into doubt about the very possibility of their being. We have exemplified this with Baudelaire's subjectivity through his poems, letters and diaries. In the same way, Baudelaire's attitude of complacency in being useless to capitalist society is an attitude of resistance in itself. Intellectuals, as has been shown, by the same time, also resisted the hegemonic capitalist form of life which threatened to assimilate them to its principle of economic maximization. Their resistance was not so much uselessness as the assimilation of other individuals to their form of life, which was based on knowledge and the formation of character. This resistance, however, kept them socially marginalized in the academic domain of universities and schools where, as it has been said, their form of life became universal in a certain community. With them, the figure of the intellectual was created. This figure could even be identified with later writers such as Antonio Gramsci, Walter Benjamin and Sartre. This could lead us to study in a future investigation how these intellectuals and others are assimilated, or enter into a situation of assimilation-resistance, by forms of life such as those propagated by communism as state capitalism (or individual maximization of the state) or collectivism (collective maximization).

Assimilations such as the one mentioned above have been exemplified by the absorption of the austere form of life typical of peasants and artisans by the capitalist form of economic maximization of labour force, time, family, etc. In these assimilations what is shown is the change of subjectivity and, subsidiarily, social change. I have insisted that the change of subjectivity is experienced as an identity crisis, since it is an ontological conversion. In this sense, I have extended the concept of conversion in keeping with the existentialist concept. One could ask, however, whether the change of subjectivity is always due to an assimilation by another form of life. The answer would be yes on the one hand, and no on the other. In other words, every conversion, by definition,

is the passage from one form of life to another, and therefore the subject that is converted is assimilated by the form of life in which he begins to integrate. The question would be whether this assimilation comes from a relationship of resistance-assimilation. We have seen examples in which subjects have understood the impossibility of their form of life and the need or demand for change, but we have not analyzed the context or situation in which this demand has occurred. In those cases, such as conversion to a form of religious life, it is presumable that exposure to that form has conditioned the conversion of the subject. Other paradigmatic cases have shown that conversion depended on the denial of one's own form of life by itself, in the sense that in a given situation the subject understands that pursuing his ends leads him precisely to embrace opposite ends: the licentious person becomes a spiritual man, the honest man becomes dishonest, and the criminal becomes a hero. These changes, if analyzed from the perspective reached at the end of the book, in a moment of meditation after the journey travelled, can also be understood as a certain situation of resistance-assimilation; certainly not between forms of life in contact, but between the subject's form of life and its negative constituent. So, every subject who maximizes flees from an austere life, and those who live for God by leading a religious life, flee from living selfishly by maximizing their own benefits, and those who live artistically by self-expression of their aesthetic ideals, flee from the life of mechanical reproducibility and the representation/copying of reality. The examples could be extended, but these are sufficient. The important thing is to remark that the passage from one form of life to its opposite, from which one flees, is also a certain assimilation. In this case, it is the subjects themselves who, faced with the dissatisfaction of their own form of life, come to understand the impossibility of continuing to live in that way and seek a new possibility in their constitutive opposite.

If conversion is experienced by the subjects as a crisis in terms of the impossibility of their way of being and acting, I have insisted that this impossibility gives way to the understanding of a new possibility, which is the form of life that denies the subject. But this denial of the subject's being when it is conditioned by a form of life with which it comes into contact is understood as the affirmation of the opposite principle. The subject is integrated into a new form of life, with a different principle, and does so from the opposite of his previous principle. We have given

as an example the artist, who, denied in his being, integrates himself into the capitalist life as an economic maximizer through the opposite of his artistic form (the artistic self-expression of some ideals), that is, through the reproducibility of art and the representation of the environment. This can be questioned from the natural attitude, that is, from the one that stays away from the conditions of possibility of change. The natural attitude could make us say that when the subjects convert or leave their form of life, firstly they do not change ontologically, and secondly, even if their subjectivity changes, there is a continuity with respect to their previous one. It would eventually be the same person, the same subject with acquired traits. In this interpretation, the core that would be maintained through the possible changes would be a kind of substance or object. Hence, this can be considered the interpretation of a natural attitude towards the conversion of the subject and his subjectivity. In this attitude, what is hidden or remains hidden is the condition of possibility of such changes and the framework of meanings in which they occur. The subjects are not complete and closed entities but a totality of possible actions that they have given themselves. That is to say, a form of life. If conversion is obtained, there are not just mere changes over a complete entity or core, but the whole subject changes. The latter is transformed by giving himself a new way of being and acting. That is, by giving himself a new totalization in which to integrate. The transcendental structure is the form of life, which makes both subjectivity and conversion possible. In that sense, and only in that sense (for this would lead us to the disputed debate of the 'causa sui', which we will have to leave for another investigation), the subject transforms himself, as an incarnation of the in-itself-for-itself, corresponding to a change in the series of possible actions determined by an ontological principle.

With this book, therefore, I wanted to contribute to the study of subjectivity as experiences and attitudes determined by a form of life, freely and spontaneously adopted. Subjectivity thus understood is a challenge with respect to cognitive theories such as enactivism, in which the individual and his or her cognitive capacities tend to predominate, but it also puts to the test the theories of libertarian authors in the debate on free will, including Sartre himself, with whom I have been in dialogue throughout the book in his various themes. If Sartre's subjectivity consists of how the subject responds to facticity, in terms

of existential psychoanalysis, I have argued that subjectivity is how the subject incarnates and lives his form of life, including the negations by other forms with which he comes into contact. Some of the necessary possibilities of his form of life are found in the subject's experience, and therefore he could never have a spontaneous and free experience that was not a possibility determined by it. Here I have insisted that 'determined' refers to the possibilities necessary to that form of life. That is, it cannot be done, valued or felt in the way that in another form of life is considered necessary. The final equation can be put as follows: my form of life is my subjectivity. This could be questioned from the perspective of individual idiosyncrasy. But, as I have discussed above, and it has been addressed throughout the book, the individual constitutes variations on a common framework. Without that framework, there are no variations, and in fact, those variations, if pointed out and shown, would only prove the necessity of the framework. They add nothing significant about subjectivity, which is not individual, but that of a potential community, their way of acting and being human. It has been suggested that the conception of irreconcilable and irreducible individuality and 'compulsory individualisation', such as Jim McGuigan indicates, is typical of neoliberalism,³⁴ and which, I add, promotes the solitude and isolation proper to objects, and is already the conception of a reified and highly integrated subject in his form of life. Not to recognize it in this way is to hide the fact that in their subjectivity they are motivated by the same ontological principle and that they pursue the same end. As reified subjects they incarnate their principle more perfectly. This creates the illusion of believing themselves to be exclusive and unique when only the universal subjectivity of their form of life is being expressed through them. In any case, it is the variations that individualize, but, as I say, this individualization only confirms a common subjectivity, which implies common actions, feelings, values and attitudes. Variations should not be confused with subjectivity.

3. In Dialogue with Contemporary Philosophy

I have explored the form of life as an onto-phenomenological unit, its structure, constitutive and inter-relational features, in constant dialogue

34 Jim McGuigan, 'The Neoliberal Self', *Culture Unbound*, 6:1 (2014), 223–40 (p. 233).

with Sartre and, although to a lesser extent, with other members of the phenomenological tradition. In the same way, in specific aspects I have maintained a critical dialogue with other authors and perspectives of contemporary philosophy, thus submitting my analysis to contrast and validation. I would like to highlight, in this section, some of the most significant debates held in the book for the understanding and scrutiny of the form of life and the phenomenological ontology that derives from it.

I have discussed the contemporary trend called new realism. The authors who gather around this label, such as Markus Gabriel and Maurizio Ferraris, uphold an ontology by which both objects and ideas, images and institutions, are all facts. Thus, they blur any line between ontology and epistemology, since the object itself and the object experienced or known by the subject are both equally facts: 'Thoughts about facts are just more facts.'³⁵ This, among other objectives and (in his opinion) advantages, has that of avoiding idealism as much as constructivism.³⁶ For the possibility of a significant distinction between the Kantian or neo-Kantian thing in-itself and the experience or phenomenon is cancelled. In other words, they make a clean sweep. From the phenomenological ontology of forms of life, first of all, it cannot be admitted that there is no difference at all between an action as an object in the world and the anthropical image or principle that determines it as its condition of possibility. The latter, as a praxical image, makes action possible. But it is not an object. It is rather what makes the object exist. The distinction is not trivial at all. For to make my praxical image an object, that is, a fact, is to reify the subject's consciousness, and therefore the subject as well. The confusion that arises from considering that there are only facts is that of erasing the distinction between the being-for-itself and the being-in-itself. The form of life does not erase this difference but shows it by forming an organic unity of meaning. That I am my actions, does not mean that I am just an object, but rather, that I am a form of life as a subjectivity constituted by my experience and my actions. The form of life as an ontological unit I have suggested allows us to understand as a meaningful whole what for the new realism are isolated and unconnected facts. On another level, the

³⁵ Markus Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), p. 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

consideration of the 'facts' of both an action and the experience of it by the subjects fragments and questions the possibility of the identification of the subject with a community with which he shares a form of life. If all are independent and fragmentary facts, the fact that there is a world as a whole is rejected.³⁷ But if there is no world as a whole, not even the totalization in which the subject is integrated, only the absurd can reign (without the whole there are no parts), which does not explain why we identify with certain communities and reject others, and why in acting as we do, we do so because it makes sense for us.

In dialogue with the theorists of free will, I have argued for a compatibilistic approach in relation to forms of life. If the subjects give themselves a way of being and acting with which they identify, by giving it to them freely and spontaneously, that is, in a pre-reflective but free way, they impose on themselves a form of life that from that moment on becomes necessary. This is what I have analyzed as a contingent necessity. It was not necessary for the subjects to be and act in that way until they imposed it on themselves as such. For example, the one who has given himself the artistic form of life and identifies with it, is determined to follow its ontological principle and to act like the artists, pursuing in every action the self-expression of an ideal. A number of possibilities for action have necessarily been given. This is in contradiction with those who argue that for freedom to be obtained it is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition that the subject has alternative options.³⁸ For freedom is not about choosing between two options, but doing and being what one identifies with. I am no longer free when I am given a choice between studying History or Economic Science, if what I want is to study Philosophy. The one who can do what he would do even if he has hundreds of alternatives is free. And the one who, having such alternatives, is not allowed to do what he wants, is not free. The form of life is freely self-imposed and in this way its necessity is also sustained. From this point of view, I have defended that freedom would not be based exclusively on the actual causes (AC) of action either, as Carolina Sartorio has argued.³⁹ To sum up, I will take the actual causes as 'reasons

37 *Ibid.*

38 Carlos Moya, 'Free Will and Open Alternatives', *Disputatio*, 9:45 (2017), 167–91 (p. 169).

39 Carolina Sartorio, 'Actual Causes and Free Will', *Disputatio*, 9:45 (2017), 147–65.

for action'. Therefore, according to Sartorio, the more reasons subjects have for their action, the freer they are. And when there are no reasons but mere impulses or passions, the subject will be less free. For example, the addict who takes drugs does so less freely than the one who takes them on a certain occasion for various reasons.⁴⁰ From the ontology of forms of life, this scheme is reversed. The reasons given are always a posteriori, therefore they cannot be taken as reliable guides. In fact, the question would be that of the anthropological image or form of life with which the subjects identify themselves. Thus, the addict who identifies with the form of life of the addict, that of constant alienation through drugs, would be exercising his freedom, as he is acting as he wants to act according to the form of life with which he identifies. The non-addicts who take drugs on one occasion, however, are less free than the addicts, as their action is arbitrary and impulsive, not motivated by their form of life. And by taking the drugs, they do not show freedom with respect to who they are and want to be, but rather, temporary slavery to an impulse or a social situation imposed by the alien community in which they find themselves. Thus, the latter subject is not integrated into his form of life with such an action. In short, freedom is more a matter of identification than of action.

In dialogue with Sartre and Johann Fichte,⁴¹ I suggested a rethinking of the French author's dialectics, which was in turn a revision of the Hegelian-Marxist one. My suggestion has been shown with historical cases. In particular, it has been elaborated through the analysis of the capitalist form of life of economic maximization and the artistic form of life. If Marxist dialectics implied the confrontation between two totalities (i.e., social classes) resulting in a third synthetic one, Sartre's analysis detects a lack of necessity in such a process, mainly due to the fact of being isolated and outside a larger totality, from which it would receive the law or principle of its development. Sartre proposes an internal dialectic between totalization and its parts. Such a totalization would be the history of humanity, as Raymond Aron explains in his analysis of the work: 'under what conditions is consciousness of a *single* history possible? [...] the first question, if I understand it correctly, concerns not

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 156–59.

41 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. by A. E. Kroeger (London: Trübner & Co., Ludgate Hill, 1889).

just the consciousness of any kind of history, not the consciousness of a fragment of a human past, but of a *single* History or, in other words, of the unity of History'.⁴² Thus the historical process would be a determination of that totalization. All dialectical relationships are internal and serve the same purpose. I have suggested that this dialectic, while bringing a sense of necessity, unduly homogenizes by isolating the elements of that history, leaving out a priori everything that cannot be homogenized.

Thus, taking into account the dynamics of the forms of life, I have proposed to replace this eminently internal dialectic with an internal-external dialectic. The latter maintains the dialectic relationship between the whole and the parts, the becoming of the form of life being the necessary determination of the whole, by which the subjects are integrated; but it does not discard the existence of other totalities outside it. The relationship between these totalities would be external, but they would enter into an internal situation of resistance-assimilation by which the hegemonic one absorbs the other form (or forms). This double dialectic allows us to understand how forms of life not only develop gradually through the determination of their parts, but also become universal through the assimilation of everything that is not them. This latter logic is taken from Fichte, for whom the ideal of the human being or Ego is to assimilate all that is not Ego. To this end, what is not has to enter into a relationship of opposition with what is under a greater entity. Thus, the hegemonic form of life as a universal ontological principle would make possible the relationship of opposition between its actions and the form of life of others. In this opposition, negation would seek to affirm the other's form of life in its opposite under the principle of the hegemonic form of life, and this dialectic has allowed the analysis of the process by which the subjectivity of the same form of life experiences changes, whereas other forms of life with their negated subjectivities are assimilated. For example, I have analyzed how capitalism assimilates the subjectivity of the austere form of life of peasants and artisans into its opposite sign, and equally how it assimilates the intellectual form of life (although some of its subjects kept it), affirming its opposite: the life of alienation and ignorance proper to the mass society of the capitalist form of life.

42 Raymond Aron, *History and the Dialectic of Violence*, trans. by Barry Cooper (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), p. 3.

In this sense, dialectic has been understood not only as an instrument, but as the very structure of the integrating process of a form of life. This dialectic avoids the Hegelian-Marxist triad process, thus subscribing to Sartre's critique.⁴³ For it seems arbitrary that only three elements are developed and in exactly three different stages. It is rather a process in which the form of life seeks to universalize itself, for to persist in its being is to extend it to all others with whom it comes into contact. This process is carried out through conflicts that result in assimilation, but a plural, not a unilateral and univocal assimilation. The capitalist form of life at first only denies and assimilates the austere form of life, which is what it comes into contact with, but as it expands, it assimilates other forms of life, opening up, if you like, various fronts in its process of universalization through plural assimilation. The unilateral process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis with respect to a society, such as that carried out by Marxism, appears from this perspective as a theoretical and reductionist process. The latter has served me to engage with Gramsci and his concept of hegemony.⁴⁴ The struggles of the forms of life are intended to persist in the being of these, not to replace a social class and its institutional power that in most cases is out of reach. A form of life is not the same as a social class, and the process of development in a society cannot be reduced to the confrontation between two exclusive social classes, namely owners or bourgeois and proletarians. Society is made up of many forms of life, all struggling to remain what they are and thus resisting assimilation by the one that holds a certain hegemony, while at the same time establishing resistance between them. In order to make sense, social classes—or even the society as a whole—have to rely on the subjectivity that shapes the community or communities that constitute each of them, otherwise they are nothing more than unrealistic and illegitimate homogenizations.

With respect to Benjamin, from the ontological relationship between forms of life, his concept of aura and of long and isolated experiences has been reinterpreted.⁴⁵ His contribution has allowed me to explore more

43 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Vol. I (London: Verso, 2004 [1960]), p. 36.

44 Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 196.

45 Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), p. 202.

closely the kind of experiences that would constitute our subjectivity. According to Benjamin, long experiences are those that the subject has within a tradition; they are inherited and constitute a line of continuity, something similar to a certain identity over time. He distinguishes them from the isolated ones in that the latter are outside a tradition, are incomprehensible and absurd and cause traumas to the subject, who is unable to give them meaning. The long experiences are those in which the aura of the experienced object is maintained, while in the isolated ones this aura is lost. I have taken advantage of this analysis by Benjamin to explain the type of experiences that the subjects have regarding their form of life. The actions, attitudes and feelings principled by their form of life appear as experiences that not only make sense, but in some way reinforce the subjects' identity. These experiences integrate the subjects into their form of life. On the contrary, the isolated experiences are experiences directed towards actions and objects of a foreign form of life, which the subjects neither understand nor experience as constitutive of their personal identity because it is the result or expression of an unshared subjectivity. This reinterpretation has allowed me to access the concept of aura and the relationship between forms of life. The loss of the aura in experience, according to this, would not be exclusively related to the passage from the predominance of the bourgeois class to that of the mass society, as Benjamin postulates,⁴⁶ but every experience of a foreign form of life is an experience in which the aura disappears. By aura, therefore, we could understand a certain empathy, namely, a constitutive identification on the part of the subject. The lack of aura in the experience would be what indicates the lack of identification. On the contrary, every auratic experience will be directed towards a form of life with which we identify and with which we constitute our subjectivity.

Finally, in dialogue with Barbara Rosenwein, a historian of emotions, I have pointed out the usefulness of her concept of 'community of feeling' and the analysis she makes of these communities by placing them outside the supposedly civilizing, and therefore homogenizing, process advocated by Johan Huizinga and Norbert Elias.⁴⁷ I have argued that a community of feeling would depend on and take its constitutive

46 *Ibid.*, p. 203.

47 Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 6–7.

principle as a form of life. For it is this that determines our habits and attitudes as well as the expressions of our emotions and values. These communities have their own development, are multiple and do not respond to a totalizing historical evolution. Phenomenological ontology maintains the importance of Rosenwein's empirical-historical approach,⁴⁸ as the identification of the parts of a whole, but suggests the task of apprehending and analyzing in advance the totalization on which the parts depend. For without the former, the latter cannot exist. Every part has the whole as a constitutive principle. Without the study of the forms of life as a determining ontological unit, the subjects and specific behaviours can only appear divorced from their original meaning in absurd fragments. In fact, I have pointed out that the same author presupposes a priori totalities in order to study a community of feelings in an empirical way. Echoing Archimedes, the form of life is that *place* where we stand to move the world. This is the form of life: the point of support on which being and movement (change or conversion) are based.

4. What Next?

I believe I have shown that the study of the form of life as an ontological unit leads to undoing the remaining dichotomies in Sartre between facticity/consciousness and individual/society, and that the phenomenological ontology of forms of life can be a fruitful approach to human subjectivity.

I have identified the structure and constitutive features of a form of life, as well as its ontological relationship with other forms as a condition of possibility of subjectivity. And I have explored and analyzed particular cases of forms of life in their dialectic development. However, many aspects have remained outside this first approach. Although I have indicated the way in which the situation of resistance-assimilation implies the notion of power, it is indispensable to reveal the constitution of power in the form of life, from where it is born, how it is exercised and what its internal hierarchy is. If being is to persist in being and resistance is to oppose one power to another power, one would have

48 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

to go deeper into how power resides in being, and how the one who persists the most and becomes the most universal is the most powerful. These ontological premises must inevitably be taken to practical cases, where the relationship between the interest in being and the ontological principle that feeds that interest can be clarified. Or more specifically, to answer why the subjects of the form of life persist in their being and why they have an interest in remaining what they are and in having their form of life persist. The power that is shown in being must have its correlative analysis from the notion of politics, as an organization of life in community. So it is understood that, in that sense, the form of life is always inevitably political.

Similarly, although communities of feeling have been analyzed, I have not devoted an exclusive analysis to the issue of emotions and how they arise from and are determined by the form of life. Considering that forms of life are related through situations of resistance-assimilation, one could ask if emotions such as love, compassion and pity have a place in this ontology. A particularized study of these and other emotions requires showing how the form of life, with its ontological principle, determines love, hate, fear, joy, sadness, and so on. And how such a determination means that, for example, one will love only that which is driven by that principle or that which has an impact on the affirmation and universalization of that principle and, conversely, one will hate that which questions or denies it.

In order for this approach to forms of life as an ontological unit to gain greater consistency, it is essential to carry out separate studies of various forms of life and their various subjectivities. These studies have to be sufficiently comprehensive to establish a certain inventory. The analysis should not only be descriptive but also genetic. That is to say, the series of possible actions, feelings, attitudes of a unitary totalization have to be described, showing their limits and their relations with other forms of life. But it must always be based on and refer to the transcendental structure explored in this book and redefine its genetic relationship with it. In the same way, in a future study it would be necessary to make a genealogy of the forms of life according to their constitutive dialectic relations and the ontological principles from which they derive; this would imply a classification and record of their empirical variants. This task is infinite, but I am confident that in the course of it, together with

other researchers, we will gain a greater understanding of our own subjectivity and the constitution of the world in the midst of which we find ourselves.

