VOLUME I: ANALYSIS

ACTION, MEANING, AND ARGUMENT:
A DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIST, EXPRESSIVIST, AND INFERENTIALIST THEMES
IN ÉRIC WEIL'S *LOGIQUE DE LA PHILOSOPHIE*

ACTION, SENS ET ARGUMENT :
UN DEVELOPPEMENT DES THEMES PRAGMATISTE, EXPRESSIVISTE ET INFERENTIALISTE DANS LA
LOGIQUE DE LA PHILOSOPHIE D'ÉRIC WEIL

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…when language dies, out of carelessness, disuse, indifference and absence of esteem, or killed by fiat, not only she herself, but all users and makers are accountable for its demise. In her country children have bitten their tongues off and use bullets instead to iterate the voice of speechlessness, of disabled and disabling language, of language adults have abandoned altogether as a device for grappling with meaning, providing guidance, or expressing love. But she knows tongue-suicide is not only the choice of children. It is common among the infantile heads of state and power merchants whose evacuated language leaves them with no access to what is left of their human instincts for they speak only to those who obey, or in order to force obedience.

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Nobel Lecture, Toni Morrison

ABSTRACT – RESUME

English:

The dissertation, *Action, Meaning, and Argument: A Development of Pragmatist, Expressivist, and Inferentialist Themes in Éric Weil's* Logique de la Philosophie, investigates Éric Weil's innovative conceptualization of the place of violence in the philosophical tradition, particularly violence's relationship to language and discourse. Weil presents violence as the central problem of philosophy. In fact, he sees the historic development of philosophical discourse as an attempt to grasp the world, the individual, meaning, human action in such ways that violence can be reduced. The reason that violence is a central problem is that although it can be reduced it can never be eliminated. Violence, as much as language, is an expression of human freedom, and makes up the individual's capacity to create meaning in the world. The way Weil characterizes the problem is that the individual is constantly before a free (unjustified and unjustifiable) choice between reason and violence. The philosophical tradition cannot suppress this choice, nor its radical consequences. The individual can always abandon reason and reasonable action for violence. However, the choice to be reasonable is as irreducible as the choice of violence. In other words, in any situation the individual can always refuse violence and refuse meaninglessness and raise themself up in order to grasp their situation coherently. In order to explain how this happens, Weil organizes his own philosophical discourse around *attitudes* and *categories*. Attitudes correspond to the implicit grasp of meaning that individual have in the concrete existence of their lives, in their understanding of the world, in their practices, and in their institutions. Categories are the explicit grasp of this meaning in discourse.

By articulating attitudes and categories in terms of the implicit and explicit, there is a striking similarity to be drawn with the inferentialist tradition as represented by Robert Brandom. Inferentialism also seeks to make what is implicit in practices explicit in discourse. To this end, Brandom's inferentialism, taking inspiration from Wilfrid Sellars, creates a sophisticated program at the junction of pragmatics and semantics, philosophy of language, logic, and philosophy of mind. This program aims at explaining the notion of discursive commitment starting from a pragmatist order of explanation by replacing representationalism in philosophy of language for expressivism. The dissertation *Action, Meaning, and Argument* builds on these insights in order to show how a pragmatist, expressivist, and inferentialist reading of Éric Weil is not just possible but is also particularly

fruitful for both Weilian studies and for inferentialism. In a word, this cross-reading aims to show that each of these two theories add something essential to the other. Inferentialism provides a technical apparatus that allows certain of Weil's key moves to become clearer, namely how to also see Weil's theory as one which turns around the notion of discursive commitment. What Weil's conceptualization of violence adds to inferentialism is the idea that any theory of discursive commitment must take the conflictual aspect of concrete commitments into account, in order to understand the possibility of violence that is always present in our language and in our discursive practices.

Key Words: *Éric Weil, Argumentation, Discourse, Categories, Attitudes, Pragmatism, Expressivism, Inferentialism*

Français :

La thèse, intitulée « *Action, Meaning, and Argument: A Development of Pragmatist, Expressivist, and Inferentialist Themes in Éric Weil's* Logique de la Philosophie », s'intéresse à la manière novatrice dont Éric Weil conceptualise la violence dans la tradition philosophique, surtout le rapport entre violence, langage et discours. La violence, pour Weil, est le problème central de la philosophie. Il conçoit le développement historique du discours philosophique comme la tentative de saisir le monde, l'individu, le sens et l'action humaine de manière à ce que la violence puisse être réduite. Pourtant, la raison pour laquelle la violence est un problème central, c'est que même si elle peut être réduite, elle ne peut jamais être complètement éliminée. La violence, autant que le langage, est une expression de la spontanéité humaine, elle fait partie de la capacité que chaque individu a de créer du sens dans le monde. La manière dont Weil caractérise le problème revient à dire que l'individu se trouve toujours devant un choix libre (à savoir non-justifié et non-justifiable) entre la raison et la violence. La tradition philosophique ne peut ni supprimer ce choix, ni ses conséquences radicales. Toutefois, le choix de la raisonnabilité est aussi irréductible que le choix de la violence. En d'autres termes, dans n'importe quelle situation, l'individu peut toujours refuser la violence et le non-sens et s'élever pour saisir sa situation d'une manière cohérente. Afin d'expliquer cette possibilité, Weil organise son propre discours philosophique autour des concepts d'*attitude* et de *catégorie*. Les attitudes correspondent à la saisie implicite du sens dans l'existence concrète des individus, dans leur compréhension

du monde, dans leurs pratiques et leurs institutions. Les catégories sont la saisie explicite de ce sens dans un discours.

En articulant les attitudes et les catégories dans les termes de l'implicite et de l'explicite, on voit apparaître une similarité frappante entre la position de Weil et l'inférentialisme de Robert Brandom. L'inférentialisme cherche également à rendre explicite en discours ce qui est implicite dans les pratiques. Dans ce but, l'inférentialisme de Brandom, s'inspirant de Wilfrid Sellars, crée un programme sophistiqué à la jonction de la pragmatique et de la sémantique, de la philosophie du langage, de la logique et la philosophie de l'esprit. Le programme inférentialiste vise à expliquer la notion d'engagement discursif à partir d'un ordre d'explication pragmatiste qui remplace le représentationalisme en philosophie du langage par un expressivisme. La thèse, *Action, Meaning, and Argument*, part de ces apports afin de montrer la manière dont une lecture pragmatiste, expressiviste et inférentialiste de Weil n'est pas seulement possible, mais aussi très féconde tant pour les études weiliennes que pour l'inférentialisme. En un mot, cette lecture croisée a pour ambition de montrer que chacune de ces deux théories ajoute quelque chose d'essentiel à l'autre théorie. L'inférentialisme fournit un appareil technique permettant de clarifier certaines des conceptions centrales de Weil, notamment la manière dont sa théorie devrait être considérée comme s'articulant elle aussi autour de l'engagement discursif. Ce que la conceptualisation de la violence par Weil ajoute à l'inférentialisme, c'est l'idée que toute théorie de l'engagement discursif doit prendre en compte l'aspect conflictuel des engagements concrets afin de comprendre que la possibilité de la violence est toujours présente dans notre langage et dans nos pratiques discursives.

Mots clés : *Éric Weil, Argumentation, Discours, Catégories, Attitudes, Pragmatisme, Expressivisme, Inferentialisme*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

In order to keep the reading of this dissertation from becoming too cumbersome I have limited the number of works that are abbreviated. I only use abbreviations for Éric Weil's major publications, and only in citations. So page one of the *Logique de la philosophie* is cited as (LP 1) for example. For the collections of essays I cite the name, the volume, and then the page number. For page one of the first volume of *Essais et conférences*, I cite as follows, (EC.I.1). All of Éric Weil's essays that were originally published in English, I cite the direct publication and not the French translations, and thus do not use abbreviations.

LP *Logique de la philosophie* (1950)

PP *Philosophie politique* (1956)

PM *Philosophie morale* (1961)

PK *Problèmes kantiens* (1963)

EC.I *Essais et conférences : tome I* (1970)

EC.II *Essais et conférences : tome II* (1971)

ENHP *Essais sur la nature, l'histoire et la politique* (1999)

PR.I *Philosophie et réalité : tome I* (2003)

PR.II *Philosophie et réalité : tome II* (2003)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The *Logic of Philosophy* is a strange book, both in its composition and its reception. The author, Eric Weil, does his reader few favors. It's difficult to read. The sentences are long: clause after subordinate clause is set one inside another and stacked one atop the other. It is dense. The ideas unfold slowly and there are lots of them to keep track of. Its density is a consequence of its style of composition, which can be best described as arid. Few people are cited directly, and few names are used. Almost every reference is oblique, present in the sentence construction or in the use of a term that almost refers, but never quite. Therefore, these references are present for searching eyes, but shadowy and obscure for those whose culture is not up to snuff when compared to that of Weil's. And Weil was a man of broad and deep culture.

The book is both humble and ambitious. It is humble in that it is the result of one man consciously wrestling with the problem of understanding, who wanted to understand what it means to understand, and the limits of that understanding. It is also incredibly ambitious because Eric Weil claims to resolve the problem, to pose the foundations of the act of understanding, and thus to close a chapter of the history of philosophy.

Eric Weil was subject to extravagant reactions. People's opinions of Weil were wildly divergent. Alexandre Koyré was, according to Alexandre Kojève, completely "gaga" for him (Strauss, 1997: 276), Raymond Aron called Weil one of the few superior minds that he knew in his life (1983: 94) and said that he "he had an exceptional, almost flawless, culture" (*ibid.*: 731). Pierre Bourdieu notes that, for him, Weil was one of the few thinkers that represented rigorous philosophy and also notes how profoundly Weil influenced him in his student years (Bourdieu, 1987: 13-14) Leo Strauss on the other hand said "he has rarely met a man as empty" (Strauss, 1997: 281), and Hannah Arendt, who harbored a great dislike for Weil, thought he was a "stupid monster" (Astrup, 1999: 185). People were charmed by him and formed a deep attachment to him or they found him intolerable.

Similarly, the book was hailed as a masterpiece or ignored.

Initially written as a doctoral dissertation, Jean Wahl referred to it as "the Phenomenology of Spirit 1950" during the defense. This turn of phrase was taken up as the subtitle to the article by Jacqueline Piatier that appeared in the newspaper *Le Monde* about the defense. In addition to Wahl, the defense included the likes of Jean Hyppolite and

Maurice Merleau-Ponty on the jury. Indeed, it seems extravagant now to think of a major newspaper covering a PhD defense. Kojève wrote about the importance of the book to Strauss and admits that he regrets not having written it himself (Strauss, 1997: 277). Paul Ricœur came back to the book again and again during his long career, and even took on the mantle of a post-Hegelian Kantian which he claims is a description Weil had used for himself (2013: 541-542)[1].

While we cannot say that the book fell stillborn from the presses (it was reviewed positively in numerous important scholarly journals at the time of publication and it has never been out of print in French), it seems legitimate to wonder, from a specifically English-speaking perspective nearly seventy years on, whether it is not flirting with the dustbin of history. It seems legitimate because Weil is not widely known, a reference here or there to his book, *Hegel and the State* (1998), or a mention to his other articles on Hegel or to one of his articles on Aristotle, not much more. This viewpoint however is a bit hasty. It says more about the English-speaking world's access to Weil's philosophy than about the interest of it. His works have been translated into numerous languages and is the subject of full studies in these same languages, but is only limitedly available in English[2]. This dissertation seeks to correct this problem of access. The goal is thus two-fold. First, it presents an original research that seeks to enrich contemporary Weil studies by proposing an inferentialist reading of the *Logic of Philosophy*. This reading allows us to highlight the interest of Weil's approach in relation to certain debates in contemporary philosophy which doubles as a critical examination of Weil's work aimed at the English-speaking public. Second, it provides the tool necessary to evaluate and critique the arguments developed therein, namely the translation of the *Logique de la philosophie*. With this two-fold goal in mind, *Action, Meaning, and Argument* is presented in two volumes. The first volume develops arguments that aim at contextualizing Weil's work in the terms just stated while the second volume contains the first translation of the *Logique de la philosophie* into English.

Éric Weil's main philosophical questions turn around the relationships between violence and reasonableness, between violence and philosophical discourse, between violence and language, and thus also the role that language and discourse play in reasonableness. In order to investigate these relationships, Weil insists on the kinds of

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[1] For an analysis of the role that this turn of phrase plays in Ricœur's philosophy cf. (Piercey, 2007)

[2] Besides *Hegel and the State,* which was translated into English by Mark A. Cohen, and a collection of Weil's essays originally published in English, *Valuing the Humanities* (1989)*,* edited by William Kluback, one must dive into long out of print collections and journals in order to access Weil's work in English.

stances we take in discourse, the types of responsibility that we take on because of these stances, and what these responsibilities commit us to. This develops a mutual feedback. Éric Weil thinks that concrete reasonableness is a consequence of taking a stance, taking on responsibilities, and shouldering the consequences of these responsibilities, because it is only when we take a stance, take on responsibility, shoulder consequences that we can have a concept of reasonableness. In order to develop this thought, Weil deploys three guiding concepts, *attitudes*, *categories*, and *reprises*. In Weil's specific technical sense, the attitude is the initial implicit grasp of meaning as it is lived in an individual's life. It does not seek to justify itself, it does not seek coherence, it does not seek to *ground* one's knowledge of the world, because the attitude grasps this knowledge as already present in a meaningful world. However, once this immediate presence is disrupted, once the possibility of other reasonable positions must be considered, in other words, once it becomes a question of justification, of coherence, and of grounding, this implicit grasp of meaning must be made explicit, it must be transformed into a *category*, into a coherent grasp of meaning that makes claims of universality and coherence. Éric Weil thus presents the *Logic of Philosophy* as a suite of categories, as a suite of the coherent grasps of meaning that have been elaborated in history, as a suite of the different discursive shapes. Thus, Weil's use of the concept of a category is different from the classic categories of substance and form, of cause and effect, etc. This creates a division between what Weil calls *philosophical* categories and *metaphysical* categories. Philosophical categories are the discursive grasp of a pure (that is, coherent and autonomous) attitude, metaphysical categories are the categories that a philosophical category uses to grasp the world, they are thus in this sense *meta-scientific*. Because each philosophical category has used the metaphysical categories differently the shape of metaphysical and ontological objects in each coherent grasp of meaning differ. This difference brings out the importance of the *reprise*. The reprise is the explanation of the conceptual content of one philosophical category under the language of another. It allows for evaluation and justification, it allows for a theory of argumentation that turns around both the communication and the reception of discourse.

There is a striking analogy to be made between what Weil calls philosophical categories and what Wilfrid Sellars calls the "space of reasons" (1997: §36). For Sellars the space of reasons is the logic space of "of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (*Ibid.*). The concept of the space of reasons is the uniting factor of a certain philosophical orientation that could be qualified as "post-Sellarsian". It has notably been richly developed in the work of Robert Brandom (1994; 2001; 2015) and other philosophers of a similar ilk

(McDowell, 1996; 2013; Kukla & Lance, 2008; Peregrin, 2014). The philosophical question that guides the dissertation *Action, Meaning, Argument* asks whether a cross reading of the *Logic of Philosophy* and the post-Sellarsian tradition can be mutually fruitful. The idea of reading the *Logic of Philosophy* in relation to other authors is not new. There have already been studies that read the *Logic* in relation to Martin Heidegger and Max Weber (Ganty, 1997), in relation to Alfred Whitehead (Breuvart, 2013), in relation to Jürgen Habermas (Deligne, 1998; Ganty, 1997; Bizeul, 2006; Bobongaud, 2011), to Michel Foucault (Marcelo, 2013; Strummiello, 2013), in relation to the phenomenological tradition (Gaitsch, 2014), and to authors of the hermeneutical tradition such as Hans-Georg Gadamer (Breuvart, 1987; Buée, 1987) and Paul Ricœur (Roman, 1988; Marcelo, 2013; Valdério, 2014). Thus, the novelty of this dissertation is not in reading Weil in relation to another tradition, but rather in reading the *Logic of Philosophy* in relation to a tradition that has hitherto been largely absent from Weil studies, namely contemporary pragmatism. However, this work does not focus merely on a comparison between Weil's work and the pragmatist tradition. Rather it makes the claim that this reading is mutually beneficial to both Weil studies and to the pragmatist tradition. What is notable about the post-Sellarsian tradition in pragmatism is that it, like Weil, insists on the notion of discursive commitment. This is the main insight of Brandom's development of his logical expressivism and of his inferentialism (1994; 2001).

Brandom claims that language and meaning are best understood, not according to the dominant representationalist tradition, which seeks to create (or find) a correspondence between language and a non-discursive world, but rather should be understood according to the notion of expression, that is, of saying something meaningful. According to this form of expressivism, the tools needed for saying something meaningful are conceptually more primitive than representing something in the world. Additionally, in his development of inferentialism, Brandom claims that conceptual content is best understood pragmatically according to the commitments that one takes on in discourse. These commitments create symmetrical *entitlements*, *obligations*, and *incompatibilities*, or to say the same thing differently, other commitments that one can take on, must take on, or are prohibited from taking on depending on their initial commitment. Brandom's major insight is that what matters in understanding constellations of commitments, entitlements, obligations, and incompatibilities is the way they are *inferentially* articulated. According to this claim, the goal of logic and of discursive argumentative practices in general is to make explicit in language what was implicit in practice.

Starting from the similarity between the importance that both theories give to discursive commitment that seek to make explicit in a philosophical discourse what is implicit in practices, *Action, Meaning, Argument* argues that the *Logic of Philosophy* and post-Sellarsian pragmatism should be read together because they mutually fill several lacunae of each theory. From the side of Weil studies, there has been an effort to read the *Logic of Philosophy* as the development of the different discursive resources that each category adds to reasonable argumentative discourse (Quillien, 1982; Kirscher, 1989; Canivez, 1999; Bernardo, 2003; Guibal, 2011, 2012). This work falls in line with that effort, but in order to facilitate the dialogue between Weil's main philosophical insights and recent developments in contemporary philosophy, it claims that Weil studies should be enriched by the conceptual apparatus of inferentialism. This dissertation argues that Weil can and should be read according to the basic conceptual commitments of a certain strain of pragmatism, notably the tradition moving from Charles Sanders Peirce through C.I. Lewis, Wilfrid Sellars, Robert Brandom and beyond. This strain of pragmatism tries to articulate conceptual content in relation to pragmatic considerations, namely the types of commitments that one takes on in discourse and the following conditional judgments that enter into play. However, because this dissertation also aims at showing the way that inferentialism can be enriched by the key insights of the *Logic of Philosophy* it develops those insights, namely the difference Weil makes between language (the creation of meaning) and discourse (the coherent grasp of meaning) and the place of violence in our discursive practices. Weil claims that philosophy is based on the choice to be reasonable, that is, to understand coherently and universally. However, because he theorizes this as a free choice, it is opposed to another free choice, that of choosing violence. In other words, the individual is always faced with a choice between universality and unmediated particularity. However, because the individual is seen as always conditioned, the choice is to make oneself into unmediated particularity by becoming violent, by remaining violent in the face of arguments, by aiming to destroy coherence and discourse. The central argument is that this choice is at the heart of the question of understanding, and for philosophy to understand itself philosophically it must take it into account. Violence is not just the refusal of discourse, because inside of discourse, it is also the refusal of a certain type of discourse, the refusal to be convinced by types of arguments. The problem that this refusal poses for the possibility of argumentation thus becomes the confrontation between different forms of argumentative logics. *Action, Meaning, and Argument* claims not only that inferentialism is uniquely situated to absorb this insight because it already interprets meaning, as Weil does, according to discursive

commitments, it also argues that the post-Sellarsian tradition must respond to the problem Weil poses because of the conceptual apparatus of commitments, entitlements, obligations, and incompatibilities that inferentialism uses.

Action, Meaning, and Argument presents both Weil's theory and inferentialism in their own terms before progressing to a cross-reading of these two positions. With these considerations in mind, the first chapter, "Discourse and Violence in Éric Weil's *Logic of Philosophy*", presents the guiding concepts of the *Logic of Philosophy*. It presents the general orientation of Weil's project as well as his characterization of violence. Starting from that characterization, it presents the specificity of Weil's use of the concepts of attitudes and categories. Weil presents four types of categories in the *Logic of Philosophy*, philosophical categories, metaphysical categories, the categories *of* philosophy, and the formal categories. The philosophical categories are the shapes of different coherent discourses. The metaphysical categories are the meta-scientific categories which are developed to be used in the particular sciences. The categories *of* philosophy characterize the individual's relationship to discourse. With this in mind, it is argued that these categories are best thought of as a pragmatic metavocabularies, to use Brandom's term (2015), because they develop the individual's relationship to the semantic content of the philosophical categories. Finally, there are the "transcendental" formal categories that serve as a recapitulative of the other categories and characterize the possibility of discourse and of life lived as a meaningful unity. Because, for Weil, Hegelian philosophy represents the first category of philosophy (the first pragmatic metavocabulary) and because Weil was both an important commentator of Hegel and sees the *Logic of Philosophy* as being a radical transformation of Hegel's project, this chapter also presents how Weil's work should be situated in relation to Hegel's. Afterwards, this chapter presents the importance of the notion of the reprise and Weil's concept of open systematicity.

The next chapter, "Logic as the Organization of Forms of Coherence" continues the development of Weil's conceptual distinctions and gives a general presentation of the categories. For Weil, a logic of philosophy is nothing other than the articulated totality of the philosophical categories and the possibility of their intercommunication. Thus, this chapter presents some of the different organizational problems present in the *Logic of Philosophy* and how these problems should be resolved. The organization of the *Logic of Philosophy* can be articulated in numerous ways, according to Reason and Freedom, according to Antiquity and Modernity, according to different fundamental contradictions that present different kinds of logics. In fact, because of the difference between metaphysical

categories and philosophical categories that Weil makes, it is argued that this multiplicity of organizational concepts is normal. Each category deploys metaphysical concepts differently and some metaphysical concepts appear, disappear, reappear, and take on more or less importance. With this in mind, this chapter presents and defends the possibility of reading the *Logic of Philosophy* as a development of the resources of reasonable argumentative discourse. This allows the insistence on certain key organizational articulations that will be necessary for the progression of the rest of the dissertation.

In Chapter 3, the reading of pragmatism that will guide the rest of the work is presented. Robert Brandom insists, much like Éric Weil, on the philosophical importance of orders of explanation in philosophy. With this in mind, *Action, Meaning, and Argument* presents pragmatism as a position that explains concrete human practices starting from a meta-commitment to fallibilism. The fallibilism that is presented in this work is built off of Charles Sanders Peirce's idea that inquiry must abandon the "three things that we can never hope to attain by reasoning, namely, absolute certainty, absolute exactitude, absolute universality." (1931: CP 1.141)[3]. No single person can possess the absolutes enumerated precisely because individuals make up part of a community of inquiring subjects. This highlights the way that explanation and inquiry are grounded in concrete socially articulated practices that must take different points of view and difference reasons into account. The meta-commitment to fallibilism gives credence to the philosophical position of expressivism, which seeks to explain meaning starting from the individual's expression of it and not from some immutable meaning that preexists the individual in a non-discursive external world. Expressivism however is not a single homogenous position. Multiple expressivisms exist. In order to see which expressivism best fits with the pragmatism program, the chapter investigates the motivations of two different types of expressivism, which can be loosely called meta-ethical or Humean expressivism and German expressivism. While some of the tools and solutions of these two species of expressivism match up, and even though modern expressivism is undergoing a conversion towards a single point (Blackburn, 1984; Price, 2013), the initial motivating factors of these two expressivisms were radically different. Meta-ethical expressivism was trying to make sense of value judgments in a causally determined impersonal nature (Stevenson, 1944; Ayer, 1949; Hare, 1952). This is different from the German expressivist model, which claims from

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[3] Following the accepted norms used by Peirce scholars, I am citing his work according to the volume and paragraph numbers as found in the *Collected Papers* Vol. I-VIII, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958.

the start that all language use is expressive and not just a certain species of moral or esthetic claims. By showing the importance of fallibilism and expressivism, we are in a better position to understand what is commonly seen as the key intuitions of pragmatism: the rejection of representationalism and the valorization of practices. By classifying pragmatism along the lines of fallibilism and expressivism we also are in a better position to understand the specific strain of pragmatism to which Éric Weil's work will be compared.

The next two chapters, "Pragmatism, Expressivism, and Inferentialism in the *Logic of Philosophy*", and "The Language of Conflict and Violence" both have the same goal of showing the fecundity of the cross-reading of inferentialism and the *Logic of Philosophy*. Chapter 4 mobilizes the concepts presented in Chapter 3 in order to show to read Weil along pragmatist, expressivist, and inferentialist lines. This chapter shows the importance of the role of error in the progression of the *Logic of Philosophy* and why Éric Weil's own philosophical position should be considered fallibilist. This does not mean that each form of coherence in the *Logic* is fallibilist—they are not—rather it means that each form of coherence builds itself out of its dissatisfaction with another form, thus both doubt and certainty are seen as playing key productive roles. However, Weil's own mature position, which is developed in the last three categories, *Action, Meaning,* and *Wisdom*, develops the importance of openness to novelty, change, and to other reasonable positions. This is only possible if one takes on a meta-commitment to being reasonable, and thus takes one's own position to be fallible. Starting from the type of fallibilism that is present in Weil's work, Chapter 4 develops Weil's expressivism, which is downstream from the German tradition developed by Johann Gottfried Herder (Herder, 2008). These observations are used to claim that Weil's development of discursive resources in the *Logic of Philosophy* can be restated in inferentialist terms without a loss, and in fact to great benefit. Following the enrichment of the *Logic of Philosophy* in the direction of inferentialism, in Chapter 5, *Action, Meaning, and Argument* proceeds to develop the way in which reading inferentialism in terms of Weil's central insights presents inferentialism with a problem that it must answer.

If inferentialism defends a model of language-use based on commitments, entitlements, obligations, and incompatibilities, then it must recognize that individuals can freely take on a commitment to ignore the entitlements of others, to ignore their own obligations and to ignore the incompatibilities in their own discourse. In other words, inferentialism, more than any other philosophical position shows just how deeply Weil's critique strikes the philosophical tradition, which sees the human individual as a rational being. Inferentialism situates itself in relation to the Kantian (and Hegelian) notion of

rationality, which Brandom terms sapience. This rationality depends on the individual's ability to act according to the laws that they give to themselves. Weil's critique shows that this rationality is something that the individual can abandon by refusing to universalize themselves and their discourse. In other words, Weil posits that the individual can leave discourse in order to *feel* as though they are in a position of unmediated particularity. This unmediated particularity does not grasp itself in discourse (which it refuses) because that would bring it back into the game of universality. Instead, it presents itself in action. Nonetheless, Weil claims that precisely because it *can* be grasped in discourse as the refusal of all discourse it can be understood coherently. Because this refusal presents itself in action, it is not something that discourse can overcome, but because it can be grasped by discourse as irreducible, it provides a form of coherence. The question thus asks what role discourse can play faced with this possibility.

In order to answer this question, Chapter 6 "*The Logic of Philosophy as a Theory of Argumentation*", presents the *Logic of Philosophy* in terms of an argumentative philosophical practice that faces the possibility of violence head on. Weil postulates that violence is irreducible to discourse, that it can irrupt at any moment, because individuals can always choose it. Thus, the question of what philosophy should do in the face of this possibility becomes essential. This chapter argues that, because Weil sees the choice between reason and violence as the most fundamental choice an individual can make, choosing reason must be seen as a meta-commitment to settle differences non-violently (that is, through argumentative means) in the face of violence. Philosophy depends on this meta-commitment because philosophizing, for Weil, is the paradigmatic form of reasonable behavior. Thus, this chapter moves from a pragmatist reading of Weil towards the defense of a Weilian practice of philosophizing. That is, a normative practice of deploying reasonable arguments in the face of the possibility of violence.

In the final chapter, "Justification and Pluralism in the *Logic of Philosophy*", this practice of philosophy is tested against the contemporary questions of epistemic authority, justification, and pluralism. This chapter argues that using the *Logic of Philosophy* as the basis of a theory of argumentation allows us to see foundationalism, coherentism, and contextual not as different mutually exclusive justificatory options but as different points of views and moments in argumentative justificatory practices in general. These justificatory mechanisms thus correspond to the problems of monism, relativism, and pluralism, or differently as a function of local, global, and "polycentric" justificatory practices. Because foundationalism and monism both seek to have a unique point of view they correspond to

local justificatory practices. They respond to individual claims and they attempt to judge these individual claims against the background of our other discursive commitments. When local justificatory practices fail because there is not sufficient overlap between interlocutors, or when certain core commitments are seen as being contradictory, individuals must reflexively analyze the coherence of their own position. Coherentism and relativism thus both correspond to this reflexive justificatory moment whereby multiple reasonable positions are considered as self-standing wholes. By judging different positions in their (approximative) globality, interlocutors try to discern whether there are good reasons to hold one position over another. When there is no clear reason to hold one coherent position over another, individuals must seek to find points of contact that allow dialogue to continue and that allow differences to be minimized, and compromises to be found *without* recourse to violence. Should individuals participate in such practices, they admit that there is at least for the moment a non-decidability between these discursive positions but they also refuse to see this undecidability as vicious or insurmountable. In other words, they maintain their meta-commitment to reasonable (that is, non-violent) argumentative practices. Polycentric, pluralist justificatory practices are thus seen as being sensitive to the different contexts between diverse discursive positions with distinct contents that are actually held by different concrete individuals. This is why the *Logic of Philosophy* is seen as grounding the possibility of an interactive and dynamic philosophical practice. *Action, Meaning, and Argument* takes monism, relativism, and pluralism to be real discursive positions that people can hold, just as local, global, and polycentric justification practices are real practices that people can employ. However, taking philosophy to be a type of argumentative practice, *Action, Meaning, and Argument* advocates that the task philosophizing can and should give to itself is that of moving individuals from monism and relativism towards pluralism. Philosophy should thus work to get people to see the value of understanding the functional role of foundationalist and coherentist claims as *moments* of concrete justificatory practices but as insufficient to maintain the meta-commitment to reasonable discourse. This dissertation thus understands philosophy, the philosophical practice itself, as a plastic and adaptable activity that considers the diversity of concrete human contexts where individuals create meaning and find meaning in their lives.

Chapter 1 DISCOURSE AND VIOLENCE IN ERIC WEIL'S *LOGIC OF PHILOSOPHY*

1.1   Discourse and Violence

Eric Weil's *Logic of Philosophy* is a book about philosophical discourse, about meaning and action, but in being a book about these things, Weil does something surprising. He reformulates them in relation to violence. Discourse, according to the philosophical tradition, is supposed to be what brings people to agreement, what settles disputes, what establishes the Good, the Just, the Beautiful. It is supposed to be what reveals what is real and decides what is true. Weil accepts that characterization of discourse, but, by framing it in relation to violence, Weil uncovers something radical. Discourse cannot itself be separated from violence. If it could be, violence could be overcome thanks to discourse, but Weil shows how discourse on its own does not overcome or eliminate violence. So, discourse is supposed to bring people to agreement but Weil asks what to do when faced with someone who not only refuses agreement, but refuses all discussion and not because of ignorance, or because of a misunderstanding, but precisely because they understand what discourse and agreement implies. By framing it this way, Weil articulates something that everyone knows but that philosophy forgets: individuals can refuse discourse, not because of a problem with discourse, but because they understand what it entails. This is why Weil frames discourse in relation to violence. The reason that Weil's formulation is surprising is because he does not present it as being solely a practical problem. It is also a conceptual problem. In other words, it is not merely a moral or political question but also a question about the role that violence plays in our understanding.

It is a problem that was born in a historical context. As a secular German Jew who had escaped Germany on the eve of the Second World War, Weil wrote this book in its dusky shadow. He could not turn away from the capacity of individuals to choose violence. This led Weil to believe that the choice between violence and discourse is a-reasonable. That is, it cannot be deduced, precisely because this radical form of violence is one that refuses all justification and all argumentation, that refuses every premise and every conclusion. If individuals are able to choose violence, are able to choose to participate in inhumane acts *and* if they are raised in a community (which is structured by discourse) this means that violence is not foreign to reasonable discourse. Indeed, for Weil, the philosophical understanding of violence is only possible once reasonable discourse has been brought to its

most radical conclusion. This conclusion is, for Weil, to be found in the Hegelian philosophical project[4] and can be understood as an absolutely coherent discourse that thinks the whole of reality and itself. These conclusions show us that discourse makes claims on us that *we* are bound to acknowledge because of their rectitude. By framing violence the way he does, Weil shows that we can also refuse to be bound by well-founded coherent discourse and that this refusal is not meaningless. It also shows how Weil goes further than Hegel does. Because this refusal is not meaningless, it show how for Weil, as Gilbert Kirscher, "the absolute is not on its own all of meaning, but only a determined meaning which does not understand itself as such, which does not see meaning precisely because it confuses it with the absolute, with the developed truth of being" (1970: 378). Thus, for Weil, the historical possibilities that absolute violence uncovered forces us, if we want a coherent discourse, to think with Hegel, but also past him. In other words, "in recognizing that freedom is irreducible to reason, Weil recognizes at the same time that freedom takes shape in diverse attitudes, themselves irreducible to one another by the very fact that they are shapes of freedom" (Kirscher, 1992: 252-253).

This is the historic lesson that Weil learned in the Germany of his time, and it is the human possibility that Weil seeks to understand. In order to do so, he frames the relationship between discourse and violence in terms of human freedom. Discourse can only be refused knowingly if the individual knows what discourse and argument imply. Premises can only be refused knowingly[5] because the individual acknowledges that premises lead to conclusions. Justification can only be refused knowingly because the individual knows that justification submits them to the constraints of argumentation. Thus the individual who refuses discourse also refuses it knowingly, and leaves argumentation because they no longer want to be subject to its norms. In this way, the individual makes a choice and that choice can be to abandon reasonableness. The problem that this poses, according to Weil, is that this possibility exists in all discourse. In other words, Weil understands radical violence as the possibility of knowingly refusing all discourse, of abandoning discourse by choosing

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[4] The relationship between Weil's philosophy and that of Hegel has been much written about. For commentators that specifically tackle the way that Weil's philosophical project should be understood as integrating and surpassing Hegel's cf. (Kirscher, 1970, 1992; Juszezak, 1977; Livet, 1984; Ricoeur, 1984; Rockmore, 1984; Roth, 1988; Burgio, 1990; Jarczyk & Labarrière, 1996; Guibal, 2003).

[5] The adverb in English "knowingly" here systematically translates the French adverbial locution *en connaissance de cause*. Which could also be rendered as "deliberately" or as "with full knowledge of the fact". Knowingly seems the best translation because in English it covers both the deliberate dimension and the dimension of being fully informed.

violence. This possibility for Weil only exists because violence is already found *in* discourse. It is found in discourse as *a form of coherence* that refuses all other forms of coherence.

The individual can coherently remain in their position to be violent, to take a stance and refuse reasonable arguments, refuse premises and their conclusions, with all the inferences that are to be recognized. This is the refusal of the individual who leaves discourse to not be held responsible to it. However, *inside of* discourse, this refusal is always against another determined form of coherence. For Weil, this radical refusal is also present in every dispute that can take a turn for the worst, every stubborn interaction where people respond out of spite, every dismissive interaction where people refuse out of hand to listen to their interlocutor or to take them seriously *because* they represent a different point of view. It exists every time somebody says, *I know you're right*, or *I understand*, and then adds *but I don't care*. It exists as a positive project whereby individuals organize their lives around violence and through the use of violence, whereby individuals are ready to use violence to silence all discourse. What Weil proposes in the *Logic of Philosophy* is a way to diagnose this problem and a way to face this problem through argumentation.

Indeed, argumentation is central to Weil's work. According to Weil, believing, taking for true, acting, all these things imply a certain notion of commitment. We take a stance and we hold to it, we are required to if we want our thought to be determined. And the more finely elaborated our thought is, the more commitments we explicitly take on. But taking on a commitment for something also indelibly means taking on a commitment against something. When somebody commits to the position that modern experimental science explains reality, it means that they cannot appeal to God in order to explain the same reality. When somebody commits to the position that homosexuality is a moral failing, it means that they cannot accept that homosexuals can be good people. This highlights the normative element of commitments, when we take them on, we accept being governed by them, and by all that they imply. These are not the only norms that govern discourse though. Yes, the logical implications of commitments are important, but what Weil's formulation of the question shows is that the pragmatic norms that govern discourse are just as important as the logical ones. These pragmatic norms start from the individual's own willingness to submit themselves to the logical norms in the first place. For argumentation and discourse to get underway, individuals must submit themselves to the constraints of discourse, they must see reasons as valid, they must see justification as having real force, they must see the normative weight of better reasons as being the last word. But by framing violence as a problem of discourse, Weil shows that as long as people hem close to the essential of their position,

without modification, without the recognition that some critique is legitimate, they are at an impasse that holds the potential for violence.

1.2   Weil's Characterization of Violence

Eric Weil speaks abundantly of violence[6]. But as Gilbert Kirscher has noted, throughout Weil's work violence is a *generic* term used to designate philosophy's *other* (1999: 12) and it seems that Weil never gives us a precise definition. It is the sentiment of absurdity, or arbitrariness, of what happens to the individual but that doesn't depend on them (LP 21). It is what is forbidden at the interior of a community (LP 25) It is the exterior danger that the world and that others inflict on the individual and the interior dangers that the individual inflicts on themselves (LP 26). It is the incoherent (LP 82). It is what can destroy what the human community has built (LP 27) It is what can't be dominated, either physically or intellectually (LP 29) it is the *given* (LP 48), which is only given because it is violent and only violent because it is given and thus demands a reconceptualization in order to be grasped as making up part of our *conceptual* landscape. It is the "nature that surrounds the reasonable" (LP 334) It is the "reign of sentiment" (LP 352). What I will pose here, and which will only be justified in what follows, is that violence is the name that Weil gives to particularity, philosophy (or reason) the name that he gives to universality. But violence is more than just a name for particularity, it is the formal concept of concrete particularity recognized in its particularity.

Weil thus characterizes violence in multiple ways, but he also provides two major descriptions of violence that allow us to understand what exactly is meant in calling it the formal concept of concrete particularity recognized in its particularity. These two major descriptions of violence happen in two different books, in *Philosophie politique* and the *Logic of Philosophy*. The story he tells in both is more or less the same, however the way

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[6] The question of violence has been tackled from numerous points of view in the secondary literature. In fact during a workshop at the Université de Lille in 2017 Jean Quillien said "Qui dit Weil, dit violence, langage et systematicité" or "one cannot speak of Weil without speaking of violence, language, and systematicity." With this in mind, much written on Weil deals with how he characterizes violence in some way or another, therefore it will be sufficient here to merely cite works that deal directly with violence or that see Weil's characterization of violence as central to their theses as opposed to those that, through the prism of violence deal with other aspects of his work. The main collections of articles that deal with these question are *Discours, violence et langage*: *un socratisme d'Éric Weil* (Canivez & Labarrière, 1990) and *Gewalt, Moral und Politik bei Eric Weil* (Bizeul, 2006). There has also been several full studies that give special attention to the role of violence in Weil's work, notably *Philosophie et violence* by Marcelo Perine (1982), *Figures de la violence et de la modernité* by Gilbert Kirscher (1992), and those for whom Weil's conceptualization of violence is central such as *Il logos violato* by Guiseppina Strummiello (Strummiello, 2001). Cf. (Roy, 1975; Morresi, 1979; Perine, 1987) as well.

that he approaches this story is not. In *Philosophie politique*, Weil presents the development of the historical content of the *sentiment* of violence in order to understand violence as a practical and political problem, that is, as a problem of organized human action. In the *Logic of Philosophy*, he presents violence as a logical problem, as a presentation of the way that the philosophical tradition has reduced violence in order to bring it into discourse by subsuming it under the logical role of contradiction. Both of these aspects are important to understanding why Weil characterizes violence the way he does and why he sees violence as being the central philosophical problem[7], and thus, while following the main lines of the argument of each presentation separately, we will nonetheless use the resources from both to present Weil's full characterization of violence.

Both presentations share the same major points: there is an evolution of the concept of violence. There is the violence of nature, social violence, individual violence, historic violence, and there is the determined violence that lives at the heart of discourse itself. However each type of violence has only become visible in history and thus graspable in discourse thanks to the evolution of discourse itself as it elaborates itself throughout that history. Social violence is only visible because natural violence has been partially understood and sufficiently reduced. Individual violence is only grasped after social and political violence is, etc. Thus, these different forms of violence are all interlocked. The violence of nature became visible because communities organized themselves together in order to overcome it. However, by organizing communities to protect themselves against a hostile nature, the fight with the violence of nature reveals social and political violence. Individual violence against others and against one's self is only grasped because it is seen as an outgrowth of social and political violence. In order to develop the differences between these diverse forms of violence, in *Philosophie politique*, Weil starts his analysis from the violence of nature.

For Weil, the violence of nature is "the original violence, and every other conception of violence (passion, natural temptation, violence of man against man, etc.) is grounded in it" (PP 62). The violence of nature is what humanity is subjected to by being natural things. It is the violence of our competition with other species. It is the violence that we face by being the fragile bodies we are, subject to the violence of disease, of injury, of death. It is the violence of the world in its movement, the violence of floods and droughts, of

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[7] This overlap leads many interpreters to fuse the two presentations, focusing on the logical presentation and enriching it with the analyses that are present in *Philosophie politique*. Cf. (Kirscher, 1992; Canivez, 1993; Ganty, 1997; Savadogo, 2003; Guibal, 2009)

earthquakes and volcanos. This violence is insurmountable for the single individual. Individuals must unite as an "organized group" to overcome it, and "society *is* this organization" (PP 62). It is the organization of the struggle with nature as "social labor" (PP 63). Because individuals have organized themselves into groups united by social labor, they have a discourse that transforms the natural world in order to make room for human goals and activities. This discourse aims at humanity's technical grasp of nature, because without this grasp, humanity is subject to all the changes in the weather and the climate, to droughts and floods, to the sudden irruption of natural phenomena, to the variety of beasts that could prey on us. We organize ourselves together to protect ourselves from these things but in developing a discourse we also subject ourselves to them *as* violent. Disasters are only disastrous because they disrupt *our* lives. The failure of crops that leads to famine are only failures because these crops are supposed to provide a stable food source for *us*. Volcanos and earthquakes are only dangerous because *we* have built our lives in their shadow or along their fault lines. But if we can predict these things we feel we can shelter ourselves from them. This is the goal of the community's technical discourse. However because conditions change, this discourse changes as well.

Weil notes that "[e]very human society struggles essentially with external nature" (PP 62), because again, it is not as individuals that we initially transform our activity in order to transform nature, but as a "organized group". It is thus "impossible to define natural violence without historical reference (to the history of human societies)" (PP 64). Violence is disclosed as violent in discourse and it is modified thanks to discourse. By presenting the struggle with nature as an original form of violence that grounds all other forms but by also insisting on its essentially historical character, Weil is in some sense providing a genealogy of violence. He is presenting the historical and logical conditions that were needed to recognize violence and that were needed in order to give a complete characterization of violence. Logically and historically (because, for Weil these two orders do not *necessarily* line up), the organization of individuals in communities is the condition for grasping violence. This is because, for Weil, "the individual is […] the product of society, in his individuality as in his existence" (PP 63). The struggle against this original violence is what changed out activity into work, into a meaningful activity that aims at transforming nature and its own procedures. It is "in and through work [that man] can transform his manner of working" (PP 64). However, it is the fact that individuals are organized in a group which struggles against nature that they are also subject to social and political violence.

In humanity's original struggle with original violence, it is the community and not the individual that is the subject (LP 25). This is because it is the tradition of the community that houses the discourse that has allowed for its own survival. Thus, those inside of the community, those that share the same tradition, that share the same discourse, are seen as working towards the preservation of this community against external violence. However, because each organized group is particular, the external violence is not, in this genealogy, merely the violence of nature, it is also the violence of other organized groups. The group in which the individual finds themself provides the meaning that the individual finds in the world, and within this group, violence is prohibited. Those that are in the group, that have ruled out violence in their relations with other members of their group consider themselves to be "true men" (LP 25)[8], or what we can call genuine persons, precisely because they have ruled out violence. These genuine persons are those that share the same goals and that agree on the same means of achieving them. They share the same unconscious awareness of what matters to the group, the same ways of behaving. In other words, they share the same "sacred" [9]. However it is the community that holds this sacred, and its sacred character is precisely what makes it go unseen. It is the unwritten law that acts upon all individuals. To protect this sacred, the community must protect itself from external violence and that includes the external violence of other groups who do not share in this sacred.

From inside a determined community, inhabited by those who have ruled out violence, the members of other groups are not seen as genuinely persons, they are "those beings who, all the while having the exteriors of human beings, are not men in full right because they don't recognize what makes man" (LP 25). In other words, despite their

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[8] It must be noted that in using the term "true men" Weil neither supporting nor rejecting it. Being that he starts his analysis of violence from the Greek tradition, he is merely highlighting the normative characterization that the Greeks give to themselves in comparison to non-Greeks. This characterization is present throughout Greek writings, and so one example will suffice. Aristophanes' play the *Wasps* explicitly sets up this opposition (Aristophanes, 1996: 1075-80). William Shepherd provides a useful analysis of the formation of Greek identity as a consequence of the Greco-Persian War, and his translation of these lines is particularly striking. He translates them as "We alone are true sons of this soil, the true men of Attica./ We are the manliest of all races./ We gave our greatest service fighting for our country./ When the Barbarians came, the blew smoke over our city/ And set it ablaze, desperate to seize our nests."(2019: 147).

[9] The sacred plays a key role in Weil's account of normativity. Weil does not treat normativity as a block, but rather divides it into different interlocking aspects which include the *tradition,* the *sacred* (or *essential),* *what goes without saying*, and a specific idea of *natural law*. I will treat most of these aspects separately throughout this work, with the exception of Weil's conception of natural law, which falls more properly under the moral and political aspects of his systematic philosophy. Nonetheless we can say a word on Weil's conception of natural law. For Weil, natural law is not some metaphysically autonomous predetermined fixed state. Rather, it is what is born in moral reflection and what deploys the present norms in the ethical life of a concrete historic community in order to ground the critique of the positive explicit laws of that community. It is thus always formally present as what grounds all moral critique. For Weil's treatment of natural law, cf. (PP § 11-14; PR.II.111-124) and for a reading of Weil's theory cf. (Canivez, 2002).

external similarities to the members of a determined community, they don't recognize what really matters. Yes, they may have their own sacred, but for any such determined community that faces such simulacra of humanity, this other "sacred" is incomprehensible. This is the pre-philosophical grasp of the community and its traditions. For insiders of a determined community, these foreigners, these outsiders "have not yet lifted themselves above nature; although they possess human features, they are not understood, neither what they do, nor what they say: they babble *bar-bar*, they twitter like birds, they ignore the sacred, they live without shame or honor" (LP 25). Thus, in the pre-philosophical grasp of meaning and life within a community, different communities present a threat and a menace, the community must be protected from them. In other words, "[v]iolence is the only way to establish a contact with them — and that's why they aren't men" (LP 25).

The violent contact between different groups has subjected one group under another, has absorbed the diaspora of failed communities, has brought into a single community different traditional and historic sacreds, without actually eliminating those sacreds, while nonetheless subordinating them to the sacred of the dominant community. This is the starting point of social and political violence. It separates the community into different social strata, into masters and slaves, into the rich and the poor, into different people with different roles who live together in uneasy harmony. This remains pre-philosophical and pre-modern, but it is also the starting point of philosophy. Weil notes that the "self-aware individuality can only establish itself at the moment where the original struggle no longer occupies all of the community's strength: before even the most rudimentary thought can be born, society must have reserves at its disposal and no longer need to dedicate all the time of all its members to the struggle for life" (PP 63). It must move from a rudimentary organization of social labor where "maximum effort, thus more or less equal for everyone, is required from men, from women, from children and where the harvest must suffice to cover the needs close to the physiological minimum" all the way to "contemporary societies, in which an extremely complex organization allows according members a freedom of movement inconceivable in other forms of work" (PP 63). In other words there is a rationalization of forms of work. It is the progressive rationalization of social labor that allows individuality to develop, that allows different forms of reflection. But this, for Weil is a fundamentally ambivalent process.

In its pre-modern form, social labor is understood as defensive. It strives to protect the community from the unchained force of the natural world. Because the progressive rationalization of social labor has transformed work itself, in its modern form, social labor is understood as offensive. It comes up with strategies and tools to overcome nature and to

make the world a truly human one, one in which individuals can find true satisfaction. Thus the rationalization of work surpasses and suppresses traditional forms of social labor, while neither surpassing nor suppressing traditional beliefs and social structures. Technical effectiveness is, for Weil, the principle of the modern organization of social labor, but this effectiveness leads to the depreciation or abandonment of everything that had previously given meaning to the individual, had previously been essential to their lives, to their values, to their sacred. Technical effectiveness is not interested in whether this or that class is more honorable, whether the woman's place has always been in the home and whether the home has traditionally been understood as a sacred space which must not be disturbed, whether a person's sexual orientation makes them moral or immoral, etc. Within a rationalized organization of social labor, it is the capacities of the individual to add to the rationalization and production of this social labor itself that is of the greatest importance. Weil notes that "for society, it makes no difference if A rather than B is gifted, strong, rich, intelligent: there will always be the privileged and the unprivileged, the only thing that matters to society is seeing these places suitably filled" (PP 78). In this way, it is only as individuals fill social roles that they are recognized before the law. However, because these roles need to be suitably filled, no one is essentially attached to the role they fill.

No individual is essentially a baker or a blacksmith, and as long as anyone can learn to do that role just as well or better, each person is replaceable in their role, because "the best yield will be attained there where each place is occupied by the individual the most apt to fill it" (PP 86). In other words, for Weil, in the modern organization of social labor, each individual becomes no more than the material that is used to fill the roles that are recognized by society and that are recognized before the law. But as Weil also note, this process is essential to the development of the individual[10], because "*thingification* in modern society is the price of *personification*" (PP 80). Grasping oneself as an individual is only possible when one wants to grasp who and what they are when all of the contingent factors are taken away, and this is only possible when the individual is seen as endlessly replaceable in all their roles. This can lead the individual to grasp what is universal about themselves, their "transcendental self", their existence as a moral subject, or it can lead them to reinforce what is particular about themselves, their violence, their attachment to traditional roles that have either disappeared or that is in the process of disappearing. For the moral individual, "the universal must dominate and *inform* the particular" (PP 27) however there is nothing that requires this

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[10] For a different development of the historical understanding of modern individuality cf. (Taylor, 1989)

to happen. Because of this tension, Éric Weil considers that in principle the condition of the modern individual is one of dissatisfaction. The individual becomes a "private" individual (PP 98) whose values and whose sentiment are in conflict with the rationalization of social labor, and with society at large. Initially, this private character is particular, it is what the tradition has left over. Therefore no society is completely rational, and it only will be when there is a global organization of social labor that assigns places to individuals based on their skills, qualities, and talents. In other words, "the perfect rational organization would be the perfect victory of man over external nature" (PP 94), but this remains an un-accomplishable dream, or a terrible defeat, when the growing mastery of nature threatens to destroy that nature itself, and thus, threatens to destroy all possibility of a truly human life.

Because nature is only known from the past, the future remains uncertain, because traditional values are in conflict with the modern rationalization of social labor, society itself is conflictual. This conflict expresses itself by the way society is broken into different social strata which, by their very existence, prevent the complete rationalization of social labor. And this conflict does not go unnoticed. Rather, it gives rise to the individual's sentiment of injustice. This injustice is found for Weil in the individual who:

> has a sentiment of not having access to all the functions for which he believes himself apt, of being deprived of certain chances, of suffering from the fact that others, installed in the advantageous places thanks to the conditions of their historical position, exclude him from them in order to keep these places for themselves without any rational justification (PP 86).

This sentiment of injustice is the main symptom of social and political violence. However, even if it can be diagnosed and reduced, this social violence cannot be completely weeded out. This is because there is a tension between society and the individual who has the sentiment of injustice. For Weil, "society, by virtue of its principle, requires that the individuality of the individual disappear. Yet, society demands this of individuality and it is only from individuality that society can hope to obtain this" (LP 95). Society demands that individuality universalize itself, society demands that individuality surpass and suppress what is particular, what is violent, what is passionate, what it irrational in itself. This pressure is a "pressure on an individual who lives in his historic individuality, and it is this individual that submits himself to the rule of society (or who revolts against it), not through what is *socialized* in him, but through what he retains as *personal*" (PP 95). This is, for Weil the heart of the problem described in the genealogy of the sentiment of violence.

Society, social labor, philosophy, reasonable discourse, rationality, all these things universalize the individual, however, they only do so by asking the individual to give up what is particular about them. To do so, they cannot appeal to the universal, but must appeal to the particular. Thus the individual must universalize themself *from* the particular. Society allows the individual to grasp themself as individual, without however overcoming individuality, and this individuality, which must constantly make a a-rational choice (that is, unjustified and unjustifiable except after the fact) to become reasonable, can also always choose their particularity. It can do so unconsciously, by being a slave to their passions, by letting their anger or jealousy overtake them, by drowning in a sentiment of meaninglessness and absurdity in their lives, by lashing out. But, and this is more dangerous, they can do so consciously. They can create self-serving ideologies, they can lie, they can be cruel, for no other reasons because it's what *they* wanted right then.

Weil radicalizes the problem of violence by characterizing it as the formal concept of particularity recognized as particular because in doing so, he breaks from the entire philosophical tradition. Weil's critique of the philosophical tradition is that it has misunderstood violence. Taking just Socrates' claim that no one is unjust knowingly in the *Gorgias* (1997: 509 d-e) or Kant's presentation of the weakness of will in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1998: 6.29-6.32) we can see that the philosophical tradition, by grasping violence as error or weakness, sees it as a problem in reason. Weil on the other hand presents violence as the *other* of reason. Thus violence cannot be reduced to reason and cannot be overcome by clearing out error or by fortifying the will. This does not mean however that Weil thinks that violence cannot be understood. In fact, what is important is the way Weil's solution allows us to understand interdiscursive violence. For Weil, different individuals have different goals and different lives, thus they have different discourses. Philosophy has long sought to bring all these discourses together under a single unified absolutely coherent discourse, however, the possibility of the irruption of particularity presenting itself as particular means that any discourse can be refused. Anyone can rebel against any content. This is *the* problem of the unity of discourse. There is no discourse that forces adhesion in and of itself. In fact, trying to force adhesion would be to turn to violence in the name of reason, and thus an abandonment of reason itself. The violence that is found in discourse, the natural violence, the social violence, the individual violence, conditions discourse. Violence is structurally linked to discourse, without being the same as discourse. The violence that exists inside of the individual's discourse (as the historic articulation of these forms of violence that the individual does not grasp) is what gives the individual their

sentiment of injustice, and it is this sentiment that leads individuals to reject specific determined discourses.

It is unjust that a disease takes someone *we* love and not somebody else; it is unjust some people have the time and the means to organize their life as they see fit when *we* don't; it is unjust that *my* desire goes unrecognized and unsated. However, when the individual struggles to understand this injustice they transform it, either by accepting it as part of the human condition or by changing the conditions that led to the injustice. People cure disease, they find ways to accomplish their goals and then work to help others who find themselves in similar situations of disadvantage accomplish their own. But the problem again, is that nothing *forces* the individual to understand their sentiment, to understand their particularity. This gives rise to interdiscursive violence. Everyone has a more *or* less coherent discourse, a more *or* less comprehensive way of understanding themself and the world. But these discourses, for as coherent as they may be, are contradictory between them. If the individual does not sacrifice their particularity on the altar of universality, this discourse will remain contradictory. Thus, the problem of violence that Weil highlights is not that individuals can overcome dissatisfaction or injustice with the help of discourse, the entire philosophical tradition has said as much, it is that individuals can choose not to. They can refuse to recognize arguments, they can refuse to recognize what is valid from another point of view, and they can do so in order to hold on to their concrete particularity. They can choose to enclose themselves in their sentiment instead of raising themselves up to discourse, and thus arguments and reason can have no hold on them. The importance of this fact, that we recognize when we are faced with someone who propagates hate speech, that produces acts of terrorism, that does not want to recognize another discourse but that wants to destroy it so that their own be unique, is at the center of Weil's logical characterization of violence.

1.3   The Logic of Violence and the Violence in Logic

The genealogy of the problem as it is articulated in *Philosophie politique* aims at understanding violence as a practical and political problem. It develops the tension that concrete particularity is in with universality by showing how the individual sentiment of particularity developed and how it can come to be grasped, but also how it can always reject universality. This tension is at the heart of Weil's logical genealogy of the problem (LP 22-53), where he develops the different forms of logic into what Gilbert Kirscher calls the different "shapes of violence" (Kirscher, 1992, 113-168). The logical forms present the

different shapes of violence as they appear in discourse as different types of contradiction. In other words, for Weil, there are different fundamental contradictions that allow coherent discourse to develop. It is this development that allows us, from our point of view, to grasp violence as the formal concept of concrete particularity recognized as particular. However, it is also because these different developments are of that possibility that they were unable to grasp violence as such. Weil thus presents the way in which the philosophical tradition has grasped violence by illustrating four different types of fundamental contradictions, and thus four different types of logic that define the shapes of violence. It will only be after Weil reformulates his problem, as it has been grasped in the tradition, that he will propose his fifth logical moment, a fifth shape of violence, which for him, allows a full grasp of the problem of violence. The four traditional moments are 1.) the formal (but not formalized) logic of the dialogical practices in a political community; 2.) the logic of classic ontology conceived as the science of being; 3.) transcendental logic with its opposition between freedom and nature and; 4.) the logic of the absolutely coherent discourse that develops and grasps itself and contradiction as the development of the Concept.

The first moment grasps violence merely as formal contradiction. This is the Socratic practice of public debate in the Greek city state. This contradiction is formal because it has no content, but remains at the surface level of language. Nonetheless, it is an essential step because it makes a fundamental discovery about the possible contradiction between different contents. The violence that it aims at overcoming is the violence that disrupts the political unity and stability of the city-state. Individuals confront each other publicly and must convince the audience that their interlocutor is saying something contradictory. It seeks the agreement of reason with itself. This is what Socrates means by saying that no one is unjust willingly, when individuals grasp reason, they see what justice is[11]. Public debate clears out all the contradiction in discourse. If it succeeds people will know what to do and how to act, they will reestablish the values of the community, and find the lost stability that the traditional community had. However, this formal reduction of violence can lead people to admit absurd conclusions. Weil notes how this formal contradiction allows one to "demonstrate to our adversary that he has horns, since he admits that he possesses what he has not lost and that he has not lost any horns" (LP 139).

The second form of logic aims at giving a content to discourse and to do so it conceives of the fundamental contradiction as that between reason and nature, between

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[11] Plato's articulation of the problem of weakness of will, of *akrasia*, is most fully characterized in the dialogue *Protagoras* (1997: 352 c).

Being and becoming. Reason is what is true and eternal, nature is what is fleeting and thus holds error. The violence that we undergo is the violence of this fleeting, changing becoming. When what is reason in us, what is true and eternal, agrees with the eternal reason of being, violence is supposed to disappear. In order to bring this about, an ontological science of Being must be elaborated and must be given discursive form. Only then will the calm contemplation of reason give satisfaction to the individual. Violence will be understood as what it is, the contradiction with reason. The development of this form of logic, based on the grasp of violence as the fundamental contradiction of Being and becoming, of reason and nature, allows multiple coherent discourses. It is, for Weil, this contradiction that is at the heart of the objective science of Plato and Aristotle, as well as the contradiction that guides the Stoic and Epicurean responses to this science. It is the contradiction that allows the initial development of modern empirical science, but that discourse also creates a new problem, one that Kant was the first to see fully. It creates a contradiction between facts and values.

In order to overcome the contradiction of facts and values, transcendental logic presents a different contradiction, that between freedom and nature. Nature is the realm of facts, transcendental logic accepts this, however, these facts depend on the values of the knowing subject, and it is only the knowing subject in themself that can assign values. For Kant the problem is "reconciling man's *freedom* with the determinations of science, of reconciling the concept of man as a speaking, questioning, choosing, acting being with that of a world determined reasonably and which determines man" (LP 44). This contradiction, between nature and freedom, for transcendental logic is formulated as the difference between knowledge and thought. The world is known scientifically, but freedom cannot be known this way, however it can be grasped and understood, because it can be thought. This opposition brings all contradiction into discourse. In Socratic dialogical logic, contradiction was at the surface of language, in the logic of classic ontology, it is between discourse and the world, here, it is at the heart of discourse itself. The same individual is determined by discourse and determines discourse itself, but the one thing this discourse can't grasp is the freedom that allows discourse to be grasped.

Discourse must find a content for this freedom, in order to have a content, contradiction must become the motor of thought. The opposition is no longer between reason and nature, nor freedom and nature, the opposition is at the interior of discourse as the different concrete contents in which the finite (as a thinking subject) thinks the infinite (as the comprehensive totality of discourse). In other words, Hegel discovers that the contradiction between different contents is an essential moment of the develop of any

content. Nature, Being, is thus reconciled with freedom. Here discourse becomes "the grasp of Being by itself and for itself" (LP 50) and Hegel provides the paradigmatic model of such a discourse. All opposition is understood as necessary steps by which Reason understands itself as "Being, which is nothing other than Reason determining itself in its Freedom" (LP 50). Thus, according to this reason, contradiction does not disappear, it is not overcome, it is given its rightful place in the development of reason and at the interior of this reasonable discourse, the individual understands themselves as they are, as the discourse that grasps itself and the world. Thus, everything is in its place and everything is completed. This for Weil is the accomplishment of the philosophical tradition, a total grasp of the totality of nature and of the individual in discourse. Nonetheless, he notes that a problem remains and that the absolutely coherent discourse glosses over this problem. What is it? It is the problem of the real satisfaction of the individual. For Weil, the contradiction that this logic is unable to resolve is between the abstract universal idea of satisfaction in discourse and the concrete particular individual that can remain unsatisfied in the face of this discourse. In other words, Hegel discovered the possibility of a coherent discourse concerning freedom, but was unable to grasp the radicality of the freedom that he had discovered.

This leads Weil to propose a fifth logical moment, a fifth shape of violence. Here the opposition is between truth and freedom. It is an opposition not in discourse but in action. Discourse is the domain of truth, life is the domain of freedom, and nothing can force the free individual to reflect on truth, to decide to understand themselves coherently, to shoulder the effort of discourse itself. The final scandal of reason is that any individual can refuse (though not refute) the absolutely coherent discourse. Discourse depends on shared principles, and once those shared principles are decided, discourse, if carried out long enough should lead to agreement, to truth, to understanding. But at the beginning of discourse, as well as anywhere on its path, any principle can be refused. By characterizing this refusal, Weil discovers that the most basic contradiction is not between content, but between grasping content because of the goodness of the content and refusing to grasp content *despite* its goodness.

Philosophy has always felt the need to prove its necessity, it has always shown that *if* one wants to think coherently and universally, *then* they must follow the rules that discourse gives to itself. This final opposition shows there is no necessity in this conditional reasoning itself. People can refuse to think coherently, to understand, and not because they have made a mistake, or because they are weak-willed, but because they don't want to understand reasonably. And here, they don't want to think coherently precisely because they

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understand what thinking coherently implies. It implies giving up on their particularity. What Weil will try to show is that unless philosophy understands this concrete freedom, it will be unable to interpret itself as the realization of freedom in the world. Thus, for Weil, philosophy is grounded on freedom in the search for truth, but this means that this freedom can also always make another choice. It can choose violence. This for Weil is the final contradiction of philosophy, but it is only a contradiction for the person who thinks that philosophy needs to be justified. And Weil thinks that it does not, but he also thinks that only the completion of philosophical discourse will show this. Philosophy creates itself in its refusal of violence, in the act of philosophizing. It is free (and thus unjustified and unjustifiable), and it is only once the individual has chosen philosophy, has chosen to understand comprehensively, that any question of justification enters into the picture. Weil's goal then in the *Logic of Philosophy* is to understand and to make explicit this free choice, and for him the only way to do so is to place violence at the center of philosophical discourse.

This philosophical reflection presents the different types of philosophical logics that have allowed different readings of the relationship between discourse and violence. For Weil, this development has been exemplified by different thinkers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, who have developed these logics and who have allowed violence to be understood discursively. Patrice Canivez notes that "for Weil, every form of philosophical logic corresponds to a certain manner of determining the violence that is the object of discourse" (1993: 11). This object of discourse, this particularity that discourse grasps, is determined and understood thanks to the notion of contradiction. Particularity is the stuff that reasonable discourse seeks to universalize, and in order to do so, each form of logic defines a fundamental contradiction that must be grasped. Each form of logic operates a double reduction of violence, violence is reduced to what is contradictory within reasonable discourse, and then discourse uses this contradiction to purify itself by defining everything in contradiction as being incoherent and thus inessential, and thus reduces the concrete violence in the world.

By subsuming violence under the logical role of contradiction, violence is what is in contradiction to reasonable discourse. It is the formal concept of the particular recognized in its particularity. Canivez notes that:

> In these traditional shapes of philosophical rationality, violence is apprehended, characterized, formalized under the form of *contradiction*. Each determined form of contradiction thus corresponds to a determined form of philosophical logic: the contradiction of interests to the formal (but not formalized) logic of coherence that

is the essential principle of Socratic dialogue; the contradiction between this formally coherent discourse and multiform reality of the sensible world to the logic of the classic ontology that reconciles discourse and phenomena by reducing them down to the unity of Being; the contradiction between nature and freedom to the transcendental logic of Kantian criticism; the contradiction as the principle of historic becoming of reason to the absolute coherence of Hegelian discourse (*ibid.*: 11-12).

Each of these different logical forms allow the different shapes of violence to be made explicit. This is precisely the way in which Weil's work must be understood as a *logic,* he articulates different types of contradictions and then provides the organization for grasping these forms of contradiction. The philosophical tradition that sees man as an animal gifted with rational language has assumed that violence and particularity could be absorbed into that rational language, into discourse, it is just a matter of elaborating the correct discourse which does so. Weil however presents a new shape of violence, one that is "irreducible to the logical form of contradiction" (Canivez, 1999: 63). This new shape of violence finds its source in human freedom. There is no contradiction between the exercise of human freedom and violence, just as there is no contradiction in the idea that human freedom can be exercised violently, but there is an opposition between freedom and truth. This is what distinguishes Weil's logic from Socratic dialogue, from Plato's contemplative science, from Kant's categorical imperative, and from the Hegelian dialectical movement of thought.

Weil's seeks to show that violence cannot just be seen as epiphenomenal. In other words, violence (and language) is what is at the core of freedom itself. He helps us to understand how the radical form of violence is violence towards discourse. It is the violence which refuses all discourse, in other words that refuses any coherent, comprehensive, and universal organization of meaning. It thus not only refuses all of the logical norms of a specific discourse, it refuses all the pragmatic norms as well. It refuses validity, justification, the normative weight of better reasons. It ignores every premise and every contradiction. It refuses all the constraints of argumentation. However, even though Weil characterizes the radical refusal of all normative constraints and of all discourse according to violence, he also highlights that pure violence is not the form that this radical refusal must always take. In fact, the way we most often encounter the radical refusal is in its banal deployment in everyday discursive practices, in the indifference that an individual can show towards discourse, in the quickly elaborated *ad hominem* attack, in the mocking dismissal of premises

that are presented, in the indifference to the discourse of others. By refusing discourse and all of its norms, these banal forms of refusal are still radical.

Reasonable discourse seeks agreement, and within the unity of reasonable discourse radical refusal is supposed to be impossible. For Plato, the Good is objective. It is to be pursued by everyone and as soon as people no longer mistake *a* good for the pursuit of *the Good*, this unity will be reached. For Kant, the categorical imperative governs all rational agents and it is thanks to this that the possibility of a kingdom of ends, where all agents are free from fear and doubt and are thus free to act morally, may be envisaged as an ideal that we must strive to realize. Both philosophers frame the radical refusal as being an impossibility as soon as people recognize the necessity of the concepts that unify discourse. Weil's formulation of the problem differs precisely because he claims that reasonable discourse is shot through with this radical refusal. It is violent *because* it is born in human freedom. It is a human choice to submit oneself to the pragmatic and logical norms of discourse, but for this choice to be free, it has to be a possibility and not a necessity. It is a choice because it is free, and violent because it is arbitrary and made in the face of violence. It is free and violent because at any time, anybody can make another choice: they can refuse discourse and choose violence.

According to the tradition, the unity of discourse is supposed to be what resolves violence. But Weil's formulation of the problem forces us to ask whether there is indeed such a unity. Can these innumerable commitments be reduced down to a single thing that rules over all others? If reasonable action in discourse is a choice, it is because discourse reveals choices as choices by showing the range of possibility. One of those possibilities is that people can always choose to live outside of discourse. They can always refuse coherence. They can thus always make the free choice to shatter any unity that is created. Because these two possibilities exist side by side, discourse cannot be reduced to a concrete unity, but Weil also asks whether all concrete commitments can be understood in discourse and thanks to discourse. In other words, he asks whether discourse has a formal unity. The goal of the *Logic of Philosophy* is to show that all concrete commitments, even those that seek to undermine and destroy discourse from the inside, even those that refuse all discourse, can indeed be understood under the formal unity of meaning, which characterizes all efforts to create an identity between concrete human situations and the concrete discourses that grasps those situations.

These different concrete discourses are built out of the manifold commitments that individuals take on. They are built around something that is so important to these individuals

that they cannot give it up. They are born out of the expression of human freedom that can resist any proposed unity for reasons. Weil shows that unity is a possibility but not a necessity. It can be posited in order to understand the diversity of concrete discourses and is present each time conflict is overcome. But because it is only a possibility, some positions *are* irreducible to others. In other words, people can live full meaningful lives according to multiple discourses. Weil accepts this. He asks however whether that irreducibility is infinite, or whether some commitments can be reduced down to a manageable plurality. The formal possibility of unity and the concrete reality of understanding show that this irreducibility is not infinite. Most commitments can be reduced down to several fundamental positions that can be compared and judged. This also shows that Weil's radical discovery of the possibility of refusing all discourse is not the most habitual form of refusal. Rather, the habitual form is a specific refusal based on specific commitments.

In every debate, everyone is pro-something and yet debates are mired in opposition. In the debate around abortion—to give a non-Weilian example—some are pro-life and some are pro-choice. However the oppositions are between discourses and are thus not the purview of internal contradiction. If somebody decides that life starts at conception and that life is the thing of greatest value, this value will coherently take precedence over the conditions in which the life will be raised, the mother's life goals, the mother's desire or willingness to have a child. They will accept that even if the life was conceived by rape, by violence, it matters more than the violence that the mother underwent or that the child may undergo after birth. If somebody decides personhood is what matters in *human* life, then during the early stages of pregnancy, when the developing fetus is more a part of the mother than a separate thing, the mother's choice is what is essential to the debate. In this case, they can build a coherent argument from that premise. The question thus focuses more on the mother's capacity to raise the child, the situation in which the child was born, the age of the mother, or simply, on whether or not the mother wants a child. However, when there are opposed and radically different conceptions of things, arguments don't even seem to get off the ground. This, again, is the problem Weil faces head on.

At the heart of the problem lies the fact that having a discourse means taking a stance. Weil says:

> [The individual's] action (and his discourse, to the extent that it forms an integral part of his action) reveals to the observer what he pursues *deep down*, what the center from which he orients himself in his world is. But to his own eyes, this center doesn't appear as such, it doesn't even appear at all, no more than man sees the spot

where he puts his feet. He always speaks of it (for the interpreter), he never formulates it: as soon as he would have formulated it, this principle would have been able to be called into question and would already be eccentric in a world whose center would have changed by this discovery's very fact, just as the ground that I see is not the one that supports me (LP 82).

What this means (and this will become central as I work to bring out what Weil's work shares with pragmatism, expressivism, and inferentialism) is that Weil presents a radical conception of commitment. This radical conception takes the initial commitment to be a completely free self-determination. Once that commitment is made it means accepting that there are things to which one is also committed, as well as things that are incompatible with one's stance. In order to do so, the individual must draw out what they "pursue deep down," they must make the implicit commitments in their pragmatic stance towards discourse explicit in that discourse. As we will see, this relationship between implicit practice and explicit discourse appears in Weil's *Logic of Philosophy* as the relationship between *attitude* and *category*. This however does not mean that the same things are incompatible in every discourse. The different shapes that freedom determines for itself gives rise to different commitments and different discourses. Indeed, there are multiple discourses than can be built around opposing stances.

The person that holds this or that position may not be aware what it is founded on. This is normal, they aren't aware of it because they live in it. It is what is essential to their life. For them, it may be an intuition, a feeling, a hunch. Whatever it is, it is meaningful and it is the source of the meaning that they see their life having. This essential governs their other commitments and thus gives shape to the specific things they refuse. It is only when individuals turn back to their action, to their choices, to their positions to understand them that the contours of this meaning become clear. When this happens, this meaning can be reduced down and organized, the essential can be grasped as essential. This changes the essential however. It is no longer the silent center of their life: it is an overt claim. Thus, there is meaning as it is lived, and meaning as it is grasped in discourse. However, it is because the meaning that is lived can be grasped in discourse that it can be understood. This distinction highlights two of the driving concepts that Weil mobilizes, *attitudes* and *categories*[12].

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[12] Multiple in-depth studies have been done focusing on the *categories* in the *Logic of Philosophy*. William Kluback for instance, insists on the way the progression of categories situates Weil as a neo-Kantian interpreter of the philosophical tradition (1987). Gilbert Kirscher reads the categories in relationship to what he calls the

1.4   Attitudes and Categories

An attitude is the sentiment of meaning that is lived in each person's life. When this meaning is grasped in discourse according to its central organizing concept, it is a category. If a discourse can grasp an attitude and present it as a coherent stance that is irreducible to any other grasp of meaning, this is what Weil calls a *pure* attitude. Pure attitudes allow for meaning to be grasped as a coherent discourse. Because Weil reframes discourse in terms of violence, a coherent discourse can be understood as a discourse that holds together in the face of violence, while also allowing violence to be grasped and reduced thanks to the discourse itself. It is a discourse that recognizes violence's place in it, but in doing so makes violence discursive. It subsumes violence under the rules of language as contradiction. This logical role allows discourse to separate the essential from what must be refused, ruled out, or put at arm's length. From inside of an attitude, this violence is contradictory because it is lived as unacceptable, as false, as immoral. From the point of view of the category, this violence is contradictory because it is understood as what limits the coherence of the discourse. This implies that different attitudes have different levels of comprehensiveness, both in terms of understanding or being understandable, and in terms of being inclusive.

The more comprehensive a discourse, the less is ruled out. The less that is ruled out, the more universal the discourse. Discourses have greater levels of comprehensiveness when they take in and explain a greater swath of human experience in the world. Building on the criterion of comprehensiveness, Weil thus adds the criterion of universality in order to understand the different pure attitudes. Different levels of comprehensiveness are organized as different levels of universality. These two criteria, comprehensiveness and universality, allows Weil to organize the different discursive centers that structure attitudes, and to understand how different grasps of meaning are themselves to be understood. The logic of

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"aporia of the beginning" which analyses the place the opening philosophical gesture itself has in a system that sees philosophical discourse as a free self-determining act (1989). Patrice Canivez offers an analysis that focuses on the individual's relationship to discourse and how this results in a specific type of philosophical practice (1999). Both Mahamadé Savadogo (2003) and Francis Guibal (2011) for their part insist on the way the categories enact a shift from ontological discourses on being and reality towards an anthropological understanding of discourse itself, with Savadogo emphasizing the political consequences and Guibal the individual's act of constituting meaning. Because, for Weil, it is the categories that have a discursive form, most attention has been placed on their place in discourse. There have nonetheless also been important studies that focus on the relationship between attitudes and categories such as the classic article by Roland Caillois (1953) or the student oriented presentation of Weil's work by Patrice Canivez (1998) and Peter Gaitsch's recent phenomenological reading of the *Logic of Philosophy* which places specific importance on the roles of attitudes (2014).

philosophy[13] is this organization. It presents the different attitudes that can be grasped according to their comprehensiveness and universality.

Weil's presentation of the relationship between discourse and violence has another surprising consequence, the philosophical attitude, the attitude of understanding, becomes one among many, and thus philosophy itself is seen as a possibility and not a necessity. In discovering that it is not a necessity, the philosophical attitude discovers something that every non-philosopher already knew. What the non-philosopher misses though is that every time they seek to understand the world around them as a coherent whole, every time they seek to understand their life as a unity, they themselves enter into the philosophical attitude. And here they come face to face with the historical role that philosophers have played in articulating the coherence that allows them to grasp the meaning they seek.

Concrete human attitudes are historically and phenomenologically articulated. In this way, they are different from pure attitudes. Pure attitudes are governed not by historical or by phenomenological criteria but by the logical criterion of non-contradiction, where the logical role of contradiction grasps the violence that has been reduced. Because their organizing criterion is logical, pure attitudes are ideal-types. In other words, they don't correspond to real concrete attitudes, which are mixed and which must always face concrete violence. Pure attitudes are thus able to be grasped coherently because they show how violence is to be ruled out. This grasp in coherent discourse allows concrete attitudes to be understood according to the violence they refuse and the contradictions they rule out. When a pure attitude is grasped in coherent discourse, it is considered a *philosophical category*.

Weil makes three major distinctions in the *Logic of Philosophy* between philosophical categories, metaphysical categories, and the categories of philosophy[14]. The logic of philosophy is built around the notion of philosophical categories. These categories are understood as "the translation of *a* determined attitude in *an* elaborated discourse" (LP 147) and they "determine the ways in which thought thinks itself and constitutes itself for itself" (LP 341). In making this claim, Weil highlights that thinking is a free activity, but he also highlights the fact that when we engage in it, we delimit and determine. We take stances about what is essential and what is not. We commit ourselves to things. In our concrete attitudes this deed is something we are only partially aware of—when we are aware of it at

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[13] Throughout this work I will use the typological convention of separating the *Logic of Philosophy* the book and the logic of philosophy the system.

[14] A fourth distinction, between concrete categories and formal categories, is made at the interior of the philosophical categories, but I will come to this point later.

all—because our attitudes are initially grounded in our historical and cultural situation. The philosophical categories are the conceptual structures that explain how attitudes grasp the world and themselves. Their role is therefore structural. Philosophical categories translate the essential of an attitude into a coherent stance towards the real, the world, experience, etc. This is different from metaphysical categories.

For Weil, metaphysical categories, such as Aristotelean categories and Kantian categories are metaphysical in terms of being meta-scientific because they, "belong to science, not to philosophy, to metaphysics, which, rightly so, has always been interpreted as the first science, not to the logic of philosophy" (LP 147). They are the concepts that allow reality to be understood scientifically, to be "grasped as an object" (LP 147). Weil's claim is that grasping the world as an object always implies a certain notion of orientation. Metaphysical categories such as "[c]ause and effect, substance and accident, *the one and the other*, the idea, the communion of great kinds or of number-ideas, form and matter, potential and actuality, time, space" (LP 147) do not provide any such orientation. In fact, they only make sense because thought is already oriented. Every attitude uses metaphysical categories, but they do not use the same ones in the same ways. This is because the use of the metaphysical categories is determined by the orientation that the attitude itself provides. By making a distinction between metaphysical categories and philosophical categories, Weil allows us to understand the historical and social aspect of the development of thought: if different metaphysical categories are used by different philosophical categories then they are not eternal structures of the world but are instead determined by other discursive commitments[15]. He argues this by showing how different philosophers justify their usage of metaphysical concepts:

> In order to ground his ontology, Aristotle doesn't use the concepts of essence, of attribute, of place, etc.; he uses the principle according to which reasoning can't go on infinitely — a principle that isn't grounded in ontology and its categories, but which allows the conception of a first science. Kant doesn't build his transcendental ontology with the help of his table of categories but the help of the "ideas" of liberty and eternity, of the transcendental ideal, of the kingdom of ends. Hegel himself recognizes the difference between the Logic of Being (that of metaphysical categories), of the Essence and of Reality, the last of which must, among other

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[15] In this way, Weil's categories share certain traits with both Michel Foucault's notion of *épistémè* and with Thomas Kuhn's notion of paradigms. Cf. (Marcelo, 2013; Strummiello, 2013) for different treatments of the relationship between Weil's categories and these other concepts.

things, make the meaning of the first part of the entire logic understood, that is, from the metaphysical categories. [...] [The logic of philosophy] is only interested in metaphysical categories to the extent that they reveal the philosophical categories, these centers of discourse starting from which an attitude expresses itself in a coherent fashion (LP 146 n. 1).

For Weil metaphysical categories do not govern thought, but their usage can help to show what does. When shared concepts are used differently, individuals can unearth underlying commitments. Concrete attitudes are to a lesser or greater extent mixed, so individuals express their essential without necessarily being aware of it. It is lived as the substratum that holds reality together. It becomes an object of thought when someone takes on the philosophical attitude and seeks to eliminate the contradiction that exists in this essential. When individuals make the free choice to understand they seek to grasp the reality of what is essential to them as a concept. Metaphysical categories can help to uncover philosophical categories precisely because when people propose different usages of these concepts, some of these usages will be contradictory. This contradiction attests to different commitments. These different commitments can thus help to bring out the structure of different pure attitudes.

Here the relationship of the logic of philosophy to the history of philosophy is important. For Weil, pure attitudes are revealed by philosophers who do the logical work of elaborating them into coherent discourse, but all pure attitudes are present throughout all of human history in the mixed form of concrete attitudes. They appear as categories at historically determined moments but this historical order does not correspond to the logical one. Their logical organization depends not on their historical appearance but rather on the level of coherence and universality they provide. In its historic appearance, Augustine is one of the people to have formulated a discourse that grasps the attitude of the faithful believer coherently and thus discovered a pure attitude (*God*), but this attitude is not limited to Augustine's work. It can be used to understand all the great monotheistic religions. Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Bayle both elaborated discourses that grasped the irreducibility of the interpretative effort to understand the variety of human interests and discovered the pure attitude of the human intelligence (*Intelligence*). Their focus on different human interests also allows for the structural understanding of relativism in general. Immanuel Kant opened the path to understanding the moral individual thanks to the synthetic unity of apperception that unites the knowing subject and the moral subject. It is the same subject-for-itself that "exists and [...] *knows* itself immediately in the consciousness of its search for a world and

for a meaningful existence, in the consciousness of a rule of the duty and of the ought that surpasses and negates every given and that, hence, constitutes man and reveals him to himself as what he in truth is" (PK 54). Weil sees Johann Gottlieb Fichte however as the person who hewed this unity down to its most essential characteristics and elaborated the pure attitude of the moral conscience in the Absolute *I* (a position that is understood, in Weil's *Logic of Philosophy*, under the philosophical category of the *Conscience*). This attitude has farther ranging applications though, because it can also be used to understand the different dilemma of moral philosophy and the domain of moral action. Hegel elaborated a discourse that grasped the idea of totality as being central to human understanding and grasped the philosophical attitude in absolute knowing (the philosophical category of *The Absolute*). But this idea can also be used to grasp the idea of philosophical understanding in general. Auguste Comte's philosophical discourse is based on the notion of progress and on science, and thus was able to grasp the attitude of scientific positivism (the philosophical category of *Condition*), but this same discourse is also used to understand the goals of modern experimental science. Friedrich Nietzsche grasped the attitude of the individual who sees themself as the source of all values in their self-creation and he discovered the pure attitude of the creative personality (the philosophical category of *Personality*). This attitude also shows itself useful to understand numerous historical artistic figures and the act of creation in general.

Once these discourses have been elaborated, they show how the different irreducible stances that people take in discourse are to be understood, but again, it is not the historical order of their appearance that matters to the logic of philosophy. Weil's logical order is a progression built on the growing order of what these discourses allow one to grasp. It is defined by the universality and coherence that each category's central explanatory concept provides. This is why *Conscience* precedes *Intelligence*. The unity of consciousness provides a conceptual ground for Bayle and Montaigne's positions even though Kant and Fichte were writing in their wake. This is because interest must always be considered as someone's interest. The *Personality* also precedes *The Absolute* because it acts as a conceptual ground for this later concept. The creative personality takes a stance in their creation and thus creates values. This is a pure attitude. By showing however that these values also depend on the recognition of others, *The Absolute* provides a more coherent position. Nietzsche's notion of the creative personality thus provides a conceptual ground for the totality found in Hegel's thought even though Hegel developed his discourse before Nietzsche developed his own.

1.5   Hegel and the Categories of Philosophy

The movement between the categories brings out Weil's relationship to Hegel, which in turn will help us to understand *the categories of philosophy*. By organizing the different grasps of meaning that philosophy presents, Weil's project bears strong resemblance to the Hegelian one in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This is not surprising. Weil thinks that Hegel uncovered and grasped the pure philosophical attitude with the idea of the absolutely coherent discourse. He also leaves much of Hegel's conceptual apparatus in place. But he also differs from Hegel in major ways. Hegel's progression in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* understood as the "science of the experience of consciousness" is built around the claim that consciousness must be explained using nothing other than the resources consciousness itself can propose. This is a high demand, and this is why so many forms of consciousness are surpassed: they simply cannot satisfy it. Hegel does not see this as problematic, rather he sees these forms of consciousness as steps on the path that brings consciousness to recognize itself in its own work of becoming aware of the world. The culmination of this progression is the recursive circularity of philosophical justification. What consciousness finds in its experience is itself and this is what allows it to explain its progress with its own resources. Thought is an immanent process that unfolds from itself. Following Hegel, Weil thinks justification must be recursive to get the job done. But he doubts that every attitude wants to justify itself, that every attitude is seeking understanding and recognition. Rather Weil posits that the movement is not immanent. Because Weil frames both discourse and violence as a free choice, every step that Weil's system provides must be seen as a rupture and a free "jump" that refuses the determined form of discourse that had up until then been in full force and effect. Each irreducible attitude is irreducible because it provides a form of coherence, and there is no slow and steady progression of reason. People cling to the forms of coherence that their attitudes provide. This is why after Hegel the problem changes. In fact, according to Weil, the notion of philosophy changes. From the origins of Greek thought to Hegel, philosophy is seen as a discourse bearing on the structure of the world, as a discourse on being, and this leads, for Hegel, to the science of experience of consciousness, which studies the way that this very experience unfolds. By characterizing attitudes as irreducible and the movement between them as jumps, Weil transforms the problem of consciousness and being into a problem of action and discourse.

In the Hegelian model, acting is acting for reasons. Weil accepts this, but he shows that the acting consciousness can give up the consciousness of its own activity in order for

the activity to be pure. In this way the logic of philosophy is not a study of the experience of consciousness. Rather, Weil presents it as the study of human relationships to discourse. The choice that consciousness makes is for discourse and not only thanks to it. Weil presents Hegel's attitude as the culmination of the philosophical attitude, as a culmination of an attitude that proposes human satisfaction in terms of understanding. The philosophical attitude subsumes all previous attempts to understand under this concept as different shapes of consciousness. Weil thinks Hegel adequately formulated the philosophical attitude, but Weil also wants to understand the violent one. Weil highlights that the violent attitude in its purest form does not seek understanding, but rather seeks to live in the immediacy of its sentiment. That is why this attitude only becomes visible after Hegel. Before Hegel, each philosophical category found a way to bring violence into discourse by subsuming it under its own concepts. But pure violence is not conceptual, it is anti-conceptual. It refuses the conceptuality of justification, the conceptuality of understanding, and the conceptuality of acting for reasons. It acts spontaneously no matter what the attitude of the person be when they want to understand. It outstrips the understanding by going against every imperative that the understanding places on the individual. It does not care if its action is moral or good or true. Weil recognizes that human liberty can stubbornly stay in any attitude, even when it fully understands what the other attitudes imply, and it is the violent attitude that teaches this lesson. The violent attitude stays in its attitude *because* it understands what the philosophical attitude implies. The philosophical attitude implies justifying, it implies argumentative practices, it implies submitting oneself to the normative weight of better reasons, and accepting to modify one's position when better reasons hold. The violent attitude does not want to accept this change. It does not seek recognition, it wants to *be* the only consciousness in the world. All other consciousnesses are tools, are means, are the background noise and opposition that the violent attitude must overcome by any means possible. This is the attitude that the *Logic of philosophy* understands under the category of *The Work*.

This is why it would be a mistake to see the *Logic of Philosophy* merely as a reworking of the *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Yes, Weil absorbs and keeps Hegel's main insights, and keeps the systematic structure, but Weil's critic of Hegel radicalizes the notion of freedom that Hegel is trying to coax out into the world. Following Kant, Hegel recognizes two types of freedom, negative and positive freedom, and one of his goals in the *Phenomenology* is to bring about the advent of positive freedom by giving it a conceptual form that allows every individual to grasp it. Negative freedom is traditionally characterized as freedom *from* something, freedom from constraint, freedom from fear, freedom from

authority. Positive freedom is characterized as freedom *to* do something, freedom to act as one sees fit, freedom to have a peaceful life, freedom to decide what authority to follow. Positive freedom, for Hegel, implies the recognition of the social historical context in which this freedom makes sense, it implies that individuals can and do recognize the norms that govern their lives, it implies that individuals recognize what others in this social and historical context add to their freedom and to their understanding of their own situation. This is where the full force of Weil's critique of Hegel can be seen. This road from negative freedom to positive freedom is, for Hegel, the immanent experience that consciousness goes through for itself, but in coming to positive freedom, the individual is absorbed into the universal, because they know themselves to be individual thanks to the universal. Weil posits that the total refusal of discourse could care less about *knowing* itself as an individual because universal. It wants to *be* individual, it wants to *feel* individual. Patrice Canivez has noted (Canivez, 2013a) how Weil's critique of Hegel turns on two different readings of the content of *Die Individualität, welche sich an und für sich selbst reel ist*[16]. For Hegel, the work (*Das Werk*) that the individual creates is an expression of their self-conscious activity and is part of their struggle for recognition. For Weil, on the other hand there exists a form of self-conscious activity that does not seek recognition, precisely because what it is refusing is the constraints, norms, and responsibilities that recognition implies. This critique points out how, in the Hegelian system, freedom only exists as a concept in the understanding. What the individual rejects then, for Weil, is not the grasp of freedom as a concept, but rather the fact that this concept can add anything to their life. For them, the concept of freedom doesn't live up to its promise. Understanding doesn't make their life better, or fill their boredom, or overcome their individual dissatisfaction. They do not want to think freedom, and they do not want to be free only to the extent that they live in thought or conform to thought, they want to live their freedom freely.

Weil's work cannot be understood separate from this conceptualization of violence. It is this conceptualization that sets him apart from his philosophical forbearers. But this conceptualization is always undertaken by somebody in the philosophical attitude, somebody who seeks to understand. This is because the violent individual rejects all categorization for themselves. To say that the violent individual is moved by the things that characterize attitudes, having a certain type of orientation that expresses itself as goals, being driven by a certain feeling about the world, is always to categorize the attitude of the violent

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[16] Section C of the chapter *Reason* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which Terry Pinkard renders as "Individuality, which, to itself, is real in and for itself" (2018).

individual from the outside. This is not what the violent person does. The refusal of discourse and of coherence must be considered a pure attitude because it can be grasped coherently in discourse, even if it is not by the person who lives in it.

All philosophical categories have grasped violence in order to understand it. They do so by characterizing violence as instinct, as evil, as madness, as passion, etc. The novelty of Weil's interpretation is in the way that he characterizes violence in relation to reason. He hypothesizes a shared source. Weil claims, "violence, and violence felt violently as such, is at the origin of all discourse which claims to be coherent. It is violence which, age after age, provides itself with what it can negate in discourse and which, grasping itself as freedom in its discourse and, at the same time, against its discourse, produces philosophy." (LP 75) Weil thus argues that philosophy and violence cannot be dissociated because both spring from a shared source in human spontaneity. In other words, violence and understanding can be seen as two different, but very human ways of interacting with the world. Here lie the radical implications. There is violence because there is reason. The choice to understand is a free choice. It sets itself violently against the world by refusing and negating it, by being dissatisfied with the way the world presents itself as the immediacy of human experience. It thus posits that there is nothing immediate about this experience, and it makes the free choice to understand the totality of its experience against this world. It is the free choice that makes itself necessary by erecting an explanation of the world that justifies its dissatisfaction. But this choice, made necessary because made, can itself be abandoned. This is evident in the claim that violence and reason are two ways of interacting with the world. One can be satisfied with incoherence just as easily as one can be dissatisfied by a form of coherence and look to transform it. This puts all the fragility of understanding on display.

In the next chapter, we will come back to these philosophical categories that are also categories *of* philosophy, which characterize our relationship to discourse *as such* – and not merely to a particular discourse. Roughly speaking, Weil distinguishes four possibilities: 1) the individual's *identification* with discourse (illustrated by Hegel's philosophy, understood under the category of the *Absolute*); 2) the violent *refusal* of discourse (category of the *Work*), that is, of the very principle of giving and asking for reasons; 3) a practice that consists in destroying (or deconstructing) the coherence of discourse from within discourse itself (category of the *Finite*); 4) the realization of discourse, that is, the transformation of the world (category of *Action*). The last categories of the logic of philosophy, *Meaning* and *Wisdom*, recapitulate the entire process and elucidate its meaning, while grounding a *practice* of philosophy whose meaning and rational and reasonable character the *Logic of*

Philosophy aims at making explicit: the logic of philosophy is the grounding logic of a practice that must be constantly renewed according the specificity of present historic situations. In order to analyze these categories, however, we will have to consider the overall organization of the *Logic of philosophy*. This will be the topic of the next chapter. For the moment, we must introduce another concept that plays a key role in Weil's conception of philosophy. This concept, which is one of the most important of the *Logic of Philosophy*, is that of the *reprise*[17].

1.6   Reprises

In its simplest form, the reprise is the grasp of one attitude or category under another. Under this simple form, the reprise helps us to understand the movement of the logic of philosophy. New attitudes separate from established ones in action and not in discourse. They take shape thanks to the pragmatic refusal of the logical norms of the established discourse, but they are understood in discourse (within the framework of a new discourse). This means that they start to develop before they are grasped. Initially, they have no discourse of their own, and so they are grasped under the language of the established category. This is because the conceptual work of elaborating a discourse that can grasp what is irreducible about the attitude takes much time and great effort. This effort is what shows that older concepts are inadequate to grasp what is irreducible about the new attitude. The concepts thus undergo major changes in order to make this new attitude understood. In this way, individual concepts whole attitudes can be reprised.

There are numerous examples of this that can be taken from this history of philosophy, but a simple one is to be found in the way that intelligent design reprises the category of the *Condition* under that of *God*. That is, intelligent design subsumes the causally determined nature present in the experimental sciences under the notion of a divine creator that puts this causally determined nature into movement. We can also see how this works in the other direction. Explanations of faith as a psychological or socio-cultural mechanism reprise the category of *God* under that of the *Condition*. The cornerstone of religious belief is made sense of by transforming it to fit into an impersonal causally determined nature.

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[17] The journal *Cultura* dedicated an entire issue entitled *A Retomada na Filosofia de Eric Weil* (Bernardo, 2013) to the question of the reprise in 2013 with 19 articles from Luis Manuel Bernardo, Patrice Canivez, Evanildo Costeski, Francis Guibal, Gilbert Kirscher, Jean Quillien, Mahamadé Savadogo, Guiseppina Strummiello, Francisco Valdério, Andrea Verstrucci, and others.

Reprises thus play a central role in the coherence of categories. They allow attitudes to capture different phenomena and to give them a place within their discourse.

Because reprises can operate in a variety of ways between different discourse, they give way to the distinction between *justificatory* reprises and *evaluative* reprises. The difference between these two reprises is directional, one from the inside of a position and the other from outside of it (Canivez, 2013a). Justificatory reprises are used when a person leaves an established attitude and tries to explain their new attitude to people living under a different one. Justificatory reprises try to make themselves understood and also try to make their new position coherent to those who do not yet understand it. Justificatory reprises are those that the individual provides facing "the tribunal of his thought" (LP 366). This is different from evaluative reprises. Weil notes that evaluative reprises are always adjectival. They add an attribute in order to understand and evaluate the attitudes of others. A *scientific* explanation of biblical events frames them in a way that allows the category of the *Condition* to grasp them coherently, ergotism, for example, can be hypothesized to explain prophecies and visions without giving up on the factuality of biblical events. Each attitude uses the reprises that allow them to understand phenomena because "the reprise, to use a Kantian concept, is the *schema* which makes the category applicable to reality" (LP 82). This also means that concrete attitudes contain multiple reprises that are both justificatory and explanative as well as evaluative. The most basic reprises hold both aspects: when it is an ancient attitude that seeks to understand a newer one, it reprises this new attitude under its own language in order to evaluate and understand it. When a new attitude it reprises itself in the language of the older one, it does so in order to justify its position and to make it understood. The reprise, at the most basic level, allows the forms of coherence in the categories to be applied to the real concrete attitudes that individuals hold in the world. There are however also two "meta-discursive" uses. First, it allows the *grasp* of the progression of discourse as a new category pulls away from other older ones in order to express itself. Then, once the entire journey through the logic of philosophy is complete, it allows understanding the *use* of the categories in a philosophical practice that opens after all the categories have been grasped in the formal categories of *Meaning* and *Wisdom*. From this second point of view, *to philosophize* is to understand the real as it presents itself to be grasped in a situation. This modifies the notion of understanding. Under this second perspective understanding becomes grasping meaning. This is both why the category of meaning is central to Weil's work and why it is formal. In its comprehensiveness, it grasps every concrete meaning and includes them within itself. The reprise is therefore one of Weil's most important conceptual

innovations and it plays a major hermeneutical role. It not only allows us to understand how individuals apply their discourse to their lives, it also allows us to understand how other discourses hang together. In other words, it allows us to understand how others organize and hierarchize their concepts as well as how we do so for our own.

1.7   Systematicity and Openness

The *Logic of Philosophy* is an exploration of the act of understanding that hopes to ground that very act. It reframes this act in relation to violence because Weil thinks understanding can only be grounded in relation to its other, and he posits violence as that other. This exploration asks what violence is, how violence impacts the way one grasps the real, how that real is understood once grasped, and the role discourse plays in that grasp. In order to flesh out this ambition, its rereading of the history of philosophy becomes a meta-discourse bearing on philosophy, or more importantly, on the act of doing philosophy, on philosophizing. For Weil, philosophy is the attempt to grasp the world coherently and universally through discourse. Philosophy, in the Weilian sense, therefore largely outstrips any professional discipline or school. It is born and reborn anytime an individual wants to understand themself coherently, anytime they want to understand what bears not only on them, but rather what bears on all people. It is the choice to understand particularity through universality. Because this choice starts from the particularity it abandons, it has as many starting points as individuals. Because it aims at universality, philosophy seeks to overcome this particularity. When universality conceptualizes particularity, it can be seen as particular, as violent, as arbitrary, as contingent. Weil however doubts that this particularity can be overcome. This is because, for Weil, the choice to be reasonable can only be understood after it has already been made. The choice, arbitrary and contingent when made, can only retrospectively be understood as necessary. This choice thus remains free. By characterizing the choice of understanding as a retrospective process, Weil follows Hegel in implying that philosophy is circular, and thus systematic. But by characterizing particularity and freedom in terms of violence, he breaks from Hegel. The individual who seeks to understand themself and to grasp themself in the reality of their world must posit an explanation, and it is only when they succeed in grasping themself that this explanation is seen to hold. However this systematicity cannot be closed and completed. The choice to understand oneself and the world is a free choice and thus is a continual effort that anyone can start or stop at any moment. It is an a-reasonable and unjustified choice that is made and that is always

threatened by violence. The a-reasonable choice to choose reason or violence does however not necessarily imply non-violence. In certain cases it can even be the choice to legitimize the use of violence. In the case of the Second World War it is clear that purely discursive means would in no way resolve the conflict that Hitler had triggered with the invasion of Poland. The only feasible response to this aggression was to take up arms.

For Weil, discourse is systematic when it tries to explain everything according to a central concept, according to something that it sees as essential. All coherent discourse is systematic because the coherence is constructed in terms of how concepts fit together inferentially. But Weil also characterizes the refusal of discourse. This shows that the central concepts are not restricted to the inferential relationships inside of discourse, but can also define a specific relationship to discourse, which is pragmatic. Weil to situate his theory between the two major possibilities of the individual who grasp what is essential from its particularity in order to explain it to others, and the individual who refuses this grasp and refuse all explanation. According to this model, when individuals try to explain what is essential to them, they enter into public argumentative practices where this essential is put to the judgment of others. When they do not, public argumentative practices have no hold over them.

The problem of the contingency of a choice and its retrospective necessity puts Weil in a tricky position. When the essential is grasped and explained, that is, when it is put into discourse, it is seen as a motivation, as an orientation, as a desire, as an interest, etc. But before this happens, it is merely the turbid depths of our experience. People already know too much and, desperately, not enough. This not enough, this lack of understanding is only clear however to the individual who decides to understand. For the rest of us, we are born in a community and our goals are already oriented by this community without us realizing that they are. This is why we know too much, we do not independently and as fully rational agents decide what is essential to us. It is a consequence of being part of a group, of a *we*, and *we* know how to act and what to do according to the contours of *our* society, *our* class, *our* gender, whether *we* are only children or come from a household crawling with siblings, whether *we* are rich or poor, etc. However, as soon as an individual seeks to understand, they are confronted by the radical insufficiencies of their own experience. Our knowledge seems solid but stands on sandy shoals, ready to be swallowed up by the slightest shift. Weil acknowledges this difficulty from the very first chapter, which starts: "[t]he defect of every beginning in philosophy is being the beginning: the choice of starting point is neither justified nor justifiable, since nothing is established" (LP 89). He is not the first philosopher

to have brought this problem forward. As Gilbert Kirscher[18] notes, as far back as Parmenides' invocation of the Goddess, philosophers have had to deal with the problem of justifying the starting point of their philosophical gesture. Weil, following Fichte, claims that the choice of starting point has to be understood as an act and this act has to be understood as free, arbitrary, and incomprehensible. It is precisely the process that keeps looking back over its shoulder to this incomprehensible choice that transforms it into a necessity.

Because individuals are born members of a community, there is an ambient authority that ranges over all the members. But there is no perfect adequacy between life experiences, between interests and desires, and thus the understanding of what is supposed to establish this authority must be chewed over again and again. It must continually be reformulated. Weil's notion of systematicity is therefore both open and evolving. Weil's systematicity posits that when an individual has a coherent discourse, they grasp their life as a unity that has a place in a community that fits into the world as a united whole. It emphasizes the continuity of humanity with the rest of existence. Its openness comes from the fact that new things can always enter into the discourse that defines the unity of a life found in a human community and its evolution from the fact that individuals can respond to this novelty from the viewpoint of their interests and desires. Its openness and evolution are found in the way that discourse transforms the human community in which individuals find themselves. It is a systematicity that tries to organize the diverse human attitudes that are found in the world in order to understand them, but an openness that understands this systematicity as a project that can be shook to its deepest foundations or completely destroyed precisely by the individual's choice to live outside of discourse.

For all their similarities, it is the movement to understand life outside of discourse that separates the Hegelian project from the Weilian one. This also show how the relationship to systematic philosophy differs from Weil to Hegel. For Hegel, everything is understood because it is understood in the system. For Weil, this remains true, to the extent that the *Logic of Philosophy* remains a system. But it is a system of the philosophical shapes of meaning that are also shapes of freedom and that must be taken up again and again in order to grasp every new production of meaning. This production of meaning is not merely recapitulative and discourse is only ever absolutely coherent formally and never concretely.

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[18] The whole first part of Gilbert Kirscher's book (Kirscher, 1989) on the *Logic of Philosophy* deals with the problem of the beginning of philosophy, both from a historical point of view, starting from the types of beginnings that have been elaborated in western thought, and from a logical point of view, that is, by examining the aporia of beginning.

Or as Weil notes in the transcription of a roundtable discussion following a conference called "Philosophie et realité" he states:

> Even in his *Logic* Hegel is required to distinguish between *Wircklichkeit* and *Dasein*, and to declare that the concept cannot penetrate the outer husk. In fact, when he works on the concrete, I believe that he does not at all maintain the pretention of absolute knowing. Absolute knowing is a knowledge of the structure and not of the structured. The structured is inexhaustible. He calls it *schlechte Wirklichkeit*, but because he calls it *schlechte* it is nonetheless real. (PR.I.49-50)

In other words, to further cite Weil's responses, "[t]here is the idea of absolute knowing, but there is no absolute knowing, that is, philosophy always remains philosophizing" (PR.I.49). The system, in order to understand itself, must also accept that it is possible to live outside the system *and* find contentment. This opens Weil project, which is systematic, to a philosophical practice that overflows every system. It creates an openness to all discourse, to all attitudes, that struggles to understand (philosophically) how these different attitudes are irreducible. The categories thus provide, for the individual who seeks to understand, who wants to remain a philosopher, a hermeneutical tool to understand how individuals close themselves into different discourses. It leads to a practice of philosophy because the individual recognizes at the end of the *Logic of Philosophy*, that nobody can be a pure Platonic, or Aristotelian, or Kantian, or Hegelian philosopher. This is because the situation in which these philosophers articulated meaning and in which they grasped the meaning of the world has changed (the greatest philosophers are even the central motors of that change). In this way, it is always necessary to modify the philosophy one finds, whether in Plato, in Aristotle, in Kant, in Hegel, or in any other philosophical work, in order to make it applicable to one's concrete situation. Weil's understanding of systematicity is defined by an openness to the novelty that the social and natural worlds provide. According to this systematicity, different discourses are so many ways of grasping each situation as it presents itself in reality. Because of the singularity of each concrete situation, the major concepts of any discourse will always need to be reprised, that is, grasped under a variety of angles in order for those concepts to be applicable to this situation itself. This is because, in each person's life, the responsibility of orienting one's lives, or giving it meaning, of grasping the meaning that they find in the world, falls on their own shoulders. No philosopher, no philosophy can provide this orientation. It is for each person to create, with or without the help of philosophy. Different philosophies can help them to realize this orientation, but it cannot give it to them fully-formed and whole.

The *Logic of Philosophy* is thus a book about human discourse that opens the door to a practice of philosophy which seeks to articulate the identity between human discourse and human situations. However, because this identity itself can only be concrete in the concrete world of human interaction and human understanding, it must take into account the possibility of failure that accompanies the very idea of this identity. This failure, as we have said, is linked to the possibility of violence. However, it is not merely the external violence of the natural or social world, it is also the real possibility of the refusal of understanding. It is the violence that lives in all of us because it is always one of our possibilities. It is the concrete individual, it is you and me, that can fail to be up snuff, that can pull away from reasonable discourse and become violent. The *Logic of Philosophy* thus characterizes and develops the free choice that the act of understanding makes in order to refuse the incoherence and the violence that human individuals find in the world, but it also develops the ever-present possibility of choosing violence. In doing so, Weil claims that three major concepts constitute philosophical discourse, *attitudes*, *categories*, and *reprises*. However, in order to this to be true, it must also be true of Weil's discourse as it is presented therein. We must thus understand the *Logic of Philosophy* as the work of the philosophical attitude of understanding that attempts to constitute its own category by reprising the history of philosophy, that is, the history of philosophical discourses in order to apply meaning to concrete situations by understanding different individual relationships to discourse.

We can now present an initial overview of Weil's substantive philosophical concepts. The logic of philosophy develops an analysis of human discourse and the way that human discourse structures our conceptual landscape. Within this work, Weil does this by distinguishing the following ideas:

- **Violence**. The concept of violence is the formal grasp of the particular recognized in its particularity. It is brought into discourse (that it, it is formalized) by subsuming it under the logical role of contradiction.

- The **essential** and the **inessential**. The essential is defined as what is central to an attitude and what discourse is organized around. The inessential is what an attitude puts aside, places on the periphery or refuse outright in order for that discourse to be coherent.

- **Attitudes** and **categories**. Attitudes are the diversity of human ways of being in the world. Pure attitudes are those attitudes that can be grasped in coherent discourse. All pure attitudes are ideal-types because they are not encountered in the world but are made of those aspects that can be organized coherently

and grasped thanks to a central concept. The category is the coherent development of the pure attitudes *as* a discourse. Pure attitudes are thus transformed into philosophical categories and not metaphysical ones.

- **Metaphysical categories** and **philosophical categories**. Metaphysical categories are the transversal concepts that are used by science in order to grasp reality as an object *inside* of an attitude. Philosophical categories are the unity of a concrete situation and a lived experience grasped *in* discourse. Metaphysical categories depend on philosophical categories for their orientation.

- **Concrete categories** and **formal categories**. Concrete categories are the categories that have a corresponding attitude. In this way, they constitute the concrete discourses of concrete individuals as they grasp the world, their situation, and their life in that discourse. Formal categories ground the act of grasping the world. All individuals participate in this act when they try to grasp the world or their life in discourse. The formal category of *Meaning* grounds the formal possibility of having a discourse that grasps a human situation. The formal category of *Wisdom* grounds the formal possibility of the unity of life and discourse in the presence of a concrete situation.

- **Reprises**. Reprises are the grasp of one category or attitude under a different category. This grasp allows Weil to explain the development of the logic of philosophy as well as to explain how individuals grasp their concrete situation. The reprise not only helps individuals to justify their action in order to make it understandable to others, it also gives individuals the hermeneutical tools to evaluate and grasp the actions and attitudes of others.

Thanks to these ideas we are now in a position to understand the main commitments Weil himself makes. In the next chapter, I will look at some of the major organizational structures of the *Logic of Philosophy* in order to help the reader to better situate themselves. These different organizational structures will be important as I present the substantive arguments of this work, and as I show what Weil's philosophical project can contribute to contemporary philosophy.

Chapter 2   LOGIC AS THE ORGANIZATION OF FORMS OF COHERENCE

2.1   Introduction

In the last chapter, I claimed that the recognition of different forms of coherence present in human discourse leads Eric Weil not to any single overarching metaphysical principle, but rather to the possibility of a type of philosophical practice. Philosophy becomes one human possibility among others, the main other being the possibility of refusing all coherence and all understanding. This falls into line with the "anthropological" reading of the *Logic of Philosophy* proposed by Mahamadé Savadogo (2003) and Francis Guibal (2011; 2015) which sees philosophy as "the tale of human realizations" and sees the logic as "the forms of humanity's expression" (Savadogo, 2003: 78), and which sees philosophy as the self-understanding and self-realization in an "anthropo-logy interior to the whole of reality" (Guibal, 2015: 137). This helps us to understand what Weil means when he says that:

> *First philosophy* is […] not a theory of Being, but the development of *logos*, of discourse, for itself and by itself, in the reality of human existence, which understands itself in its realizations, in so far as it *wants* to understand itself. It's not ontology; it's logic, not of Being, but of concrete human discourse, of the discourses that form discourse in its unity (LP 69).

According to this reading, the refusal of coherence and understanding is a free choice, just as understanding philosophically (coherently and totally) is. For this reason, the philosophical choice is what Weil calls an "absolute principle" (LP 61). This description brings out three concepts that will guide this chapter, those of coherence, totality, and ground. Together these three concepts help develop the notion of comprehensiveness that Weil puts into place in order to understand the different shapes that discourse takes. Weil's position is the result of a historical development of these concepts and he organizes his own discourse in order to see the ground of philosophy as free choice to understand coherently and totally. The individual who makes this choice and who chooses to understand philosophically does so by refusing incoherence and violence, by positing a starting point and then by organizing their discourse coherently. The suite of categories is thus the history of the individuals (the philosophers) who have succeeded in elaborating discourses that allow a specific form of coherence to be grasped and understood. Because they have succeeded, not only have they extracted a form of coherence that allows them to grasp the

world and their experience, they have also articulated a form of coherence can be used by others in their own grasp of the world. Philosophy is a possibility and an absolute principle for the individual who refuses to accept that the world is meaningless and that meaning is ungraspable. This refusal is the exercise of freedom that characterizes every coherent discourse.

The refusal that posits meaning is central to understanding the logic of philosophy. This is because the logic of philosophy, in being the organization of these different discourses, is not a logic in the terms that we are normally familiar with. Is it the study of the rules of thought? Yes, but it proposes multiple systems of thought which see these rules differently. Is it the study of valid inference? Yes, but only in so far as valid inference allows us to distinguish between different forms of discourse. Is it the study of arguments? Yes, but first and foremost to show that argument is born of a choice that itself is not logical. Weil notes that the logic of philosophy is:

> not logic in the sense of non-contradiction—because it deals with solutions that between them are contradictory and self-contradicting—, not a logic of science—because science, for logic, is only one of man's possibilities, and perhaps not the first possibility for logic, supposing that there can be a first possibility—but the *logos of eternal discourse in its historicity*, understood by itself and understood as the human possibility which has chosen itself, but which also knows that it has chosen itself and that it would not exist were it capable of being necessary (LP 77).

Weil thus presents the logic of philosophy as the organization of the different grasps of concrete forms of coherence that have *actually* held up in history. These grasps present themselves as coherent discourse. These different forms of coherence can be contradictory between them (and are), but they also build off each other and respond to each other.

Coherence is built in opposition, in opposition to incoherence, in opposition to the nonchalance of partial coherence, in opposition to other forms of coherence that it doesn't accept. As it develops into different discourses there are problems that appear and disappear, there are concepts that come to guide coherence and those that become errant. This is why concepts like being, freedom, truth, etc. have had long and varying fortunes. The logic of philosophy, as the organization of different philosophical discourse into a suite of categories according to their coherence and universality, helps us to understand these varying fortunes. Each category, by being the presentation of a form of coherence, is the articulation of a free choice to organize the act of understanding according to a central concept. Taken as autonomous, free-standing forms of coherence, the categories are limited to the types of

inferences that their central organizing concept allows or forbids. But, taken as a systematic whole, they are essential moments in the development of *all* forms of coherence. In other words, they are false as on their own, but true as moments of the logic of philosophy. The different categories, with their different forms of coherence, and the different scope of universality that each form proposes, highlight the role that orders of explanation plays in the logic of philosophy.

Different starting points and different orders of explanation provide different forms of coherence. In fact, if we look at Weil's three driving concepts (attitudes, categories, and reprises) according to the idea of orders of explanation we can better understand why Weil's project has the shape it does. He starts from attitudes because he wants to understand the human activity of individuals embedded in their lives. However, he highlights how objective understanding is always discursive, and thus he shows how attitudes can only make claims of objectivity *when* they are grasped thanks to discourse. This difference between attitude and category is, as I have said, the difference between the production of meaning in language and in action, and the organization of meaning in discourse. Each discourse, starting from their central concept, thus takes on an order of explanation that allows them to make a claim of coherence and universality. It is the reprise that allows us to grasp how these different forms of coherence use the same concepts. Based on the type of order of explanation that they put into place, different concepts will be reprised in different ways.

The differences between attitudes and categories, between the different types of categories, the difference between language and discourse, the role of human spontaneity, the uses of different reprises, the choice of an orientation, all of these things are the means Eric Weil uses to coherently explain and understand the role and place of violence in our conceptual apparatus. As already mentioned, for Weil, this violence goes all the way down. Even if it is discernable from the act of understanding, it remains inseparable from it. By noting that the choice to understand is built in opposition, we recognize this violence. The choice to understand is the refusal and modification of forms of coherence that *have* held together, that not only already propose understanding, but also already form the understanding of the individual who refuses and modifies them. In other words, opposition does not happen in a vacuum, rather, the choice to understand implies the rejection and refusal of specific forms of coherence that are found in discourse.

The move from one form of coherence to another is a free jump, it is a leap where one tries to pull free from the constraints that hold them back while trying to build a stable landing out of these same constraints as they fall. It is a rupture because in landing, these old

constraints are used to climb higher in understanding. This rupture happens between each category, between each form of coherence, but Eric Weil also tries to understand how these different forms of coherence fit together. In this chapter, I will present the forms of coherence that Weil uses in the logic of philosophy and explain how they fit together. This presentation will not be exhaustive, rather it will be the minimum necessary to orient the arguments that I will develop in the rest of this work[19]. This work focuses on specific aspects of Eric Weil's arguments so it can in no way replace the study of the *Logic of Philosophy*. To the end of grasping specific arguments, I will bring out certain organizational and conceptual features that will help us to better understand the *Logic of Philosophy*.

2.2   Organizational Strategies of the *Logic of Philosophy*

There are multiple overlapping organizational possibilities in the logic of philosophy. This is normal: there are multiple historical and logical developments that interlock in different ways and Weil tries to take them into account. This multiplicity also highlights why Weil thinks that all of the categories are necessary, and why any conceptual grasp deploys all the categories. To explain different things, different orders of explanation are needed and these different orders reduce the totality of meaning in order to bring out certain salient features. If this were not the case, the different organization features that Weil and his commentators deploy would be a confusing mess, however, because of Weil's insistence on multiple points of view, it is a reasonable plurality if it is seen as participating in a grasp of meaning that requires the plurality of all forms of coherence. With that in mind we can look at the different organization features that are present in the *Logic of Philosophy*. The most immediate and simplest division is between the different categories. Each category corresponds to a single chapter in the book. They are:

> *Truth, Nonsense, The True and the False, Certainty, The Discussion, The Object, The Self, God, Condition, Conscience, Intelligence, Personality, The Absolute, The Work, The Finite, Action, Meaning, Wisdom*

The next simple division is between concrete categories and formal categories, which breaks the work up as follows:

Concrete Categories

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[19] For full developments and analyses of the suite of categories cf. (Kluback, 1987; Kirscher, 1989; Canivez, 1999; Savadogo, 2003; Guibal, 2011)

Truth, Nonsense, The True and the False, Certainty, The Discussion, The Object, The Self, God, Condition, Conscience, Intelligence, Personality, The Absolute, The Work, The Finite, Action

Formal Categories

Meaning, Wisdom

This division separates the categories that have concrete attitudes and those that have no attitude but rather that explain the possibility of concrete attitudes and that allow the retrospective understanding of the logic of philosophy. When looking at the difference between concrete categories and formal categories, we can note that the content of the attitude and the concrete category is not different. In fact, the category is nothing other than the totality of the attitude given as a discursive shape. Thus, for the concrete categories it would be more correct to label them (as Weil himself does on numerous occasions) attitude/categories and not separate the two. This is because the development of the attitude, and thus understanding a category, is grasping this development in all the particular aspects that make up the totality.

The next simple division that Weil makes is between philosophical categories and the categories *of* philosophy. This division is useful but also problematic. The simple division seems to show *The Absolute* as the first category *of* philosophy, however Weil neither not tell us whether the categories of philosophy are also philosophical categories nor whether the formal categories are part of the categories *of* philosophy or not. Nonetheless, with this division we see that the categories *of* philosophy characterize what philosophical discourse does, and not just its content. If we keep the division such as it is described by Weil, this division is as follows:

Philosophical Categories

Truth, Nonsense, The True and the False, Certainty, The Discussion, The Object, The Self, God, Condition, Conscience, Intelligence, Personality

Categories of Philosophy

The Absolute, The Work, The Finite, Action, Meaning, Wisdom

This division is further complicated however because there is an ambiguity between the initial categories and the other philosophical categories. Weil claims that philosophy starts in *The Object*, that is, it starts in the development of classic ontology as exemplified by Plato and Aristotle. If this is the case, what is the status of the categories preceding the object? Weil repeatedly calls the first categories "primitive" categories. Because they are, when all is said and done, pre-philosophical. Thus, are the "primitive" categories philosophical

categories or not? He speaks of philosophical categories in *Certainty*, which is the last "primitive" category, so therefore it would seem that the primitive categories are philosophical to the extent that Weil sees them as necessary for the development of philosophy, but they are primitive because, strictly speaking, they do not themselves provide any philosophical reflection.

If the philosophical categories are those required for philosophical reflection, all the categories are philosophical categories but there are different subsets. However, if we follow this line of thought, *The Discussion* poses a problem, it is clearly not a "primitive" category, (nonetheless it is pre-philosophical in the sense that it prior to philosophy understood as philosophy, which, for Weil, starts from *The Object*). Rather *The Discussion*, which is exemplified by the formal dialogical practices developed by Socrates, is political, because it is the first category where the questions of rights are posed. The dialogical practices that are put into place by this attitude/category do not aim at understanding reality in its totality, they aim at the agreement of different individuals inside of a political community. However, it is also clear that Socratic dialogical practices lay the groundwork for the categories that follow. Thus, we cannot say that it is primitive. According to this reflection the different subsets of philosophical categories can be divided as:

Primitive Philosophical Categories

Truth, Nonsense, The True and the False, Certainty

Simple Philosophical Categories

The Discussion, The Object, The Self, God, Condition, Conscience, Intelligence, Personality

Categories of Philosophy

The Absolute, The Work, The Finite, Action

Formal Philosophical Categories

Meaning, Wisdom

Nonetheless this organization is also complicated by the relationship between *Action* and the two formal categories, *Meaning* and *Wisdom*. Éric Weil develops the categories as the shapes human discourses on meaning have taken in history, however because he thinks that each new concrete shape provides something that an older one did not, the older shape is in a sense surpassed. Weil claims that *Action* is the last concrete category, because *Action* is the most fully realizable human attitude. It is the attitude of the individual who leaves the reflection on discourse and on reality to act on that same discourse and that same reality that presents itself in discourse *through discursive means*. It is the action that aims at the

collective action of individuals to realize a world where discourse is real and effective. It thus is a return to a political attitude, but one that surpasses philosophy. It is the articulation of a philosophical attitude that gives itself the task of educating mankind. This leads Gilbert Kirscher for instance to note that *Action*, *Meaning*, and *Wisdom* hold Weil's own philosophical attitude and as such this tryptic holds a special place apart in the *Logic of Philosophy* (1992: 49-59).

Does this however mean that we should divide the categories according to Weil's philosophical attitude? Does this mean that we are thus forced to recognize that Weil has fully explained the possibility of philosophy? Is that too bold of a claim? Maybe. It has been noted that Weil develops a philosophy of meaning and that this philosophy "claims to be the last systematic discourse, of understanding, of understanding one's self and of making one's self understood" (Venditti, 1984: 104) However this claim has yet to be shown, and only history can show it. Again, at the interior of Weil's own discourse there are a multitude of organizational strategies. And again, this is normal. Weil thinks that grasping meaning requires multiplying point of view and trying to bring this multitude together in a coherent and comprehensive unity. This also explains why different commentators have highlighted different articulations. Multiple commentators (Kirscher, 1992; Canivez, 1993; Ganty, 1997) for instance bring out the way Weil develops different logical moments from the Socratic dialectic to Hegelian conceptual logic (LP 22-53) and then compare it to Weil's development of the contradiction between reason and violence (or truth and freedom, which are the grounds of this opposition).This division can be presented as:

Prelogical Categories (in the sense of non-contradiction)

Truth, Nonsense, The True and the False, Certainty

The Logic of Formal Dialogical Practices

The Discussion

The Logic of Classic Ontology

The Object, The Self, God, Condition

Transcendental Logic

Conscience, Intelligence, Personality

Hegelian Dialectical Logic

The Absolute

The Logic of Reason and Violence

The Work, The Finite, Action, Meaning, Wisdom

This division is useful and is one Weil makes, however two categories, *Intelligence* and *Personality* seem difficult to situate. Are *Intelligence*, (the category exemplified by Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Bayle) and *Personality* (exemplified by Friedrich Nietzsche) to be understood according to transcendental logic's division between nature and freedom as it is developed in *Conscience* and as it is exemplified by Kant and Fichte? Their placement after *Conscience* would lead us to say yes, because they reflect on freedom in a conditioned nature even though it is unclear that they would recognize themselves under these categories. In fact, for Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Bayle, it would be impossible to reflect on their discourse in terms of Kant's transcendental logic, precisely because they wrote before Kant. However, this highlights why Weil insists that attitudes "have precedence *in history*" (LP 79) but that the logical order is dependent on the categories. *Intelligence* reflects on something that *Conscience* was the first to grasp coherently even though Montaigne and Bayle wrote before Kant.

The categories following the initial "primitive" categories have undergone different divisions. Gilbert Kirscher (1989) separates them according to Weil's distinction of the degrees of reflection that they allow (LP 341-344). He asks the question of what categories grasp and how they grasp it. Do they grasp the world? Yes or no? Do they grasp it partially or totally? Do they grasp the world *and* themselves? Yes or no? Do they grasp this unity partially or totally? A yes or no response to these questions distinguishes the degree of reflection the categories have, from the simple pre-reflexive categories such as *The Discussion*, *The Object*, and *The Self* which don't fully grasp the problems that the distinction between the subject and the object create all the way to the categories of absolute reflection in *The Personality* and *The Absolute* which seek to unite the subject and the object in a single discourse. Francis Guibal (2011) keeps this division but additionally insists on the relationship between the categories of Antiquity and of Modernity. According to this division, the categories that are grounded in reason from *The Discussion* to *The Self* are those of Antiquity and those that are grounded in freedom, from *God* onwards, are those of Modernity. However, Weil insists that *God*, as the union of Greek thought and Judeo-Christian thought (ENHP 15), straddles both. It is what he calls "the turning point of philosophical becoming, the most modern of the categories of antiquity, the most antiquated of the modern" (LP 188) and as straddling both, how to understand it? Which division to use?

The problematic position of the category of *God* allows us to bring out another conceptual distinction that Weil makes and that has been highlighted by Francis Guibal

(2011: 121), that of the different "*sols*" of discourse. The French term *sol* here is best translated as "floor". In using the term *sol*, Weil plays off the polysemy of the term in French which could alternately be translated as floor, ground, soil, or earth. The reason that floor is the translation used here is to bring out certain conceptual distinctions while also retaining the term *fond* to be used exclusively for "ground" in the sense of what grounds reflection and thought, or what grounds justification. Additionally, floor also allows us to exploit the notion of a multi-story vertical structure where each floor is solid but not foundational. Thus, *The Discussion* is the floor of the categories of Antiquity, and the *Condition* and not *God* is the flood of Modernity. Weil notes that:

> in each category, ordinary existence is recognized, under the title of unconscious life, life of the people, the mass, particularity, etc.…, that the *condition*, as attitude, is seen throughout as the soil [*sol*] out of which the new attitude blossoms, just as the new category grasps itself in the opposition to the one that immediately precedes it." (LP 395).

Thus, the categories of *The Discussion* and *The Condition* highlight that the floors of discourse are defined by a type of social organization and a type of language. The categories that follow *The Discussion*, the same as the categories that follow *The Condition* are developed on and react to their floor of discourse.

The notion of *sol* illustrates that there is something solid that supports later discourses. While it is true that every category builds off previous ones, we can exploit the architectural metaphor of floor here and note that there are certain floors in buildings that divide the building between what is below and what is above, like landings or atriums, and that the things above and below are understood in relation to these specific floors. The discursive floors that I will speak of are thus important because the following categories interpret and understand themselves in relation to this floor. If we accept this than the category of *Certainty* can be seen as the floor of any pre-reflexive, pre-philosophical understanding of the world, because all pre-philosophical attitudes are grasped according to the certainty that they provide to the individual. *The Discussion* is the floor of simple reason which has a critical reflection on the tradition, but is not itself reflexive. This is different from the reflexive total reflection on the world that takes shape in *The Condition* where the world is seen as a totality of conditions. The notion of discursive floors allows us to better understand why Kirscher insists on the degrees of reflection, and why Guibal and Kirscher analyze the *Logic of Philosophy* along the lines of what they call simple reason (Kirscher,

1989: 243; Guibal, 2011: 80) which make up the categories of Antiquity, and freedom which make up the categories of Modernity. This allows the following articulation:

The Ground of Discourse

Truth

Categories Interpreted Exclusively in Relation to this Ground

Nonsense, The True and the False, Certainty

The Floor of Antiquity

The Discussion

Categories Interpreted in Relation to this Floor

The Object, The Self

Transitional Category Between Antiquity and Modernity

God

The Floor of Modernity

The Condition

Categories Interpreted in Relation to this Floor

Conscience, Intelligence, Personality, The Absolute, The Work, The Finite, Action, Meaning, Wisdom

The multiple divisions that are highlighted here are all present in the *Logic of Philosophy*. Their presence goes further to showing why Weil thinks that a plurality of points of view are necessary in order to understand philosophically. Nonetheless what seems clear in all of these divisions is that there are certain key junctions in the *Logic of Philosophy*. The key junctions that I will present are those that allow us to understand the *Logic of Philosophy* as a development of discursive resources, as a development of the resources that certain categories add to coherent discourse. This approach is not new, most authors have in some way or another tried bring these resources out and some authors have done so explicitly (Quillien, 1982; Kirscher, 1989; Canivez, 1999; Guibal, 2011, 2012).

This division will present the suite of categories according to the development of discursive resources. Thus, the primitive categories become the categories that present and develop the preconditions of argumentative coherent discourse. The simple philosophical categories are modified to be seen as the genesis and development of coherent discourse. By presenting the categories along the lines of the development of coherent discourse, *The Absolute*, which is seen as the completion of coherent discourse, falls into this grouping. The following categories *of* philosophy, *The Work, The Finite, Action,* the categories that multiply points of view are thus understood as characterizing the individual's relationship to

discourse. This is a major change from the other forms of organization because it allows Weil's difference from Hegel to become clearer. Furthermore, the formal philosophical categories are understood as formal here, not only because they have no concrete attitude, but rather because what they add to coherent discourse is the characterization and development of its possibility. This thus gives us the following organization:

The Background of Argumentative Discourse

Truth, Nonsense, The True and the False, Certainty

The Genesis and Development of Coherent Discourse

The Discussion, The Object, The Self, God, Condition, Conscience, Intelligence, Personality, The Absolute

Relationships to Coherent Discourse

The Work, The Finite, Action

Reflection on the Formal Possibility of Coherent Discourse

Meaning, Wisdom

Following this organizational strategy (while occasionally deploying the others), will allow us to avoid presenting a full commentary of the *Logic of Philosophy* (which as I have said, has been done elsewhere) in order to focus on several key concepts that are present in the work. These concepts, (ground, coherence, and totality) are to be seen as the development of the different discursive floors. Thus, this chapter will merely present certain articulations that allow these concepts to become clearer, namely the initial categories from *Truth* to *Certainty*, which cover the preconditions of argumentative discourse followed by the articulation between *Certainty*, *The Discussion*, *The Object*, which will allow us to explore the transition between a prelogical understanding and the first two logical forms, those of formal dialogical practices and ontological logic. It will also allow us to present the discursive floor of reason and better define the categories of Antiquity. The next articulation that is presented is between *God, The Condition, Conscience*. This will allow us to explain the discursive floor of Modernity in freedom, the reflection on the totality of nature, and allow us to investigate the transition between ontological logic and transcendental logic. Afterwards, we will present the rupture between *The Absolute* and *Work*, which will allow us to see the transition between Hegelian logic and the logic of reason and violence as well as the transition from the categories that develop coherent discourse and the categories that develop the relationship to discourse. Finally, we will examine the tryptic *Action, Meaning, Wisdom* which is the heart of Weil's own position.

2.3 The Background of Discourse

I have said that the reflection on orders of explanation is central to the *Logic of Philosophy*. This is clear as soon as Weil presents *Truth*, the first category. Weil posits that every philosophical starting point is a free act, unjustified and unjustifiable except at the end. So, what do we learn at the end of the *Logic of Philosophy* that justifies this starting point? We learn that Weil is seeking to understand the different shapes coherent discourse has taken throughout its history in order to understand the free choice between violence and coherent discourse. The first category is curious because in it, Weil less explains the attitude and more reflects on the difficulty of starting. He thus chooses a starting point, notes that we should remain suspicious of it, but also notes that though has to start somewhere. This starting point is that "[p]hilosophy is the search for truth, and is only the search for truth." (LP 89), He then goes on to add that "the judgment: "Truth is everything", can't be part of the doctrine; it is part of the explanation. The doctrine can start only with the single word *truth*. Said otherwise, *all* judgment about truth is absurd" (LP 90). This is important, because it gives a key to unpacking his starting point.

The concepts of *doctrine* and *explanation* are as Gilbert Kirscher shows (1989: 162-166) essential to understanding the *Logic of Philosophy* and are central concepts within the distinction that Éric Weil makes between attitudes and categories. The doctrine is what is lived in the attitude. It is the meaning the individual finds and creates. It is the center from which the individual thinks. In other words, it is what is implicit in the simple non-reflexive thinking and acting of the individual living in the world and grasping this world's meaning. Because this thinking and acting is non-reflexive and simple, it does not grasp itself (it will later, but here it is incapable of doing so). It remains invisible without the appearance of another attitude that is different and that can also be grasped. The appearance of this difference is what leads to the explanation of the attitude. The explanation is thus the explicit content of the attitude, it is the reflexive grasp of what the attitude thinks and what the content of the attitude *means*. This allows us to reframe the reprise in terms of doctrine and explanation, in terms of the implicit and the explicit. The reprise is what permits a content to be made explicit. As soon as one starts to do so, by reprising the older language under a new attitude, the older attitude is changed into a category. This explains why, for Weil, "*reflection* precedes the *doctrine*. But the reflection *is only* in the doctrine, which is first" (LP 92). The category is the starting point of *philosophical* understanding, but it is itself always mediated by discourse. Thus, to the "reflection of discourse actually started" saying

that *Truth* "is a category of discourse is saying that it appears in its transcendental function (as the ground of discourse)." This is why "discourse is essentially reflexive and is only realized starting from the reflection on the fact of discourse" (Kirscher, 1989: 165). Thus, to mobilize the concepts that I said would guide this reading, *Truth* is the ground of all discourse but it is not the ground of philosophy understood philosophically. This is because, in *Truth*, the questions of coherence and totality have not yet been asked. Whatever coherence there is, is lost in the totality of the pre-reflexive life lived as a total unity.

The discursive grasp of the attitude of *Truth* can only start from a single word and in a way, the logic of philosophy is a development of the inferential unfolding of this single word. This is because the attitude of *Truth*, as a unity of the individual and the world is silent and the grasp of the pure attitude in discourse cannot develop anything that has not yet been developed. There is no judgment because every predicate involves restricting truth's domain. There is no certainty because certainty involves the notion of subjectivity. In fact, not only is truth a silent attitude, it is unrecognizable to the person who lives in it because there is as of yet no contrast. This is why, for us, here and now, the entire background of our own attitudes, what we don't recognize because it is too "natural," is a reprise of truth. It is only insofar as we each live embedded in the world and in the attitude of *Truth* that the world is taken to be factual, that it is the domain of facts. It nonetheless remains a reprise because we can only understand it thanks to notions such as *facts*, *attitudes*, *world*, etc. None of which is present in this first attitude.

The attitude of *Truth* is silent and yet Weil presents Parmenides in order to help the reader understand the category. This seems to be a contradiction, Parmenides spoke, he wrote, his poem has passed down through the generations. However, what Weil notes is that it is not Parmenides' teaching, nor his poem that is our guide, but rather it is the recognition of how he lived, as the mouthpiece of the Goddess, that allows us to understand the attitude of *Truth*. The content of the pure attitude grasped in discourse is a single word. This is why, in the presentation of the category, Weil does not elaborate any content, but rather gives a description of the difficulties and dead-ends that lie in wait for any reflection on the attitude. He warns that these difficulties are born from the fact that we come to this primordial category with all the conceptual determinations of our own modern attitudes, and that these are precisely the things we have to watch out for as we develop the category of *Truth*.

Because Weil hopes to avoid the difficulties of other philosophical projects, it is instructive to look at another starting point to see how it is different from Weil's. As already noted, Weil's project bears great similarities to Hegel's, we can thus look at two different

starting points that Hegel uses to contrast them with Weil[20]. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel starts his presentation with an explanation of *Sense-Certainty*, that is, he starts from the description of what he sees as the most primitive attitude of the knowing consciousness. In the *Science of Logic*, he claims that philosophy must start from "*being*, and nothing else, without further determination and filling." (Hegel, 2015: 21.55-56). In terms of starting points, Weil's *Logic* bears similarity to both Hegel's *Phenomenology* and to Hegel's *Logic*. In the first, Hegel is trying to show the *experience* of consciousness as it evolves from a purely subjective point of view into a socially articulated understanding where the individual recognizes their place in the whole thanks to that experience. In the second, he is trying to show the *nature* of thought as the development of the concept. Weil's project shares some aspects of both of these goals. In fact, we can say that *Truth* as an attitude can be compared with that of *Sense-certainty* in the *Phenomenology* whereas *Truth* as a category can be compared to *Being* in the *Logic*. Weil, like Hegel, is trying to say something both about the experience of and the nature of his object, but his object is not the thought understood metaphysically. In a way, it is discourse understood empirically, that is as a concrete and manipulable phenomenon. He is not looking to give the most basic shape of consciousness, but the most basic grasp of the world in discourse. This difference, added to the fact that for Hegel, Being leads to becoming, and thus to a type of immanence that Weil is seeking to avoid, helps to explain the difference between their starting points.

Weil circumnavigates the metaphysical question of Being and starts, like Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, from a human attitude. The difference here is that it is not the attitude of *Sense-certainty*, but rather the attitude of the individual that lives their experience in the world as *Truth*. This is because, *discursively*, in order to understand the problems of *Sense-certainty* we must already have a concept of truth in place, we must already make a distinction between what is true and what is false. The problem, for Weil, in both cases is that this starting point of philosophy remains *discursive* and he sees Hegel as not adequately investigating the conditions of discursivity. I mentioned how, in the last chapter, Weil's system goes beyond that of Hegel's because of the way he seeks to understand the non-philosophical attitude. Here at the beginning of his own *Logic*, Weil already distinguishes himself from Hegel. It is the loss of meaning that opens the search for understanding for Weil and not the confusion of sense-certainty that shows its insufficiencies as in the *Phenomenology*, nor the mediations of *Nothingness* as in the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*.

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[20] For a complementary but different reading of Hegel's place in the initial categories cf. (Renaud, 2013).

Weil thus posits that there is a more fundamental attitude than that of sense-certainty, that there is a unity more profound. Nonetheless, in positing a unity more fundamental than certainty, Weil also claims that when the individual tries to grasp it they can only do so obliquely. It becomes fugitive as soon as discursive concepts are introduced. This is why Weil starts from a single word as well as why he makes a distinction between language and discourse. Language certainly did not start from a single word. Rather it seems that all the resources that we have in language had to be in place for language to be language. However, discourse, the coherent grasp of the world, starts somewhere else. This also explains why the early categories develop the preconditions of coherent discourse. These early categories are all reconstructed and make up part of all coherent discourse that follows.

This discursive starting point differentiates Weil from Hegel. Hegel's system, as the experience of consciousness or as the nature of thought, depends on metaphysical and ontological claims that allow the system to be built but not interpreted. Any interpretation of the system, any *discursive* explanation of the system keeps in place the deep divide between what thought or consciousness *is* and how we know it, how we defend that position, how we articulate it for others. In other words, the interpretation "falls outside the system" (LP 340). Weil starts from a discursive position in order to defend a discursive position and thus starts from a single word as the whole of the discursive grasp, and goes through the work of unfolding how this discursive starting point holds up.

If the first category is understood as a discursive grasp of the individual as they are embedded in their world and as they live this world as a unity, then the attitude is one that knows no separation between the individual and their world. *Nonsense*, the next category, is the grasp of the individual separated from their world. *Nonsense*, like *Truth*, is silent. It refuses the meaning that is offered in *Truth* as a refusal of the meaning that is present in the world, but because it is silent it highlights that one does not have to speak to refuse something that is given in experience. An animal strikes out when cornered or cajoled, an infant turns their head to refuse to eat. *Nonsense* holds our proto-discursive capacities to make ourselves be understood and to understand through our refusal. However, this attitude is also the dissolution of the unity that is found in *Truth*. It is the attitude of dissolution in general, and when it is reprised, it is the attitude of every individual who can't see meaning around them, who lives their life as meaningless. Weil explains the difference between *Truth* and *Nonsense* by saying that "truth is the domain, and […] all that fills this domain and which reveals its existence to us is nonsense. We could explain truth as the 'yes' and nonsense as the 'no'." (LP 95). This attitude characterizes individuals who refuse what had up to then

been essential. *Truth* and *Nonsense* are both silent attitudes that are lived, but that are also both seen as the *logical* and *pragmatic* grounds of all other discursive developments. If the categorial content of *Truth* cannot be more expansive than a single word, then the categorial content of the *Nonsense* more than just the single word *no*. It is also the pragmatic gesture that refuses all meaning, but it does so without finding any new meaning. It is the attitude of the lost, of the adrift, and it needs a new concept if it is to re-anchor individuals to their lives.

Under *Nonsense*, the capacity to refuse the essential can itself be seen as what is essential to the attitude. This transformation allows *Nonsense* to be seen as meaningful. In other words, *Nonsense* can be reprised under *Truth*. The pair *Truth/Nonsense* are pragmatically essential in that they are *reprised* every time a new attitude opposes itself to an existing category. The existing category expresses a truth. This is the world in which a new attitude appears: the truth that the older category expresses is seen to be meaningless; it is a truth that leaves the individual unsatisfied. When this happens the truth changes. The *truth* of *Nonsense* is that everything is meaningless. The reprise alters the attitude. In the attitude of *Nonsense*, life has no meaning, it is empty of all sense, it is without direction. When individuals live in this attitude, whether they be violent or docile, they are stuck in the mire of their lives. This distinction allows us both to shed light on Weil's starting point and on the function of the reprise.

The transition from the unity of meaning in *Truth* to the lack of all meaning in *Nonsense* is violent, and there is no way of identifying all the specific ways that this can happen. In fact, the slide towards meaninglessness is possible at any moment, but the reprise of *Nonsense* under *Truth* helps to understand how the free act of understanding is also itself a violent (that is, arbitrary and unjustified) act. When somebody refuses *Truth* they raise themself up against a determined meaning, but when they refuse *Nonsense*, they raise themself up against the lack of meaning in the world. They choose to understand, and in doing so they seek the meaning of meaninglessness, the *truth* of the *nonsense* that surrounds them. They seek to understand this meaninglessness, they seek to give a positive content to this sentiment of meaninglessness that inhabits their life. In this way meaninglessness *becomes* a sentiment that gives meaning, a sentiment which in turn leads the individual to develop their own discourse whose truth satisfies them. In doing so they live nonsense as truth, and transform its content in order to understand it. The attitude of *Truth*, the unity of meaning and life, the embeddedness of an individual in their world is what Weil calls presence. It is being outside of time because always in the present of one's life. In *Nonsense*, this presence is lost. For it to be found anew, the emptiness of *Nonsense* has to be interpreted

as *Truth*. In this way, the individual understands and overcomes that feeling of meaningless: they give meaning to that emptiness. The presence that was lived in truth is now seen as being naïve because it doesn't satisfy the individual. It allowed the world to become meaningless, but this meaninglessness revealed the truth that underlies both of these positions, the truth that everything is meaningless. This reprise allows us to understand the pair *Truth*/*Nonsense* as the framework of the logical movement of the logic of philosophy. Each attitude is lived in truth and develops a discourse, each discourse brings out structural commitments and incompatibilities that can lead to a sentiment of meaninglessness. The sentiment of meaninglessness gropes around for meaning and in doing so lays the groundwork for a new attitude, which uses the old language to make itself understood.

As attitudes, as ways of being in the world, both *Truth* and *Nonsense* are irrefutable. This is because *all* attitudes are irrefutable, but they can both be *refused*[21]. A person can refuse any attitude and any category and can live in their refusal of all determined meaning, just as they can live in modern experimental science, just as they can live in their belief in any of the numerous representations of God or of the gods. As long as these positions remain attitudes, that is, as long as the people who live according to them ignore the possibility of comparison, these positions are irrefutable and incommensurable. However, the philosophical attitude also always remains possible as the refusal of incoherence and violence. The act of understanding transforms attitudes into categories and it is the categories that can be refuted if the individual is seeking to understand coherently and totally. Categories, because they try to grasp what is essential to an attitude in conceptual form, make claims of coherence and universality. They are thus subject to evaluative judgments and to argumentative practices that allow comparison and contrast, that allow for refutation and validation. It is the attitude of *Nonsense* that allows the category of *Truth* to be taken as such, as a category, as conceptual in a full-blooded sense. Weil notes, "[i]t is through the reprise that the attitude becomes category" (LP 99). In its opposition with the category of *Truth*, the attitude of *Nonsense* allows *Truth* to be grasped. *Nonsense* allows *Truth's* essential concept to become visible, by reprising its attitude under *Truth*. *Truth* is the silent positivity of the individual in the world, whereas *Nonsense* is the pragmatic negation of all judgments once that silent positivity speaks. *Nonsense* understands that truth cannot be said because every utterance is particular and that truth, as the background of all meaning, is total. Every

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[21] Weil makes the forceful distinction between refutation and refusal in the article "Les fondements de la philosophie" where he says that "philosophy has no absolute foundation, if by foundation one understands something that cannot be *refused*. Philosophy is only something that cannot be *refuted*." (PR.II.21-22)

particular utterance is absurd. As Patrice Canivez notes, "the oldest form of [philosophical discourse] is the proposition which states the meaninglessness of every particular statement as such, of every determined statement that would claim to contain *the* truth, that is, to make an absolute of a particular thing" (1999: 26).*Truth* lives in the silence of its attitude, and *Nonsense* negates every particular utterance. To come back to the distinction between the doctrine and the explanation, between the attitude and the category, *Nonsense* is what allows this explanation to take place, it is what will allow the passage from a single word, *truth*, to propositions such as *this is not truth*, and *that is not truth*.

This difference becomes clearer in the category of *The True and the False*. The first two attitudes are silent. When we live our lives as a unity we have no need to say anything and when we face the dissolution of all meaning the idea of saying anything is pointless. Their categorial analysis exists for us, for those who have chosen to speak and to understand. The category of *The True and the False* is the first logical *appearance* of discourse, in other words it is the first attitude where language is what is essential. *Truth* and *Nonsense* can use language (and they do) but it is not what is essential to them, what is essential is the lived sentiment of unity, or the lived sentiment of meaninglessness. Weil's characterization of the use of language in the first two categories is instructive. For Weil, these attitudes do not discuss, they do not speak, they proclaim. They bequeath their word and their refusal. All refutation, all correction, all justification would be mysterious to them. In this way, both attitudes produce meaning, but it is as of yet free of the logical constraint that *we* rely on. The classical rules of thought: the laws of contradiction, of the excluded middle, of identity have no weight in these early attitudes. The category of *The True and the False* is the first where discourse is a necessity, and it is also here that the affirmation found in *Truth* and the negation found in *Nonsense* are subsumed under the rules of language and given logical roles. However, these logical roles are not yet those that we would recognize. Further logical developments are needed.

Truth is only grasped thanks to the development of its negation in *Nonsense*. This negation is itself transformed thanks to the reprise of *Truth* as meaninglessness and the reprise of *Nonsense* under *Truth*, where the truth is that everything is meaningless. *The True and the False* builds off these changes in order to sift through what is truly true and what is truly false. For Weil "[t]he true illustrations of the first two categories would have been what Parmenides and Buddha lived, not what they uttered" (LP 102) precisely because of the way language and discourse are not important to them. This is why *The True and the False* is the category "of the disciple become master" (LP 106). As Weil notes, even Parmenides, "the

master of Plato's dialogue, considers himself a disciple" (LP 102) and this is the start of what can be called *serious conversation* where individuals "no longer speak 'lightly'" (LP 103). For Weil the disciple is "the man who pronounced and understood words and discourses, who didn't know that the acts of pronouncing and listening had importance, and who now hears *serious* discourse from the masters" (LP 103). The individual hears the discourse of a master who speaks from *Truth* and thus becomes a disciple and uses discourse to give the *true* interpretation of the doctrine and to rule out all *false* interpretations. This new category thus uses language to sort out what is essential and inessential to discourse. However, because the person in this attitude does not see themselves as the mouthpiece of *Truth*, they recognize a separation between themself and discourse. All they can do is promulgate or interpret what the master has revealed. Their own attitude is not a life lived as a meaningful unity, nor the concrete rejection of all particularity, it is the mixture of universality and particularity. This also allows us to reinterpret the first to categories. Discourse opens from the universality of *Truth* and then must face the particularity of *Nonsense*.

By starting from the attitude of *Truth*, and by showing its early development in the first silent categories of *Truth* and *Nonsense* and the "primitive" category of *The True and the False* where language and discourse first appear, Weil hopes to explain the logical possibility of reflective understanding, which itself is only communicated and developed in the activity of discourse. The disciple, in this attitude, speaks, but does not speak as the master did. Language, which always says too much and never enough, needs to be interpreted, needs to be reformulated and corrected, and the disciple who takes on the mantle of the master does just that. Those who come after Parmenides are not mouthpieces of the Goddess, rather they interpreters of Parmenides, who was. This transition already takes us further than *The True and The False* into the category of *Certainty*.

Certainty is, as Weil notes, the first "understandable" category. It is, so to speak, the attitude that characterizes all attitudes. Every attitude exists in the certainty of its content. No matter the content of the discourse, the attitude of the person within it, when they hold it sincerely, is that of certainty. *Certainty* thus allows us to understand why Weil characterizes the logic of philosophy as the historical development of discourse for itself. The three previous categories—like all categories—are all defined by their relationship to *Truth*. *Certainty* however is the first attitude of concrete truth. It is in *Certainty* that subjectivity is first developed, that the world is seen as such, as a world, as an organized whole (in the Greek sense of a *kosmos*). However, subjectivity and the world are both invisible to this

ancient shape of certainty precisely because objectivity has not yet been developed. As Weil notes,

> [c]ertainty is […] essentially limited. It is what it is—to speak reflection's language, it is a for-itself that has no in-itself in opposition, and we must carefully eliminate every in-itself (= for us), that is found on the side of content. Certainty is thus the origin of subjectivity, the origin, but not subjectivity itself. There is no subjectivity without certainty, but this isn't sufficient to create that. For this *pre-subjectivity* doesn't know objectivity as its opposite. But from the point of view of posterior categories—which ours inevitably is—we can say that certainty is, in itself, subjectivity. Because, for us, the plurality of certainties is given and all certainty that isn't total (that's to say, that isn't ours) is only a particular opinion for us. Taking content into account, we distinguish (and, at the same time, identify categorially) certainties that, for themselves, are absolutely separate and unrelated. (LP 111-112)

It is thanks to this subjectivity that the notion of what is essential to a discourse comes to light. However, because the person living in naïve non-philosophical certainty does not see subjectivity and objectivity as inhabiting their discourse, they see subjectivity only as the false discourses that are held with certainty by others. For them, the others have just not yet seen what is essential to the world. An essential allows individuals to be certain of their discourse, and this certainty allows them to choose, decide, judge, act. *Certainty* is thus inextricably linked to the notion of orientation and commitment. It is when an individual is certain of what is essential to their discourse that they take a stance that allows them to orient themself in this world. This notion of orientation is of capital importance and will return later as a central element of the argumentative character that I will develop from Weil's theory. Here, what we can note is that certainty is present in every attitude. Every category is present in every attitude, even if only as a refusal, however, it is the way that certainty is present in every attitude that is different. All concrete lived attitudes are lived under a reprise of certainty, no matter what other reprises they participate in, and no matter how these reprises are organized.

    Truth is the background of all discourse, but in fact, because *Certainty* is the first attitude that we understand head-on and not just obliquely, all of the initial attitudes from *Truth* to *Certainty* can be seen as background attitudes that develop the preconditions of reasonable discourse. This now allows us to go back to Hegel's starting point in the *Phenomenology*. I said Weil's use of attitudes in his starting point is analogous to Hegel's

starting point. However, there is also a very important difference. *Sense-certainty* is what Hegel sees as the most fundamental shape of consciousness, and indeed from the point of view of the modern consciousness it is, but this is because *Certainty* is the first attitude that uses a language we understand. Hegel's modern consciousness depends on distinctions like subject and object, like true and false, and these developments are only present once *Certainty* is, because certainty is intimately linked to its other, doubt. There is no doubt in the first attitudes. The person living in *Truth* really has a unity in their life, the person living in *Nonsense* really is unable to find any meaning to which to moor themselves, the person in *The True and the False*, really is trying to excise the inessential in order to make the true clear and available to everyone. Anyone who speaks depends on all these tools to speak coherently. But it is precisely the recognition of the difference of their certainty from another that forces them to examine their position. When *we* examine our position, it is the awareness that somebody can so blithely live in what we see as incoherent, as false, or even as a delusion that forces us to turn to ourselves and wonder whether our own position is justified, or if we are one of the blithe fools.

Any content can be lived in *truth* or as meaningless, as being *nonsense*. *Every* attitude distinguishes between what is *true* and what is *false*, and *every* attitude is lived in the *certainty* of its content. As the background of discourse, they are present in every category as the logic of philosophy moves forward. This is important for two reasons, first is that it shows how, for Weil, multiple points of view are required from the beginning in order to make sense of conceptual content, and second because it shows the way that *Certainty*, by being the first truly recognizable attitude *in history,* bundles together all of these attitudes in order to form what Hegel would call the naïve consciousness. In the last chapter, I discussed how Weil places an emphasis on the way that the categories *of* philosophy multiply points of view. What the initial categories show is that this multiplication of points of view is present as soon as we can make ourselves explicitly understood. Yes, the attitudes of *Truth*, of *Nonsense*, of *The True and the False* exist, and we can recognize them, but we also interpret them from our point of view. This difference shows the importance of dialogical practices. We recognize these initial categories because we can live them, but we interpret them because they appear to us in the attitudes of others. Some aspect of our experience is always beyond all critique, because it is not even visible to us, it is what goes without saying. Some aspect of our experience is always denied out of hand as meaningless, in fact, it is so meaningless that we cannot even take it seriously as an option. We are always sifting through some aspect of our experience in order to decide what is factual and what is meaningless,

and when we decide, we are certain about our decision, but we are just as certain as every other individual, even those who make choices, or who live in attitudes, that we see as not making sense or as being meaningless. We are only aware of these differences however because we are embedded in a social context in which these differences become clear. We interpret the naïve form of consciousness under the category of *Certainty* because *Certainty* is the first attitude that brings out difference, it is the first where the place that others have is recognized, and it is the first where we can turn back to ourselves thanks to what others add to our conceptual practices and see ourselves. Weil thus interprets *Certainty* as the first attitude where the content of discourse matters to the category itself. However, this discourse is still pre-philosophical. The separation between the individual and their discourse has not yet taken place, *Certainty* is the content in which the individual *lives*, which is why it is not questioned, it is not yet a discourse that the individual *has*.

2.4 The Genesis of and Development of Coherent Discourse

The rupture with *Certainty* marks the genesis of coherent discourse. It is the jump from the prelogical categories that merely develop the background of discourse to the formal dialogical practices of *The Discussion* that are exemplified by Socrates and that is present in the Greek city-states. It is also the jump from the floor of both the ancient pre-political attitudes and of the naïve, pre-philosophical attitude of every individual as they enter into reasonable discursive practices. This is because historically the movement towards truly political organization (organized around the questions of rights) and our everyday pre-philosophical attitude both depend on reasonable discursive practices[22]. These practices, whether in their historic or modern form, present a new discursive floor, that of simple reason. Simple reason is born in *Discussion* and is developed in *The Object* and *The Self*. It is the "speech that measures itself and justifies itself in discussion, which elevates the individual to the universal and proves to be the decisive and acting speech of the community on the subject of its wellbeing" which from a purely philosophical point of view means that "language-reason is all of reality and reality is established in its right, justified" (Kirscher, 1989: 245). This reason appears both logically and historically first appears in the public discourse of the community because it is available to everyone and is something in which

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[22] This is not to say that the political interpretation of *Certainty* does not exist. It does and the communities that are present in *Certainty* are both recognizable as political communities and are interpreted as such *by us*. What the distinction pre-political/ political means here is that *Certainty* does not interpret itself that way. Rather *The Discussion* is the first category that in is in its essence political.

everyone partakes. It is thus a reason that was invisible to the "primitive" categories, which was not bothered by the question of whether individuals have rights as equals insofar as they are participating members of the same community. In other words, the public discourse of *Discussion* marks the transition to a reason that is the only thing that is real and the only thing that is *knowable*. However, *Discussion* is a shape of discourse that, because it is looking to reground the political community through discourse, is also radically aware of its own contingency, of its own fallibility, of its own precarious hold on its claims, and it is this awareness that gives rise to the specifically political attitude that Socrates exemplifies and that marks its difference with *Certainty*.

As a pure attitude, *Certainty* is where human orientation and the essential of discourse become visible as such for the first time. Because it is where the essential becomes visible, it is also the first place where the specific refusal of specific discourses are seen conceptually as forms of violence. As a category, it regroups all of the other background categories under its own banner, and it thus provides the initial interpretation of otherness. *Truth* and *Nonsense* are silent in their pure shapes, because their pure expression is lived, *The True and the False* is a speaking category, because language is essential to it, but this language has not yet been formulated in discourse, *Certainty* is also a speaking category, but one that marks the transition to discourse. Its content is central to it, but its discourse is not yet governed by the logical rules that will become essential. The same thing can be true and untrue, can be contradictory, can be and not be. All the forms of understanding that we, from our modern point of view, call magic and mythology fall outside of the classic laws of thought, and yet this poses no problem of efficacity to their practitioners, in fact it does not appear at the level of language and discourse, it appears at an ontological level. Everything is and is not.

This ontological interpretation of discursive contradiction exists between all forms of certain discourse, but for the category of *Certainty* the existence of multiple discourses poses a different problem. Its certainty is the whole world, thus there can be no multiplicity of certain discourses, there are only enemies to eliminate. The attitude of *Certainty* has neither critical distance from itself nor from the content of its discourse and thus any difference has more often than not been dealt with historically through violence. The discourse of *Certainty* is the discourse of a worldview, of a community, of a tradition, and often, it sees its very existence as depending on the falsity of other discourses. The initial attitudes still exist insomuch as anyone can live their life embedded in a meaningful unity, can refuse any proposed unity as meaningless, can consciously grasp the essential of their

life and separate out the inessential. But it is as a foreign certainty that different attitudes presents themselves for the first time as truly foreign, and it is under *Certainty* that we grasp the earliest human civilizations in their political and social organization. These other civilizations seem so radically different from our own that, although we can marvel at their ingenuity, their military prowess, their technological sophistication, their way of life seems impossible. This is not a question of the past either. Yes, innumerable civilizations have risen and fallen under the banner of their gods and their beliefs. Yes, innumerable ways of life have maintained that they depend on the destruction of another, foreign, heretical way of life, because this false way poses an existential threat. But this is certainty understood as a historic or social problem. What is important about Weil's articulation of *Certainty* and the jump to *The Discussion* is that it allows us to formulate a philosophical problem that will be the one that will be tackled head on at the end of this work in Chapter 7. This problem deals with the role certainty plays in argumentative practices and in the relationship between absolutism, relativism, and skepticism. The following formulation is not Weil's but is rather an important takeaway from reading Weil the way I do.

The problem is formulated as follows: an absolute discourse is absolute precisely because it either absorbs all others or it successful refutes all others. *Certainty* lives in the absolute validity of its position. This is why the failure of certainty leads to either relativism or skepticism. Absolutism, relativism, and skepticism all depend on an incommensurability of discourse. *Either*, only one discourse exists and all others are false, *or* many exist, but none can be judged and measured because they cannot be compared. When they can't be judged and compared, either all are accepted and seen as relatively true, or all are refused as being absolutely false, and the possibility of meaning itself is also refused. Absolutism, relativism, and skepticism are thus all structurally linked. In other words, relativism and skepticism are the nihilism of failed absolutism. They accept the material existence of other discourses, but differ in their reaction to them. Relativism refuses to give up on its own absolute and thus accepts all absolutes. Each discourse is built from a relatively true and incommunicable absolute. Skepticism not only is fine giving up on its own absolute, but it thinks that because its own absolute has proven false, there can be nothing to replace it. Relativism and skepticism are born when the individual accepts the reality of multiple discourses, but they refuse to compare them. They refuse because comparison forces individuals to submit their own discourse to the critical analysis that would potentially change it. When individuals refuse the incoherence and pessimism that go along with relativism and skepticism they enter into discussion.

This reading is different from (but not incompatible with) Weil's because it takes on the point of view of the (modern) individual. For Weil, the jump from *Certainty* to *Discussion* is just as radical but it takes place when different socio-cultural discursive *communities* are brought together into a new community. The loss of certainty is the consequence of one or more communities being subjugated to a foreign master. It is not individuals that recognize the multiplicity of discourse, it is the whole community that loses the right and the access to the discourse that had previously governed it. For Weil, individuals were forced to accept this new discourse precisely because the old discourse had become empty of values and had lost its force by the domination of a foreign master. From our modern point of view, when faced with new possible and convincing discourses, if individuals do not want to remain in their naïve certainty they must submit their own discourse to modification. This happens because these individuals refuse to slip into meaninglessness. In other words, they make the choice to understand philosophically. From the historic point of view, we can see the forceful subjugation under a new discourse as making up part of the violent history of non-violence. The loss of certainty and the birth of discussion, which Weil situates as a consequence of the Greco-Persian wars, was a violent fact, but it did not wipe out the particularity of the already developing Greek thought, rather it transformed it. Under these historic conditions "simple *otherness*, their existence, incommensurable and without contact, changes itself into *difference* in a *common existence*: there is no longer *content* there are *contents*, and since there are many and because none among them can prove itself, there is no certain content" (LP 122).

This passage introduces *dialogical controls*[23]. Dialogical controls are the discursive criteria that are developed by taking others to be genuine dialogue partners. They are what allow people to critically judge the contents of their discourse. Or, more correctly, it allows them to critically judge the contents of their discourse against that of others. The community is important here because dialogical controls are always socially articulated. The most basic dialogical control that Weil presents is the law of non-contradiction. Because different discourses of certainty present ontological contradictions, dialogue with others is the only way to eliminate them if one wants to refuse violence. This dialogical control allows for the

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[23] The term "dialogical control" is borrowed from Harald Wohlrapp's *The Concept of Argument* (2014) and the argumentative theory that I claim is present in the *Logic of Philosophy* has great affinity with the pragmatist theory of argumentation that Wohlrapp develops in that book. This is not surprising since Wohlrapp, in grounding what he calls "the Aristotelean foundation of Argumentation Theory," explicitly follows Weil's reading of Aristotle for certain key conceptual distinctions, notably the "relationship between the syllogistic and the dialectic" (2014: xxiii n. 13).

first logical development that, for Weil, opens the possibility of identifying discourse with philosophy. In *Certainty*, violence is seen as a legitimate way of dealing with difference, individuals must either be converted to the true path or be eliminated as a threat. The authority of a discourse can be imposed or reinforced thanks to violence. In *Discussion*, no authority asserted through violence can be seen as valid. As soon as dialogical controls are in place, dialogue partners have to be seen as equals, and all authority must be established through discourse.

Weil notes that "certainty's content isn't necessarily logical" (LP 115), that is, it does not rely on the law of non-contradiction to determine its content. Rather, it is the confrontation with other positions that are equally sure of where they stand in the world, and which can neither simply be ignored or destroyed, that leads to a full development of the logical tools such as the law of non-contradiction. The importance of the transition from *Certainty* to *Discussion* cannot be overstated. Given that Weil presents the philosophical project as the choice, a choice to be reasonable, a choice to resolve substantial differences discursively and not violently, reprises of the jump from *Certainty* to *Discussion* are capital to reasonable discourse. In fact, because certainty is built into every attitude, it is a choice that individuals must constantly make. It is never a choice that is made once and for all. Each person can always come face to face with the limits of their concepts, and they can do so over and over again in their life. In fact, most people do. It is rare to experience no change and growth in the way we see the world. This change and this growth are a consequence of being embedded in a world with other concept users who not only also present and defend the goodness of their claims, but with whom we refuse violent interaction, and who we see as adding something to our lives and to our understanding of the world.

Discussion is the category that gives birth to formal (though not formalized) logic both as it applies to metaphysical categories, and as a novel step that allows for the development of the philosophical categories. Weil notes, "[l]ogic, in dialogue, prunes discourse." (LP 24) and contradiction is central to revealing differences that allow dialogue to take off. The logic of philosophical categories however is, for Weil, different than that of metaphysical categories. The logic of philosophical categories is understood in relation to violence, whereas that of metaphysical categories are not. The four types of logic that Weil highlights in order to establish his new logic shows this. Each logic brings violence into language by subsuming it under the role of contradiction, but it does not recognize that it is doing so, because it does not recognize its philosophical category, because this would mean recognizing their discourse as being a particular point of view. *Certainty* is not logical in

sense of the philosophical categories because the differences that contradiction reveals still lead to violence. In *The Discussion*, this violence is put at arm's length. In *The Discussion*, contradiction reveals to the members of the community that agreement has not yet been reached and this is why a *law* of non-contradiction must be elaborated. This is not to say that the notions of contradiction and non-contradiction had not been employed before the development of this category. Rather, it means that non-contradiction is defined for the first time as the essential character of an attitude. In this way, non-contradiction and coherence become essential to discursive practices for the first time.

Once the individual has entered into discussion, belief gives way to reasons. It is no longer enough to assert something, rather it is necessary to have reasons for asserting it. This fact shows the distance that separates us from the pure attitude. For us (that is, in order to develop the guiding concepts of this presentation) we must establish the authority for our reasons and we do this by grounding them. The pure attitude of *The Discussion* does not see the need to ground reasons and thus showing that one's adversary is in formal contradiction is sufficient. This is why the dialogical practices of Socrates do more to reveal the instability of our beliefs than to assure their solidity, and this is why it is not yet properly speaking philosophical but political, it seeks the agreement of the community. In *The Discussion* the stability that is to structure dialogue is merely formal and not yet substantive. It sees the need for grounding but has no solution. This attitude thus reveals the conflict in our discourse but it does nothing to resolve it. It proposes coherence and a form of totality that is the accordance with reason but that is all. This is nonetheless still a monumental step forward.

The groundwork of the philosophical attitude as a free choice to understand is laid in *The Discussion* (even though it is born in *The Object*), in the political discussion that seeks to re-ground the unity of the community by eliminating the contradictions that are tearing it apart. These are contradictions between values and between diverse interests and they must be eliminated for the true values and interests of the community to have a hold on everyone. This constitutes a break with the earlier categories. The earlier categories are reconstitutions of the logical moments that make up the "primitive" attitudes that are lived and not discussed. *Discussion* refuses the naïve attitude of certainty, and thus opens all philosophical problems. Skepticism and relativism, for instance, as philosophical problems are born within the destruction of the community. This does not however mean that they were not present before, rather it means that their importance was limited. Here their role is seen as central and productive. Indeed, skepticism and relativism as doubt and difference are always present in the productive role that they play in every reprise of the jump between a determined

certainty and the discussion that follows. This productive role is thus present every time an individual leaves their certainty to place conflictual positions in relation and to see which hold up.

The presence of different discourses that can neither be eliminated nor ignored can be transformed into philosophical understanding because these differences provide a moment that relativizes one's own discourse. This relativization is essential to seeing one's own discourse as modifiable. If one's discourse is not seen as modifiable, the individual sees no reason to leave their certainty. Other discourses never even become visible as a possibility. When a discourse is seen as modifiable, it opens up a type of doubt that turns towards one's own discourse. This doubt undermines the previous certainty that the discourse had previously held. Together, doubt and difference open the individual up to the possibility of another discourse. This type of relativism and skepticism falls under the reprise of the earlier categories under *The Discussion*. For *The Discussion*, when the individual in *Truth* recognizes doubt and difference, they are ripped out of *Truth* and thrown into *Nonsense*. In *Nonsense* they see doubt and difference as proof that all is meaningless. Should they recognize the possibility of a discourse that reestablishes meaning they convert to this discourse and become the master's acolyte, taking this new discourse on whole. In *The True and the False*, they thus separate doubt and difference out of their discourse as inessential to find *Certainty*. But in *Certainty* this doubt and difference is seen not only as inessential but as incommensurable, as the external discourse of their enemies who must be converted to the true and certain discourse. When violent means are refused or impossible the means of conversion change and so do doubt and difference. In *The Discussion*, where individuals see themselves as equals, all conversion must happen through *discursive* means. When individuals are seen as equals, doubt and difference is productive because each party is seen as adding something to the discovery of the truth. Nonetheless, the category immediately shows its limits. Non-contradiction is a formal criterion and as such the resolution of contradiction is at most a formal agreement between dialogue partners. The whole of discourse must be made coherent for this agreement to hold, and so discussion goes on forever.

Discussion thus stirs a need for grounding in philosophical discourse, but it does not provide it. It is *The Object*, the category that opens philosophical understanding, that provides the first ground, that moves logic to classic ontology, to the contradiction between reason and nature, and that is exemplified by the contemplative science of Plato and Aristotle. Each permutation of the philosophical attitude from *The Object* up to the *Absolute*

is the same in that they seek something to ground discourse, but they differ in the way they choose to ground it. *The Discussion* provides discourse with the concept of a totally coherent discourse but it does not present a ground. This problem presents itself in the indeterminacy of many of the early Platonic dialogues. Various definitions and positions are presented and tested in these dialogues, only for the most part to be rejected, shelved, or left completely open. The Good, the Just, the Beautiful are bushes we beat around without scaring out any game. A ground is needed, but what kind? *The Object, The Self, God, Condition, Intelligence, Personality,* and *The Absolute* each try to answer that question and it also opens a reflection of the place of dissatisfaction in the *Logic of Philosophy*.

2.5 Immanence versus Dissatisfaction

Each philosophical category is separated by a free jump and this is one of the primary differences that separates Weil's project from Hegel's. Because Hegel's project limits itself to the philosophical attitude of understanding without developing the other possible attitudes an individual could have towards discourse (except perhaps that of the pre-philosophical one in order to show it insufficiency), its progression is immanent. For Hegel, the naïve consciousness in *Sense-Certainty* is untenable. The *Phenomenology* shows how this consciousness develops into philosophical understanding thanks to the determinate negations that push it forward. The specific refusals of determinate negations can be seen as the inferential unfolding of the different determinations that show how concepts stand into relation to one another. By showing that philosophy is a non-necessary free choice that can start from anywhere *and* that can build itself out of specific refusals of specific aspects of discourse, Weil might seem to share Hegel's position. The difference lies in the fact that Weil sees philosophy's non-necessary character *and* its specific refusals as being downstream from the possibility of a total refusal of all discourse and coherence. This absolute refusal thus opposes itself to the immanence found in Hegel's model.

In the logic of philosophy, not only does Weil posit other attitudes that precede the attitude of certainty, he also notes how, thanks to the reprise, this certainty is found anew in every attitude. He shows that certainty is not the eternally unstable starting point that pushes people into philosophy, but rather that it is itself a conceptual development, and as such it also provides each category with a certain level of stability. Each of the categories proposes a form of coherence, but each form of coherence reprises all the initial background categories. They live in the certainty of truth and push away every other attitude as

meaningless by separating the essential from the inessential. In other words, Weil characterizes the way that individuals can find human satisfaction in any attitude by refusing all other forms of coherence. The possibility of satisfaction through refusal undermines immanence because nothing can force an individual to leave a form of coherence where they are satisfied. Weil thus proposes dissatisfaction as the mechanism of philosophical movement because paradoxically it is what allows the individual to "maintain a distance between themself and the world, allows them to preserve the transcendence of their freedom and thus to avoid alienating themself in the things that they create" (Savadogo, 2003: 76).

Dissatisfaction is to be seen as an explanatory mechanism and not as a metaphysical object. In other words, it is not a self-standing supersensible entity that is the source of meaning but rather part of the free act of understanding, the content of which changes in every specific concrete discourse. It is a real possibility, people can be dissatisfied, but as a possibility it is on its own insufficient. It is a part of and a consequence of discourse and discursive practices. In other words, the individual must transform their sentiment of dissatisfaction into a critical discourse, for it to serve a discursive function. The ordinary individual is not *necessarily* pushed into the philosophical attitude because of their dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction can present itself in countless ways. It can always remain vague for example, or be temporary, or lead to *Nonsense*. When it remains vague, the individual does not know how to grasp their dissatisfaction, even if they recognize that they are dissatisfied. When it is temporary, it gives out faced with the more global satisfaction that the individual finds in their attitude. When it leads to *Nonsense,* the individual sees the world around them as immutable and their dissatisfaction is just a part of their condition. It only serves as an explanatory mechanism to the individual who makes the free choice to understand. This is because each form of coherence presents a form of satisfaction that allows individuals to live full human lives. The individual jumps from their "natural" attitude into a new (mediated) one when they refuse the determined form of satisfaction proposed therein *and* when they refuse meaninglessness.

When someone accepts meaninglessness because they suffer under the weight of dissatisfaction, they do not look to overcome it. They don't even see it as dissatisfaction. What they seek is respite. They seek different palliative forms of release to distract them. They participate in the gratuitous violence that is always possible, either against others, or against themselves. When they refuse meaninglessness, they see what motivates them as their dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction as an explanatory mechanism is also a formal concept: the specificity of concrete dissatisfaction is defined by the specific forms of violence that

individuals face. It will thus be different in each concrete situation and in each concrete life, and different categories characterize it differently. So, dissatisfaction is a formal explanatory mechanism in the logic of philosophy, but this is also what allows different categories see it is a metaphysical principle. This thus illustrates the difference that Weil makes between metaphysical categories and philosophical categories. The use of metaphysical categories helps us to see the shape of philosophical categories. Understood as part of the logic of philosophy, the differences in the contents of dissatisfaction help us to draw out the differences between different philosophical categories. This in turn helps to show how metaphysical categories are downstream from philosophical ones. Dissatisfaction changes from discourse to discourse. Dissatisfaction is part of an explanation only to the individual that seeks to grasp the whole coherently.

By framing the development of the logic of philosophy in terms of dissatisfaction, we can better understand the development and the order found therein. The different philosophical categories from *The Object* to the *Absolute* propose different grounds. Each ground is supposed to relieve the individual of their dissatisfaction by providing them with a coherent explanation of the world and of experience. As I have said I will not analyze each of these categories. Rather I will look at specific significative ruptures and articulations between categories, namely the articulation between The *Discussion* and *The Object*, followed by that between *God, The Condition,* and *The Conscience*, and then the place of *The Absolute*.

The dissatisfaction of the individual who makes the jump from *The Discussion* to the next category, *The Object*, is two-fold. *Discussion* is formal and this can lead individuals to ask if non-contradiction is a sufficient criterion to orient human action. In *The Discussion*, individuals can come to absurd but coherent conclusions if they start from absurd premises. The community can agree to put Socrates, the individual who embodies the morality of agreement, to death. Discourse must thus both be formally coherent (non-contradictory) and in agreement with objective reality (the reality on which discourse bears). This is the first principle of science and of philosophy as first science. The initial dissatisfaction is not only that discussion goes on forever, but also the fact that the individual wants to be satisfied not in language but in their activity. Because *Discussion* is characterized by a merely formal agreement, the dissatisfaction that *The Object* is trying to overcome is the impotence of discussion. Purely formal discussion is impotent if it has no contact with the world. Weil notes that the greatest shock of Plato's life was watching the community execute somebody who was right (LP 130). Discussion could not save Socrates, moreover, it was his

participation in discussion that led to his death. The people around him, living in the certainty of their tradition, did not want to become aware of the glaring contradictions that existed in this very tradition. They did not want to recognize the tradition's contingency. I have said that *Certainty* is the floor of naïve, pre-philosophical certainty and that *The Discussion* is the floor of simple reason, we can now specify that *Certainty*, as the floor of naïve, pre-philosophical certainty is the floor of tradition. Each individual, being born into a tradition and taking it for granted, does not see it as a tradition but merely as the way the world is. However, what the jump from *Certainty* to *The Discussion* and then to *The Object* shows is that:

> the tradition is insufficient as soon as decisions must be made, […] it has value uniquely in working life where there are not decisions to make and where one can continue along the path that one has always followed, and he nonetheless notices that this tradition, for as incapable as it is of justifying its way of doing things, achieves in its domain results that discussion doesn't arrive at. Tradition and common sense know and don't speak; the discussion speaks and doesn't know. (LP 141)

The Object seeks both to *speak* and to *know*. It is built off *The Discussion* and thus it develops in relation to *The Discussion* (This is what is meant by a floor. Each category interprets itself in relation to the problems that its floor announces.) but it modifies it and in doing so opens the philosophical attitude of understanding. In other words, it develops *theoria*. In *theoria* the individual wants to "reach reality, by means of language" (LP 141) and to do so through universal judgments. *Theoria* is thus a "concrete and reasonable" science, "a total view on the totality of beings in their unity" (LP 142). It is the immediate *sight* of this unity, but not the sight of appearances, rather sight of the One, of the Being that underlies appearances. In positing this possibility, the individual of *The Object* surpasses the subjectivity of *Certainty* to posit the subject and the object, and to posit that it is their unity in discourse that will allow individuals to overcome their dissatisfaction. In this way, *The Object* is the first category to recognize the importance of grounding discourse, of establishing its coherence, and of doing so by presenting a total unity. This is why it opens the philosophical attitude of understanding.

The Object posits that in order to find satisfaction the individual must leave the formal agreement of discussion and take reality into account. It must build a science that allows this reality to be grasped by each individual in order to avoid the mistakes of *The Discussion*. This is the science that, born in the work of Plato and Aristotle, covers the

discourse of classical ontology. Going back to the distinction that Weil makes between metaphysical categories and philosophical categories, it is in this category where philosophy and metaphysics is conflated, where philosophy is seen as first science. According to *The Object*, The Good, the Just, the Beautiful are only known thanks to the science of Being. Once this science is completed, satisfaction can be found in the contemplation of the One, and the individual can disappear into Being. This category inherits the notion of coherence from *The Discussion*, it develops the importance of grounding in the ontological object, however it does not have a sufficient notion of totality. The contradiction that structures this category, like all the categories of Antiquity is that between simple reason and nature. Because of this, the individual who is a mix of reason and desire cannot interpret themselves fully. A more sufficient notion of totality is needed. This is provided by the category *God.*

God is the first category of total reflection. The tradition that is the floor of *Certainty* does not reflect, *Discussion*, the floor of the simple reason (and the categories that follow) reflect, but in a simple partial reflection that separates the individual and the world, reason and sentiment. *God*, the transitional category between Antiquity and Modernity, unites the individual, the world, reason, and sentiment in a total reflection, but a total reflection that remains exterior to the individual, because all these aspects are reflected in God. But it adds two essential pieces to the *Logic of Philosophy*, a sufficient concept of totality and the modern concept of freedom. This total reflection first happens by postulating an absolute creating self that is the immutable unity of sentiment and reason by being their source. The individual understands this unity because they are made in its image and because they maintain a dialogical *I/Thou* relationship with God as well as with all the other members of the community of believers that love and trust each other thanks to their faith. This is the discourse of the great monotheistic religions. For the individual in this attitude, the word of God is *revealed* to the human being. In the attitude/category of *God* man is free, but this freedom is only felt in the individual's disobedience to God's law. In other words, the individual discovers their freedom in their failure (such as in the doctrine of original sin) and must thus be forgiven and restored through God's forgiveness and the possibility of salvation. It is thus *in* God that the individual knows themself to be free, and this is where the individual and the world are totally reflected in God. It is a freedom and reflection that the individual feels in God's love, in his mercy, and this love and mercy is what delivers the individual. In this attitude/category, sentiment is the unity of reason and of nature, whereby God is the source of all nature, is absolutely free, and is absolute freedom as the source of all freedom. Man is free in God and because of God, but he is separate from God, who is

impossibly far away. This division explains the way that the category remains a category of Antiquity. Man understands the unity of reason and sentiment, but is merely its reflection. This is clear in Weil's interpretation of the attitude and the category. He splits them in two, and analyses the attitude of the believer and the development of the category in the elaboration of Christian theology separately. The elaboration of the category gives birth to the modern interpretation of the individual, and places this category halfway into Modernity, but the lived attitude of the believer and their separation from this totality also holds them back. This split is part of the birth of the reflexivity that is born in the category. The categorial interpretation of this form of theology (which is exemplified by St. Augustine) is the interpretation of its own attitude. For this interpretation, the individual is entirely absorbed into the unity of God, reason, sentiment, and the world and it is in their "interdependence that they have their legitimacy" (Kluback, 1987: 81). This interdependence and this total reflection thus make this attitude/category the first place in the history of discourse that ground, coherence, and totality are fully united. Thus, the modern notion of comprehensiveness that is essential to the understanding proposed in the *Logic of Philosophy* first sees the light of day here. However, because this comprehensiveness is transcendent, the reflection of freedom and totality must be brought down to earth, so to speak. This is why *The Condition* and not *God* is the floor of all modern categories.

For Weil, discourse structures thought, it allows the individual to grasp their attitude and to grasp reality, but this means that reality is graspable in discourse. There is however no direct grasp of *God*. There is no direct grasp of any metaphysical object, what the individual grasps when they grasp God, or their attitude, or their faith, or the certainty of their sentiment is discourse. More precisely they grasp these things as mediated by discourse. This is another reason why Weil separates metaphysical categories and philosophical categories. The first are graspable only thanks to the second, but it is the first that reveal the second. It is discourse that allows the individual to be in agreement with their sentiment, and the category of *God* is the first discourse to do so. This explains the force and persistence of this discourse. It proposes an eternal discourse that allows the individual to explain all their present dissatisfaction as a trial, as a test, as part of a greater plan. This is a seductive option, but it is precisely what *The Condition* refuses. The dissatisfaction that raises itself up against the category of *God* is the dissatisfaction of the here and now. *God* proposes a form of satisfaction, but this satisfaction is found outside of the scope of human *life*. It is to be found in some great beyond. The faith that the individual must have is not just in *God*: it is in themself. The individual must have faith that their acts will provide them with the

satisfaction that is to be found in *God*, but the life in which they hold that faith must also be lived. And it is lived not outside of time and space, but in the natural conditions of their own situation. The individual that is dissatisfied with the discourse of faith seeks a discourse that allows them to grasp this reality as it is placed before them, as it is lived.

The Condition, in a sense, reverses the discourse of *God*. It demands totality but refuses transcendence instead of seeing that totality within it. The structure of reflection for *The Condition* thus becomes the "indefinite movement whose totalization constitutes the world of the *condition*, the unachieved and unachievable system of conditional interdependencies" (Kirscher, 1989: 268) where "rationality is no longer in search of origin or end, foundation or meaning, it makes itself into a pure operational exploration of a universal relativity excluding any depth of essence" (Guibal, 2011: 123). Thus in this category what the individual reflects totally is a "nature considered as a system of conditions, of phenomena conditioned by one another" (Canivez, 1999: 48-49). This category, exemplified by Auguste Comte and Voltaire, is that of scientific positivism. Nature and not reason is seen as the ground of all thought and the source of all coherence, because nature is seen as an accessible comprehensive totality. Thus, this shows how the different possible articulations of the *Logic of Philosophy* overlap and multiply. *God* discovers the modern concept of freedom, but *The Condition* refuses it because freedom is not a knowable condition. Freedom is present but it is problematic. *The Condition* is thus the floor of all modern categories of Freedom, because each interprets itself in relation to it. Nonetheless, *The Condition* only retains the unity of ground, coherence, and totality found in *God* "at the price of a radical reduction" (Kirscher, 1989, 269). Nature is the ground of discourse and any coherence must be in accord with nature, which is nothing other than the totality of conditions. The individual that is dissatisfied by the distance that separates them from God and by the mystery of His will, seeks to explain the life that happens down here and consequently any meaning that this life is to have must also be found on this plane. In other words, *The Condition* corresponds to the individual's loss of faith. The individual in *The Condition* must face "the real insofar as real" (LP 213) and thus all that is real, the individual included, is merely understood as a totality of natural factors to which the science of calculating rationality applies its techniques. This allows the individual to have a total reflection but only a total reflection that is quantifiable. Weil says that the tradition knows but doesn't speak, and that *Discussion* speaks but doesn't know. The development of the science of *The Object*, the science of contemplative reason, seeks to both speak and to know. *The Condition* also develops a science; however the functions and goals of that science are

radically modified by the union of a total reflection which fuses ground, coherence, and totality into a single comprehensiveness. The ground must be that which allows coherence and which leads to totality. *The Condition* is thus "not there to speak, but to act by means of language" (LP 206). *The Condition* thus adds a dynamism that was missing in earlier discourses. Contemplation is no longer enough. Language tracks the changes in nature to generalize them and elaborate laws. Nonetheless, this discourse does not yet recognize its own dynamism as essential because in the condition "man only has this science in order to speak. Undoubtedly, he exists for himself merely to the extent that he speaks: but being for himself signifies, for him, being for science, and being for science is to not be language, but to be opposed to language as objects are opposed to theory" (LP 206).

In *The Condition*, the individual understands themself as a conditioned thing in a conditioned nature. Their life is the totality of conditions, and if they want to be satisfied their discourse must grasp the totality of these conditions. They must participate in progress. Discourse must get rid of the contingent and traditional beliefs that litter our understanding: it must find the laws of nature. In order to do so, the individual must give up their sentiment and become a disinterested observer of nature in order to act on that nature. Humanity develops science and the individual understands themself thanks to it. They understand themself according to psychological, sociological, and biological conditions. This is the discourse of modern experimental science. It covers the attitude of the scientific researcher in their role as a researcher. It is the discourse of observation and hypothesis. It is the discourse of the mathematization of nature and of nature understood in measurement. All that cannot be measured and understood in terms of observation and hypothesis is ruled out. It is the attitude of progress, and humanity must progress by finding the facts. Progress is the only (invisible) value and so *The Condition* makes a hard value/fact distinction. Unless it can find a way to explain values in terms of (psychological, social, biological, etc.) facts, all values are considered false or empty.

Because the unity of ground, coherence, and totality is in the world, *The Condition* interprets the individual as part of this coherent totality of conditions, however in doing so it not only reduces all the values that make up the individual's life and makes life meaningful, it also reduces the individual. The world is a totality of conditions but it is empty of meaning and yet the individual still sees their life as meaningful. How does this happen? Is it merely a trick nature plays on us? In the category of *God* the individual felt free in their ability to disobey God, that sentiment of freedom does not disappear in *The Condition* but it becomes problematic. Freedom is not a condition. The categories of Antiquity separated nature and

reason, in the categories of Modernity, nature and reason are united, but nature and freedom are not. *The Condition*'s solution is to reduce freedom, but for the individual that feels free, this reduction is inadmissible. According to Weil's reading of the different forms of logic as a reduction of different forms of violence, *Conscience* moves us out of the logic of classic ontology and into Kant's transcendental logic. However, it still interprets itself in relation to *The Condition*. *Conscience* demands a discourse that allows the contradiction between nature and freedom to be resolved. The category seeks to unite the individual's lived sentiment *and* their discourse and it does so by "discovering the possibility of a discourse other than that of scientific knowledge" (Savadogo, 2003: 141). This discovery is decisive because it is in the *Conscience* that the ground of modern discourse changes. *Conscience* seeks to elaborate a totally coherent discourse grounded in freedom not reflected in God, but in the individual. Here "science must have a meaning for a *conscience* that essentially conceives of itself as a moral conscience, as awareness of freedom" (Canivez, 1999: 50). This freedom is essentially negative, it negates the hold that conditions have on the individual and it shows how dissatisfaction plays a key role in the jump between categories.

As the floor of Modernity, all modern categories are interpreted in relationship to *The Condition*, and thus it is also (through a reprise of *Certainty*) the floor of *our* tradition. It is the source of *our* naïve pre-philosophical attitude. The pull it has on us is thus massive. Anyone who is in this tradition and who does not ask themself the question of meaning for themself sees the discourse that the tradition has elaborated as being "natural" and "given". If the individual chooses to reflect philosophically, that is, coherently and totally, and if they ask themself the question of what grounds this reflection, the question of freedom is unavoidable. It is the thinking individual, the thinking conscience that grasps that:

> [a]ll is discourse and is only discourse; but this *all* is a silence that speaks merely to reprise all words in itself: Freedom is at the bottom of everything that is and all that is merely is for freedom, for the conscience. Language is not then a *thing* in the world; it is *speaking*, which conditions the world and, freely, conditions itself in the world (LP 236).

It is in this rational activity that the individual determines themself but only by taking the science of conditions into account and by searching beyond external determinations. This is why, in the discourse of *Conscience*:

> [t]he pure conscience is […] for itself, determination and knowledge of the determination, and it is both inseparably. Free determination alone gets me to leave conditioned knowledge; only the reflection about the determining act as a

transcendent possibility gets me to see the absolute that I am as *I*, but which I don't know in the condition (LP 241).

It is this possibility that transforms the idea of reflection into an "access to the absolute" (LP 241).

The individual who jumps from *The Condition* to *Conscience* jumps knowingly, jumps not because satisfaction is not possible in *The Condition*, it is, but jumps because they are conscience of the fact that they don't want to be satisfied in the manner that *The Condition* proposes. It is thus in *Conscience* that the individual becomes aware of *meaning* and of the quest for meaning. The conditioned world provides no meaning because meaning transcends conditions, meaning must be found by the individual and in their life, in both united in a whole. *Conscience* thus opens the possibility of the individual to see themself as the source of meaning. According to Weil, for *Conscience*:

> [p]hilosophy is not the goal, it has a goal, and this goal is not speaking about freedom, but steering man to determine himself as free. Man is the being who surpasses the world of the *condition*—there is no other world—to enter into a world that now has a *meaning*: it is the realm of human decision, of the confrontation between freedom and conditional necessity (LP 244).

Conscience is thus totality reflected into itself as a total reflection, but this total reflection is merely formal. This is why *Conscience* is distrustful of reprises. In *Conscience*:

> [m]an has ideas of his own making, an expression that must be taken literally; but it is only the conscience that sees this fundamental *making*, which it is not a fact, but expresses itself in facts. In the idea of a just God, the moral law exists for the man who is free, but unconscious of his freedom, just as the idea of the science dominating the conditions represents—but represents only for the conscience—reason's spontaneity, just as that of the universal kingdom of law prefigures the free determination through the suppression of individual interest, as that of wisdom announces the total reflection of the *self* in the *I*. For the conscience, man has always tried to *make* himself in the condition, and has always betrayed himself in the two meanings of the word: betrayed by trying to abdicate his freedom, betrayed because he isn't able to do so and because his own attempt to objectify himself precisely demonstrates his fundamental spontaneity (LP 255).

The contradiction between nature and freedom is thus internal to the individual themself. Each individual is both nature and freedom at the same time, they are both an empirical and a transcendental self, and though *Conscience* only resolves this problem formally, it opens the path to its concrete resolution. Reflection becomes the idea of absolute reflection, the

idea of a reflection that grasps both freedom and nature in philosophical speculation. This contradiction continues through *Intelligence* (exemplified by Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Bayle) and *Personality* (exemplified by Friedrich Nietzsche), which both interpret themselves in relation to *The Condition* but also in relation to *Conscience*, and it is resolved in the category of *The Absolute*.

     The Absolute is thus the culmination of the philosophical attitude. It is the pure attitude that unites ground, coherence, and totality in reflection and its fulfillment is what allows all the categories from *The Object* onward to be seen as permutations of the same attitude. This allows us clarify what we have already called *the philosophical attitude of understanding*. Éric Weil uses the term "philosophical attitude" twice in the *Logic of Philosophy*. The first is to critique certain types of philosophical attitudes and the second is to give a definition of the usage itself. In *The Object* Weil makes a distinction between the attitude of "restricted common sense" that reprises *The Object* (the first category of the philosophical attitude of understanding) and the philosophical attitudes that this creates. Restricted common sense, for Weil, is marked by the fact that it "refuses transcendence" which leads:

> the judgment of the very same common sense, to the most absurd *philosophical attitudes*[24]. Absolute skepticism, materialism, idealism are traced back as a last resort to reprises of the category of the *object* by common sense using the category of the discussion; they are not philosophical but scientific systems because they set off from the science of common sense in order to pass to the absolute of the science of discussion, to the totality of theses arranged in a non-contradictory fashion. They all want to explain how man can have knowledge of reality — the only thing that doesn't need explanation for philosophy in the strictest sense of the word (LP 154).

We can thus interpret the difference between the attitude of common sense and that of the philosophical attitude as distinguished by the way that the goal of explaining and understanding coherently and totally is understood. According to this reading, common sense is nothing more than the pre-philosophical attitude of the tradition. It does not seek to understand totally and coherently, and when it does, it reprises the initial category of philosophical understanding. The historical development of the philosophical attitude has already long surpassed these initial categories (even though it reprises them) in that it no longer takes the solutions and the satisfaction proposed by *Discussion* and *The Object* as

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[24] This is highlighted by us.

being freestanding. They require reprises. The second time that Weil highlights the philosophical attitude is to say that:

> there is thus no philosophical attitude — it is the word "philosophical" that matters — of the conscience, since there is no coherent discourse of the *I*, which is present only in the destruction of any coherence: man is always what he ought not to be, and it is only in this way that he knows what he must be (LP 260).

Conscience is the attitude of pure transcendence that seeks be "necessary coincidence of attitude and category" (LP 255). But because it is merely the formal coincidence of these two things, in its purity, the attitude is not "philosophical". It is nothing other than the awareness of its self-grounding totality. This is not a contradiction in the sense that, for Weil, the *I* is a transitory state that evaporates every time it has to act, that it has to come face to face with the conditions of the world. It is merely the *"ungraspable ground"* (LP 256) of total reflection, it is an empty absolute because it makes itself into a formal "absolute emptiness" (LP 255).

The form of satisfaction that *The Absolute* proposes resolves this problem by filling this absolute emptiness of the empty absolute with content. The individual is satisfied because they understand themself as a member of a community and a State, as a member of different associations, as the member of a family, and by understanding themself in those terms, which are universal, the individual in their particularity renounces that particularity in order to embrace the universal. But it is precisely this characteristic of *The Absolute* that will lead Weil to surpass it. By framing the development of the philosophical attitude in terms of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, it allows us to see the range of possibilities of human attitudes. We can see how attitudes resist change and how they jump forward. Individuals stay in their attitude when they are reasonably satisfied in it, or when they are unable to see the point of entering into the philosophical attitude for themselves, or when they don't want to accept any change to the content of their attitude. When they do take on the philosophical attitude, they develop their understanding, but this does not mean that they will go through all of the categorial developments that lead to *The Absolute*. They will not necessary put their coherence to the test. In *Conscience* the category posits the coincidence between the attitude and the category, between life lived by the individual and their discourse on this life, between the individual's sentiment of freedom and reason, but it was unable to provide it. In *The Absolute* it is "no longer a matter of the *individual's* liberation and realization, but of *man's* liberty and reality" (LP 321). The individual universalizes themself in *The Absolute* and in doing so man and Being "are *unified* in discourse" (LP 322). It is thus the speculative attitude. Everything that is and that is understood is understood in discourse. This discourse

takes in and understands every attitude as being moments of *The Absolute*, it sees them all as necessary for the realization of its content. It is thus the first category to multiply points of view.

The Absolute becomes an attitude "that wants to be a category. It realizes itself only—and totally—by thinking itself. It is the universal attitude, the totality of attitudes, not juxtaposed and added up […] but as the whole of negativity, organizing itself." (LP 327). *The Absolute* thus unites ground, coherence, and totality, but not as something transcendent as in *God*, not as something reduced and external as in *The Condition*, nor as something formal and empty as in *Conscience*. Here freedom is the absolute ground of discourse, discourse is coherent and its content is total. It is all content. The category is nothing more and nothing less than "the development of the attitudes" (LP 327) that understands everything and itself. In fact, we can say the it is *The Absolute* that interprets itself as the philosophical attitude of understanding because it sees itself as the whole of discourse. In this whole, "[c]ategory after category, attitude after attitude reveal themselves thus as what they are in the Absolute: the Absolute itself in its becoming." (LP 328). From the naïve pre-philosophical attitude through the groundwork that is laid for philosophical understanding in *Discussion*, through its start in *The Object* and its development, each moment is "the Absolute in its stages" (LP 328). All were necessary for the absolute discourse to become aware of itself and all are contained in *The Absolute*.

Each pure attitude can be taken independently. This is one of the things that defines its purity. But each attitude also includes reprises of every other one. In fact, it is the presence of *The Absolute* which allows us to identify the two separate overarching attitudes. There is the "naïve" pre-philosophical attitude of *Certainty* and of the tradition which must be taken by the hand and led to philosophy, and the philosophical attitude of understanding, which regroups all of the forms of coherence that propose different metaphysical grounds and that make up the western philosophical tradition from Plato to Hegel. *Certainty* dominates the other background attitudes because they all only become visible in *Certainty*. The categories from *The Object* to *The Absolute* are all permutations of the same attitude, because they all offer satisfaction in terms of understanding and of reasonable discourse. These two attitudes mix however, both because as history marches forward the naïve attitude is given access to the forms of coherence that are developed in coherent discourse, and because anyone who wants to understand reprises all the background attitudes in their concrete attitude. As I mentioned in the last chapter, the reproach that the categories after *The Absolute* present is that the philosophical attitude offers satisfaction in thought, in the act of thinking and of

understanding, in the speculative activity. It thus proposes that human satisfaction is that of the individual as a thinking being, not as an individual understood in their individuality.

The categories following *The Absolute* don't want to understand satisfaction as it is grasped in discourse, their question is one of actual satisfaction. The jumps between *Certainty, Discussion,* and *The Object* radically alter discourse by opening the philosophical attitude. As the philosophical attitude evolves, it reveals forms of coherence that allow individuals to grasp themselves in the world. By framing this movement in terms of satisfaction and freedom, we are able to see how this evolution opens a range of possibilities to each individual. The philosophical attitude culminates in the freedom of thought, thought realized through its freedom, thought thinking satisfaction and its own freedom. The jump from *The Absolute* to the next category is an equally radical jump as that between *Certainty* and *Discussion*, because it also changes the orientation of discourse. *The Absolute* elaborates a discourse that offers satisfaction in the freedom *of* thought, *The Work* seeks satisfaction in freedom *from* thought. *The Work* refuses coherence, universality, reasonable discourse, and freedom itself to live, to feel, to act.

2.6   The Individual's Relationship to Discourse

The dissatisfaction of the individual in *The Work* is the dissatisfaction with absolutely coherent discourse. However, this dissatisfaction cannot be reabsorbed into *The Absolute*, rather it presents discourse with a new shape and with new resources. The primitive categories are interpreted as the background of discourse because these categories develop the discursive resources needed for discourse. For Weil, discourse starts from a purely pragmatic attitude of the unity of the individual and the world in *Truth* and then develops the productivity of the pragmatic negation in *Nonsense*. This difference allows Weil to distinguish between doctrine and explanation, implicit and explicit, attitude and category. *The True and the False* allows the reduction of the implicit to the explicit by distinguishing the true interpretation of the doctrine from all those that are false. *Certainty* develops the essential content of discourse that allows individuals to take up a commitment to a specific determined content in order to orient their life and their activity. In this way, these "primitive" categories are all pragmatic, but "naïvely" so. In other words, they are pre-philosophical. The logical tools that define coherence have not yet been fully and explicitly developed and so coherence has not yet been posited in terms of non-contradiction. The importance of grounding discourse has not yet been recognized. The possibility of a total

discourse is still invisible. Discourse is thus not yet essential to the individual's attitude. *Discussion* develops the importance of coherence, but this coherence is merely formal. But if *Truth* to *Certainty* are pragmatic categories, that is, attitudes that don't develop themselves, *The Discussion* to *The Absolute* are semantic (taking the term very loosely as the development of meaningful content) categories. They are semantic because their contradictions are between different contents. They are categories where the determined shapes with determined contents of the attitude matter. Each attitude is lived in certainty, which merely means being committed to something. Starting from *The Discussion* however it means committing to a specific something. *The Discussion* discovers "the form of content" (LP 122) which must be filled with concrete determinedness, but it only fills it formally with the notion of coherence. It is ungrounded and it is not total. *The Object* poses a ground and allows a substantial determined discourse. *God* reflects this ground into itself but as something separate from discourse, all the other categories develop additional discursive resources all the way to *The Absolute. The Absolute* shows that in order for discourse to be complete, it must be self-sufficient. Discourse is free in its realm. It is not grounded by anything other than the free choice to develop itself. What else is there? There is life, there is human struggle, there is violence. The passage from *Certainty* to *The Discussion* is the passage from a naïve relationship to tradition to a critical relationship to it thanks to discourse. It is the passage from life into discourse. The attitudes from *The Discussion* to *The Absolute* see life only as it appears in discourse. Life, God, sentiment, all these things are reduced to discourse. The passage from *The Absolute* to *The Work* is the refusal of the satisfaction that is proposed in discourse, because it is the refusal to be mediated (Kluback, 1987: 133). It is the attitude of pure particularity understood as particular. It is the attitude of revolt (Kirscher, 1989: 303; Ganty, 1997: 669) It is life without discourse. In this way it is a pragmatic attitude, like those at the start of the logic of philosophy and it develops no discourse for itself. However, because it adds something new to discourse and because its pure attitude is graspable in discourse, there is a category of *revolt*. This category reflects on the relationship the violent individual has to discourse, on the interplay between categories and attitudes, and in this way, it opens what we can call, following Robert Brandom (who uses it in a different context), the possibility of a *pragmatic metavocabulary*. Brandom notes that a pragmatic metavocabulary characterizes and develops the "*pragmatically mediated semantic* relation between vocabularies" (2010: 11). The refusal of coherence that Weil characterizes is a metavocabulary in this sense because it reflects on the pragmatic relationship a certain attitude has towards the semantic content of different discourses, and

in fact, what I suggest is that all of the categories *of* philosophy are best understood as pragmatic metavocabularies in that they characterize the different types of relationships that the individual can have towards discourse.

Every discourse makes room for violence. There is violence that is legitimate, whether it is held by the State or certain individuals, and violence that is illegitimate, but this illegitimate violence is understood in discourse. *Certainty*, for example, which is the first attitude that we recognize and which is an absolute position, allows no room for comparison. The certainty of its discourse is what matters. The certain discourse must be protected against other equally certain discourse. The best form of protection is to bring others to see the truth of this unique discourse, even if it means by force. *Certainty* legitimizes its use of violence in order to create a unique world or at least to protect their certain discourse from attack. Violence is illegitimate when it puts this certainty at risk. *The Discussion* sees violence as illegitimate at the interior of the community, *because* this violence is what puts the community at risk. In fact, each category uses discourse to decide what illegitimate violence is. This allows them to decide what the legitimate use of violence is, whether it is defending the community from barbarians, converting infidels to the true faith, interpreting the recalcitrant elements of society as criminal or psychologically unsound. For *The Absolute*, violence is seen as a step on the individual's journey for recognition. This is clear from in Hegel's interpretation of *Das Werk* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. However, *The Work* adds something new that cannot be reduced to *Das Werk*. It lives in violence and refuses discourse so does not separate legitimate and illegitimate use. Because of this, it is *discourse* that is seen as inessential to life and not violence. This attitude thus refuses to allow its violence to be subsumed into language, refuses letting contradiction have any hold on it, refuses all forms of coherence. The individual living in *The Work* refuses to adhere to any discourse because they are not only the center of the world, their sentiment is the whole world. In a way, we can say that *The Work* is the practical position of solipsism. The individual in this attitude does not recognize others as agents, as individuals, as peers, but only as obstacles or tools.

The Work allows Weil to theorize violence, but he goes farther than merely looking at violence on the individual level. He uses *The Work* to also make the leap to a political analysis of violence. *Certainty* uses violence rather than argument against other communities. Argument requires submitting oneself to certain dialogical controls whereby the best reasons take the day, even if they are the reasons of one's opponent. *Certainty* does not see the need to do so, because one's opponent can be overcome or ignored, but the

certainty that is put forward is the found certainty of the tradition. *Discussion* is born because individuals accept that in the community there are those individuals whom they can neither overcome nor ignore. They are equals, and therefore they must discuss. *Certainty* is thus the last category where adherence to its discourse through violence is seen as legitimate. Any other discourse that uses violence to force others to adhere does so through a reprise of certainty. Each category provides a form of coherence that promises that once everyone adheres to it, violence will be reduced to a set of logical norms and pure violence will disappear. Even *Intelligence*, the first category that recognizes the irreducibility of other discourses, promises that violence will be overcome as soon as individuals see that it is relative particular interests that cause violence. What the jump from *The Absolute* to *The Work* shows is that even if violence can be understood, it can't be overcome. It is the "remainder that remains" (Perine, 1982: 190). *The Work* is the violence of the individual that knows themself to be individual and that wants to be individual, and who therefore recognizes no equals that could serve as dialogical controls.

Violence can't be overcome, because as *The Work* shows, it can be violence itself that gives meaning to the individual. This shows the importance of the free adhesion to discourse. There is nothing that grounds discourse *and* eliminates violence, except the free choice to exclude violence. Discourse is grounded in the free choice to understand, but this same freedom can be used to refuse or destroy discourse. In other words, *The Work* is the manifestation of a freedom that does not seek recognition.

At the individual level, the world reasonably organized and understood by *The Absolute* is a world where each individual is recognized in the roles they fill and in the path they take to be functioning members of society. *The Work* understands this organization and is born in this organization but refuses it. The individual accepts that education is necessary to individual development, but disdains education and refuses to be educated. The individual accepts that each person is understood and recognized thanks to the role they fill as children and parents, employees and employers, friends and lovers of others, but refuses to be bound by these roles, and thus respects no duty that goes along with them. The freedom and satisfaction that *The Work* reaches for is the immediacy of feeling. It is the freedom to act, the satisfaction of doing something without reflection, and therefore it does not characterize its activity as seeking anything. It is the pure sentiment of existing found in refusal itself. It is the presence of sentiment outside of reasonable discourse. It knows that the others are there, and that acting correctly requires taking them into account, but it sees them as the malleable stuff of its own ends. It knows that discussion leads to reasons but that reasons

lead it back into the endless spiral from which it wants to be free. There is no adhesion to a unique discourse that will satisfy the individual, and they do not seek to convert others to their discourse, they do not recognize the others, not as individuals, not as equals, not as legitimate discursive partners that can help them to correct or purify their discourse. The others don't matter. The individual feels themself individual in the act that no other individual can accomplish, because it is their own.

The others either keep the individual from their activity or help them accomplish it. This is why the individual does not want to convert others. The individual *uses* others. In this way, the others must adhere to the individual's project, and all trickery and cunning is allowed to bring them to do so. *The Work's* purest *political* expression is that of the totalitarian leader who seeks to reorganize the entire political structure to suit their own goals. Its project is to reshape the masses and the world. But as a project that has no goal other than the immediate satisfaction in its activity, it can never stop. There is no day after the revolution. The masses serve as tools for the individual in *The Work*, but as individuals they are individually taken into this project. This is because as individuals *they* are looking for meaning, they are looking to reasonably be fulfilled, and this is what the individual in *The Work* offers them. But it is an empty promise. The individual in *The Work* offers them a perfect meaningful world tomorrow, and to do so, it has to eradicate those who block the project today. Since the project depends on this, it can be accomplished by any means necessary.

The individual in *The Work* refuses reasonable discourse, but uses language, and uses all the forms of coherence that have been elaborated. They use this language to convince the others, but without being convinced of it themself. In this way they can instrumentalize what reasonable discourse creates, and build a formal coherence that convinces others. *The Work* flies in the face of the philosophical attitude and in doing so it reveals that the earnest use of language, the use that sees understanding as the goal, is merely one of the types of stances the individual can take towards discourse. In fact, *The Work* reveals that there are multiple possible relationships to discourse. By showing that meaning develops in the free adhesion to discourse, and by showing that the individual is free to reorganize and use discourse as they see fit, *The Work* shows that there is no necessity outside of discourse. Necessity has a conditional if…then… structure. Discourse is a human affair and what it forms and reforms is human lives. This is why Weil's analysis of *The Absolute* is anthropological and not metaphysical (Ricœur, 1982: 408) he lived and wrote as *The Work* showed itself in its purity.

Discourse and its refusal happen in human lives, there is nothing otherworldly about it. No single discourse can demand or require the adhesion of the totality of humanity. Discourse must multiply its point of views in order to face this plurality, to understand it, and more importantly to act upon it. *The Absolute* is the first category *of* philosophy because it brings a certain relationship to discourse to its culmination; it takes the multiplicity of points of view and shows how they are moments of a single *absolute* point of view. It is *The Work* however that brings out the importance of the individual's relationship to discourse. *The Work* opposes itself to this Archimedean point by refusing to even enter into discourse. The other categories *of* philosophy weave these two strands together in different ways.

In *The Work*, the types of dialogical controls born in *Discussion* are ruled out. This individual is indifferent to objection, to rational argument, to reason itself. They are indifferent despite the fact that they understand it. They have freely chosen to abandon reason. The individual in this attitude no longer seeks to understand, but rejects understanding because they already understand what reason implies. It implies being open to refutation, to counterexamples: it implies laying oneself bare before the normative weight of better reasons. It means abandoning their individuality, their particularity to opt for the universal. This possibility both secures the reality of philosophy as a free choice and opens a new philosophical question. This new question is neither ontological nor metaphysical. It does not bear on the constitution of reality, or at least not directly, but rather it bears on the reality of someone who stubbornly does not care about such questions.

The Work is followed by *The Finite*. This attitude for Weil is exemplified by Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and the existentialists, but we could also include someone like Jacques Derrida. It recognizes concrete particularity, but it recognizes it in discourse. However here, each discourse presents itself as the "*singular* act" that knows itself to be singular (Canivez, 1999: 71) and which understands its freedom in this act. *The Finite* seeks to preserve the awareness of this freedom by the destruction and deconstruction of the coherence of discourse from the interior. This new attitude learns the lesson that *The Work* teaches, that there is no necessity in philosophy and so it refuses the immanence that was proposed in *The Absolute*, just as *The Work* had done. But *The Finite* also refuses *The Work*. Not for "philosophical" reasons but rather because the individual doesn't believe in the project, because they don't want it. They refuse the purely violent interaction with the world, because they don't want to be violent. *The Finite* refuses coherence but accepts discourse. In this way, it preserves discourse, but it preserves it in a refractory form. It is the attitude that destroys coherence in order to maintain the point of view of the individual who is the

one that performs this destruction. The single viewpoint sought by the tradition is refused because multiple viewpoints are needed. It is only thanks to these multiple viewpoints that individuals can recognize themselves as free and recognize the possibilities offered in discourse. Because *The Finite* refuses pure violence for discourse it discovers that the creative freedom felt in violence is also present in language. It is found in the poetic production of meaning that gives birth to discourse. The individual feels their freedom in their creation and this creation is humanity's fundamental expression. What *The Finite* also recognizes is that this fundamental expression, this productive creation of meaning in a poetic language, this *poiesis*, is only understood thanks to discourse. The individual is alive and feels themself living in the contingency and finiteness of the life that only they can live, in the choices that only they can make, in the acts that only they can accomplish, but they recognize the situation because they have passed through discourse. The language that they recognize is the prelogical grasp of the meaning of their lives in the poetic creation of meaning itself. It is idiosyncratic, it is private, it is fleeting. For it to be understood, the essential attitude must be mined out of this rich ore and refined into discourse, otherwise the meaning created disappears just as the individual does. Discourse is thus seen as the substance of understanding, it is what offers some permanence. What *The Finite* refuses is that this permanence be absolute. There is no consolation for the finiteness of the individual, for the fleetingness of their activity, for the failure they inevitably face. In *The Finite* the individual is stripped of all consolation that the tradition offers.

All meaning is found in the singular creation of a singular individual, and the individual is free because they are finite. *The Finite* accepts that genuine meaning is the meaning created by the individual, and thus is limited by the limits of that individual, by the limits of all of humanity in their human condition. The limits of the individual's talent, of their means, of their life is the limit of their meaning and *The Finite* wants to grasp this limit in discourse. The coherence proposed by *The Absolute* is not merely rejected, this rejection is also explained. The total coherence proposed by *The Absolute* is seen to be impossible because we humans, speaking, acting creatures, are mired in the unforgiving thickness of our own lives. We cannot separate ourselves from our temporal nature, from our limited perspective, from the muddy opacity of ourselves. To see how this position is a departure from those found in the previous categories, it suffices to look at how the notion of the consolation of philosophy is treated in the categories before *The Absolute* and after. Seneca's *On the Shortness of Life* (2004) (or the Stoics in general), Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* (1999), or the famous Book One, Chapter Nineteen in Montaigne's *Essays*

(1958) entitled "That to Study Philosophy is To Learn to Die" are all examples that find their ultimate salve to human finitude in the philosophical act. Compare that reading with Simone De Beauvoir's closing reflections in her *Ethics of Ambiguity* where she rejects any such salve. She states:

> Whatever one may do, one never realizes anything but a limited work, like existence itself which tries to establish itself through that work and which death also limits. It is the assertion of our finiteness which doubtless gives the doctrine which we have just evoked [that of Plato] its austerity and, in some eyes, its sadness. As soon as one considers a system abstractly and theoretically, one puts himself, in effect, on the place of the universal, thus of the infinite. This is why reading the Hegelian system is so comforting. I remember having experienced a great feeling of calm reading Hegel in the impersonal framework of the Bibliothèque Nationale in August 1940. But once I got into the street again, into my life, out of the system, beneath a real sky, the system was no longer of any use to me: what it had offered me, under the show of the infinite, was the consolations of death; and I again wanted to live in the midst of living men. I think that inversely, existentialism does not offer to the reader the consolations of an abstract evasion: existentialism proposes no evasion. (2015: 158).

The date she gives is telling. She rejects the consolation of philosophy because she is pressingly aware of the precarity of her situation. De Beauvoir goes back into a world of men where the Parisian streets are newly filled with German soldiers. She does not turn away from the singularity of her situation. She is a single life facing the *real* possibility of death. In this context one must steel their resolve and accept their finiteness in order to act meaningfully, even in the face of insurmountable odds and certain failure. She thus tries to show that this awareness of our finitude is instrumental to our awareness of our human freedom.

It is not the content of philosophy that is put into question, rather it is the relationship that the individual maintains with philosophy that is, specifically how that relationship affects human sensibility to that content. Different situations call for different philosophies. *The Absolute* proposes a single totally coherent discourse, a discourse by which the subject is a subject-for-itself, where the subject is its own object. This is supposed to hold a-temporally. *The Finite* refuses the possibility of a single totally coherent discourse, because the singularity of every situation is what matters. Each individual is faced with a plurality of possible discourses in a singular situation, the individual must refuse coherence because

coherence is the forgetfulness of our finitude. *The Finite* cannot propose real human satisfaction, and thus renounces the notion of satisfaction. All it can propose is the sentiment of freedom that one has when looking their dissatisfaction and their inevitable failure in the face. The individual can find satisfaction in the awareness of freedom in their finiteness, but if they do, it's by chance. There is no necessary satisfaction to be had. It must be made. This is precisely what the last concrete attitude, *Action*, opposes to *The Finite*. The individual in *Action* refuses to live in a world where they are unsatisfied. But instead of refusing all coherence, it seeks to change the world reasonably and coherently so that their satisfaction can be realized.

Action, which is exemplified by Karl Marx, (although one should refrain from seeing Weil's work as "Marxist") is the attitude of the individual that sees themself as the junction of action, judgement, and the world. They recognize that this junction only makes sense in a world with other agents, and the embeddedness of their lives in social and political structures. Thus, Weil's account of *Action* looks to interpret and understand the world in order to change it. In this way, the philosophical "problem of action is the transformation of the social and political world in such a way that the individual can freely seek satisfaction within it" (Canivez, 1999: 75). The world is modifiable because it is understandable and understood, but this world is a world filled with others. This is why the attitude aims at collective action. The attitude of *Action*, and the category that grasps it, posits the possibility of an individual who, because they understand their actual situation as being the consequence of a historic process, knows how to act upon the historic conditions therein in order to modify them and to align their discourse with this situation in order to bring others into meaningful action. This modification of the world is different however from the type of activity that is undertaken within the attitude of *The Work*. Within *The Work* the individual does not worry about the validity of their project, because they are unconcerned with understanding and because they feel alive in the refusal of coherence. Within the category of *Action,* the individual presents a discourse that makes claims of coherence and universality. This discourse is thus still open to refutation and modification. That is, the individual still submits themself to the types of dialogical control that happen in discussion, but they have the content that *Discussion* lacks. They inscribe themselves in a theory of history. They understand that the world has been grasped through discourse and that there are facts. These facts not only help the individual to grasp their situation, but they also condition it. The person wants their action to be reasonable, that is, they want to know why, how, and when to act, but they also want it to be transparent to others. They want their reasons for acting to

be taken up and appropriated by others; they want their reasons for acting to be coherent and universal, and thus become reasons for everyone. The category of *Action* completes the political analysis that was started in *The Work*. Discourse works on humanity and humanity is formed through discourse, thus for real satisfaction to be possible, the world must be *made* reasonable for the universal satisfaction of the whole of humanity. This is discourse's task. As discourse elaborates this task, it allows individuals to understand themselves and their situation and allows them to freely organize their goals and act upon them. This is thus the last concrete category, because it is the last pure attitude. The discourse of *Action* "saturates the philosopher's requirement of universality" because they "no longer only aim at the universality of discourse for all thinking individuals, they aim at the realization of a world where thinking would be a real possibility for the universality of individuals" (Canivez, 1999: 78). This real possibility of thinking is only possible when individuals have real autonomy articulated in civil and political rights, thus it is realized through the social and political action that reduces the violence of the world for thinking and acting individuals.

We are now in a position to understand the different attitudes that Weil treats. The initial attitudes, from *Truth* to *Certainty* are background attitudes because they accompany all other human attitudes. They are regrouped in *Certainty* as the pre-critical or pre-philosophical attitude. *Discussion* opens the search for coherence but does not ground it. *The Object* proposes the initial ground that opens philosophy. All the "semantic" attitudes from *The Object* to *The Absolute* are permutations of this philosophical attitude which have different semantic contents. These categories provide different logical points of view based on different ways of grounding understanding. Each category thus reveals a different irreducible attitude because it offers a different order of explanation that provides different scopes of comprehensiveness and universality. *The Absolute* brings the idea of total understanding in the absolutely coherent discourse to a close in its universality. However, it reduces the actual freedom of the particular individual. The attitude of *The Work* reveals that this freedom is irreducible by seeking a life outside of discourse. *The Finite* accepts particularity and discourse but as a particularity that is only maintained by destroying coherence from inside of discourse. *Action* is the attitude that seeks to make the world a place where universality is effectively universal, to modify discourse to transform it into a discourse that can transform the world thanks to its universality. The categories *of* philosophy, from *The Absolute* to *Action*, all characterize different relationships that the individual can have with discourse. They all reprise the different forms of coherence that are found in the philosophical attitudes, and those found in the pre-philosophical background

attitudes. The way that they combine their reprises, mixed with the way that they position themself towards discourse, and the aspects of their own discourse that are pre-critical, define the specificity of *each* person's concrete attitude. This is what allows people to act for reasons.

Action is the start of the theoretical crux, which along with the categories *Meaning* and *Wisdom*, defines Weil's own philosophical project. The attitude of *Action* is thus different from the category of *Action*. The individual acts in the attitude but understands thanks to the category. However, with this understanding Weil refuses a simple return to *The Absolute*. He wants to understand the possibility of understanding in the face of the refusal of discourse, just as he wants to understand the possibility of living a meaningful life outside of discourse. In order to do this Weil embarks on a "transcendental" reflection in *Meaning* and *Wisdom*. These two final categories bear on the two possibilities that Weil seeks to understand and they complete his project.

None of the concrete attitudes hold the totality of meaning. In fact, meaning depends on the interaction of all human attitudes and it is created anew in every human life. It is created in violence and in language, in violence by presenting the specificity that reasonable discourse will raise itself against, and in language by creating the stuff of discourse. The category of *Meaning* thus gives us the concepts that are necessary to understand concrete meaning, in other words it gives us the form that meaning takes in all of its concrete appearances. Language produces meaning and discourse organizes it in a given situation. Thus, for Weil, meaning is understood formally as the concrete expression of human freedom organized in order to grasp a specific human situation by a specific individual. *All* meaning takes on this form. The additional concepts that Weil develops, attitudes, categories, reprises are used to understand how this form of meaning is articulated is specific situations. In human attitudes individuals produce meaning in their freedom, they grasp it thanks to the categories and they apply it to their concrete situation with the help of the reprise. The reprise thus highlights the way that all concrete meanings participate in meaning. Additionally, Weil uses the notion of satisfaction and dissatisfaction to understand how people situate themselves in attitudes. When an individual is satisfied, there is no movement, the individual lives their life as a unity, however satisfaction is a rare thing. When they are dissatisfied they *can* articulate a new meaning in their attitude. When this meaning becomes visible in reality as making up a part of reality, *philosophers* seek to grasp it in the form of coherent discourse.

Philosophers understand this unity, but they do not necessarily live it. In other words, another category, *Wisdom*, is needed to explain how individuals live their lives as a unity. The union of reasonable discourse and life is thought in *Meaning* and is lived in *Wisdom*. In other words, *Wisdom* provides the form that reasonable life outside of discourse takes. It is a return to the attitude after the thinking and understanding in the category. It is also this reflection that allows Weil to see the logic of philosophy as completed. The acting individual uses discourse because they have understood it. They know what to do precisely because they have passed through discourse. But what do they find when they leave it? They find the attitude of *Truth*. They find the starting point of reflection in their action, in their life, in the unity of their sentiment in presence. *Wisdom* is the formal category that reflects on this possibility but as a formal category this also means that the idea of wisdom is filled by all the concrete appearances of wisdom. In each form of coherence, in each logical point of view, the individual can find this unity and can return to the attitude of *Truth*. Each concrete individual can find a coherent discourse that grasps their singular situation and guides their action so that they can find plenitude in their reasonable sentiment. In other words, the formal category of *Meaning* reflects on "the unity between coherent discourse and coherent reality" (LP 413) and the formal category of *Wisdom* reflects on the unity life lived as a coherent whole. This life though is a life that lives in the universal among other individuals and thus is able to unfold the meaning that it found and created in the world.

2.7   Conclusion – The Beginning is at the End

The Logic of Philosophy comes to an end in a reflection on life, in a reflection on the meaning that is created in human action and how that meaning should be understood, but this is also why the final reflection is formal. There is no normative prescription that can cover the meaning that has not yet been created and that humanity is always in the middle of creating. This is why Weil's thought leads to a philosophical practice understood as a *discursive* practice, this is also why *Action* saturates the philosophers demand for universality. The categories are the totality of discursive shapes that coherently grasp meaning as it is lived in the world. *Action* unites these discursive shapes with a discursive activity by recognizing the plurality of discursive shapes as the plurality of forms of meaning. Because of this the individual that reaches *Action* cannot properly said be a Weilian philosopher, just as they can also no longer be an Aristotelian, a Kantian, a Nietzschean, a Hegelian, or a Marxian philosopher. We leave these books aside and we reflect on our

concrete situation in order to grasp it in discourse. The individual who passes to the attitude of *Action* always becomes their own philosopher by deploying the plurality of discursive shapes in order to grasp their situation, and they do so in order to elaborate a coherent discourse that will allow others to do the same, *for themselves*. Philosophy thus becomes an argumentative and educative discursive practice. It deploys the plurality of forms of meaning in their plurality of discursive shapes because each individual is faced with other individuals that have different situations. In order to maintain reasonable discursive practices with these individuals they must deploy this plurality. Argument does not bring individuals to see their own choice to participate in this reasonable practice. Individuals must freely choose to refuse meaninglessness, violence, and incoherence. But once they choose reasonable argumentative practices, individuals lift themselves up to the philosophical attitude of understanding by deploying the multiple forms of coherence in order to grasp the singularity of their life. In doing so they grasp meaning and create meaning. They modify the world by modifying their own practice and by modifying the practices of others reasonably. This is the highest goal that humanity can give to itself: to live reasonably with others in a world that is understandable and understood, to act to make the world ever more reasonable. The relationships between life, action, meaning, practice, satisfaction, sentiment can be articulated in multiple ways, and Eric Weil presents a way to understand those relationships, a way to understand them that helps others to grasp themselves coherently and reasonably thanks to them. In this way, Weil's discourse unites ground, coherence, and totality in a comprehensive *open* discourse. Freedom is seen to ground discourse, but only in its initial opposition to truth. In discourse, it is the perpetual effort to resolve this opposition in each *my* and *your* life that allows us to see our coherence as total, because it aims at a comprehensive comprehensiveness.

Weil is certainly not alone in trying to understand these relationships. In fact, as I will argue throughout this work, the comparison between the way that Weil treats these themes and the way that they are dealt with in the American pragmatist tradition is particularly felicitous. From pragmatism's origins in the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, this tradition has grappled with the general problem of understanding and how understanding is linked to human action. In the next chapter, I will present my reading of pragmatism and its main threads in order to establish a dialogue between Weil's work and the work of pragmatist thinkers.

Chapter 3   PRAGMATISM, EXPRESSIVISM, AND INFERENTIALISM

3.1   Introduction – Orders of Explanation

In the first two chapters I presented the main driving concepts of the *Logic of Philosophy*, an overview of the structure, and the goal of the book. The *Logic of Philosophy* presents a development of historical forms of coherence as they are found in discourse and as they can be logically structured according to the universality and coherence of their content. Weil claims that these different forms of coherence take on a categorical structure because they organize what is essential to a lived attitude conceptually, thus providing an understanding of concrete lived situations. Because categories allow us to understand how assertations and claims are structured within different forms of discourse, Weil's use of the term category is meta-conceptual. This meta-conceptuality is important because several different strands of modern philosophy, namely pragmatism, expressivism, and inferentialism, when taken together, also insist on this meta-conceptuality, and thus make for natural dialogue partners with Weil's philosophical position. It is precisely this meta-conceptual emphasis that I hope to draw out of an inferentialist expressivist pragmatism.

In this chapter, I will present an overview of these positions in order to be able to place Weil's theory in relation to them. What I will claim is that there is a strain of pragmatism whose primary concern is, like Weil's own theory, a certain practice of philosophy (even though Weil's theory has a political destination that is hitherto underdeveloped in this strain of pragmatism). This philosophical practice aims to understand what is *done* when one makes substantial claims about the world. This strain presents the substantial ontological and metaphysical claims made in discourse as explainable in terms of the kinds of practices that are involved in holding a claim as true. By saying that claims made in discourse are explainable in terms of practices, I am claiming that the type of philosophical explanation that is given in pragmatism places the individual's relationship to discourse front and center, and that this is one of the main bridges that I am going to build between Weil's theory and pragmatism. This explanation is thus itself meta-philosophical. However, in order to do this properly I must first say a word about how I understand the notion of explanation.

As argued last chapter, Weil uses the term explanation in a specific technical sense. It is the reflexive work of making explicit discursively what is present in a doctrine, that is, in an implicit lived grasp of meaning. Explanation thus makes up part of what Gilbert

Kirscher calls "the critical reduction of appearances" (1989: 127) whereby, through "elimination" and through "progressively destroying untenable interpretations" (*ibid.*: 131)[25], the doctrine is reduced down to its essential commitments that have allowed for a reduction of violence in the form of a pure attitude. However, because Weil insists on the plurality of discursive positions, explanation also allows individuals to bring diverse points of views together and see which hold up. Thus, as a technical term, *explanation* aims at 1) developing all of the consequences of a discourse so that the individual knows what they are committing to if they hold this position, 2) making the plurality of discursive positions explicit in order to understanding the diverse paths that can lead to common conclusions.

Explanation is thus understood as having a pedagogical function and an argumentative function. In its pedagogical function, explanation helps individuals to understand the consequences of concepts they may not have encountered and or have difficulty understanding. In its argumentative function, explanation acts as a type of dialogical control that allows individuals to understand where difference and disagreement falls. Difference and disagreement are seen as essential components of understanding because they allow us to shake the slough off of our concepts by showing us what is not understood, what needs to be clarified, what needs to be taken from a different angle, what needs to be *explained* further.

However, despite referring to explanation in terms of the critical reduction of appearances (and violence) it must be highlighted that Weil's position is stubbornly non-reductive. Reduction is limited and not absolute. For Weil, the need for explanation implies a certain distance. It is needed when individuals do not immediately *see* what is in front of them, because of multiple options. This plurality can be reduced but only to a certain degree. The effort of reduction allows the philosopher to act in good conscience (LP 64-65). That is, it allows them to understand their choice of commitment and what their commitment means because they faced with a plurality of commitments. Explanation thus aims at being a step in an integrative process. Explanation leads to understanding, understanding leads to judgment, judgment decides whether this new explanation will be taken on or not. An individual understands the thing being explained when they understand how it fits in with other concepts and what it entails. Therefore, an individual can understand thanks to explanation but still refuse the thing being explained because there are other options.

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[25] Kirscher also notes here that despite the deep influence of Hegel in Weil's work, the insistence on critical reduction of appearances bears more the mark of Fichte than Hegel, and that it is a centerpiece of Weil's critique of constructivism.

Remember, the form meaning takes is the application of a specific concrete discourse to a specific concrete situation. Weil highlights that there is a plurality of possible situations. Because of this, there are also a plurality of possible ways that meaning can be articulated and a plurality of explanations and understandings. In other words, no single *prima facie* explanation is privileged. Rather, explanations become privileged through argumentative practices, and they become privileged *only* to the extent that they allow for a coherent, more universally communicable explanations of concepts and concept-use. But they also demand a choice. And this choice cannot be reduced. Things are turned in a variety of ways and multiple perspectives are used in order to bring out understanding. Explanation must exploit this diversity.

Explanation understood this way, falls under the concept of the *reprise*, the individual evaluates and justifies other positions in terms of their own, and they try to see whether their position can be understood under another discourse. In his *Problèmes kantiens*, Weil suggests that in the act of understanding, individuals should both tackle concepts in their strongest, most robust, most cogent form, and take their interlocutor seriously, seeing them as real dialogue partners[26]. In this way, the individual engaging in the act of understanding has the best chances of being sure that they actually understand. In addition, following this head-on confrontation with a robust, cogent explanation of things, the individual that is not convinced, if they want to remain in discourse, must be unconvinced for reasons. This itself is linked to the articulation I have made between the normative weight of better reasons and the possibility of the radical refusal of discourse. In other words, we can recall that norms are not external necessities (even though they can often feel that way), but rather internal necessities that we submit ourselves to or that we give to ourselves. In order to stay in discourse, individuals must enter into real dialogue when there are differences and disagreements about concepts. Explanation in its argumentative function is thus itself the result of difference and disagreement and is also another way of understanding one of the principle functions of the reprise. In *Problèmes kantiens*, Weil describes the reprise as:

> [a] fundamental phenomenon in the history of thought and in history full-stop, the grasp of the new in an antiquated language, the only one at the innovator's disposition (who nonetheless transforms it), the only one, above all, in which he

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[26] Weil states, "why study an author unless we are ready to get something out of it, ready to consider them, therefore, as someone we can learn something from if we seek not their weaknesses but their strength" (PK, 18). This aspect of the reprise can be seen as a hermeneutic principle of the same family as Quine's (1960) and Davidson's (1984) use of the *principle of charity*. For a good overview of the evolution and differences of Quine's and Davidson's use cf. (Delpla, 2001).

can make himself heard to his contemporaries, at the risk, the neighbor of certainty, of not being understood without the considerable effort made by posterity, a posterity which itself has taken advantage of what the reprise has brought it in order to develop a new language (a new conceptual system) (PK 19).

Categories, as meta-concepts, thus play an essential role in explanation for Eric Weil by sculpting the pure forms of coherence that are concretely present in the history of thought. These pure forms are nothing more than irreducible coherent explanations of the world and how people position themselves in them. In an important way the content of a category is the part of previous explanations that has gone all the way through the integrative process mentioned above. It is born thanks to a reprise that seeks to explain an attitude. This new attitude has become visible by opposing itself to the category in place. It gives way to a new category *because* it grasps (explains, understands, and integrates) the pure attitude in discourse. The reprise grasps pure attitudes in discourse and thus allows new categories to emerge in their articulation. This is the argumentative function. This process, like all processes in the logic of philosophy, is dynamic. The explanatory function of the reprise exploits its justificatory and evaluative functions in order to judge the way in which explanation will hold and how best to reach one's interlocutor. In other words, the reprise allows us to see our interlocutor's reasons as reasons. It thus allows us to apply explanation in both its pedagogical and in its argumentative function.

With this idea of explanation in mind, we can now turn to pragmatism. According to a certain strain of pragmatism, metaphysical and ontological claims are explainable in terms of the kinds of practices that are involved in holding these claims to be true. They thus can be understood as involving certain types of practices, namely commitments, entitlements, and endorsements. These practices allow us to explain substantive ontological and metaphysical claims because they allow us to describe the kinds of commitments we take on when we say something, what we are entitled to say from those commitments and what is involved in endorsing them. The language of commitments, endorsements, and entitlements, calls us to the work of Robert Brandom. He was not the first to use this vocabulary, but he was the first to use these concepts to give language use a full systematic treatment. This systematic treatment allows us to link his work to certain developments that are present both in Weil's work and in the strain of pragmatism that is defended here. Centrally, both argue

that claims are explainable in terms of the kind of practices that are involved, which is another way of presenting a pragmatist slogan: *the definition of meaning according to use*[27].

By focusing on practices, pragmatism differs from philosophical positions that start from first principles. In other words, pragmatism refuses to deduce the content of beliefs from any set of such first principles. This is because pragmatism holds that any principle can itself only be understood as resulting from the effort to understand the content that is supposed to follow from the first principle in question. For example, Platonic Ideas or Forms, according to their positions as first principles, should guarantee and ground the rest of our knowledge. However, if they are to be understood according to the pragmatist position, it is as meta-concepts that seek to explain how a particular just act, for instance, falls under the concept of justice, and not as the ontological and metaphysical substrate of reality. What pragmatism highlights is a certain stance towards discourse and a certain stance that in discourse plays a major role in conferring content to concepts. The Platonic model (which I am using as a generic term to cover a whole strain of thought throughout western philosophy) presents individuals as passive receptors of content and not at all as the active fashioners of content. Pragmatism refuses this position because it is interested in showing how the commitments, endorsements, and entitlements taken on and conferred in discourse play a structural role in defining conceptual content itself. In other words, for pragmatists, content is shaped in discourse and through discourse by the types of stances individuals take towards discourse itself. However, once understood as a way of positioning oneself towards discourse, pragmatism does not escape the question of the kind of substantive claims that can be made in the discourse that the pragmatist holds. Therefore, I will claim that expressivism, as a way to understand language use, best fits pragmatism, and that it is in this sense less problematic than its competing framework, representationalism.[28] What this says is that the practice of language use gives way to a substantive claim about the nature of language. In light of this, expressivism claims that language's primary use is not to represent something but rather to express something. Both frameworks, expressivism and representationalism, face real problems. Based however on our initial commitment to fallibilism, the expressive model of language use provides a more coherent order of explanation. It is thus a more promising way of explaining conceptual content than that the

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[27] Cf. (Williams, 2013) for an analysis of this slogan.
[28] To come clean about this claim, and to stay in the Weilian spirit that I am developing, this position is a claim and not a first principle. The claim is a result of my struggle to understand language use that is built of the work of others. Thus, the arguments presented in this work attempt to justify this result and to enter my understanding into the human project of understanding our world and what we as individuals do in it.

representational paradigm, which starts from a specific content and tries to explain how it stands in for nonlinguistic entities.

Expressivism in philosophy of language can thus be understood as a conceptual commitment to explain language use in all its forms and variety. The kind of expressivism in philosophy of language that is defended here, and that I am claiming is present in *Logic of Philosophy*, aims to provide a conceptual framework within which this form and variety can indeed be understood. However, it is, taken alone, insufficient to understand the mechanisms that make individual sounds and signs meaningful. A more robust articulation is needed in order to understand how, starting from language use, we can understand language use itself. That is, a recursive, self-critiquing, self-correcting definition of the mechanisms of language use is needed. What I claim is that Robert Brandom's articulation of inferentialism provides a robust framework within which the mechanisms of language use, and not merely its variety, can be understood. What is particular about this articulation is that it itself depends on a pragmatic metavocabulary that explains conceptual content starting from the kind of linguistic practices concept-users engage in. Therefore, in this chapter I will present these positions and then show, in the next chapter, how they marry with Weil's project in the *Logic of Philosophy*.

3.2   Pragmatism and Fallibility

Pragmatism is a broad term, and it has known varied fortunes in its history. Although the term was first brought to public attention through a series of lectures given by William James, the movement that is now known as pragmatism started well before that. James himself indicated (2000: 25) that its origins come from an informal discussion group at Harvard during his student days and that its founding document is the article "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" by Charles Sanders Peirce. Louis Menand argues in his book *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (2001) that this discussion group was to have a lasting impact on those involved and was to give them all a similar pragmatist bent of mind. However, as he also notes, even though the manner of thinking that was to become known as pragmatism crystallized in this informal discussion group, it was born out of the social ferment that accompanied the American Civil War. The people that participated in the discussion group either fought, like Oliver Wendall Holmes, or had loved-ones who fought, like William James. Menand claims that Oliver Wendall Holmes was to have a revelation during the conflict that came to be shared by all his fellow pragmatists, namely that

"certitude leads to violence" (2001 61). The certitude of which Menand speaks concerns specific political convictions that during this period hardened to a point where the conflict between the North and the South became inevitable. However, political convictions are merely one species of belief, and the lesson of the American Civil War made pragmatists suspicious of first principles in general. Nonetheless, in the political domain as in the theoretical domain, it is not necessarily the principles that pose problem, it is the competing incompatible interpretations of these principles that do. In other words, it is judgment that is problematic.

Understood in the political context of the American Civil War, first principles transformed specific beliefs into necessary principles. Under the guise of necessary principles, people recused themselves from the critical endeavor that is implied by the dialogical controls of discussion and doubt and saw their competing interpretations as necessary. When people recuse themselves in this way they are no longer responsive to the normative weight of better reasons. This is because their goal is not to come to better beliefs as a result of argumentative practices. Rather, they are merely looking to defend the certainty they place in their beliefs, shoring them up against any defeating critique. Early pragmatist, by refusing to exempt themselves from discursive practices and by seeing beliefs as correctable and modifiable results, elaborated one of the main characteristics of pragmatism, its fallibilism.

Peirce, from his first papers, would insist that his philosophy was not understandable separate from fallibilism and that fallibilism is a necessary element of inquiry because "[a]ll positive reasoning is the nature of judging the proportion of something in a whole collection by the proportion found in the sample. Accordingly, there are three things that we can never hope to attain by reasoning, namely, absolute certainty, absolute exactitude, absolute universality." (1931: CP 1.141). In other words, genuine inquiry is marked, for Peirce, not by radical doubt that leads to absolute certainty, such as that found in Descartes, but by a reasoned and conservative doubt that comes out of real problems in our conception of things and that leads to a reasoned and conservative conviction. In order to resolve this doubt, inquiry cannot be impeded by first principals or unassailable truths[29], but rather must admit

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[29] For those that would argue that this itself is a first principle cf. supra and (Kirscher, 1989: 19-154) for a reflection on the "the aporia of the starting point". Fallibilism can thus be thought of as a working hypothesis that has become more rigorous and robust precisely because it has withstood challenge. Should a position be proposed that shows itself to be more robust in the progression of history, the pragmatist would be obliged to adopt this new position and to abandon fallibilism as not actually being essential to inquiry. One must note however, that the pragmatist would be abandoning this working hypothesis in the interest of the hypothesis itself.

that the conception that we have of the world can give way to a better, more coherent, more universal picture of it. Peirce himself was aware that a perfect picture of the world might never be forthcoming, however he nonetheless imagined an ideal end of inquiry where a completed science would be agreed on by the totality of the scientific community. This position was the consequence of his strict realism (Tiercelin, 1993), and his belief that pragmatism itself was an elaboration and correction of the scientific method. Whether one takes on a realist picture of the world or not, Peirce and the classic pragmatists opened up a new horizon of inquiry and of thinking about concept use. By abandoning first principles and certainty as epistemic criteria for the goodness of claims, the pragmatists brought about the possibility of explaining what people mean, that is, the content of conceptual claims, by an analysis of what people do when they make such claims. This is what is at the root of the emphasis that pragmatist put on the practical character of concept use.

Peirce would go on to develop and refine his picture of pragmatism at the same time that other thinkers rallied to the pragmatist banner. These thinkers, such as William James and John Dewey, took up Peirce's insistence on the practical character of concept use and modified it to suit their own projects. James use of the concept is varied. At times he treated it, like Peirce, as a method, and at others, as a substantive theory that made robust metaphysical and ontological claims. These claims were used to describe how different psychological characteristics gave way to different philosophical beliefs. He, in turn, used these psychological characteristics to explain the pluralism of philosophical beliefs and to make room for religious and moral claims in a world described in scientific terms. James however adhered to Peirce's emphasis on the practical character of concept-use, and saw human knowledge as adaptive and evolving. That is, they both saw human knowledge not as a thing that mirrored a fixed and eternal reality, but as the type of thing that is deeply embedded in a reality that is itself adaptive and evolving. John Dewey would exploit this aspect of his understanding of pragmatism to great effect, while placing even more emphasis on the social character of knowledge and thought. While all pragmatists, by starting from human practices, are aware of thought's social character, Dewey, who was deeply influenced by Hegel in his student days, exemplifies this thrust better than any of the other classic pragmatists. This becomes clear when we see how his pragmatism (which he preferred to refer to as instrumentalism) was tightly linked to his theory of education and of democracy (1916; 1927). For Dewey, education and democracy are bound to pragmatism because they reflect the kind of social embeddedness that characterizes concept-use in general, and it is

through the development, promotion, and refinement of education and democracy that good concept-use is fostered.

By breaking with the Cartesian tradition, Peirce and his fellow pragmatists take on a form of epistemological fallibilism that goes hand in hand with a critique of Descartes's representational model of cognition. How and why is pragmatism seen as a break with the Cartesian, or going further back, Platonic, model? William James subtitled his book, "a new name for an old way of thinking" and it is true that the most important element of pragmatism, the insistence on social practices and on concrete human experience has important antecedents. Peirce cut his teeth on Kant, and the concerns of the German thinkers that followed Kant are largely shared by the pragmatists. There is a large and important body of literature that compares and critiques the connection between the pragmatists and the German idealists, especially Hegel. This is important because Hegel, like many German thinkers in the wake of Kant, insists, as the pragmatists would, on the social articulation of knowledge. Despite the propinquity between German thought and the pragmatists, James's did not have them in mind when he gave his book this subtitle and he reserves some choice words for Kant and Hegel. Rather, he dedicated the book to John Stuart Mill, who he claimed would be the pragmatists' leader were he still alive. It is true that the John Stuart Mill of *On Liberty* (2008) (and in his economic writings) has a keen appreciation for rich variety of the human experience, even if his central conceptual commitment remains the sensual monism of his utilitarianism. What, however, is just about James's subtitle is that the pragmatists were not the first to put practice front and center.

The early pragmatists instance on social practices and their critique of the Cartesian criterion of certainty, and of representationalism, allowed for a reversal of the order of explanation that dominated western philosophy. One of the key aspects of the Platonic order of explanation that the pragmatist wanted to throw overboard was the notion of intuition. Intuition has played a key role in the history of philosophy from its ancient articulation in Forms all the way up to its modern descendants in concepts such as the perceptual given. Intuition here must be understood as a broad, but still technical, term. It is *not* to be understood in accordance with the general non-technical usage, whereby an intuition is a feeling or a hunch about the way that things are. Rather, it is to be understood as that which grounds the content of beliefs, of mental states, of propositions, etc. Peirce defines this usage of intuitions in his essay, "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man" as "signifying a cognition not determined by a previous cognition of the same object, and therefore so determined by something out of consciousness" (1931: CP 5.213). According

to this definition, an intuition is an immediate and unconditioned perceptually basic state whereby one can identify and thus *know* at least some aspect of the content of a perception, a concept, a mental state, or whatever else is to count as the thing intuited.

This content comes conceptually pre-formed by the mere fact that it is the thing being intuited. Peirce's sees intuition as being one of the key features of what he calls the "spirit of Cartesianism," (*ibid.*: CP 5.264). For Peirce, this "spirit" is the ambient and pervasive influence that Descartes had on the philosophy of his time. According to Peirce, this Cartesian influence promotes universal doubt that can only be remedied by finding a perceptually basic state that guarantees knowledge (*ibid.*). This basic state must be known internally and immediately and must be undetermined by other things. While Descartes is the target, and while the *cogito* is a paradigmatic version of immediate cognition that is supposed to serve as an unconditioned foundation of other cognitions, he is hardly the first or only thinker to have defended a model of intuition such as this. Plato and Kant are two examples of thinkers that lean on intuition and give it an explanatory role. As I have already said, Platonic forms provide a model of intuition and examples are littered throughout Plato's work, so highlighting one occurrence should suffice. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates argues that true knowledge is only visible with the mind (1997: 247b-247c). In this sense true knowledge is non-sensory, is outside time and space, and is already present in the intellect. All the individual has to do is turn their intellect to this knowledge to perceive it *as* knowledge. The intellect partakes in the divine, and through that union they perceive the Forms. For Kant, the intuitions of time and of space are the transcendental conditions that allows all our other representations. We immediately know time and space objectively as the form of our inner and outer awareness of phenomena.

Whether Forms, the *Cogito*, time and space, or any other candidate, intuition plays a central role in explaining the possibility of knowledge when it explains how *a priori* principle guarantees that all our other knowledge holds. This thing is thus supposed to be self-evident and immediate. Peirce however attacks first principles precisely because they seem to be results that are either lodged in public social practices or are the consequence of a lifetime of philosophical work. In any case, they are not grasped and understood immediately through introspection. Indeed, he argues that, under examination, no candidate for this conceptually basic state is adequate and thus the idea of intuition itself is incoherent. This attack of intuition is the cornerstone of Peirce's fallibilism. Models that depend on intuition claim that their candidate for conceptual primitives (concepts, representations, pieces of knowledge, perceptual givens, etc.) already has some immediate content which is

sufficient to ground the rest of knowledge. This model, according to Peirce, ignores the inferential interdependence that exists between any candidate (concepts, representations, pieces of knowledge, perceptual givens, etc.) and the other elements of our conceptual landscape. This is why he claims that intuitions are of a piece with a "premiss (*sic*) not itself a conclusion" (1931: CP 5.213). Because he takes one of the roles of cognition to be the process of linking inferences into valid reasoning (*ibid.*: CP 5.267-269), he argues that the structure and content of every candidate that could stand in for this conceptually basic element is itself only known as the conclusion of reasonings and not as an absolutely simple first principle. The problem according to Peirce's critique, is not only that intuitions are claimed to be outside of this inferentially articulated structure, but also to be a certain and solid entry point into the conceptual sphere. Following this idea, any individual in isolation would therefore come to the same knowledge claims as any other individual, either in isolation or in a community of knowers, because the intuition provides the same basic information.

Any model depending on intuition thus makes robust claims about the metaphysical structure of conceptual primitives. The goodness of its claims depends on the correspondence that these claims have to a pre-existing reality, and should they be wrong, the system itself is shown to be false. Fallibilism looks to reverse that role. Therefore, it cannot depend on metaphysical underpinnings in order to make a necessary connection between the content of a representation and the world. In looking elsewhere Peirce, in his defense of pragmatism as a method of scientific inquiry, proposes that one look to the discursive and argumentative practices of the scientific community itself. Thus, Peirce provides a limited meta-discourse about how the search for scientific truth should be carried out. Though Peirce did not fully exploit this fact, his philosophical project nonetheless has all the resources needed in order to upturn the Platonic model. This strain is present, though again not fully exploited, in the work of the pragmatists that follow. Credit must be given to Robert Brandom for fully seeing the force of what this shift implies[30] and for giving it a clear articulation.

Peirce's work had all the resources to make this shift because of its radical anti-essentialism and its critique of the representationalist model of cognition. These two things have been put forward as sufficient criteria to be considered a pragmatist, and it has allowed people to categorize important thinkers who themselves either did not read the pragmatist or

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[30] Cf. the first section of the *Introduction* in (Brandom, 2001: 1-22) for a long reflection on his specific order of explanation, and the role of explanatory strategies in his pragmatism.

were critical of them to be categorized as such. Wilfrid Sellars, for instance, was resistant to the term pragmatist[31], but for many, he is so closely associated to the lean middle years of pragmatism that his place in the pragmatist canon is sometimes taken for granted. And his philosophical project indeed seems to point to a form of fallibilism similar to that of Peirce's. However, the assessment that Sellars should be considered a pragmatist, as well as the idea that pragmatism even had any lean middle years, is much contested.

3.3   Fallibilism and Pragmatism's Narrative

In fact, both Sellars's place in the pragmatist canon, and the idea of the lean middle years center around the same person: Richard Rorty. Rorty himself consistently places Sellars at the center of his telling of the pragmatist story, along with the Hegel of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Donald Davidson, the Ludwig Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* (1958), and Jacques Derrida, in addition to the "classical" pragmatists, Peirce, James, Dewey. In his telling, pragmatists merge with what he also calls "ironists" or the "sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires" (1989: xv). By linking pragmatism and his philosophical version of irony, Rorty was able to absorb the changes in his own thought, which had moved from a relatively sober form of philosophical analysis to the sweeping claim that the shove and push of history is the story that humanity tells to itself. In his own telling, this change was brought about by his reading of the classical pragmatists, which allowed him a way out of what he saw as the stagnant analytical philosophy in which he had been working and opened his eyes to the presence of pragmatist themes across the history of philosophy. Rorty goes on to recount that his rediscovery of pragmatism ran against the philosophical grain of his era, and that, with the exception of a similar independent but concomitant rediscovery by Hilary Putnam, no one was even interested in pragmatism.

Rorty claims that, "[a]mong contemporary philosophers, pragmatism is usually regarded as an outdated philosophical movement – one which flourished in the early years of this century in a rather provincial atmosphere, and which has now been either refuted of *aufgehoben*." (1982: xvii). This gives rise to what Robert Talisse and Scott Aikin have called the "eclipse narrative". According to the eclipse narrative, pragmatism was founded by

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[31] He notes that he saw pragmatism through the eyes of his father, the important critical realist philosopher, Roy Wood Sellars, who saw pragmatism as "shifty, ambiguous, and indecisive" (2017: 9). Wilfred Sellars nonetheless adapted and used the notion of pragmatics in order to characterize certain concepts in philosophy of language well before it entered into the linguistic mainstream in the late sixties.

Peirce, adopted by James and Dewey and then, following the death of Dewey and the arrival of Austrian and German philosophers influenced by Frege, Russell, and the first Wittgenstein, was displaced. Pragmatism was abandoned for what Wilfrid Sellars called "the new way with words", that is, analytical philosophy. Pragmatism, the story goes on to say, was thus indeed forgotten and considered surpassed up until the publication of Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1981). The publication of this book thus gave philosophers a new taste for pragmatism and led to the pragmatist renaissance that has been growing in importance since that moment.

While Rorty's prominence in the philosophical scene of the last forty years seems uncontestable, there are clear problems with the eclipse narrative of pragmatism. Talisse and Scott Aikin (2008: 5) note that one of the problems of this narrative is that it distorts the relationship between classic pragmatists and contemporary pragmatists. That is, according to the eclipse narrative, contemporary philosophers look back to the classical pragmatists in order to "retrieve" certain aspects of their philosophical program. This implies that pragmatism itself has not evolved past these earlier articulations. If pragmatism has not evolved, we are, according to Talisse and Aikin, faced with two separate problems. The first is that if pragmatism has not evolved, its usefulness to contemporary philosophical debates is merely historical. A return to classical pragmatists allows us to see how contemporary debates formed and it is thus important background information in order to fully understand arguments being made today. This option seems clearly false. Contemporary pragmatists, even those with the most historical bents, are not making this claim. They are rather saying that there is something vital in pragmatism. However, this leads us to the second problem. If there is something vital in pragmatism and it has to be retrieved, this implies that contemporary philosophy made a wrong turn somewhere and that to correct that wrong turn, one must look to the classical pragmatists. This errs in the other direction.

The first option claims that contemporary philosophy needs pragmatism only to fill in historical details, and the second option claims it is only classical pragmatism and not the various forms of contemporary philosophy that can move us forward. Both claims seem both too strong and too narrow. Rather, contemporary pragmatists are saying that pragmatism is vital both as a body of philosophical questions, and as a participant in *contemporary* philosophical debates. Refusing the first problem by insisting on pragmatism's relevance and vitality allows us to clearly see the second problem with the eclipse narrative. The eclipse narrative suggests a rupture, that is, two separate pragmatist moments in philosophy that are connected because certain contemporary philosophers were able to retrieve

pragmatist commitments to apply them to contemporary debates. However, again following Talisse and Aikin, if we insist on pragmatism as a living body of questions, as a vital philosophical position, we are more apt to see the development of pragmatism not as a rupture but as a continuity. This allows us to understand how certain pragmatist positions evolved and entered into contemporary philosophy.

Following this option, one no longer sees Dewey's death as the start of a long cold winter of pragmatism. Rather, one is more sensitive to the development of mid-century pragmatism. One example should be enough to show that the movement did not go gentle into the good night. If we look at the biography of Clarence Irving Lewis, the great logician and epistemologist, we can trace a clear line through mid-century pragmatism. Lewis was a student of William James's at Harvard and one of the first avid readers of Peirce's then unpublished manuscripts. He himself was the teacher of Nelson Goodman, Roderick Chisolm, and Willard Van Orman Quine. All are thinkers who have been connected in some way to the period where pragmatism was supposedly dormant and who, either like Quine and Goodman, produced works that have a distinctive pragmatist leaning, or, again like Quine but also Chisolm, wrote papers dealing directly with pragmatism.

Lewis's conceptual pragmatism is built off of his understanding of Peirce and Kant, as is evident in his description of what he calls the "pragmatic *a priori*." This is a marriage of Peirce's fallibilism and Kant's insistence that it is the pure categories of the understanding that shape experience. Lewis notes that:

> At the bottom of all science and all knowledge are categories and definitive concepts which represent fundamental habits of thought and deep-lying attitudes which the human mind has taken in the light of its total experience. But a new and wider experience may bring about some alteration of these attitudes, even though by themselves they dictate nothing as to the content of experience, and no experience can conceivably prove them invalid. (1923: 176)

He is thus arguing that categories structure our thought and that we need at least some concepts in order to think anything at all, but that the conceptual framework of the categories themselves can be modified and changed. As Cheryl Misak has noted, Lewis takes seriously the idea that "[w]e investigate, revise, and perhaps even reinvent our framework" (2013: 193). Thus, in arguing for a pragmatic *a priori*, Lewis abandons the purity that structures Kantian categories but keeps Kant's insistence on the categorial structure of our knowledge. He thus maintains that there must be something central to our thinking in order to ground our other knowledge claims.

Lewis uses the notion of the *given* to describe this something that contains "the real and the unreal, confusingly mingled"(Lewis, 1923: 174). This would be one of the central targets of the philosophers that followed him. In fact, one of the easy ways to see the depth of Lewis's influence is to see the vigor with which the subsequent generation of philosophers looked to refute him. So much effort would not have been expended were he not taken seriously. Thus, Quine took to attacking the analytic and synthetic distinction not as Kant lays it out, but as Lewis taught Kant. And Sellars, though he does not mention Lewis directly, sets his sights on Lewis's *Mind and the World-Order* (1956), when he looked to solve what he calls "the epistemological problem" in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind". His goal of dismantling "the Myth of the Given" is a clear shot at Lewis. But Lewis's influence is also clear while reading their works. Lewis's own claims about the pragmatic *a priori* already go a long way to dissolving the analytic-synthetic division that Quine so fiercely fought. It would also be used as a meta-concept to understand how there could be different types of conceptual landscapes. Lewis notes that "Our categories and definitions are peculiarly social products, reached in the light of experiences which have much in common, and beaten out, like other pathways, by the coincidence of human purposes and the exigencies of human cooperation. Concerning the *a priori* there need be neither universal agreement nor complete historical continuity" (1923: 177). Thus, by situating the *a priori* at the level of social practices, he is admitting that there are important discontinuities in people's conceptual frameworks, but that there is a progressive universalization that takes place as concepts are "beaten out" and smoothed over. He admits that even there where some discontinuities remain, such discontinuities do not hinder us in our conceptual endeavors. This insistence on *some* ground that forges and forms our conceptual framework is a claim about what it means to categorize and the role of categorization in having any concepts at all. Some ground is needed, however we cannot, under a pragmatic conception, present the ground chosen by our position or by that of another as having a *prima facie* justification. Rather, the pragmatic *a priori* follows the fallibilist groove carved out by Peirce. It presents the different grounds of different positions as the minima necessary for conceptual thinking in general. We thus can herein see both the germ of Nelson Goodman's notion of "worldmaking" (1978), whereby Goodman insists that phenomena themselves support numerous valid descriptions and that distinguishing between them is a pragmatic consideration, and Sellars "space of reasons" which sets out to describe both how the conceptual landscape is structured and what one does by operating within this conceptual landscape.

This rapid sketch of Lewis's influence and place in mid-century pragmatism is sufficient to show that there was at least a minimal continuity between the classical pragmatists and contemporary pragmatism. However, this path could have also been drawn from Peirce to British thinkers, as has masterfully been done recently in Cheryl Misak's *Cambridge Pragmatists* (2016), where Peircean ideas are shown to be an influence on Wittgenstein. This influence starts in the work of Victoria Welby, the under-known philosopher of language. Welby, who in some ways is the first British pragmatist, maintained a long correspondence with Peirce and was instrumental in introducing his work into British intellectual circles. She was also to have a strong influence on Charles Kay Ogden, the philosopher that edited the English translation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Ogden would go on to mentor a young student that was widely seen to be of considerable genius, Frank Ramsey. It was presumably Ogden that presented the thought of Peirce and C.I. Lewis to Ramsey. Whatever the exact order of events, the influence of pragmatist thought on Ramsey, and the influence of Ramsey on Wittgenstein, is undeniable. This shows that on both sides of the Atlantic the eclipse narrative is not as total as one would think reading Rorty. This also highlights a third problem that we can add to the eclipse narrative, which is the idea of a single unified narrative.

Richard Bernstein has claimed that pragmatism is itself "a conflict of narratives" (1995) and also argues against the eclipse narrative. Indeed, since the early days of pragmatism, there has been no clear distinction of what pragmatism itself is. This is clear already ten years after the word first appeared attached to a philosophical movement. In a famous article, Arthur Lovejoy claims that he can identify at least thirteen different strains of pragmatism (1908). Worse, he claims that not only are these strains not coherent between them but moreover that they cannot be reconciled. The question of whether pragmatism should be thought of as a unified school with a unified doctrine is thus put into question. It is an important question that is as difficult to answer now as it ever was. In fact, this question becomes even more difficult following the eclipse narrative, which places the resurgence of pragmatism squarely in the hands of one person. Indeed, Rorty's constant invocation "we pragmatists" gives the impression that there is one monolithic block of thought called pragmatism and that he speaks for them. This unified monolithic character that follows from the eclipse narrative disguises the virulence with which Rorty was attacked and critiqued by other thinkers staking claim to pragmatism.

If we look at some of the garden varieties of pragmatism, there seems to be little in common between them. Robert Brandom's neo-analytical linguistic pragmatism and Cornell

West's theologically grounded pragmatist social critique, for example, seem difficult to reconcile. And yet, both equally claim to be drawing influence from the classic pragmatists. The problem of a single unified discourse however seems answered by the resolution of the problem of pragmatism's retrieval. By showing that contemporary pragmatism should not been seen merely as the retrieval of certain of the classical pragmatists' conceptual commitments, we can see that the initial philosophical problems and concerns of the classical pragmatists shifted and evolved. The shift and evolution take on two forms, interaction and influence. When the classic pragmatists interacted with the works of other philosophers, they provoked responses that took into account pragmatic concerns. This interaction with various different philosophical currents continues as the philosophers they trained and influenced went forth into the world. Therefore, there *should* be a plurality of pragmatist views as one gets farther away from its roots. Recognizing this natural plurality allows us to refrain from too narrowly defining the term.

One must look for a minimal description of pragmatism in order to understand what pragmatism is. I argue that, throughout its evolution, what most pragmatist have retained is its order of explanation. Pragmatists look to what one does in order to understand what one means, or in order to justify normative claims. As I have already showed, this order of explanation is itself an outgrowth of Peirce's insistence on fallibilism. Fallibilism implies a plurality of discourses, but it is not a zero-sum game like skepticism. Skepticism takes the failure of all forms of metaphysical discourse as being proof of the truth of its own. Therefore, it is a strong metaphysical position. There is no knowledge, no truth, and the plurality of discourses is a sign that none say anything meaningful. In this case, the abundance of different discourses is seen as proof that all discourse fails. Fallibilism however is an argumentative position (or a weak metaphysical position at best) and not a strong metaphysical one. When the individual sees the plurality of discourses as being grounded in argumentative practices, and when the individual refuses to give up on the notion of knowledge and on the possibility that these different discourses have something meaningful to say, doubt leads not to skepticism but to the form of argumentative pluralism that Peirce calls fallibilism. This is because pluralism seeks to coordinate diverse positions. However, in order for this plurality to not fold into relativism, there must be at least one criterion, even if it is formal, in order to explain the possibility of unifying these discourses or judging between them. The pragmatist order of explanation thus implies a certain meta-position that deals with a multitude of discourses. By looking at discursive practices, one looks at the way individuals use and defend these discourses and pragmatism starts from an

anthropological hypothesis and not from a metaphysical principle (this is important because Weil makes a similar move). So even though there is a diversity of possible discourses, and a diversity of pragmatist positions, my own particular defense of pragmatism has a strong preference for the Peirce, Lewis, Sellars, Brandom line of thinkers. This is because I am interested in what we do in language and the way that our linguistic practices are formed, understood, judged, critiqued, and corrected. Brandom is the pragmatist who most clearly sees that what is living in pragmatism is its order of explanation, and he is also the pragmatist who most clearly addresses the issue of how pragmatism ties into specifically linguistic practices.

For Brandom pragmatism starts from "an account of what one is *doing* in making a claim, […][which] seeks to elaborate from it an account of what is *said*, the content of proposition—something that can be thought of in terms of truth conditions—to which one commits oneself by such a speech act"(2000: 12). Brandom is thus defending a form of linguistic pragmatism whereby an explanation of linguistic practices allows for a robust description of conceptual content. This is why his order of explanation takes on the form that it does. He denies that truth and with it, certainty, should be considered primitive semantic concepts. Rather he holds that one should look at the practice of ascribing, judging, and holding conceptual contents as true in order to know if these contents were formed in reliable ways. In other words, pragmatics comes before semantics. He thus defends what he calls a pragmatic metavocabulary, that is, a vocabulary that allows talk "about the use of expressions, about discursive social practices"(2015: 5) which in turn allows us to understand the content of expressions.

He claims Wilfred Sellars as his direct forbearer, and he thus thinks that contemporary pragmatism should take its direction from Sellars work. Here, I largely agree with him (although I also agree with Richard Bernstein, who claims that Brandom is a bit too hasty in his dismissal of the early pragmatists. Like Bernstein, I see the resources for this jump as present in the early pragmatists, especially in Peirce), both in the sense that Sellars work is the direction that should be followed in advancing pragmatist notions, as well as the importance of a metavocabulary for the understanding of conceptual content. In drawing on Sellars's insistence on a pragmatic metavocabulary, Brandom constantly directs readers to a passage in Sellars "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" where Sellars says, "[in] characterizing an episode or a state as a knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (1997: §36) and then defends Sellars's idea that the

logical space of reasons plays a normative, structural role in concept use. By focusing on *how* one places things into the space of reasons, Sellars starts to develop the pragmatic metavocabulary that Brandom is to exploit. According to this metavocabulary, the content of descriptive language use, such as someone saying "this is a tree" or "this is an oak" or "this is a live oak" is not to be understood *essentially* in terms of an object in the world but rather as fleshing out the contours of the space of reasons, as a certain practice of categorization.

Taking the example of the hypernym "live oak," we can note that in English this term refers to certain evergreen species of oak. We can then go on to note that such a hypernym is not universal. In fact, it is missing in some languages, such as French, which jumps from the word "chêne" to the specific species of oak that in English fall under the term "live oak"[32] such as "chêne-liège" or "cork oak". While an analysis of the concept CORK OAK[33] would show that "chêne-liège" and "cork oak" both correctly cover the concept, an analysis of the concept LIVE OAK shows that French has no direct equivalent. Thus, an analysis of the concept LIVE OAK says just as much if not more about the conceptual commitments concerning colloquial English arboriculture than it does about the trees themselves. A proper analysis of the meaning of LIVE OAK looks neither exclusively nor primarily to a specific thing in the world, but rather to the way that world is carved up in different spaces of reasons. Therefore, in order to say anything about the meaning of this concept, a metavocabulary is needed in order to analyze the practice of ascription of such a space of reasons, in this case that of colloquial English arboriculture.

John McDowell makes this point clearly when he notes that "the conceptual apparatus we employ when we place things in the logical space of reasons is irreducible to any conceptual apparatus that does not serve to place things in the logical space of reasons. So the master thought [of the space of reasons] as it were draws a line; above the line are placings in the logical space of reasons, and below it are characterizations that do not do

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[32] George Lakoff, in his important work, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* notes how reliable basic, *genus* levels of categorization are because of how context sensitive they are. Thus, to paraphrase Gertrude Stein, an oak is an oak is an oak. Lakoff insists however that this reliability breaks down as we move up or down into superordinate or subordinate categorization (1987: 199-200). This is an important discovery, because, as he highlights, a representational model *should* have the same articulation across different granularities of fineness of categorization. Thus, *genus* level categories should be confirmed as we move through superordinate and subordinate categories. The live oak example however shows how quickly categorization breaks down as we move across languages and levels of categorization, an experience which I am sure any frustrated second language learner can attest to.

[33] Throughout this work small uppercase letters will be used to refer to the central elements of a concept that is being highlighted when it changes languages or when it is articulated differently according to various reprises.

that." (2013: 5) To apply what McDowell is saying to our example, we can argue that even basic descriptive vocabularies, which involve claims like "this tree is a live oak", themselves have to be understood according to the practice of categorization, or the placing in the space of reasons. The observations that are made about the world thus depend on the conceptual framework within which that observation is made. However, the analysis of the framework itself cannot be made in the same register of language as the observation without running aground in a confusion of eternal regresses and vicious circularities.

I have already claimed that the pragmatist program that I am defending here is one that puts fallibilism front and center. Fallibilism is thus seen as a key move in order to understand how pragmatism shifts focus from old requirements to new ones in two different ways. First, it shifts from the requirement of a single metaphysical discourse that is confirmed only when it reaches certainty, to a plurality of discourses understood as argumentative positions. Second, it shifts from an object language (identifying a live oak) to a meta-description of how reliable practices in concept formation and concept use involve multiple layers of judgment (how constituting the concept LIVE OAK is involved in the identification of a live oak). This move is not limited to pragmatists. To take a single example, we can look to John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. Here, we see the same kinds of moves being made[34]. In this book, Mill shows how the concept of freedom of expression depends on recognizing that individuals, and thus their beliefs and opinions, are fallible. Because of this fallibility, we are doing a disservice to truth when we claim that only one opinion should be heard, or that a dominant opinion should be accorded more space in argumentative practices. This is because, in this work, Mill sees truth as depending on a variety of points of view. What is interesting is that in the political sphere, concerning the freedom of expression, Mill seems not to be arguing from the discursive center of his utilitarianism. That is, he is not presenting a sensual monist position by which all good is reduced to a metaphysical principle. Rather, he is arguing from a meta-position that claims that many discursive centers should be encouraged, because they contribute to truth.

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[34] Mill is merely an example. I am of the opinion that many philosophers change position and that when they reflect on this change they come to a meta-reflection based on argumentative practices. I am also of the opinion that this shift often gets obscured by more rigid readings of their positions. Thus, we could look to Plato's dialogues for clear examples of him staging argumentative processes in order to lead us to a meta-reflection of how we constitute our concepts cf. *Sophist* (1997) and *Gorgias* (1997), for example. But we could just as well look elsewhere, to Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (2007), or Kant's third *Critique* (2000).

By presenting a form of fallibilism about discursive practices, we can see Mill as making the exact move that the pragmatists make. Fallibilism can thus be seen as leading to a meta-description of the types of practices that take place in concept formation and concept use. The concept Mill is looking to explain is the freedom of expression within the limits of doing no material harm. This leads Mill to take a political stance for pluralism, which although itself seems antithetical to his moral stance for the monism of utilitarianism, is understandable if we see his political engagement as a meta-position that allows his moral reflection. Following this line, and the Mill of *On Liberty*, we can much better understand how William James was able to see Mill as the lost leader of the pragmatist movement. From this point of view, we see a John Stuart Mill that is open to the richness and diversity of human experience, as well as someone who is sensitive to the plurality of ways that one can lead a good life, both positions that James himself was to defend. We also see a defense of the evolving character of truth stemming from the changes in concrete human practices, another point that was to be dear to James's heart. Thus, I am taking fallibilism to be *the* central discursive commitment to pluralism, and I am claiming that taken together, fallibilism and pluralism require that individuals become sensitive to the multitude of discursive practices. Pragmatism is a philosophical position that takes that multitude seriously because it is committed to providing a robust description of meaning according to discursive practices.

3.4   The Two Sources of Contemporary Expressivism

The pragmatist order of explanation allows us to understand what people do in their discursive practices. By showing that certainty is not the ultimate criterion for the goodness of claims, the pragmatist takes into account the evolving and refutable content of concepts themselves and thus is in a better position to judge the practices that individuals actually use. By joining fallibilism with the dialogical controls of argumentative practices, the pragmatist order of explanation is nonetheless not advocating for radical skepticism. In fact, hyperbolic doubt of the kind that is found in the *Meditations* (1992), for example, is seen as a non-starter. As Peirce likes pointing out, even Descartes, in his attempt to raze the field of philosophical reflection in order to start over, takes quite a bit for granted. Thus, certainty is seen to play a central productive role in our knowledge claims, but it is not seen to be the only thing that does, and the temptation of radical skepticism throughout the early modern period must be accounted for. As we can see in the Humean division between philosophical

and vulgar reflection, certainty remained a prime criterion throughout this period. Philosophical reflection, according to Hume, upholds certainty as the criterion for claims. However, as Hume himself notes, even the most assiduous philosophers abandon this criterion in the vulgar day-to-day reflection in their lives, thus returning to *pragmatic* considerations. In this way doubt and certainty interact in our run of the mill everyday claims in a way that they don't in classic philosophical paradigms. We can thus articulate pragmatism's focus on real human practices as seeking to bring the vulgar and the philosophical together.

While it may seem evident that language practices should be at the center of the understanding of language use, this is not actually always the case. Indeed, there have been a variety of formal semantic projects that place pragmatic considerations in the back seat[35]. There are two major contrasting traditions in philosophy of language. I shall follow Charles Taylor's lead and call them the *designative* and the *expressive* traditions (1985). According to this distinction, the designative tradition—which Simon Blackburn alternatively calls the descriptive tradition (1984)—claims that the role of language is to designate something out in the world. Thus, reference is seen to be the primitive semantic concept. According to Taylor's argument, in the designative model, something is meaningful if it assures a word-world relationship. Thus, to return to our example above of the live oak, the statement, "this is a live oak" or "there is a live oak in the field" is meaningful as long as the thing I am pointing my language towards, the thing out in the field, *is* a live oak. Taylor's complaint is that, while this relationship holds up pretty well in ideal designative-type sentences, there is a plethora of other language uses that human agents take to be meaningful that does not fall under this kind of designative situation. Sentences that express value judgements, for example, are often taken to be meaningful (and often to be much more informative than designative sentences) but it is difficult to see how there is a simple designation in a sentence such as "live oaks are the most sublime evergreens". However, precisely because this sentence is taken to be meaningful, the meaning must lie elsewhere.

The expressive tradition looks to respond to this problem by proposing that the most basic role of language is not in fact to designate something, but rather that it is to express something. This does not mean that designation is not involved in this language use, or even

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[35] Noam Chomsky's generative grammar for instance, insists that there are universal rules that is hardwired into our brains and that are sufficient to *generate* all meaningful sentences (Chomsky, 1957). Not only does this position put pragmatic considerations into the back seat, it also puts a clear limit on what meaningfulness is, thus also creating criteria that exclude forms of expression that do not fit into its paradigm.

that its role is not essential, rather it means that when trying to establish an order of explanation that allows us to grasp the indeterminable diversity of things that individuals do with language, reference and representation are not the basic unproblematic starting points the designative tradition have taken them to be. The expressive model of language use claims that this designative character matters *because* of the way it is used in other judgments, rather than seeing humanity to be merely continuing the adamic endeavor of going around giving names to all things under the sun. Thus, the designative role of the statement "this is a live oak" is itself embedded in a rolling mess of arguments, judgments, and claims. It becomes important because it is followed by another claim, such as "live oaks are the most sublime evergreens", or because it can be used to settle a previous disagreement, such as "*This* is a live oak, the oak we saw earlier is deciduous."

Simon Blackburn notes the importance of expressivism as a meta-ethical position and says that "the point of expressive theories is to avoid the metaphysical and epistemological problems which realist theories of ethics […] are supposed to bring along with them" (1984: 169). While this is certainly true in Blackburn's reading of expressivism it seems less clearly obvious in Taylor's reading. This highlights the two separate origins of contemporary expressivism. One of the origins of expressivism follows Blackburn's line and was initially limited to meta-ethical statements dating back to Hume's position in the *Treatise of Human Nature*, and thus can appropriately be called Humean expressivism. The second origin is linked to the German Enlightenment and to what Isaiah Berlin calls the Counter-Enlightenment (1979). Here, expressivism starts to take form in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Georg Hamann and then moves through German thought from Hegel and Wilhelm von Humboldt through the neo-Kantians as late as Ernst Cassirer. Thanks to its specifically German character it can appropriately be called German expressivism.

While these two currents seem to be coming closer and closer, as is seen in the work of Huw Price (2011; 2013) who claims that Robert Brandom's German expressivism lines up well with Blackburn's Humean expressivism, their initial impetus nonetheless remains radically different. Hume's moral expressivism is difficult to square with his own theory of language use which remains firmly anchored in the so-called "way of ideas" that offers a representational picture of content, and opposes a truly expressivist understanding of language use. Humean expressivism is based on an emotivist reading of Hume. According to this reading, starting from his famous distinction that "is" in no way entails "ought" (2000:

T 3.1.1.27)[36], emotivists claim that there is an unsanctioned leap from descriptive to evaluative claims. The emotivists read Hume to be saying that moral claims, because they express certain emotive dispositions towards states of things, do not state facts and are thus not subject to truth conditions. Saying something is good or bad relates subjective preferences and not qualities bound up in the objects or states of affair to be evaluated. Even though Hume's moral theory was waylaid by the rise of Kantian deontic ethics and utilitarianism, early analytic philosophers, looking to overcome G.E. Moore's naturalist fallacy while nonetheless naturalizing moral consideration found an easy ally in Hume's emotivist moral position. Thus A.J. Ayer in *Language, Truth, and Logic* defends a position whereby only empirical or causal claims can pretend to have the status of genuine propositions. Ethical claims, because they present a normative content, are thus emotive, they are used "to express feelings about certain objects, but not to make any assertions about them." (1949: 108).

An easy way to distinguish between Humean and German expressivism is to look at the scope of the initial expressivist projects. Thus, in A.J. Ayer's reading, as well as that of C.L. Stevenson (1944), and R.M. Hare (1952) after him, Humean expressivism is specifically meta-ethical. It maintains a representational picture of conceptual content that is inherited from Descartes and taken up by Hume himself, while presenting a model of this representational picture that can be applied to normative content[37]. Expressivism is thus used as a way to naturalize moral claims by explaining them according to an empirically realist paradigm. Meaningful claims are claims that allow descriptions of causally structured relations. The causally structured relationships that carry over from moral claims are psychological, they are expressive claims about individual sentiments on states of affairs while saying nothing about the states of affairs themselves.

The German expressivist project is, from the beginning, far more ambitious. In contrast with the initial Humean expressivist motivation, German expressivism looked from the start to overthrow the representationalist picture of conceptual content. In order to do so, the German expressivists, notably Herder and Hamann, claim that *all* language use is primarily expressive. According to this model, meaning itself is not dependent on external entities such as Forms, nor internal entities such as ideas, but rather meaning is bound up in language use. The idea that meaning is bound up in language use itself and is not *dependent*

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[36] In referring to Hume's texts, I follow the standard norms of Hume scholarship, here referring to the *Treatise*, followed by the book, the part, the section, and finally the paragraph.

[37] Ayer states that this applies "*mutatis mutandis*, to the case of aesthetic statements also"(1949: 103).

on non-linguistic factors is one of the key elements of Herder's expressivism. In fact, according to Michael Forster, these are two of the three key doctrines to Herder's picture of language use. These doctrines argue that:

1) thought is dependent on and bounded by language—that is, that one cannot think unless one has a language and one can only think what one can express linguistically.

2) *meanings* or *concepts* are [not] to be equated with […] items, in principal autonomous of language, […] for example, the objects to which they refer, Platonic "forms", or mental "ideas" [but are rather equated] with *usages of words.*

3) Meanings, or concepts […] are of their nature based in (perceptual or affective) sensation (Forster, 2012: 56-72).

While the third doctrine is one that Hume would share, his own notion of concept use clearly goes against these first two doctrines. So how does Herder's expressivism link these aspects? First of all, he sees the language of sensation as being in continuity with the vocal production of other animals. In his *Treatise on the Origins of Language*, he says, "already as an animal the human being has a language" (2008: 65), and for Herder, this language is the language of sensation, it is the common language of all feeling creatures, and his claim is that humans as animals are sensuous beings before becoming reasoning beings. In fact he notes that "the human being is feeling through and through" (2008: 111). Thus, we can read Herder's account of language use as trying to create a holist image of human beings, as opposed to the dualist picture that goes along with pure representational theories. This holist image of human beings emphasizes human embededness in the natural world, thus showing how humanity is more in continuity with nature than in rupture from it.

According to the picture presented in the emotivist reading, Hume still maintains the rigid dualism between the rational and the sensual aspects of the human being, between the philosophical and the vulgar aspects of human life. This reading completely ignores the normative content of meaning and of concepts. This is because this reading of Hume presents him as having a descriptive language, based on sensation, or more correctly, on the transformation of sensuous impressions into ideas, that makes genuine claims about the world, and an expressive language, that does not. This descriptive language would itself depend on some higher function—which goes unexplained—that transforms impressions

into ideas and ideas into the linguistic material from which languages are built[38]. While the Humean expressive language is also based on impressions, that is, the impression of a certain moral feelings, preferences, aversions, etc., this language does not add any actual content to concepts. Thus, according to this reading, Herder's first two doctrines do not hold up: thought is not bound up by language, because this implies that language is logically prior to thought, or that they are at least concomitant developments, and meaning *is* independent from language.

In Hume, since one works back up to the source impression to get to meaning, language itself must be thought of as arbitrary sounds that express the content that is represented in the impression. It thus only serves to uncover the content of that impression. It would then be custom and habit that link these sounds to the meaning that they have, however these meanings are understood as logically prior to language itself. The Humean picture assumes a preexisting structure of thought that explains how it should be that human beings acquire meanings at all. In other words, for the Humean expressivist, thought would have to precede language. Even though Hume does not exploit this option, he nonetheless clearly distinguishes between thinking and feeling as two separate faculties. Herder, on the other hand, seems to be saying that thinking grows out of feeling. In order to show this, he claims in the *Treatise on the Origin of Language* that the expressive language that reports emotional states is shared with all animals and it is from this origin that human language developed. Because he claims that thought is bound by language, Herder commits himself to the idea that language is first and foremost a social practice and that meaning is out loud, so to speak, before being in our heads, this is something which expressivist readings Hume do not have to commit themselves to[39].

Given this tension, it is unsure that Humean and German expressivism can be as easily united as Huw Price would like to claim, at least in its earliest iterations. If it can be brought together, it is because expressivists working today have abandoned a certain number of commitments which seem to be central to one of the positions or to the other. And if they can be brought together it is certainly because of the social emphasis of the role of language use. This emphasis, which is explicitly present in Herder, lines up nicely with the pragmatist

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[38] The famous copy principle whereby "All our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent" (2000: T 1.1.1.7) is itself insufficient to explain how this transformation happens.

[39] These two options seem to present the two branches of expressivism as a strict either/or choice, however I will show later on, current developments in expressivism overcome this strict division, and they do so through what can be characterized as a reprise.

order of explanation. Because this conception of meaning is use-based, the analysis of meaning must pass through an analysis of social linguistic practices in order to present a convincing picture of semantic content. Here we can thus see that although Humean expressivism and Herderian expressivism share a similar goal, to naturalize our understanding of language use[40], this is done in strikingly different ways. On the one hand, the expressivist reading of Hume is based on an initial meta-ethical position, which tries to describe what is meant by the use of moral sentences. Herderian expressivism, on the other hand, makes more substantial claims about the nature of mind and language. However, these two forms of expressivism have the same goal in mind, to explain language use in non-representational, non-truth-conditional ways. For the Humean expressivist, up until Simon Blackburn, this explanation of language was limited in scope. For Herder, this claim amounts to an affirmation that the primary role of language is neither to represent, nor to know, nor to designate, but to express something. Expressivism and pragmatism thus share similar features because they share similar goals. Their goal is to better explain actual human practices, which of course include description and designation (and which may always pre-philosophically be explained that way) but which are seen as more problematic when description and designation are given a primitive status in explanation. This goal implies upturning the notion of correspondence and replacing the notion of representation in our knowledge claims about the world. It displaces truth as the conceptually primitive notion by opening up a meta-discourse that looks to explain what an individual does when they use a descriptive language.

3.5   The Taxonomy of Expressivism

These goals, especially as they are articulated in the Herder's expressivist project, were vitally important for the development of German Idealism. There nonetheless remains quite a bit of debate concerning how clearly we can describe German Idealists, Hegel for instance[41], as expressivists. The story of the development and legacy of Herder's expressivist thought has been masterfully told in two companion volumes on German philosophy of language by Michael Forster (2012: 2014)[42]. Therefore, I will not retell the story that he

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[40] It is important to note that expressivism does not need to be *necessarily* naturalist, and that both Weil's and Brandom's expressivism are non-naturalist.
[41] Charles Taylor's book *Hegel* (1977) inaugurates the debate (and much contemporary thinking about expressivism) that has since turned into a small cottage industry of scholarship. Cf. (Buchwalter, 1994) for a critique of his position.
[42] Cf. (Englander, 2013) for a critical continuation of this position.

does, that goes from Herder and Hamann, through Hegel and Humboldt all the way to Frege and Wittgenstein. What I do want to do is use his taxonomy in order to distinguish between different types of expressivism. Forster distinguished between what he calls broad and narrow expressivism. According to Forster, the three criteria given above are characteristic of narrow expressivism, thus Herder is the archetypal narrow expressivist. As a reminder, these criteria are 1) the dependence of thought on language, 2) the rejection of external metaphysical entities to explain meaning and 3) the sensual origin of meanings. According to Forster, narrow expressivism is sensitive to the expressive powers of other forms of communication outside of language, and wants to be able to explain their expressive force. However, it claims that there is something qualitatively different about language use itself.

What Forster goes on to claim is that narrow expressivism denies non-linguistic forms of expression full autonomy. That is, gestural expressions, dance, non-textual music, bodily signals, as well as visual expressions, painting, drawing, scratches on surfaces, are all only fully meaningful because language has already instantiated meanings. While the shapes of natural expression certainly exist well before the emergences of language, these things themselves must be understood as proto-conceptual up until the point that there is a language to instantiate the meaning that ranges over them. Language thus allows these proto-conceptual elements to emerge as such, that is, as the amorphous block from which meaning is hewed, but they themselves require the presence of thought and meaning already bound up in language to be understood as such[43]. Thus, narrow expressivist defends a position whereby language is the necessary key to understanding the possibility of meaning that is found in other forms of expression.

Forster contrasts this position with what he calls broad expressivism. Broad expressivism is, according to Forster, committed to the same principles as narrow expressivism, that is, thought is still considered to be dependent on language, however where they differ is in the definition of the notion of "language". Language is thus to be understood as "drawing, painting and music" (Forster, 2014: 184). All forms of expression are put on an equal footing, and equally responsible for the conceptual jump between animals as feeling, reacting things, and animals as reasoning, acting things, language is just one of the forms of this conceptual development. According to Forster, Hamann is the archetypal broad

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[43] While narrow expressivism claims that thought is bound up in language, I would argue that it does not imply propositionalism, the idea that all intentional states are propositional states. Rather it implies that non-propositional states, attention, boredom, desires, emotions, only become clear as intentional states because there are *also* propositional states. Cf. (Montague, 2007) for a clear critique of propositionalism.

expressivist, but he is not alone. Hegel, both in Charles Taylor's development of the expressive themes found in his work, and in Forster's interpretation is to be seen as a broad expressivist. However, Forster sees Hegel as shifting towards broad expressivism. Taylor, on the other hand, who does not make the distinction between broad and narrow expressivism, and who himself seems to defend a form of broad expressivism, places Hegel's expressivism under a form that must be considered broad expressivism. Forster sees the work of Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to fall mostly under narrow expressivism, but claims that he evolved towards a position of broad expressivism as he continued to reflect on aesthetic questions.

The twentieth century saw Wilfrid Sellars develop a sophisticated form of narrow expressivism in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1997). Therein he recounts what he calls "the myth of Jones". With the myth of Jones, we are invited to imagine a society of people who follow a certain behavioristic paradigm. That is, the intelligibility of the members of the society depends on overt behavior. They have no theoretical framework with which to speak about inner episodes such as thoughts, emotions, beliefs, dreams, etc. In this story, a member of the society, Jones, comes up with a way to talk about such inner episodes. He proposes that we model inner episodes on the external episodes that include overt linguistic expression. In other words, Sellars proposes that we can model thought on speech in order to understand thought. Jones therefore proposes a way that individuals can come to understand how other individuals in their society seem to be acting intelligently even there where there is no overt behavior with the kind of reasoning that happens in linguistic episodes.

There are two benefits of modelling thought on speech that need to be highlighted to understand how Sellars's myth of Jones links into the expressivist project at large. Firstly, he is proposing a model of cognitive episodes that insists that thought can be understood thanks to discursive episodes, and thus thanks to basic semantic categories. Secondly, by claiming that thinking is learned in conjecture with speech, he is also claiming that the basic semantic categories of thought are learned with the semantic categories of linguistic behavior. Thus, he can be seen as arguing against the notion of a universal grammar that is to be found in Noam Chomsky's work, as well as against forms of dualism that are to be found in the Cartesian model of thought[44].

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[44] Chomsky's *Cartesian Linguistic* (1966) explicitly combines these two elements.

Sellars goes a step further and claims that thinking only happens after speaking has been mastered. He notes that Jones's theory "is perfectly compatible with the idea that the ability to have thoughts is acquired in the process of acquiring overt speech and that only after overt speech is well established, can 'inner speech' occur without its overt culmination" (1997: § 58). His position, that "thoughts are *linguistic* episodes" (1997: § 47) must thus be thought of as defending the first claim of narrow expressivism, namely that thought is bound by and dependent on language. Sellars then goes to defend the second criterion of narrow expressivism. Jones's theory gives us a model for speaking about non-empirical entities, because the members of such a society do not initially have a way of discussing inner episodes. Inner episodes are thus postulated along the lines of overt linguistic behavior in order to explain other behavior, namely intelligent behavior that itself is overt without the use of the direct reasoning that accompanies overt linguistic behavior. What distinguishes Jones's theory, and what lines up with the second claim of narrow expressivism, is that he is not proposing any metaphysical entities. The entities are methodological. He is not claiming that there is such a thing as thoughts and that they are made up of such and such matter and that they function in such and such way. Rather he is proposing that in order to explain certain behavior, certain mechanisms need to be postulated. However, the mechanism or the entities that are postulated are conservative. That is, they do not make claims that outstrip their explanatory needs.

The step to a type of inner speech called thought does not itself sanction the jump to metaphysical entities with specific describable characteristics such as Ideas and Forms. Thus, linguistic meanings are not explained by inner speech, rather inner speech is a conservative extension of aspects of the theory that are already taken for granted. This conservative extension is itself subject to test and discussion, which highlights another essential aspect of Sellars expressivism, its intersubjective nature. In order to solidify their intersubjective nature, Sellars notes how certain methodologically sanctioned conservative extensions of working concepts take on a reporting role in a theory. Thus, initially, inner speech is postulated in order to explain the intelligent behavior of members of Jones's society. Other members of the society can however take up Jones's theory and use it both to accurately describe, and understand, their own behavior and that of others. Once they have taken up the theory of inner speech, they can take it to no longer be a hypothesis, but to be a working part of the theory. Thus, thoughts are used to report certain behavior and to accurately describe it. They can be used, for example, to understand the privileged access that each individual in the society seems to demonstrate towards their own inner speech as

well as the idea of rational motivation that accompanies non-verbal but understandable behavior. When theoretical entities, such as thought in the myth of Jones, take on reporting roles, they can be used as reasons in argumentative practices and as part of the general framework of concepts that are mobilized by dialogue partners. Thus, the transition from a conservative extension to a concept that serves a reporting role "constitutes a dimension of the use of these concepts which is *built on* and *presupposes* this intersubjective status." Sellars, similar to Herder, but also to Hegel, thus insists that "language is essentially an *inter-subjective* achievement, and is learned in an inter-subjective context." (1997: § 59)

It should be noted that Sellars does not come to his expressivism as Herder does, by trying to understand the origins of language use. Rather he comes to his expressivism the way Humean expressivists do, that is, he comes to understand that certain questions cannot be solved without taking a meta-theoretical position. His initial goal is to say something about what happens in thought, and how a scientific reporting language, the language of observation, can be squared with the theoretical framework which is necessary for the observation itself to make sense, the normative meta-language. Thus, his expressivism, while structurally more similar to Herder's, because it clearly distinguishes itself as a form of narrow expressivism, also resembles Humean expressivism, because it uses a similar technique to answer a different set of questions. In the case of Humean expressivism, the set of questions is (or *was*, since the scope has since grown, and since there are more and more philosophers who marry the two questions) how to understand and explain moral claims, whereas in Sellars case, the question is how to understand and explain scientific claims.

Humean and Herderian expressivism were both looking to minimize the multiplication of metaphysical entities while giving robust explanations of actual practices that themselves cannot suitably be described in their own observation language. We can thus now add Sellars's expressivist concerns to the categorical thinking that defines his space of reasons. Sellars thus stands in an essential middle position to understanding the historical development of the contemporary pragmatist and expressivist programs developed here. It is however, Robert Brandom who is seen as the primary contemporary innovator of these programs. Brandom, Sellars's younger colleague at the University of Pittsburgh, was to mine Sellars's developments and mine his antecedents in order to forge his own *inferentialist* program.

Brandom sees his own expressivism as a descendent, by way of Hegel, of Herderian (or as he calls it, Romantic) expressivism. However, in addition to Sellars, the most important aspect of Brandom's expressivism is his expressivist reading of Frege. His

expressivism, which he calls logical expressivism, can also be seen as a species of narrow expressivism. He states that the goal of logical expressivism is "not to *prove* something, but to *say* something." This lines up with previous expressivist programs that shift from a concentration on the kind of knowledge that can be represented in our language to a concentration on the diversity of the human experience that can be expressed in language. What Brandom hopes to show is not only that the role of language is expressive, but more pressingly, to accommodate the advances of modern philosophy of language as well as the developments of contemporary logic, in an expressivist program.

It is not sufficient, for Brandom's project, to say that language has an expressive role, rather he wants to say that that this expressive role is not at odds with logic, which *has* historically been taken to *prove* something. Thus, he has to develop the expressive role that logic is to play, but in order to do so he must clear out the brush in the tangled forest of the philosophy of language[45]. He thus claims that the role of a logical vocabulary is to make explicit the conceptual content that is implicit in natural language use. The question then becomes, how exactly does a logical vocabulary make explicit the conceptual content that is explicit in natural language. Here, we can see the importance of the pragmatist order of explanation. This order of explanation must look to the practices present in natural language. Brandom does this not by trying to analyze complex concepts into its simpler composite parts, but rather by using the logical vocabulary as a practical metavocabulary that brings out what one commits themselves to when they use certain terms or concepts. This leaves concepts as complex as they are outside of a logical way of speaking, all the while showing their embeddedness in other conceptual commitments.

The designative paradigm of language, by focusing on a word-world (or mind-world) correspondence[46], thus places truth and knowledge at the center of its philosophical concerns. The expressive paradigm of language, by focusing on expression, places understanding front and center. Brandom extends the expressivist paradigm by focusing on the expressive roles of certain logical operators, namely the conditional and the negation. Here, Brandom situates himself as a narrow expressivist, because he sees certain practices, specifically linguistic and logical practices, as being central to the intelligibility of other practices. So, just as for Herder, language allows other forms of expression to be understood as meaningful, for

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[45] It is significative that recently, Brandom has insisted that the goal must now shift from *logical expressivism* to an *expressivist logic* (2018).
[46] It is interesting to note that this model could be perhaps also be interpreted as a form of expressivism, it is trying to express what designation does, but because it does so starting from the objects to be designated and not from what the designation is trying to accomplish, it cannot interpret itself in this way.

Brandom, within language use, the conditional and the negation are the resources necessary in order to see other language use, other speech acts, as meaningful. He reinforces this position when he claims, *pace* Wittgenstein's claim that language has no downtown, that it in fact does, that there is a "region around which all the rest of discourse is arrayed as dependent suburbs" (2013: 120). This downtown through which all the other commerce and transport of language passes, is what Brandom calls "the game of giving and asking for reasons". Within this "game" assertion has place of pride because, according to Brandom, other speech acts, referring, naming, asking questions, giving commands, are all "in an important sense derivative from or parasitic on speech acts involving sentences, paradigmatically claiming, asserting, or putting forward as true" (1994: 82)[47]. Brandom importantly does not reduce all meaningful speech acts to assertion, rather he presents assertion as a qualitative threshold that discloses other speech acts as in fact being speech acts. As logical operators, the negation and the conditional become necessary resources. This is because the negation and the conditional are the resources needed for assertions to have *full* expressive force. That is, in order for assertions to do all the things we claim that they do.

Brandom's expressivism is not only narrow, but follows the general criterial structure of narrow expressivism at each level. That is, at each level there are certain paradigmatic functions or entities that allow the other functions or entities of the level to become visible as actually being functions or entities. In this way, logical operators such as the negation and the conditional, are only *seen* as meaningful because of their role in speech acts. Speech acts are only *seen* as meaningful because they are *seen* as part of the same category of acts as assertions. Assertions are only seen as paradigmatic because they are the speech act that best

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[47] This type of claim which is present throughout Brandom leads Rebecca Kukla and Mark Lance to claim that Brandom falls into what they call, following Nuel Belnap, the "declarative fallacy". This fallacy presumes that "semantic content in general could be understood entirely in terms of declarative content"(Kukla & Lance, 2008). They go on to state that "It isn't that Brandom and others fail to notice the existence of imperatives, interrogatives, etc., but they feel confident that these will fall into (their secondary) place once the account of declaratives is completed" (2008: 11-12). Their account attacks the declarative fallacy in order to defend their claim that observative such as "Lo, a rabbit!" and vocatives such as "Yo, Fiona!" play critical roles in an embodied theory of the recognition of pragmatic normative commitments we *actually* take on. For them, "[t]he appropriate response to the utterance 'Lo, a rabbit!' in not, then, merely to believe the consequent declarative, but to *look and see* the rabbit for yourself. Thus lo-claims call people into just those intersubjective practices of observation that constitute the necessary framework supporting declarative truth-claiming and epistemic inquiry. In a lo-claim, we explicitly mark the intersubjective character of observatives by calling others to shared attention in a public world" (2008: 81). Because of the emphasis that Éric Weil places on the pragmatic roles of imperatives (LP 363) his analysis of *language* seems partially at least to line up more with that of Kukla and Lance than that of Brandom, however, because of the reflexive role that *discourse* plays in understanding, the declarative, or what Weil terms serious conversation, seems to line up with Brandom. This must remain at least in this chapter an open question.

exemplify sentences. Sentences are *seen* as paradigmatic because they allow us to understand and explain the normative practices of being responsible for a content, for taking something as true. It is, in turn, these types of normative practices that allow us to see ourselves as having agency and as being the kind of things in the world that we are. And finally, for Brandom, it is the discursive practices which are central to language that allow other forms of expression to be *seen* as meaningful. It is only thanks to these discursive practices that we can recognize meaningful behavior and attribute it to others.

So, just as Sellars develops a form of narrow expressivism to show how Jones attributes reasonable activity to his peers in his myth, Brandom develops a multi-layered system of dependencies that all have the main feature of narrow expressivism. There are thus certain thresholds that have to be attained in order to see the constituent parts as actually constituting the activity. Although narrow expressivism highlights and emphasizes thresholds, it is important to note that it is dialectic. An easy analogy is found in learning processes. There are aspects of learning a technique or a skill that only become clear after the skill has been learned. Thus, learning to blacksmith, for example, requires learning how to hold a hammer, learning how to strike the metal correctly in order to translate the force of the hammer into the desired effect in the heated stock. However, where the process shows itself to be dialectic is where we can see how single concepts are parasitic on other concepts. Learning one's way around the forge will mobilize a whole battery of practical and conceptual skills that the individual has already mastered and integrated into their capacity to navigate the world. The initial gestures will necessarily be crude, even if the whole series of movements are explained in a language that the individual understands. It is only once the gesture as a whole is mastered that one can retrospectively look back at what is involved and *understand* how the parts fit together. Learning involves multiple steps of partial mastery that allow the learner to move forward. It is only because the individual acquires a partial mastery of all the parts involved that they can identify and correct what is lacking, or that they can ameliorate their skill. Thus, mastery involves different thresholds that allow us to retrospectively look over our shoulder in order to understand what we are doing.

These thresholds are themselves then the result of dialectic processes that already use the conceptual capacities that need to be mastered before they are fully *understood*. This is also what allows concepts to be explained at different grains of fineness and at different levels of complexity. Each new level of complexity incorporates what was learned and what is essential from the level precedent, and in fact takes it for granted. While this seems paradoxical, the deeper paradox is that it is this dialectic process itself that allows us to take

acquired skills for granted and thus also to mischaracterize them. Once we have a skill, because we can see its constituent moving parts, we think that the skill has always had the form it does when we try to characterize it, however autonomy transforms processes. This is what makes teaching such a difficult practice. One must find the appropriate level of fineness in order to explain a concept, and must continue to evolve their explanations with the evolution of the student's understanding of the complexity that is contained in the concept. An apprentice blacksmith will blindly follow what they are told to do long before they understand how and why they do it, just as a child learning a language will speak long before they are able to understand what their speaking implies. Thus, narrow expressivism always implies a reflexive moment that *discloses* the activity of language as meaningful in itself, just as learning processes imply a reflexive moment that discloses the activity to the learner. But in language this reflexive moment only happens after the speaker has already been using language for so long that they have integrated its use. This disclosure allows one to recognize the parts as being parts *of* the activity. These levels of disclosure are like Matryoshka dolls. If one had only the innermost doll, its painted approximative forms might be unrecognizable. However, with a complete doll, when we move towards the innermost doll, we can still recognize its features, its flowers and designs, just as we recognize meaningful moves in language and thought as we move into its finer grained layers. So, it is not just that, without the most basic mechanisms, we would not have a language recognized as such, it is moreover, without crossing a certain threshold that allows for a retrospective, recursive point of view, language would not be language, but would only be the noisy orchestra of instinct. Because narrow expressivism implies that we are only able to recognize parts when the whole is present, our recognition depends on a holistic picture of language use.

3.6   Holism and the Consequences of Fallibilism

We have already traced certain philosophical commitments through the work of Wilfrid Sellars. We saw how his pragmatism sought to create a metavocabulary in order to talk about how linguistic practices can be mobilized to understand meaning. We also saw how this ties into his picture of language use, which, as a form of narrow expressivism, uses the primacy of these intersubjective social practices to justify the conservative extension of vocabularies in order to explain phenomena such as inner episodes. According to this picture, Sellars defends the narrow expressivist picture that thought is bound by linguistic

practices. These characteristics all carry over into Brandom's theoretical position, with Brandom seeing Sellars as an essential forbearer in the development of inferentialism. However, Brandom also reads inferentialist commitments back into the philosophical tradition, seeing for instance a fundamental shift towards inferentialist semantics taking place in the work of Immanuel Kant. According to Brandom, the main lesson to be learned is that normativity is central to understanding what we do as concept users. Representationalism, whose linguistic primitive is reference, guards an uneasy tension between a descriptive observation language and the kind of language it uses in its conceptual framework, which itself is itself only derivatively descriptive because it bears upon the observation language itself.

In the most basic articulation of a representational theory, it is the mere presence of the object that is supposed to present the conceptual material necessary in order to understand and deploy its concept. However, the mere fact of the diversity of categorial structures across different languages places this into question. Going back to the example of live oaks, the reference is somehow supposed to hold by the mere presence of the live oak before the observer. However, clearly there is a lot of conceptual baggage that goes along with the identification of a live oak. For one thing, this level of categorization is something that has to be available to the language users in the given language. Thus, in French, identifying a tree under the concept LIVE OAK, while not impossible, does require certain periphrastic somersaults in order for the concept to be clear. Thus, even though an individual can identify the qualities captured by the American vernacular hypernym and then class all the particulars that fall under these qualities they cannot easily deploy the concept of LIVE OAK itself. Rather, each time they must announce the quality of being evergreen, and then identify the "chênes" that have that quality. Clearly then there are more considerations than just simple observation in order to identify a live oak[48]. This again is not to say that reference doesn't play a role, or that it doesn't matter, rather, to follow Jaroslav Peregrin, it is to say that "reference should not be seen as something independent and prior to inference"(2014: 24).

Brandom claims that one responds to this tension by shifting away from a whole group of interlocking representational commitments. Thus, by deemphasizing the place of reference, he displaced the importance of knowledge and its two structural criteria, truth and

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[48] Our live oak example can also be used to show how learning to ascribe reporting roles can become non-inferential. A person, once they have mastered American vernacular arboriculture terms, can easily non-inferentially *see* a tree as a live oak, even though that is a learned skill.

certainty. One does not abandon these concepts, rather they reorganize their order of primacy, creating a new hierarchy that claims that inference is more important than reference in order to understand our language use. This reorganization implies changes across the whole philosophical project. Representation is thus seen to depend on expression and not the other way around. Knowledge in turn is seen to hold only when the individual understands what goes into it, certainty and truth move into the background and allow a fallibilist picture of justification that is sensitive to change and evolution to move into the spotlight. This change shows that what is sought in truth is in fact meaning. For Brandom, Kant's solution to overcoming the tension between a descriptive observation language and a normative framework language is to be found in Kant's development of the notion of necessity, which seeks to understand what it means to act "according to a rule" (2013: 115). He describes this tension saying:

> The important lesson [Kant] takes Hume to have taught isn't about the threat of skepticism, but about how empirical knowledge is unintelligible if we insist on merely *de*scribing how things in fact *are*, without moving beyond that to *pre*scribing how they *must* be, according to causal rules, and how empirical motivation (and so agency) is unintelligible if we stay at the level of '*is*' and eschew reference to the '*ought*'s that outrun what merely is (*ibid.*:115).

Brandom sees this as a main motivating factor in the development of his inferentialism, and as the way to give full expression to the normative vocabulary that he sees as accompanying all concept use, even at the most basic level of designative observational sentences, such as "This is a live oak".

In other words, reference loses its place as the conceptual primitive needed to understand language use. While there is certainly some kind of representational connection between the tree out in the field and the person pointing to it (and Kant certainly retained the language of representation), the meaningfulness of this connection depends on the inferences that go together to form the concept LIVE OAK. Thus, being able to identify a tree as a live oak doesn't just means being able to distinguish it from other evergreen trees, such as pines or yews or cedars, as well as from other flowering trees such as apples or chestnuts or beeches. It means being able to make a more fine-tuned distinction between deciduous oak and evergreen oak, and between certain evergreen oaks and those that are considered live oaks (namely North American evergreen species of oaks). These distinctions are themselves the historical work of other language users looking to make their own understanding of the world ever more coherent, and thus to distinguish between interconnected differences. This

interconnectedness—and the historical work—is, according to Brandom, normative. It tells us what distinctions we *ought* to take into consideration in order to understand the world. It thus argues that these distinctions are not given immediately in perception as referential theories hope to show, but rather depend on conceptual frameworks that are in place. In order to make sense of this problem, Brandom adopts Sellars's notion of "the logical space of reasons", as being the normative space in which these kinds of conceptual distinctions make sense. The space of reasons, as mentioned above, is defined by its normative characteristic, precisely because it structures what an observational designative language looks like. Brandom thus makes a clear break with traditional representational theories of conceptual content: by emphasizing the mutually supporting role of inferences, he goes against the atomism that defines most representational or designative theories. In doing so, he defends an expressive and inferential form of holism about conceptual content.

This holism is a direct descendant of the type of holism that is defended by Sellars. Sellars notes that being able to distinguish something as 'green' (and to make further claims about its properties) entails that the individual be able to make claims about it being 'not red'. Just as with the example of the live oak, the concept of greenness or GREEN does not stand alone out in the field: it has a whole root system that connects it to other concepts and on which its very content depends. This is in part what Sellars means when he says that to have a single concept one must have "a whole battery of concepts" (1997: § 19). Sellars's holism is thus linked to his narrow expressivism. One of the claims of narrow expressivism is that thought is bound by language. Sellars's way of stating this is to say that inner episodes can be conceived of as linguistic episodes because we can conceive of language learning as happening before articulate thinking. There is a qualitative shift that happens when we can manipulate enough concepts that we become aware of them as concepts. That is to say that full awareness, self-consciousness, depends on socially structured linguistic practices that allow us to become aware of ourselves as individuals. These socially structured linguistic practices also allow us to become aware of our concepts as being the kind of things that can be about the world, and also in an important way—because they can be modified without changing anything about the phenomenon—not about the world. This explains how we can make mistakes, change our minds, make cognitive leaps forward, dig in our feet and stick with certain concepts despite the evidence, etc. This idea flies in the face of the notion that conceptual content is atomic and associative.

According to forms of atomism, all meanings, concepts, ideas, can be brought back to single particular defined facts, this is clear for instance in the logical atomism of Bertrand

Russell or the opening proposition of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus* whereby Wittgenstein explains that the world is the totality of facts (1999: 1-1.21)[49]. In atomism, these particulars are at the origin of all knowledge, all truth, and all conceptuality. Thus, in order to know something, it suffices to break it down into its composite parts and thus to find what the atomic facts are. This viewpoint marries happily to associationist views such as Hume's. In Hume's view, because all our knowledge comes from impressions of individual aspects of things, they are associated to build up our mental geography. Holism goes against both of these ideas. It should be clear why holism goes against atomism. Atomism supposes that there are fundamental conceptual or epistemological items, and that these items can be held or deployed independently. Going against that, holism insists that all conceptual and epistemological items are all to a certain degree interlaced.

One of the main arguments I have been putting forward has been that order of explanation has a certain priority in our conceptual landscape. Following that, the specific order of explanation that I have been defending is fallibilist because fallibilism provides a robust explanation and response to the changes and evolutions in our knowledge. I have claimed that fallibilism is an argumentative position and not a strong metaphysical position. However, here it is important to note that fallibilism does not bar one from making substantive metaphysical and ontological claims about the world rather it uncouples metaphysical claims from any special status in order to not fold into skepticism. Fallibilists yoke their mistrust of the a-temporality and infallibility of metaphysic entities as sufficient first principles to their confidence in argumentative practices. By combining doubt with argumentative features, not only is the fallibilist permitted to make substantial claims, they take for granted that they must. The fallibilist accepts that substantial claims go part and parcel with discursive practices, it's just that they also accept that their own claims' stake of coherence and universality itself be trumped or surpassed. Should this happen, because they yoke their mistrust of metaphysic entities (as having some independent ontological reality that is free from critique) to their confidence in argumentative practices, they would have to bend before the normative weight of better explanations and justifications, and thus change their position.

Fallibilism allows us to understand how we can examine key aspects of the internal mechanisms of our concept use without stopping the whole conceptual motor as skepticism would like. Rather, we can take one element of it out, turn it over, judge, examine, and repair

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[49] It remains true however that Sellars's logical space of reasons is a modified descendant of Wittgenstein's "logical space" in (1999: 1.13)

it as we keep moving forward, without "suspending" conceptual practices. However, this entails taking the other moving parts for granted, so that the conceptual motor *does* continue to move forward. Thus, we can say that fallibilism entails what I will call a *placeholder* conception of metaphysics[50]. The term placeholder should be taken in two senses, one global and one local. 1) Globally, the whole conceptual apparatus is *held* in *place* by what is being taken for granted. Thus, one can only examine this or that aspect of something because the rest is there and lends contextual meaningfulness to the whole. 2) Each element of the conceptual apparatus is subject to change or revision, but during the analysis and reevaluation of this element, we note the place that it takes up and mark that place as being under consideration. It is in this second sense that Peirce claims that only reasoned and not radical doubt should be taken into consideration when we are looking to analyze and modify our concepts. Thus, fallibilism includes a type of local suspension of judgment, or *epoché*, but refuses the global *epoché* that skepticism pushes. In fact, there is a certain naivety built into skepticism, because it mistakes the real force of the local *epoché* for the need of a global *epoché*. In doing so skeptics ignore the fact that metaphysical and ontological commitments go along with every claim that is made. This naivety is evident in the fact that skepticism turns its back on metaphysical positions all the while advancing a strong metaphysical position of its own, namely that truth and knowledge do not exist. Fallibilist understand that in order to make claims at all, we must take a whole mess of things for granted, otherwise our claim can't get the traction necessary to jumpstart our conceptual motor. This motor however must not be considered fixed, rather it is seen as a dynamic structure that changes and evolves with the claims that we are examining. Each new change modifies all the inferences that connect to it, and because of the type of holism that is defended, this also means that progressive changes can over time radically alter *all* beliefs, but this does not happen in one fell swoop.

With this distinction between local and global suspension of belief, we can now go back to the conflict between atomism and holism, and try to see what kind of substantive commitments should go along with the holism I am saying is present in Sellars's work. The main claim I made is that holism insists that, at least to a certain degree, our conceptual and

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[50] Here, I am making a claim about how the semantic content of claims is held in place as part of the continual fallible reevaluation of content. Nonetheless, Mark Lance and Rebecca Kukla make a similar claim concerning pragmatic normative relations. They state that "concrete normative relations among people are established and sustained through vocatives—that is, through the Yo-claims that *hold us in place* in a social space."(2008: 181). We can thus reasonably argue that they defend a placeholder model of normative relations.

epistemological apparatuses are interlaced and interlocked. Because of this, the association that goes along with atomism creates a tension that complicates holist positions if association is taken to be the most basic of our cognitive functions. The tension shows how important orders of explanation become. The goal of the pragmatist order of explanation is to abandon first principles in order to streamline our conceptual landscape, that is, in order to resolve the tension that exists between conceptual schemes. It is uncertain (and improbable) that all the tension in our concepts can be resolved, however, I am arguing that the pragmatist order of explanation offers the best chance we have so far to resolve it. Association implies that there is already a set of discrete conceptual building blocks and that our cognitive functions put them together in some way. Holism on the other hand, being radically anti-reductionist, cannot claim that the whole is *just* the assembly of its parts. This goes hand in with the claims of narrow expressivism, that there are thresholds that qualitatively alter the individual elements that can be seen as proto-conceptual, but not as fully conceptual. So, how to resolve the tension?

A possible solution to this problem is proposed by the holism of William James[51]. This solution claims that discrimination (or dissociation, he uses the terms interchangeably) is to be considered more basic than association. According to this position, there is a variety of different ways to pick out the salient features of our experience, and because of this, we cannot see what we are doing conceptually as merely taking complete and discrete conceptual units and putting them together. Rather, we discriminate out certain features as being central to things and base our explanations on them. In his *Principles of Psychology* James says that "Experience proceeds and intellect is trained, not by Association, but by *Dissociation*, not by the reduction of pluralities of impression to one, but by the opening out of one into many" (1950: 486). James does not reduce all cognitive functions to discrimination, he even goes on to defend association. Rather, he claims that we need discriminatory practices in order to *explain* associative practices, thus he is not excluding association, rather he is establishing an order of explanation that gives primacy to discrimination. He says, "The truth is that Experience is trained by *both* association and dissociation, and that psychology must be writ *both* in synthetic and in analytic terms. Our original sensible totals are, on the one hand, subdivided by discriminative attention, and, on the other hand, united with other totals" (1950: 487). This is exactly the question Kant is

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[51] Cf. the work of Stephane Madelrieux, notably (2008: 32-61) for a defense of the importance of discrimination to William James's understanding of the psychological construction of the spatial world. It was this work that called my attention to this problem, and I largely follow his solution.

grappling with when he claims that we experience time and space as a manifold. By putting the manifold first, he glimpsed at the discriminatory order of explanation, but that is also what slipped through his fingers if we read him as going on to defend things-in-themselves as in some way being individual, although unknowable, objects. This reading thus sees the problem but is unable to free itself from the associationist, atomic order of explanation. This is what Hegel understands in his chapter *Sense-Certainty* in the *Phenomenology* and also what Sellars recognizes in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind." Both claim that we do not start from basic building blocks and then build forward, but rather that we start from a coarse notion of the world around us and then slowly come to an ever finer one. It is the difference between building a house out of bricks and carving a sculpture out of marble. When a house is built brick by brick, the size and the use of the bricks are already pre-determined. With a block of marble, although the sculptor must be sensitive to the grain of the stone and to any impurities that are in it, they adapt the marble to their needs. In this way, our conceptuality bears more resemblance to Michelangelo's captive slaves than to urban row houses. It is unorderly and brute, but we can work those rough shapes to bring them more fully out.

3.7   Discursive Commitments and Inferentialism

Brandom's inferentialism takes the expressivism and the holism that is developed in Sellars's work (among others) and develops them into a robust position in philosophy of language. One of Brandom's key moves is to show that inferring is itself a practice and that a full-blooded theory which answers the same questions that reference and representation are used to answer can be fleshed out of this practice. Brandom seeks to use the pragmatist order of explanation to show how conceptual content can be restated and understood starting from the specific linguistic practice of inference. By combining the pragmatist order of explanation with expressivism, he continues the shift from knowledge, and thus truth-values, to understanding, and thus goal-oriented communicational practices. This shift focuses on what speakers are trying to say and not on what part of the world they are correctly picking out. Thus, the pragmatist order of explanation, combined with expressivism and holism precludes reference from being the primitive explanatory concept and opens the field for the inferentialism that Brandom develops. The goal, when starting from inference as opposed to reference, is to clearly distinguish the realm of the conceptual. This is done by showing how inference functions both at the level of a pragmatic metavocabulary and at the level of an

144

observation language. In order to show how these two levels are linked Brandom develops the notion of *awareness*. Brandom's articulation of awareness allows us to see that an observational vocabulary depend in many ways on a pragmatic metavocabulary. If we look at non-inferential reporting sentences, such as "this is a live oak", the representationalist tendency is to assign the term "live oak" a labeling role. That is, the term labels a particular object in the world, and the sentence then reports a state of affairs.

Besides highlighting certain objectional ontological claims that go along with this notion of states of affairs and particulars, Brandom's strategy is to show that many things can be considered to produce non-inferential reports without themselves being able to manipulate and share concepts, without being, to use Brandom's apt turn of phrase, concept-mongers. For instance, he explains that one could teach a parrot to say "red" every time the parrot was in front of a red object. This parrot could then be said to reliably produce non-inferential reports of red things in the world. He goes on to explain that thermostats reliably produce non-inferential reports about the temperature, just as iron produces reliable non-inferential reports of ambient humidity. However, we would be hesitant to attribute any full-fledged notion of understanding and conceptuality to animals like parrots or to artifacts such as thermometers and pigs of iron. The reason for this, according to Brandom, is because these things reliably respond to different characteristics of the environment yet nonetheless lack a mastery of the inferential connectedness that defines concept use. Thus, as we have noted before, to distinguish a live oak, someone who masters the concept must also be able to master the incompatibilities of the concept, such that a live oak is neither a conifer nor a deciduous flowering plant. In other words, the must be aware of these differences. They must also be able to master the kinds of inferential entitlements that go along with knowing that a certain tree is a live oak. This means that, when someone is able to identify that this or that tree is a live oak, they are also entitled to certain inferences that are judged permissible by this information.

At the most basic level, using the concept LIVE OAK would allow one to infer that the specific oak is an evergreen tree, that it is a hardwood, that it produces acorns, etc. Brandom points out that there are concepts that allow us to establish continuities as well as discontinuities. Thus, by focusing on the parrot's perceptual capacity to reliably distinguish aspects of its environment, we can note that the parrot, and all other animals share this capacity with human beings. By reliably distinguishing aspects of its environment by its sensual capacities, we can say that the parrot is *sentient*. Human beings are also sentient, but there is another quality that overlies our sentience, our *sapience*. Brandom defines sapience

as "a status achieved within a structure of mutual recognition: of holding and being held responsible, of acknowledging and exercising authority."(1994: 275). Sapience, according to Brandom, who equates it with the faculty of judgement, is essential to our self-consciousness. This faculty is built out of our sensitivity to reasons. This mean that we act not only following sensual stimulation but also following conceptually articulated propositions. For instance, standing in a field, one does not have a determined reaction to the live oak, as the iron would to the ambient humidity, but rather one has a panel of ways of interacting with the tree and this will follow from the way that individuals organize their goals and their desires, the way they create a hierarchy of needs for instance. Thus, if a person goes over to the live oak to sit below it, it is because they want shade, or are tired, or they like the smell, or think that trees are the appropriate poetic backdrop for sitting, and they can thus give a reason that explains *why* they do what they do. The parrot or the pig of iron cannot explain the *why* of their activity: it is classified as purely reactive. Thus, sapience overlies sentience, and the why of our activity binds us to certain commitments[52].

When Brandom insists on inferential semantic holism, he does so not only by insisting on the fact that in order to understand one concept, one must be able to also access a multitude of concepts that are inferential linked to the target concept, he also claims that the proposition is the minimal semantic unit. Atomism, as we have discussed above, claims that the word, (or some particular) is the minimal semantic unity. However, what Brandom underlines is that single words, used alone, are not useful in reasonings. Even when single words are uttered in isolation in reasonings such as red in the presence of red things, they only make sense if we can access sundry contextual commitments that allow the role of the single word to emerge. This, Brandom claims, is because the sentence, a complete proposition, expresses a judgement, and the judgement is the minimal unit for which we can hold ourselves, or hold others responsible. It is starting from the judgment that we are able to define the space of reasons that is being deployed, because it is from a judgment, articulated in a proposition, that we can see the inferential commitments that are involved in the reasoning[53].

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[52] This also shows us the way that Brandom makes good on the final commitment of narrow expressivism. Without being a strict naturalist, he creates a hierarchy between sentience and sapience, and shows how sapience can be seen as growing out of sentience.

[53] Weil makes a similar move in the jump from *Truth* to *Nonsense*. The doctrine of *Truth* can only start from a single word, but that sense is meaningless from the point of view of judgment. *Nonsense* is the attitude that claims that each judgment that states to assert the truth in its totality is meaningless, thus it pragmatically negates all judgments. Nonetheless, as the word *Truth* can have an expressive meaning, but it is one that is constituted retrospectively, that is, after all the semantic and logical tools necessary to understand propositions are in place.

These inferential commitments, what we and others are responsible for in judgement, is essential to the structure of sapience. In order to make sense of the notion of commitment, Brandom builds off of David Lewis's notion of scorekeeping (Lewis, 1979). As a basic notion, scorekeeping is the idea of tracking our interlocutors' language use as one would track the score in a game. According to Brandom, in language games there are two basic aspects of linguistic practices that we track, commitments and entitlements. Tracking commitments builds off the responsibility we take on when we make a judgment. What we are responsible for, what we commit to, is the conceptual content that goes along with asserting something. Thus, when someone standing in a field says that the tree out in front of them is a live oak, they commit themselves to the content of the inferences that accompany the concept LIVE OAK. In this case, the success or failure of language user's claims define the implicit score that is attributed to that individual's knowledge in colloquial American arboriculture. Commitments pair symmetrically with entitlements. Entitlements are the inferences that the individual is allowed to make based on the commitments that they take on. Entitlements allow the individual to make additional claims that are not explicitly contained in the judgment "this is a live oak". By saying that the tree out in the field is a live oak, the individual is entitled to judgments such that, in normal conditions, this tree will retain its leaves throughout the entire year, or that it will produce acorns. These are the types of inferences that allow us to move from one claim, that such or such thing is a live oak, to other claims that we have not made. This also adds a third essential concept, endorsements, to Brandom's inferentialism. Endorsements function to guarantee the intersubjectivity nature of Brandom's position including larger social practices with the practice of inferring. When one commits oneself to a content, one endorses the content and places it in the social sphere as a candidate to be endorsed by others. When one recognizes someone else's entitlements to a content, one in turn endorses their interlocutor's commitments. Thus again, by saying something is a live oak, I commit to it being an oak and being evergreen. I am entitled to say that it will keep its leaves and that it will produce acorns. But I may not be able to distinguish between two live oaks, between a white oak and a cork oak. Thus, if my friend claims that something is a cork oak, because I consider her a reliable reporter on arboriculture matters, I will endorse her claim and thus see her as entitled to the other claims. When I endorse her claim, I am saying that her judgment is such that I can adopt it in my own reasoning. Thus, if she gives me criteria that allow me to distinguish between white oak and cork oak, I can independently take up these criteria, and share them with others.

While it is convenient to separate these three concepts, commitments, entitlements, and endorsements, in order to bring out their specificity, it is important to note that they are not in reality separate but are rather interlocking. When we commit to something, we endorse something and we take on new sets of entitlements, just as when we endorse something, we attribute entitlements and take on commitments. Thus, if our claim that a certain tree is a live oak is endorsed by others, to remain coherent in that endorsement, they must also endorse the claim that it is a hardwood and that it is an Angiosperm, as those claims are implicit in the concept LIVE OAK. By saying that they must also endorse the claims that are implicit in the concept, we highlight the normative structure of concept use. Commitments and entitlements structure the correct use of concepts. Claims are implicit in the concepts and by making them explicit, the individual makes good on their inferential entitlements. By taking responsibility for a judgment the individual is committing to a content. Individuals implicitly keep score of their own commitments and entitlements and those of others. This double scorekeeping allows us to keep track of the general shape of spaces of reasons. This means that certain people will be considered reliable reporters of tree species but not of sports, or of classical French literature, but not of classical Chinese literature. We can thus come to rely on some people for certain types of information and not for other types, and we can see people as being good at some things and not at others in concept use. This is what is meant by saying that sapience has an underlying structure of mutual recognition. We track individuals' use of concepts and recognize when they use them correctly, this allows us to endorse their concept use, which in turn allows us to use their reasons as our owns. At the same time, others are doing the same thing, including with us. When we endorse someone's claim we recognize that we can use that claim in our own reasoning. When we assert a claim, we are committing to its goodness, claiming that others can use it in their reasoning. This is the lynchpin of "the game of giving and asking for reasons". It is precisely giving our reasons and demanding reasons from others that brings out the shape of commitments and entitlements[54].

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[54] By insisting on the way certain commits affect the scores of some individuals and not others, we are lining up with Lance and Kukla's critique that Brandom mostly presents scorekeeping as if it existed in a Platonic space of reasons whereby the abstract changes of scores obscure the concrete content of the embodied individuals that make up these spaces (2008). Their claim is that observatives and vocatives call us to recognize *our* commitments as concretely being our own. This is a critical extension of Brandom's theory and not incompatible with it. Rather they claim that Brandom underemphasizes this aspect. What Weil's theory provides by articulating the kind of semantic content that goes along with the specific commitments of specific categories is an inferential articulation of the ultimate consequences of different commitments, and what concrete individuals are really committing themselves to if they hold this position. This is why Weil's logic of philosophical discourses adds something essential to Brandom's philosophical analysis of language. It is the

Reliable users of certain concepts allow us to gauge the assurance with which we use them ourselves. They will act as potential correctives when we use them poorly and will help us to whet our judgment. Thus, I will be more likely to take the word of a friend who knows a great deal about arboriculture when they tell me that the tree we are looking at is a cork oak than I will of a friend who has never shown any interest in trees before. This does not mean that this second friend does not have this information, rather it means that I have not yet myself made a judgment about their reliability, so I am hesitant to endorse their claim. This shows that judgments are housed in other judgments, which themselves concurrently work at multiple levels. There are judgments that are tracking what my friend says about the tree that is being compared to other instances where we have spoken about plants. There will be, at the same time, judgments tracking my general confidence in their reliability about other non-tree related claims. This will go hand in hand with the judgments that track my own knowledge about trees, and what I myself feel responsible for and entitled to, and whether I feel competent to endorse their claims as good claims.

These judgments themselves all happen underground so to speak, and one thing that discursive practices do is to bring them out. This goes back to the expressivist claims that were made earlier on, that thought is bound by language, and that certain structural claims can themselves become reporting claims. By making the claim that the kind of mental practices that are involved in sapience cannot become visible without language, we are also making the claim that the socially shared "speaking out loud" practices have a certain priority over the internal monologue that we all carry on. It is in these social practices that we are first held accountable for what we say and do, it is only later that we learn to hold ourselves accountable as well. Furthermore, by defending that claims do not initially have reporting roles, but must enter into the game of giving and asking for reasons to come to have reporting roles, we are uncovering a structural particularity of sapience. Before claims have reporting roles, they are subject to greater scrutiny, they are treated as hypotheses. These hypotheses can have lower or greater levels of verisimilitude and credibility. It is at this level, the level of scrutinizing claims, that sapience is fully operational. When claims take on reporting roles, it is because they are endorsed and because the scrutiny is terminated. In other words, the work of sapience is relaxed. Claims can always undergo a new period of scrutiny when new information is introduced, however, normally they have no need to. When the period of scrutiny is over and when claims take on reporting roles, it is at this

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recognition of certain individuals and their specific commitments that allows *me* to see them as a reliable reporter of classical French literature, for instance, but not of classical Chinese literature.

moment that they become part of the structure that holds our conceptual motor in place. It is also at this moment however that they run the risk of becoming hypostasized.

A hypostasized concept that becomes so structural that it resists scrutiny allows us to operate on autopilot so to speak. But it also means that we are no longer sensitive to the different ways that concepts are used by different interlocutors. To recall the distinction that Weil makes between metaphysical categories and philosophical categories. When a metaphysical concept such as that of causality becomes hypostasized according to a specific philosophical category it is resistant to the use of the same metaphysical concept by another philosophical category. Thus, the world of magical thinking that is present in the category of *Certainty* uses the concept of causality, but this use is foreign to someone whose discourse is based in the category of *The Condition*. Nonetheless both are explaining things in relation to the temporal appearance of an antecedent and a consequent that structures the concept of causality. When people are operating on autopilot thanks to a hypostasized grasp of a concept, they no longer make the effort to try and grasp what is meaningful in what their interlocutor says, and thus they refuse their discourse out of hand. This is a major impediment to reasonable practices, because it means that individuals have taken up a position of dogmatic certainty about their claims and that they are no longer operating at the level of sapience. In fact, because hypotheses can take on reporting roles, individuals do not always need to operate at this level, and in fact, even with concepts, individuals can (and probably most often) operate at the level of sentience. This also means that to be a fully-fledged agent, to be sapient, one must not only be able to operate at the level of claims, they must actually do so. They must make their own claims, and evaluate their own claims and those of others. In addition, they must be able to see others as adding something to their own ability to make claims.

Once an individual learns to identify something, such as a live oak, and learns to distinguish it from other things that are similar, such as deciduous oaks or other members of the same family such as beeches and chestnuts, they no longer need to evaluate the criteria that go into the concept, nor to go through the check list of those criteria in order to identify the thing as a live oak: they can do it non-inferentially. Non-inferential identification, which is precisely something human beings share with sentient beings, holds a complicated place in sapient practices. Both humans and non-propositional animals non-inferentially identify things, because both can have reliable differential dispositions towards those things. That is, they can act the specific ways in the presence of the thing. However, both human and non-propositional animals can also make mistakes in their dispositions. They can see food, eat it

and get sick, they can see the surface they walk on and fall into holes or through ice. Both call even see things as errors and correct them, and learn from others through reciprocal processes. The difference is that discursive practices allow us to generalize these corrections and share them indifferently with others. Sapient practices bring out conceptual commitments and entitlements, but normally we do not need them, because normally we have a strong enough grasp on our environment to be able to navigate it without worry. It is there, where our grasp on our conceptual landscape is less sure, that we must reason, argue, and discuss. It is at this point that we play the game of giving and asking for reasons until we have settled back into the instinctive confidence of our concept use. This we do with others, both because it is the others that can show us the limits and weakness of our commitments and entitlements, but also because it is social argumentative practices and the dialogical controls that interlocutors offer when endorsing our commitments that open wide the field of our entitlements. This is the key extension of Brandom's theory of inferentialism. It makes explicit a certain notion of discursive commitment and puts it at the center of language use. The notion of discursive commitment is essential both to explain the way that certain individuals willingly assume the binding aspect of concept use as well as to explain how there can be error in concept use. Error here is not to be seen as crippling to concept use, but rather as one of the main elements that brings discursive practices out into the light of day and that allows sapience to go beyond sentience. It is the recognition of error that demands that concept use correct it. It is this recognition that is at the base of our order of explanation that moves us away from certainty and into a dynamic notion of conceptuality.

3.8   Conclusion – Pragmatism and Eric Weil

In the first chapters I claimed that Eric Weil's *Logic of Philosophy* is a work that confronts us with the problem of understanding as the problem of philosophical discourse. In this chapter I showed that this problem is not unique to him, but has been a central concern to a variety of philosophical positions. In recent years, thanks to philosophers working in the expressivist and the pragmatist idioms, this problem even seems to have come back to the philosophical fore. This chapter, by developing a pragmatist position in opposition to the eclipse narrative, claims that this worry has never actually stopped being present but has been in continuous evolution. It thus seeks to show that it is a perpetual problem that human beings confront *whenever* they seek to understand meaning and understand the meaning of understanding. It thus defends the fallibilist order of explanation and an expressivist picture

of language use as the best options to understand meaning philosophically. In addition to these main commitments, it develops ancillary commitments that I claim add to the overall coherence of these initial positions, namely semantic holism and the priority of discrimination in our cognitive explanations. From there it claims that these positions culminate in an inferential understanding of semantic content. This is because a focus on inference opens a reflection on the structural metavocabularies that go into concept use, and thus has greater explanatory force than reference does. These positions are what I will have in mind for the remainder of the book when I use the shorthand, *pragmatism*.

It is because I see these commitments as present in the various positions which take up the problem of understanding human discourse as *the* philosophical problem that I claim that they are present in the work of Eric Weil. This, he claims is the problem that animates philosophy understood in the largest possible terms. In the chapters that follow, I will make good on the claim that these commitments are present in the Weil's work. I will also develop what I see as being his key achievement in terms of diagnosing this philosophical problem, that is, the fundamental entanglement between language and violence. By developing Weil's arguments concerning this aspect of concept use, I will show how he has much to teach contemporary philosophy, both at large, but also, in the specific branches, such as philosophy of language, epistemology, and philosophy of action.

Chapter 4 PRAGMATISM, EXPRESSIVISM, AND INFERENTIALISM IN THE
LOGIC OF PHILOSOPHY

4.1   Introduction

One of the main claims that is being made in this work is that there are great benefits to be found in reading Weil along pragmatist, expressivist, and inferentialist lines. These positions can help us to better understand some of Éric Weil's key moves in the *Logic of Philosophy*. While I argue (Chapter 5) that Weil's position can also help us to understand certain problems and positions in pragmatist, expressivist, and inferentialist programs, in this chapter I will focus on developing these commitments as they appear in Weil's work. The question that must be asked, now that I have sketched how I read Weil as well as how I connect pragmatism, expressivism, and inferentialism, is: how well do Weil's philosophical program and pragmatism actually fit together? To that end, in this chapter I will be directly developing the aspects of Weil's thought that fit into this program and claim that these aspects are central to a more profound understanding of Weil's work. In the next chapter I will apply this understanding and his presentation of violence to the inferentialist position itself.

The first question that has to be asked how Weil reads pragmatism. The start of Weil's professional career as a philosopher, in the late 1920s, took place at a period when pragmatism was still the dominant philosophical school in the United States. Although the rest of his professional career took place as that influence waned (without disappearing, cf. Chapter 3), Weil, a man of deep and wide culture was not ignorant of pragmatist writers. Notably, it is clear that he at least read William James[55], and he speaks about pragmatism several times in his work. However, his use of pragmatism in his work is particular. Most writers dress up a list of the "classic pragmatists" Peirce, James and Dewey, (Rorty, 1982; Tiercelin, 1993; Rescher, 2005; Talisse & Aikin, 2008; Bernstein, 2010; Cometti, 2010; Brandom, 2011; Bacon, 2012) and then enrich it according to their goals and definitions. Weil refers to pragmatism and "pragmatists", but, with the exception of Hermann Lotze (LP 223, n. 1), he does not describe who these pragmatists are. This is also complicated by the fact that he lumps pragmatism in with historicism, relativism, and skepticism, which he all criticizes as different forms of positivism that "sacrifice the autonomy of moral reflection"

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[55] The Institute Éric Weil, which houses Weil's personal library, has both James's *Pragmatism* and *Varieties of Religious Experiences*, the second of which at least was closely read and annotated.

(PP 41) in order to avoid thinking through the real implications of autonomy, which for Weil is the way that moral reflection gives way to political action. In other words, he seems to either mischaracterize pragmatism, or to dismiss it too easily. Why does he do so?

Pragmatism was introduced into Germany before the First World War, and William James had direct interaction with and a direct influence on Wilhelm Wundt and Ernst Mach[56], but because of the war, any burgeoning interest in pragmatism seems to have disappeared. In fact, after the war the influence of pragmatism was characterized by "a long chain of misunderstandings and misconceptions […], originating from some of the most eminent German philosophers, and passed on with an amazingly uncritical self-assurance to others" (Oehler, 1981: 27). Heidegger, for example is one of these philosophers that was distrustful of pragmatism, but the prevailing thought among the immigrant German philosophers that went to the United States, and thus confronted pragmatism head on is that "the sensational reception accorded to […] [*Sein und Zeit*] by the German philosophical world in 1927 would have been tempered—without detracting from Heidegger's achievement—had Germans been more familiar with the pragmatist tradition (Oehler, 1981: 30). This thought that there is a specific pragmatist strain in Heidegger's work has been reinforced repeatedly by Richard Rorty (Rorty, 1989; 1991) and has been dealt with in great detail by Mark Okrent (1988). What is important for Weil's understanding of pragmatism, is that he came to age philosophically in this context, and he sees Heidegger's work as adding something essential to the history of philosophy. In fact, because he interprets Heidegger as one of the prime representatives of *The Finite,* the second to last concrete category, he sees Heidegger's work as an essential modern step that allows a full grasp of the concept of *Action* and to the reflection on the possibility of meaning itself. But because of this historical context, he may have merely adopted, the "uncritical misunderstandings" that where prevalent in the German academic context of his time. Nonetheless, he may also have absorbed (in a way similar to Heidegger, and perhaps by way of Heidegger) a certain pragmatist bent. His characterization of *praxis* certainly gives credence to this possibility. For Weil, praxis is "the activity of the man who wants to act reasonably in nature" (LP 41) and thus it always precedes theory. Humanity, "everywhere and always, has lived in and by *praxis*" (LP 42), and both humanity's production of meaning in language as *poiesis*, and its discursive grasp of this meaning (and of itself) constantly "refers back to *praxis*" (LP 43). Weil, like the pragmatists,

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[56] It is interesting to note that Weil claims that the "*Methodologists*, such as Mach or H. Poincaré" (LP 223, n. 1) share certain commitments with pragmatists, namely the way that methodological reflection opens the way to scientific progress.

builds his thought out of a constant reflection on concrete human situations and the concrete human practices that are found in these situations. These practices, as meaningful practices, are seen as the throbbing heart of philosophical reflection. Therefore, according to the characterization given of pragmatism in the last chapter, Weil already fulfills one of the necessary conditions, which is the constant reflection on concrete human practices. However, it remains to be seen if he fills the most important condition that I am here defending as making up pragmatism, which is the introduction of fallibilism as the central meta-commitment which governs its order of explanation.

4.2   The Role Error in the *Logic of Philosophy*

In Chapter 2, I touched on the jump from *Certainty* to *Discussion*. Therein I claimed that discussion plays the essential role of relativizing beliefs. It is only once beliefs are relativized that they become claims. Difference and doubt are thus essential elements of claim-making. In other words, if there were only one thing to do, all would do it, if there were one thing to know, all would know it. Without difference and doubt there is no need to distinguish between knowledge and error, between claims that are well-grounded and those that are not. Without multiple reasonable choices, discussion never starts, because there is no doubt about what to do. This doubt leads to the demand of justification that opens the argumentative moves that happen in discussion. According to Weil, *Discussion*'s goal is to settle debate, to reset the bases of belief, to end enquiry so that people can get back to the business of living. However, this idea of an end of inquiry, where the dust settles and all is clear and known and justified is also for Weil merely a nostalgia for lost certainty, because a world once lost is never reclaimed. I already insisted that the relativization of beliefs that happens in the jump from *Certainty* to *Discussion* should not be confused with relativism as a philosophical position. Rather this jump is a condition for making claims of coherence and universality.

The philosophical position of relativism is defined by the incommensurability of criteria between different contents, whether it be moral relativism, epistemological relativism or semantic relativism. Weil, by arguing that there are different discursive centers that are irreducible, would fall into relativism unless he were able to offer substantial criteria to distinguish between these positions and show their coordination. In some sense, this is a goal of the logic of philosophy. Yes, some discourses are irreducible, but they can nonetheless be compared by a set of criteria. That is, they are irreducible but not incommensurable. This is why the logic of philosophy is presented as a suite of categories

155

that make growing claims of comprehensiveness. Weil shows both the possibility of multiple forms of comprehensiveness within which claims of universality and coherence make sense *and* how concrete individuals can move between these forms of comprehensiveness. Weil thus wants to defend a position that puts plurality front and center, while not folding into relativism.

In a manuscript dating from around 1939, which comprises structural notes and ideas for the *Logic of Philosophy*, Weil sketches some key positions that he would work through in the book. Notably this text shows some of the difficulties that Weil hoped to resolve in the *Logic*. One such difficulty bears on his starting point. He looks to overcome the problems linked to two common starting points in the philosophical tradition, subjective interest and a metaphysical concept of truth. Weil states, "If we start with interest, we start with a for-itself that only leads to action. If we start with truth, we remain in an in-itself that is merely identical to itself, One will need to start with the fact of man thinking about the false and the possibility of error."(PR.II.228). This is important for two reasons. First, it shows that Weil seeks to avoid a possible tension that leads to either a purely instrumental theory of action or of a theory of truth that folds into a notion of Being. Second, it shows that his solution is to focus on an order of explanation that places human error at its center.

The reason that Weil seeks to avoid the tension between an instrumental theory of action and an ontologically grounded theory of truth can be redrawn according to Weil's commitment to a plurality of human discourses as the distinction between relativism and skepticism. Eric Weil's goal is to navigate past one without falling into the other, to avoid the gaping maws of both Charybdis and Scylla. The problem with purely instrumental theories is that they collapse into subjectivism and relativism. When the individual's interest is the sole criteria for acting, action becomes a solely subjective endeavor. Each interest becomes an equally valid reason to act, thus leading to the philosophical form of relativism: the criterion of each interest is incommensurable with that of all others since it is grounded in personal interest which can be understood as free from all dialogical control. On the other side, there is the problem of skepticism. Ontological theories of truth lead to skepticism because the gap between the object outside the mind in the world and the representation of that object inside the mind can never be overcome. The link between these two things can always be attacked as arbitrary and thus can always undermine any possible certainty and set of a tilt-a-whirl of doubt. This creates a problem because, as I stated before, Weil thinks that doubt and difference, the roots of philosophical skepticism and philosophical relativism, are necessary conditions in order for the jump from *Certainty* to *Discussion* to be possible,

however he also insists that these *necessary* conditions are far from being sufficient. Rather the jump (and every reprise of this jump) depend on specific historical conditions. Nonetheless, without doubt and difference playing a productive role, philosophical inquiry would never be born out of the naïve attitude of *Certainty*.

As already mentioned, the attitude of *Discussion* alone (and not dialogical practices more largely construed) shows itself unsatisfactory to reestablish certainty. The type of discussion that happens under the philosophical category that bears that name—the discussion illustrated in Socratic dialogue—establishes nothing[57]. Rather it leaves the initial questions unresolved while opening more questions. In other words, one question leads to another, and to another, and to another. The original question, which needed to be resolved in order to know what to do, leads to an interminable discussion. Classic foundationalist claims about knowledge aim to stop this infinite regress by providing something external to discussion, something that itself cannot be put into doubt, something that is immediately known and understood. In other words, foundationalist claims seek to *ground* discussion in something that can be immediately and non-inferentially admitted as being true. However, because one of the main points of Weil's work is to show that there is a real plurality of discourses that can be organized in a coherent manner, he cannot accept this foundational claim because of its monism.

A key feature of monism is its absolutism. The jump from *Certainty* to *Discussion* happens precisely when the original monism of *Certainty* is no longer operable. Before this jump, the world is a single unified meaningful whole. When the single unified meaningful world falls to the wayside, more and more distinctions are made that are translated into the various domains. These domains give rise to epistemological distinctions, ontological distinctions, semantic distinctions. Foundationalist programs seek to re-articulate this unity by grounding discourse on a single condition. Foundationalism's monism is put into peril by the existence of other discourses and monism finds itself in a weak position. It is far easier to show that one possibility is wrong than to show that only one possibility is correct. The monist discourse must show that the world cannot be organized in any other way, otherwise monism collapses into relativism or skepticism. That is, if there is no single discourse that can be said to be all-encompassing, then monism fails because there are a plurality of discourses. However, as long as these discourses claim to be coherent on their own but are incommensurable between them, the absolutist claim risks to become relativist. And if all

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[57] Even though we call this Socratic dialogue it is merely exemplified by Socrates. For Weil, this type of dialogue characterizes the whole practice of discussion in Greek city-states of Antiquity.

are refused precisely because of the recognition of the real plurality then the absolute claim risks falling into skepticism.

Weil recognizes the dual dangers and his solution is not to overcome them in order to rule them out but rather to integrate them by showing the productive role they play. He shows how the failure of beliefs at the most fundamental level, the level where beliefs allow individuals to succeed in their endeavors, relativizes the beliefs themselves. This failure that leads to relativization by recognizing differences has a world-disclosing function. The shape of our concepts become visible thanks to difference. This difference, in turn, causes doubt in the well-foundedness of those concepts that before were not even visible and reveals them as making up one human possibility among many. This highlights the free choice to understand. On their own, argumentative practices can lead to full-blown philosophical relativism or skepticism if the individual chooses not to give up on the absolute validity of their own position. Argumentative practices though also stand as a bulwark to relativism and skepticism while profiting from their productive roles. These productive roles are present in the ability to form coherent discourse from older failures. This shows that the effectiveness of discourse itself is built off the failure of certainty. In other words, failure is real inasmuch as discourse is real and failure only happens in light of discourse, in light of things being held as certain.

One can accept the failure of discourse that leads to skepticism and relativism, just as one can refuse it. Both are real possibilities. Many a philosopher have bitten many a bullet and have accepted skepticism or relativism. In fact, each moment of the historical development of philosophical discourse, each of the philosophical categories, has its own skeptics and relativists. When one does not accept skepticism and relativism, it means that they are still committed to the possibility of a single unified discourse that involves the possibility of the thing that the skeptic denies, the possibility of knowledge, of values, of meaning, and the thing that the relativist denies, the criteria by which we can judge different possibilities. I said that the movement from the attitude of *Certainty* to that of *Discussion* destroyed the faith in the certainty of one's own position. This does not however mean that it leads to the philosophical positions of skepticism and relativism. Rather, they are the unstable terminal points of two necessary aspects of human reasonability. Doubt and comparison are essential dialogical controls that are both used in discussion in order to find the best positions.

The experience of failure teaches the individual—philosopher or otherwise—that certainty can be put into doubt; the experience of other people having different reasons for

doing things leads the philosopher to compare their position to that of others. It is a bit puerile—though understandable—to move from one's own failure, and one's own awareness that there are multiple reasonable positions, to a claim that all knowledge is impossible and that there is no position that can unify the divergent positions. Weil's solution, as I have stated above, is to refuse an instrumental theory of action built on interest, and to refuse an ontologically grounded theory of truth, for a position built on the reality of the possibility of human error in order to ground the formal unity of discourse. In other words he takes this failure as a learning lesson instead of as the world's failure. What pushes the individual to continue to seek a reasonable position, when their previously reasonable position has failed? For Weil, the individual makes a choice, but a choice that is confirmed at every corner.

Weil notes that the attitude of certainty accompanies every concrete attitude. He states: "Man always lives in a world. This is the anthropological expression of certainty. There are no detached objects, isolated values, independent thoughts; everything is linked" (LP 116). The individual is only capable of living in the certainty of their world because they do not face failure massively. When they do, it wears away at more than just certainty, it wears away at meaning itself. When it has sufficiently worn away at meaning, the individual collapses into *Nonsense*. They live their life as meaningless. This is because there are no concepts to play a structuring role. Without certainty, concepts turn idly. Certainty thus plays a productive role in structuring commitments, it allows them to resist scrutiny. Weil notes that "in daily life, far from addressing oneself to the theory, we don't even ask questions. The concrete certainty according to which this naturally follows that is so strong that it isn't even felt. A failure, an unforeseen event, is needed so that it shows itself lacking" (LP 117). So, failure, for Weil, marks the entry into the philosophical attitude, but as he also notes, the bulk of our lives happens in certainty, and thus outside of the philosophical attitude. Weil highlights this when he goes on to say, "What's the most certain, the best "known" science, is at the same time what is the farthest from consciousness: know-how. If man recognizes the essential of his world in and through his life, he isn't necessarily capable of designating it in his theory" (LP 117). It is know-how, the implicit certainty that the individual exhibits and experiences every day, that keeps them from accepting the route of skepticism and relativism. This is because skepticism and relativism are of a piece with the philosophical attitude and most people spend most of their lives outside of this attitude. This insight is pivotal in Weil's work. Thus, in abandoning certainty as an absolute criterion, Weil defends a form of fallibilism similar to the one that animates the classic pragmatists. It is an order of

explanation that places human error at its center, however into doing so he transforms the notion of error.

For Weil, error is always intra-discursive and retrospective. It is intra-discursive because what is considered to be false, to be erroneous, depends on the fundamental commitments that are provided by a category, that an individual grasps by having an attitude. For Weil, the tradition has characterized error as a "deficient form […] of reality" (LP 17). However, this presentation of error, for Weil, is problematic. For error to be error, it must true, that is, it must truly be error and thus it "errors finds itself included in truth" (LP 67). This is the basis of the category of *The True and the False*, where what is true and what is false mix in discourse. Before discourse nothing is false and nothing is impossible, both what is false and what is impossible is based on a necessity that is determined in discourse itself. Thus error is seen as what is inessential to a discourse, as what keeps the discourse from grasping the world coherently, and the goal of the philosopher is to purify "his discourse of these errors which disfigure it and which keep it from being reasonable and from grasping truth" (LP 32). The pre-philosophical attitude, such as we recognize it, is marked by its certainty. For this pre-philosophical attitude, and in a constantly evolving present tense, in its progression of nows, "error doesn't exist: the present (barring a projection into a future that allows watching, by anticipation, the present as a past) only knows certainty" (LP 110). One of the things that marks the move from the pre-philosophical attitude to the philosophical attitude is its awareness of the possibility of error. However, within the structure of the logic of philosophy, error is always retrospective for another reason. When the individual moves out of one attitude into another, when they refuse the coherence of one attitude because it does not comprehensively grasp what they want to understand, they grasp the older attitude as a category. In this way, they grasp what didn't satisfy them in the older category as error. Thus, by presenting error as intra-discursive and retrospective, he transforms error into a retrospective grasp of the explanatory mechanism of dissatisfaction. It is this mechanism that allows us to grasp the movement of the logic of philosophy itself. Thus, in this way, we can interpret Weil's insistence that philosophy starts from thinking the false and from the possibility as error within the logic of philosophy as the way that the individual grasps their dissatisfaction in order to transform it into a coherent discourse. As already noted, dissatisfaction on its own is insufficient to account for the movement of the logic of philosophy. Individuals can always be dissatisfied without seeking to grasp that dissatisfaction coherently, because they are always within an attitude, that is structured by a coherent discourse. Thus, philosophy starts from the possibility of claiming that this

unsatisfying coherence is not just unsatisfying, but also misses something, therefore it does not state the whole truth. Somewhere, it is wrong. The error of *The Condition* for example, from the point of view of *The Conscious*, is not in the way it describes nature, it is that it ignores the free self-determination of the moral consciousness.

Thus the philosophical progression of the logic of philosophy reaches the truth that the non-philosophical attitude always knew, that error is "nothing more than what causes the failure in the pursuit of satisfactions" (LP 17). This failure highlights the other reason that Weil interprets error as starting in dissatisfaction. The concrete categories themselves are not fallibilist, it is only the formal reflection on the possibility of meaning that allows for a fallibilist position. Each concrete category recognizes the error of a previous category, but only because they have another discourse. When these categories reprise *The Discussion* they relativize their beliefs, thanks to a meta-commitment to reasonability. They accept that their position may be wrong, that it has to prove itself. Thus, in a sense, each attitude becomes fallibilist in order to reject a coherent discourse that is already in place, but loses its fallibilism as soon as it has grasped its dissatisfaction coherently, as soon as it has re-grounded its certainty. However, this leads to an apparent conflict in Weil's position. How can Weil be fallibilist if each discourse's goal is to re-ground certainty? Weil claims to have found a discourse that encompasses the possibility of discourse, and in doing so, how does he avoid not just creating another super-discourse, that is blind to its own possibility of failure, that allows the man Éric Weil to understand the meaning in his life, but that goes no further? This is a problem because even though Éric Weil tries to understand the possibility of dialogue between discourses, he unites all of them into a single discourse which seems itself to necessarily absorb all other discourse. In other words, how does Weil avoid falling prey to the very problem he is trying to understand?

The answer to this question must be found in Weil's notion of systematic openness. I have already claimed that Weil's theory opens the door to a practice of philosophy. By positing *Action* as the last concrete discourse, and by positing a formal "transcendental" reflection on meaning and on the possibility of a life lived as a meaningful unity, Weil highlights the way that, in order to have a concrete discourse that allows one to be oriented in the world and in their thought, the individual must reprise the totality of discourse in order to apply it to their concrete situation. This applies to Éric Weil's position in the logic of philosophy itself. Thus, what is characterized in pragmatism as fallibilism, is characterized in the *Logic of Philosophy* as openness. In order to have a coherent discourse that grasps the possibility of coherent discourses, that grasps the possibility of philosophical possibility, this

discourse must be open. It must seek to grasp the meanings that individuals articulate in the world and see them as meaningful, thus as possibly adding something to one's own discourse.

We cannot abandon certainty without abandoning meaning, and we only look for it because it is everywhere. This opens what, following Weil, we can call the paradox of certainty. According to Weil, certainty only becomes a criterion in the face of doubt and difference because doubt and difference disclose the world. They allow its features to become visible. Certainty only becomes a criterion because we are no longer certain, but precisely because we are trying to establish certainty, our research is oriented. This orientation is itself based on a new certainty that is not yet disclosed. Thus one can only *become* philosophically certain about a claim by the loss of a pre-philosophical certainty because it is the loss of pre-philosophical certainty that allows the claim to be tested. But the claim can only be tested if one is certain. Thus, the paradox of certainty is that the individual is looking for something they already have. What they are looking for, this know-how, this essential, is found in what Weil calls "the fluent activity of daily life" (LP 117). This should recall the place-holder conception of metaphysics that I presented in the last chapter. What the paradox of certainty shows is that science must take failure into account in order to test for it, but the object or claim that is being tested is always limited in scope because it depends on a deeper certainty to be in place. The paradox of certainty is thus the key to understanding Weil's fallibilism and also allows us to compare it with Peirce's fallibilism.

4.3   The Paradox of Certainty

In the last chapter I noted how Peirce built his fallibilism in contrast to Descartes. Descartes starts philosophical inquiry by claiming that everything must be put into doubt, therefore he tacitly assigns doubt a critical productive role even though he later wants to deny this productive role by excising doubt completely. Peirce, and Weil, also assign doubt a productive role, however they differ from Descartes because both refuse hyperbolic doubt. This is because they also assign certainty a productive role, Peirce with his insistence on reasoned doubt in the face of hyperbolic doubt and Weil with the paradox of certainty. Descartes, by turning certainty into a static result, limits the use we make of certainty to orient our thought and thus refuses to give certainty any productive role. For Weil certainty, along with doubt, is part of the dynamic conceptual motor that allows for inquiry. It is the mixture of doubt and certainty in their productive roles that allows discourse to jump into

Discussion and which inaugurates the philosophical attitude. For Weil, however, it is only certainty and not doubt that can attain categorial purity. There are two reasons that skepticism does not reach categorial purity, one practical and one logical. First, categorical purity depends on recognizing something that is essential in the *fluent activity of everyday life* and philosophical skepticism is born in the philosophical attitude, thus outside of this fluent activity. In this way skepticism is always parasitic on the pure categorial form that it is looking to refute. Here we can again think of the distinction David Hume makes between the philosophical and the vulgar. The philosophical can posit a pure form of doubt, but the vulgar overrides it in the practical actions of one's daily life, in their fluent activity. Thus practically skepticism never reaches categorial purity. Logically, skepticism doesn't reach categorical purity either, as the paradox of certainty shows. Skepticism as a philosophical position says everything must be doubted, but as a philosophical position, it is sure of where it stands. Thus, skepticism only exists in the attitude of certainty and as such contradicts itself. As Weil notes, this doesn't convince the skeptic, but this is precisely because they are certain. A*ll* discursive commitments are confirmed in a free choice and the skeptic, like any other individual, can decide to remain in their position. We must take the productive role that Weil gives to certainty seriously. It is this productive role, this recognition of our own certainty in our activity, that allows philosophers to refuse skepticism and relativism and to seek understanding and unity. By recognizing the productive role of certainty we are already on the path to resolving the problem of the multiplicity of discourses and the possibility of failure.

It is as an attitude that certainty has a productive role, this role however is invisible to the category because the category has not yet accepted the productive role of doubt and difference. In the category of *Certainty* the world appears as a united whole for the first time. But, because this united whole is particular, held only by this community or that, *Certainty* also sees difference for the first time without recognizing the role that it will come to play in the relativization of beliefs. In *Certainty*, before the acceptance of the relativization of beliefs in *Discussion*, speaking is nothing more than a statement of fact. Weil notes, "Certainty is so sure of itself that it doesn't understand how a man could not accept it; there must be something in him other than merely opinion's way of speaking, a quality that doesn't depend on his thought and his language, a stubborn and wicked *character*, a *force* foreign to his humanity, a psychic, physical, astrological *misfortune*, an evil *demon*, the *devil*: to certainty, man *must* be open to its content" (LP 112). The plurality of discursive contents is recognized in certainty but it also poses a very real existential threat. This threat must be

eliminated. Since the world is seen as a united whole for the first time in discourse, the failure of this discourse signifies the end of *their* world, which for them is the equivalent of the end of *the* world. The individual's certainty depends on the ontological and metaphysical claims made in discourse that structure the world. Without these claims, they are at a loss to understand how the world could be meaningful, because for them it is precisely this content of discourse that gives the world meaning. Here we can see how two separate aspects of what I said in Chapter 2 come back with full force. First, the category of *Discussion* plays a key role in relativizing the claims of certainty that all these different forms of life make. Second, the jump between one category and the next is always free and unjustified. It is thus only once the individual has passed to *Discussion* that they can see that the failure of their discourse was not *the* end of the world, but only *an* end to *their* world. In *Certainty*, however, the end of *one's* world remains identical to the end of *the* world.

The attitude of certainty sees these external influences, the demon or devil, as what keeps them from being able to access truth. Thus certainty, like all other pure attitudes presents a universal character. All individuals can access truth if the path is cleared for them. It is just sometimes the obstructions are too large or too imposing for them to see it immediately, by intuition, thus the only way to guarantee that each individual has access to this path is to clear the way by force, to level the path by any means necessary so that the unfortunate, who do not yet see that they are in the false, can be led to truth. The problem is that certainty reinforces certainty. If an individual is certain to be right all they do is push their opponent to double down and dig their heels deeper into their own certainty. This blinds people to the possibility of seeing opponents as potential dialogue partners that have something to contribute to their conceptual content. Even seeing them as possible sources of dialogical controls becomes difficult. As Weil says, "the man of certainty only knows one way of behaving towards the one who doesn't share his truth: if the sermon doesn't force the adhesion of his fellow man […] there remains only the destruction of the infidel who, by his very obstinacy, has shown that he is man only in appearance and in reality is the most dangerous of animals" (LP 113).

The jump to *Discussion* thus plays a key role because it allows people to relativize their claims. However, it does not just change the individual's posture towards content, from certain to fallible. The jump to *Discussion* also plays a key role in altering one's interaction with others. Because it opens dialogical controls, others are seen as equal and autonomous partners who add something to discourse. This is precisely the reason that discussion fixes dialogue as the domain of non-violence. One does not act violently towards an autonomous

equal who adds something to their lives. Weil, thus claims that dialogue is impossible without a commitment to non-violence (LP 24). This affirmation, that non-violence is the domain of dialogue, highlights the importance of the claim that Weil makes that the jump between each category is free and unjustified. It also highlights the difference between the relativization of claims in discussion and the philosophical position of relativism. In other words, the incommensurability of discourses is different from the local relativization of claims. The local relativization of claims structures the possibility of grasping multiple point of views and thus is implicit in the structure of discussion. It is implicit in the structure of discussion because it is this relativization that allows dialogue partners to see each other as indeed being partners. This is the crux of Weil's claim that non-violence structures the domain of dialogue. Without this relativization, individuals see each other not as potential dialogue partners, but as potential opponents. *Discussion* presupposes that for the most part, the parties concerned agree. Dialogue (and logic) is in place to settle the remaining questions. *Discussion* thus alters discursive practices because it alters the role that others have, they are taken to be essential.

The relationship between partners and opponents is subtler philosophically than it seems at first sight. It is easy to see one as a positive relationship and the other as a negative one, however, in accordance to the Hegelian influence that is present throughout Weil's work, it is more correct to see them as dialectic, and thus the poles of positivity and negativity can easily be reversed. Weil ironically quips, "Individuals struggle because they agree, as François I was in actual agreement with Charles V about the value of Milan" (LP 289). Weil uses the historical example of the rivalry between these two kings during the so-called Italian Wars to show how their deep difference revealed a deeper agreement. Both kings agreed that wielding a strong influence on European affairs was essential, what they disagreed on was who should wield it and how it should be wielded. The struggle to control Milan can thus be seen as representative of that agreement. According to Weil's reading, both saw it to be of central strategic importance and thus again showed the depth of their agreement. Here, it is the opposition that allows the contested aspect of their agreement to come to light. Conflict, by revealing what is essential to a disagreement thus also reveals what is essential because of the disagreement. Conflict and difference reveal what is to be overcome. This is another way of understanding the crucial jump from *Certainty* to *Discussion*. Weil notes that "We can demand what virtue is, but it is therefore necessary to be in agreement as to the existence of virtue; one can contradict another about the sacred character of this act or that phenomenon only when the adversaries have agreed on the fact that there is a sacred" (LP

25). *Discussion* thus seeks to render this disagreement productive. For this to happen, the common ground must be recognized as such. By focusing on the difference, certainty fetters the search for a common ground. Precisely because seeking a common ground involves recognition, one must see opponents as partners linked in their conflict. Their conflict itself is what reveals what is essential both to their disagreement as well as to their agreement.

When individuals accept the possibility of seeing opponents as partners, they legitimize their place in discourse and thus also recognize them as making up the same community. Discussion binds people to discursive norms which are only recognized if individuals see themselves as being bound by the same customs and traditions, as being equals before the normative weight of better reasons. Weil thematizes this community as initially being understood as the community of "true men" (LP 26) as genuine participants in the dialogue that resolves conflict[58]. This form of recognition is defined by non-violence. Certainty leads to violence when violence is seen as a solution to resolving conflict. If one decides to avoid violence, there must be another way to settle conflict. Weil uses *Discussion* to show how argumentative practices become a viable way of avoiding violence to settle conflict. This does nothing to change the fact however that one must freely enter into argumentative practices for them to hold any sway. It is only once individuals freely enter argumentative practices that they are willing to accept the common character that is under discussion. Conflict shows what is essential, but the goal of argumentative practices is to end conflict. In order for argumentative practices to come to term and to thus settle the conflict, all recourse to violence must be refused. That is, individuals must be willing to abandon violence. This however is merely a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. There is no sufficient condition. There is no sufficient condition, because nothing guarantees that people won't choose violence. Philosophy is taken to be the free choice to refuse incoherence and to seek understanding, but this also means that the free choice to opt for violence is just as much always present. This opposition of free choices reminds us that there is no sufficient condition possible. Necessity, possibility, sufficient conditions, all happen inside of discourse and thus do not affect the decision to enter discourse.

Individuals find themselves in a paradoxical position, they are looking to avoid being submitted to violence, but in order to do so, they must themselves be willing to abandon

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[58] As already noted, it is not Weil that characterizes them as true men, it is the Greeks who characterized themselves as such in relation to the non-Greek "barbarians" who were not true men precisely because they recognized another sacred from the Greeks and because their relationship to the Greeks was mediated by violence.

violence. They must be willing to abandon violence with no guarantee that others will abandon it. This position is built not out of a single refusal of violence, but out of a continual refusal of recourse to further violence. Individuals have already shown themselves partially willing to do this by looking to resolve a conflict by non-violent means. But in order to recognize opponents as equal dialogue partners, one must willingly abandon violence from within violence. Thus, conflict reveals a deep agreement, but it only does so by first presenting itself as conflict. This conflict only comes about because the attitude in which every individual lives is that of certainty. But there is naïve certainty and there is what Weil calls reasonable certainty (LP 33) but which we can also call *mature* certainty[59]. This allows us to give a second formulation to the paradox of certainty: one only arrives at mature certainty by abandoning the violence that defines naïve certainty. In its first formulation, the paradox of certainty states that things can only be put into doubt because we have a deeper certainty. We lose certainty and we find it again, but when we find it again we seek to justify it. In order to do so, we must be willing to abandon this certainty and many others and put them to the test. But we can only put them to the test because we *are* certain of our new content. Thus we open the relativization of certainty in order to compare different certainties from within certainty itself. When we have accomplished this task and justified our certainty, we have transformed it. This transformation reveals a deeper certainty that grounds the one that had been naïve. In the second formulation, this deeper certainty is only disclosed because of the conflict that forces one to see the possibility of error that defines the initial formulation. Thus, the paradox of certainty is only a paradox for people who are reflecting on it from naïve certainty and who want to resolve conflicts non-violently. For the person who has found mature certainty there is no paradox because they have done the work to understand themselves and the world. For the violent individual, there is no paradox either, but for different reasons. There is no paradox because there is only another determined content that is not their own and that must be eliminated. In some ways this second formulation of the paradox is more primordial than the first, however, logically they happen simultaneously. In order to be recognized as an equal partner by someone, one must recognize what that individual has to say as potentially valid and as potentially true. Without this, discussion is not the means of resolving conflict. This means that one must willingly abandon their certainty and their violence in order to recognize their partners as having potentially good reasons, reasons that help to establish mature certainty. Here is the greatest

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[59] I am calling this development *mature* in recognition of certain traits that are similar to Kenneth Westphal's development of the notion of mature judgment (Westphal, 2003).

paradox. The paradox of certainty only exists for the person who is caught between naïve certainty and mature certainty. What reflection shows is that this person caught between naïve certainty and mature certainty turns out to be all of us, again and again. We can always choose to understand and we can always choose violence because our lives are constantly wrought by new situations and our understanding is continually surpassed by our own hand. What we do is the material of the human world. The question is, what does mature certainty look like to Weil?

The paradox of certainty deals with how violence is to be overcome by means of argumentative practices, and for Weil, the partial resolution to this paradox is to be found in the category of *Action*. It is in this category that the individuals understand their concrete situation and look to transform the world in such a way that individuals no longer need to turn to violence in order to settle disputes. They look to transform a violent world so that individuals can see themselves as belonging to a world that is reasonably organized. This resolution always remains partial however because it is always in a violent world that the individual seeks to act reasonably, and because as a free choice, it is itself violent (that is particular and recognized as such). This world needs to be reasonably organized because that is the condition for the individual to carry out reasonable action. This also shows that the world is already reasonably organized, precisely because in *Action* the individual acts reasonably. What they find though is that its organization is only partially coherent, and so the goal of action is to make the partially coherent world ever more so. Reasonably action thus happens against the background of the partial coherence of a reasonably ordered world that the individual seeks to change by presenting a discourse that allows others to grasp what is still incoherent about the world's organization. This formulation is in fact just a way of unpacking what goes into the concept of a *pseudo-nature* (which is Weil's preferred term for the concept of a second-*nature*), a concept that plays a critical role in the category of *Action* and formally in *Meaning* and in Weil's philosophical project in general.

The pseudo-nature governs our social lives, it is what causes us to live our social lives as external to us and imposed upon us from the outside. It is the depository of ancient discourse, of former actions, of historic organizations, of accepted norms. It is what appears as given to the individual when they enter into the world and it is what they can refuse in their free activity. It is what overlays the natural world and with it, what makes up human reality. It appears to us as given because as Weil notes, "it is not the same man that thinks reality and that constitutes it" (LP 402). In this way, the pseudo-nature makes up the naïve certainty that the philosopher looks to overcome. It appears to the individual as external, as

inhuman, as hostile, and as violent. Mature certainty thus presents itself as the recognition of this pseudo-nature as the condition for human action, as being violent, but constituted of a violence that can be grasped and reduced, as being hostile, but hospitable enough for humanity to make a home there, as inhuman when it is seen as external, but as inimitably human when it is recognized as something that makes us the kind of creatures that we are. This *pseudo-nature* is not just the domain of individual's activity, (the interaction of a conditioned thing with the other natural conditions existing in the world), it is the domain of their action (the transformation of their activity through the reasonably application of discourse). Here action is acting for reasons, and thus the question bearing on how reasons are constituted becomes all important. The transformation of the world in *Action* is undertaken to create the real social and historical conditions that allow every individual to present their action as reasonable, and thus as a reason to act for every other individual. Thus the action is social, not only because its target is the rest of humanity, but also because it targets the understanding that humanity has of itself and of its place in the world, it targets human understanding. In other words it targets the normative structures that allows individuals to understand the world in which they live so that their activity becomes action, so that their action in turn seeks to act on the normative categorial structures that allow the real to be grasped in discourse. Mature certainty thus here reveals itself to be what Weil would also call *wisdom* or "the certainty of understanding and of reasonable action" (LP 442).

The paradox of certainty disappears when it is resolved in the mature certainty of action *or* when it is left unseen in the naïve certainty that precedes the relativization of belief in the jump to *Discussion*. It is a paradox when individuals recognize their certainty but are led to undermine it through philosophical discourse. By recognizing the possibility of error at the beginning of his philosophical enterprise, and by interpreting it according to the explanatory mechanism of dissatisfaction, Weil gives us a key to resolve the paradox as it presents itself in our own lives. In other words it is only partially resolved in *Action* because the category shows the plurality of ways that it can be resolved in the concrete action of the concrete individual in their concrete life. It is only fully resolved by me and by you when we take a stand and know what to do because we have a discourse that holds together. Error is thus not as the deficient form of reality, it is the recognition that a concrete individual makes that a given form of coherence does not satisfy them. It is a failure of discourse in a world structured by discourse and it is real. It not an illusion. It is a self-standing part of human activity in the real world. As such, it is what allows individuals to orient their activity

and their thought. This is what is sought in coherent beliefs, a way to avoid error because of its *real* consequences, a way to find a satisfying discourse, that allows the individual to grasp the world and their life concretely. But error also shows possibility as possibility. It allows us to doubt our discourse and to compare it to others. It allows us to stop seeing the world as given in an a-temporal sense and to see it as made up of conditions which we can shape and alter. Weil recognizes that each person has a hand in making the human world and so argues that we must recognize both the possibility of success and of failure in individuals' discourses and in their practices.

Weil's fallibilism is built around the recognition that we cannot step outside of human conditions and outside of our social pseudo-nature to find an unchanging eternal nature of abstract laws underneath. Individuals can constantly be dissatisfied with what presents itself as given in this pseudo-nature and can lift themself up to refuse it and to refashion it and to make the world over, over and again. Fallibilism (understood as openness) is thus a keystone of mature certainty. In mature certainty, the individual recognizes the place they have in redefining the conditions they found in the world and they understand the scope of their action in its limits and its breadth because they recognize the place of error and doubt in their certainty. People recognize error in the fluent activity of their daily lives and this is why Weil defends its place in philosophy. For philosophy to understand itself philosophically, it must constantly hem closer and closer to actual human practices. Error allows individuals to recognize the limits of beliefs and the scope of discourse. The scope of discourse is important because each discourse is defined by the scope of their essential and their consequent inessential and because these discourses are compared in terms of their relative scope and ordered based on the coherence and universality of that relative scope. Fallibilism plays a central role in allowing internal and comparative scopes to be articulated because it sees discourse as a dynamic process that constantly seeks to recognize what is amidst different claims of what must be. This distinction, as I said earlier, is one the reasons to defend an expressivist reading of the *Logic of Philosophy*.

4.4   Weil's Expressivism

In the last chapter, expressivism was contrasted with representationalism. However, in Éric Weil's defense of expressivism, he does not directly critique representationalism, in fact, this concept almost never appears in the *Logic of Philosophy*, and when it does it is never defended as a primitive explanatory concept, but is always a mediated position. Thus

in order to present Weil's expressivism, it cannot merely be contrasted with representationalism, but must be looked for in the distinction he makes between language and discourse. For Weil, language is the creation of meaning born out of human spontaneity while discourse is the coherent grasp of meaning in language[60]. The evolution of discourse involves multiple stages and different distinguishing ruptures. This does not mean that Weil never deals with the concept of representation in his work, but rather he assigns it a specific role. Representation, for Weil, is a metaphysical category, and thus is a concept that is used in different ways by different categories. We can see that Weil assigns representation such a multifaceted role in the way he presents the concept in the one text, "De la dialectique objective" (PR.I.59-68), where he does deal with it head on.

In this text, Weil defines representation according to the tradition as the formal being of a thing in itself. This, for Weil, traces the use of representation from Descartes to Kant. This is because for Weil, Kant, with his distinction between knowing and thinking, opened a path to a radical transformation of the concept. Weil treats representation insofar as it is what we designate as an object. Under this definition, representations contradict each other precisely because they lack permanence, thus discursively, the representation is merely the formal characteristic of what is left over of the object as we grasp it. In their changing nature, phenomena can't be identified, but the thing in itself must be conceived of as permanent and immutable. Thus all change happens on the side of the subject and not on the side of the object. In other words, for the tradition, "[i]t is not formal reality that is contradictory, it is our ideas about reality" (PR.I.60). For Weil, this creates a gap between the individual and reality, between a subject and an object. However this gap only exists as long as the individual wants to *know* objectively, that is, it only happens in philosophical and scientific discourse and not in the fluent activity of daily life. More precisely, the *theoretical* gap between the individual and reality does not happen in the fluent activity of their daily life, at least not the way it happens in discourse. In their daily life, the individual faces the resistance of the real to their action and to their desires, and thus in this sense the "subject" recognizes and understands that there are "objects" that resist them, that stand in their way (in the Latin sense of *ob-jectus* what is thrown down before them). In regimented discourse this happens in two different ways: in scientific discourse this gap is a corrective to theory; in philosophical discourse it is an unbreachable distance that separates the individual from

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[60] Because of this division, the imperative, the vocative, the observative and other purely instrumental uses must be understood as falling under language and not discourse. Nonetheless the call us to recognize the normative claims of discourse.

reality. This is one of the pulls of philosophical skepticism, it is always there linked to the notion of objectivity. That Kant kept the concept of representation does not bother Weil, what matters to him is that the distinction between knowing and thinking allowed for the distinction between subject and object to become secondary to the "relationship of the finite with the infinite" (PR.I.65). With this change, "it is not a content that would add itself to a form, it is not a form that would superimpose itself, as though from the outside, to a shapeless material. What exists is experience and experience grasped in science's discourse: the philosopher does not construct, he analyzes in order to develop first conditions, necessary but in no way sufficient." (PR.I.65-66)

Weil thus sees representations not as being the solid metaphysical foundation of knowledge claims, but rather as an outgrowth of a certain way of talking about things. This is because representations contradict each other, but only for the person that wants to speak about reality without falling into contradiction (PR.I.63). Thus Weil's solution is found in the way that he separates language and discourse and the way this separation governs the distinction that he makes between attitudes and categories. Language is the spontaneous creation of meaning and discourse is the coherent grasp of this meaning. Language is not *necessarily* reflexive, it is a way of being in the world, it is how the individual expresses themself in their attitude. Discourse is precisely the reflexive grasp of an attitude and the language it produces, but it grasps language by subtraction. It is a "critical reduction of appearances" (Kirscher, 1989) that rules out certain determined language uses in order to grasp an attitude. The individual always finds themself in a world that is meaningful and that is structured and that is reasonable, because this is the background against which their activity makes sense, but this meaning, this structure, this reasonableness is also the source of their dissatisfaction. This points to the reality of discourse and of the human activity which defines the world that others will take as given. The individual can lift themself up to refuse this given, this meaning, and they can do so reasonably. They can transform their language into reasonable discourse. When they do so, they call on representations, because they are making claims of objectivity, but these representations depend on the discourse that they are already deploying. Thus in this short text, Weil defines the scope of representation as being an affair of certain types of philosophical discourse and this gives us a clue to how to interpret representations in light of the logic of philosophy. In these discourses, representations are seen to originate in the fundamental relationship between man and what

is given to him, but given 'as though in a mirror,' a distorting mirror whose *images* must be corrected. (PR.I.61)[61].

Weil barely speaks about representation in the logic of philosophy, this may be because as Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel notes, in its classic characterization "the equivocality of the term is […] total, given the multiplicity of the domains under which it falls (image, signification, concept and finally thought)" (2000: 8) Weil nonetheless does reflect on the concept of *image*. This concept is present throughout the logic, but it is modified in different categories. If we are to see Weil's use of the concept of image as part of a critique of representation, then we can quickly see why representation is insufficient to ground meaning. Weil thinks that images can serve any purpose because of their incomprehensibility (LP 91). It plays the role of projecting something in order to allow others to grasp it, but this grasp is always imprecise. It must be refined. Thus for Weil, images (in the sense of representations) are a specific product of language, because it is in language that the individual forms and reforms the content of concepts in *his* image (LP 176) (in both sense of the possessive pronoun). The world, the self, the self as a reflection of God, God as a reflection of humanity, transcendence, these are images that the individuals deploys in language, they are attempts to grasp something that is too large to be reduced to a simple word or proposition, it is something which contains contradictions in its very conception. Thus images do not do the job that Weil is looking for language and discourse to do, namely to explain the possibility of meaning and its grasp. There is no representation of this possibility, it is only drawn out in and through language, through different points of view, through multiple reformulations. In so far as images have content, this content can be created and destroyed (LP 249) but they "can't be controlled" (LP 227). Nowhere is this clearer than in the category of *Personality*. The *Personality* is the category whose central concept is the idea of the individual, of the *personality*, as a creative source of concrete values, as the source of value itself. It grasps its own irreducibility in and through its struggles with others, who are themselves also irreducible sources of the concrete production of values. Here what is projected onto individuals are the values of others, and the normative claims that others make on us. Others demand that the individual "conform to the image that they have made of him for themselves" (LP 291). The modification that the *image* undergoes in this category corresponds to the all-important move from knowing to thinking. In the previous categories, the image is supposed to ground and guarantee knowledge, it is supposed to be the image of

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[61] My italics.

173

something, however, in the category of *Personality*, the image is not of anything in particular, rather it is a total image as a *relationship to the world*. In *Personality* this image-world does not point outside of itself, and so, for this category, falls under thinking comprehensively. The image is the comprehension of the individual's struggle in the world. It is thus comprehensive and it is only at the interior this comprehensiveness that the question of knowledge (of objects, of determined phenomena) appears. This total image is thus our grasp of normative claims *as* they are presented in the action and discourse of others, but because they come from others they are "dead values" (LP 293), and only authentically have a hold on us if we reform them and give them to ourselves. They are empty if we do not see ourselves as their source. Thus if we accept the claim that Weil uses the term image as an analogue to representation then we can see all the elements of a critique that itself explains why *expression* is seen as more conceptually primitive.

The goal of the *Personality* is not to present a causal scientific discourse, it accepts such discourses but for the *Personality* there is something more fundamental, it is the individual's self-expression faced with other individuals and struggling with them. The *Personality* is the attitude of the individual trying to express values in the world of facts. However, what the *Personality* learns is that all external values need to be eliminated. The *Personality* wants to see itself as the source of its own values, of value itself. By positing concrete values in conflict, one of the resources that *Personality* adds to discourse is the transformation of commitment. We have already said that *Certainty* is the category that presents commitments for the first times as commitments. What *Personality* adds is the individual's responsibility for the discernment and the judgment of these concrete commitments (LP 294). However, because this responsibility is found in the self-creating, self-affirming subject, the first appearance of this responsibility is towards their own individuality. Weil says that in the attitude of *Personality,* "I *feel* what I want to be, I don't *know* it; but to say *yes* to this creation-discovery of myself, I must know what I say *no* to" (LP 295). Binding one's self to the norms of discourse is an individual process that happens in a social context, but before this category, the individual did not recognize that. Before this moment, "[t]here were things that were good, others that were not, and they were so for reasons that I bent before. I bent, because I subjugated my feeling to my thought. God or science or duty or happiness or disinterested play was what mattered: my feeling of self only got in the way. There were values, but among these values, there was no place for me" (LP 295) It is thus the personality as a source of values in its sentiment that "wants to express

itself and to express itself as it is […] in the world such as it is" (LP 299). The personality
is:

> the man who makes himself understood without reasoning, who says what everyone
> imagines having felt as soon as he teaches them how to feel it, and this by means
> of a language that makes no sense and that nonetheless takes possession of man all
> of a sudden, as if by magic, that fills him and obsesses him without him being able
> to say what has happened to him (LP 299).

We can already see that for *Personality* what is at the origin of meaning is the expression in
language that the individual in this attitude raises to discourse, to a coherent grasp of
something irreducible. However, because this individual sees their expression as being
grounded in language, in the poetic production of meaning, this personality "doesn't live in
the environment of discourse, but in the image" (LP 300). It will take *The Absolute* to grasp
the world as discourse.

The discourse of the philosophical tradition claims that representations are the
bearers of meaning, but for Weil this is an error precisely because the objectivity that
representations are to secure is downstream from discourse. In language, the image is too
indistinct and protean to secure that objectivity. It must be raised up to discourse. It must be
mediated. For Weil, the error of the tradition that sees the image as an *explanatory* primitive
is:

> to believe that the image possesses or should possess a *signification*, that it conceals
> a meaning that could be otherwise exposed, that it is a method, a way of grabbing
> man by the guts instead of tackling his intellectual faculties. Yet, for the personality,
> image is everything. It grasps nothing through the image, it grasps the image. Nor
> does it *form* images [..]; the image *is* the reality of this world that it is, a reality that
> no more depends on the image than the image itself does on this reality. It is self-
> creation by oneself that discovers the image, as inversely it is in the discovery of
> the image that the personality creates itself (LP 300).

This extract shows us two things, first, that the image in *Personality* does not grasps anything
other than itself. It does not stand in for anything because it is not concerned with knowledge
but with its own self-affirmation. It is identical to itself and thus as an unmediated image it
does not provide a non-inferentially articulated starting point of discourse, rather it is only
interpreted and understood thanks to a discourse. Second, the image is not an external causal
source of meaning, it is the product of the self-determining individual that wants to express
something, and even if what they initially express is an image, this image neither makes

175

claims of objectivity, nor claims to grasp anything outside of itself. In this way, for *Personality*, the "image then is the sentiment that exposes itself. It is not an image of something, it has no meaning outside of itself" (LP 300) and because it has no meaning outside of itself, "the question of the meaning and of the interpretation of the image doesn't exist for the personality" (LP 300).

As a metaphysical category, images are deployed differently by different philosophical categories. The reason that *Personality*'s use is of particular importance is because it grasps its insufficiency for philosophical discourse. In *Personality* the image "doesn't exist for it as something separated, even less is there an explanation or an interpretation of this image. But if the image doesn't detach itself from man, if it does not *explain* itself for him, it nonetheless *makes itself explicit* in conflict" (LP 302). Given that the image, in *Personality* does not fall under knowing but under thinking, this also implies that the way it is made explicit in conflict is also at the level of thinking and not of knowing. In fact, this is a key move for Weil, because it shows that *all* explicitation happens at this level. It happens in discourse, at the philosophically categorial level and not only at the metaphysically categorial level. It is in the conflict of different concrete commitments that the individual makes their image itself explicit, or more precisely, that the individual that grasps themself as this image refines and articulates themself through the conflictual interaction with other individuals. Weil clearly places the image on the side of language, and thus the image has an ambivalent place in philosophical discourse, it is present in discourse, but insufficient to explain the meaning that is grasped therein. This is because:

> Projecting itself into the human world, projecting the human world, […] [the personality] creates itself from bits of debris of prior creations and has never finished creating itself: tension, conflict, never ending, never starting, an always clear, always incomplete image, an incoherent language, and more *unified* than any speech from prudence and reflection, without argument, and convincing beyond any discussion and any system (LP 305).

Language, for Weil, is the source of discourse, but the grasp of language depends on discourse. The image, insofar as it is present in language, expresses individuality, expresses the idiosyncratic grasp that individual has of themself, but as this extract shows, this image depends on public discursive practices that predate the individual. It is built of other idiosyncratic grasps that struggle to raise themselves up to discourse, to a coherent grasp of what is universal in the individual. In this way, the image is insufficient to ground any universal grasp, precisely because the universal is mediated by these public discursive

practices that are present only once a discourse is. Thus, if reading Weil's use of image can be seen as analogue to representation, what Weil refuses is not the concept, nor its use, what he refuses is the scope that has been given to the concept in the philosophical tradition.

The scope of representation is limited to objective claims about the world that try to reduce language to a discourse grounded on something external to discourse itself. The problem is that, for Weil, discourse is always built on a decision to speak coherently. This decision posits something that is essential and then eliminates the inessential in order to make discourse coherent. Representation is no different. It is posited as a way to explain assertoric, truth-conditional, referential language. In order to do so, all language that is not assertoric, that is not truth-conditional, that is not referential is deemed inessential and removed from discourse, however representation itself is neither assertoric nor truth-conditional, and the sense in which it is referential is modified. The discourse that is paradigmatic of the transformation of the protean image into discursive representation (the grasp of the formal being of the thing in itself), is *The Condition*, and insofar as *The Condition* is the floor of modern discourse, its influence is felt. However, what the presence of discourses after *The Condition* shows us, is that this discourse does not grasp all of reality comprehensively. It leaves out values, it leaves out the fact of meaning. The discourse of *Personality* surpasses this model of representation by referring to itself and not to something outside of discourse. Representation is used in order to grasp the conflict between different images in the intersubjective, shared, and perspectival dimension of discourse, and then, only derivatively is used to point outside of discourse. Thus Weil's critique of representation is linked not only to the distinction he makes between language and discourse, but also to the distinction he makes between metaphysical categories and philosophical categories. Remember, metaphysical categories are meta-scientific. They are linked to objective designative kinds of language, but they only make sense inside of a philosophical category, that is, inside of the pure attitude that can be grasped in discourse. This all comes down to saying, that for Weil, representation is not the ground of a philosophical category but is a concept that is deployed in the service of different grounds. Like most metaphysical categories, representation's pull has so much gravity because it is used by so many philosophical categories, but it remains insufficient to ground the commitments we make in discourse. Rather it is defined by them.

The base of these claims, for Weil, is the presence of a meaningful life outside of discourse as well as the fact that his order of explanation starts the transformation of dissatisfaction into error. Following these commitments, we can note that anything that plays

a primitive explanatory role in Weil's theory must fill two distinct criteria. First, it must be large enough in scope to apply to *all* the categories. Second, it must be able to integrate subsequent concepts by providing an explanation of them. In these terms we can see that representation does not fill these criteria. It is already limited in scope and it leaves much out of explanation. Thus whatever takes the place of representation as an explanatory primitive must be larger in scope than representation. That is, it must be able to explain all the types of activity that fall outside of what we have called the designative model. It must also be able to integrate the role of representation seamlessly within it. That is, it must be able to explain *both* what falls outside of representational designative models of language use, but *also* explain the kind of language use that defines designative models, and gives an appropriate pride of place to designative language. As shown in *Personality*, Weil leans on the notion of expression in order to reject representation as an explanatorily basic concept: images depend on expression. Designative models seek to guarantee the possibility of knowledge about the world by fixing it to something outside of discourse. These are the categories of truth-conditionally structured object languages. If we refer back to the Kantian thing-in-itself we can see how putting representation first in terms of orders of explanation creates unsavory consequences. This type of formal solution is only required in a designative representational model in order to guarantee the understandability of phenomena. In an expressive model, the thing-in-itself has no role to play outside of reprises (in reflections on the self that give it a transcendental status in the synthetic unity of apperception for example) and can thus be put aside.

Designative models maintain the distinction between subject and object and thus claim that all that happens on the subject side is false, is illusion, is shadow, and must be corrected or be weeded out. In other words all that happens on the side of the subject is a deficient form of reality that must be corrected. In the *Logic of Philosophy*, there are thus categories that grasp the world coherently thanks to the designative model, however, these categories are bookended by multiple other categories. On one side, in the categories dominated by speech (*The True and the False, Certainty*), knowledge claims have not yet become important because the distinction between subject and object in not yet clear. On the other side, in the categories dominated by the individual's relationship to discourse (the categories *of* philosophy), knowledge claims are important only in so far as they show the kinds of commitments that individuals hold in their relationship to discourse. This is not to say that knowledge claims are not important, and this is not to say either that *The Absolute* and the subsequent categories of philosophy have lost the notion of objectivity. Rather it is

to say that this notion has changed. Objectivity remains, but instead of being something in the world that we must come into contact with, it is found in discourse. It is a formal consideration of discourse that guarantees the comprehensibility of the real, and critically, the capacity to share that comprehension. In this way, one can always find reasons to doubt the goodness of this comprehension, but only by presenting another articulation of the real that makes claims of objectivity. The importance of the designative model cannot be overstated. It is not just that the development of this model goes hand in hand with the historical development of the metaphysical categories that we use in everyday speech, in our own creative production of language, and in our own discourses, it is also that this use shows the importance of the reprise and the refraction of discourse that happens in the categories of philosophy. Each individual mobilizes *all* of the categories in their efforts to understand while also positioning themselves towards various contents in multiple ways. Thus we use representation in our discourse every time we reprise the categories that are grounded in the designative model, but again, this model is insufficient as an explanatory primitive because of all that falls outside of its use.

Weil does not directly critique representation, and thus resituating representation in his work includes some reconstruction and speculation. This is not the case however with his defense of expression. His texts are brimming with descriptions of our expressive use of language. In the clearest statement of his defense of expression, Weil states: "language isn't an instrument destined to state what is, but to express what doesn't satisfy man and to formulate what he desires; its content isn't formed by what is, but by what isn't" (LP 8). He then goes on to state that

> language is the tool of negativity, every judgment bearing on the present is false as judgment and true only in the measure that it expresses an interest, a desire, a dissatisfaction of man, and the philosopher's speech cannot be otherwise. If man is the being who isn't satisfied with the given, he will not be satisfied, either, with that given being which is his own and which consists in negating the given. Once a *nature* of man is given, it will be transformed by man's activity; once man's character is given—and this is what happens in and by the philosopher's language—man, being he who negates every given, is unsatisfied with this being which claims to be his. He only expresses it to surpass it, to transform it, to negate it—to negate himself; once he understands his own life as the active expression of his dissatisfaction, he will raise himself up against this dissatisfaction and against this same activity: he will no longer search to rid himself of what dissatisfies him,

but to create contentment by victory over this same dissatisfaction and negativity.
(LP 9)

Here we can see Weil refusing to give primacy to the designative role of language by placing its expressive role in the forefront. Weil insists that what language in its expressive capacity actually expresses is a lived human sentiment, but he also sharpens his thought by insisting on the role of negativity. In this way, it is precisely the expression of dissatisfaction that triggers the conceptual movement that defines the type of concept use that transforms language into coherent discourse. We can see how this thought is clarified further when Weil calls language the tool of negativity. Thus, even though it is a lived human sentiment that language expresses, what matters most to conceptual content is the negativity that transforms the sentiment. The individual expresses dissatisfaction in order to transform it. In this way the negativity of language is transformed into the positivity of content. The individual determines a content by refusing another content, by clarifying what has been said, by giving criteria in order to understand, by limiting and delimiting the determinations that they posit. Weil presents a form of expressivism that leaves a place for representation, but this place is limited in scope. Representation belongs to a certain type of speaking *about* the world, which is central to us being the kind of discursive creatures we are, but is not the whole story.

4.5   The Placement Problem

By recognizing Weil's defense of expression as an explanatory primitive concept, we can look at how Weil's expressivism lines up at the two distinct levels of analysis that we put into place in the last chapter. These levels of analysis distinguish between Humean and German expressivism and then between broad and narrow expressivism. Remember, in the last chapter, I claimed that the expressivism falls into two distinct currents, one Humean, and the other German. The hallmark of Humean expressivism is to limit the amount of metaphysical entities that need to be posited in order to explain certain concepts, namely, in the Humean meta-ethical example, those concepts that are used in moral judgments. The goal of German expressivism, as I have said, is quite different. It seeks to create a holistic picture of humanity by finding where language and cognition fit. In a certain sense, Weil's project does look to limit the number of metaphysical objects that are mobilized in order to explain things, even though he is working from the German tradition. His project limits metaphysical objects precisely because he is looking to trace their correct scope. This takes the form of seeing how different metaphysical categories allow us to determine the shape of

different philosophical categories, but he does this by rejecting classic Humean expressivism. Why does he reject Humean expressivism?

Humean expressivism is built of off what has been called the "bifurcation thesis" (Kraut, 1990). According to this thesis there is a clear distinction between descriptive and non-descriptive language that can be made, between facts and values. The Humean expressivist thus places expressive language on the side of non-descriptive language while allowing descriptive language to do the heavy lifting, thus preserving the classical representational model. The bifurcation thesis has the advantage of allowing Humean expressivists to minimize the metaphysics concerning moral and normative vocabularies (although most classic Humean expressivist fall into the trap of realist metaphysics in their descriptive language) while still recognizing that there are moral and normative vocabularies. But in resolving one problem it opens another. Humean expressivism suffers from what is known as the placement problem. The placement problem asks where to put or place the kind of practices or concepts that fall outside of the scope of a theoretical framework. In other words it asks what must be rejected or reformulated so that discourse remains coherent. For example, in a causally determined representational framework of language moral and normative language is an uneasy fit. Therefore these models seek to place normative language outside of its framework in order to "save" the framework. Humean expressivism's solution is to describe moral and normative language in terms of sentiments or dispositions, in terms of attitudes. This allows the causally determined representational framework to accord a subordinate place to the work normative language does, while removing and minimizing the incoherencies that could trip up the representational model.

Weil rejects classic Humean expressivism, or at least rejects the bifurcation thesis even though he recognizes the placement problem (as is clear in his argument that each philosophical category's coherence is defined by its essential and its inessential). Weil notes that "at least since Hume's days" (1965: 180) the following thesis has been formulated over and over: "there is no path from fact to value. Science is concerned with facts exclusively, and science alone is qualified to distinguish what is a fact from what is not. Value judgments are not scientific nor can they become so." (*ibid.*) But he then asks, "whether this purely negative fact is sufficient to elucidate the relations between facts and values" (*ibid.*) because even if "[i]t is certainly true that values do not follow from facts […] it now appears that facts become relevant only through values" (*ibid.*: 182). By looking at Weil's characterization of what is essential in terms of the placement problem we can see how each

philosophical category can be understood as different response to what falls inside and outside of coherent discourse. Using this strategy we can claim that Weil sees the bifurcation thesis as a specific response to the placement problem and Humean expressivism as a specific solution (that in Weilian terms falls under the category of the *Condition*) that tries to keep the bifurcation thesis in place, while making room for normative language. German expressivism shows that this is not the only solution possible and the tension between it and Humean expressivism shows that there may be a better one. By placing expression at the base of language use, German expressivism minimizes the threat of the placement problem, but it faces its own problems. It potentially trivializes language use by blurring the distinction between different forms of expression, and some of its iterations seems to allow the multiplication of metaphysical entities. However, this does not mean that these two forms of expressivism cannot be brought together. It will thus be helpful to look at Huw Price's efforts to do so in order to see more clearly what the problems are and how Weil's position relates to this solution.

Price presents what we can call a "deflationist" expressivism. Price's deflationist expressivism presents Humean expressivism and the Brandomian articulation of German expressivism as being reconcilable because he claims that the differences are in fact only superficial (2011). While this may be true, it is important to notice however that Price makes significant changes to both Humean and German expressivism in order to make them fit, thus in their pure form, they seem less reconcilable. Remember, the Humean expressivist's goal is to explain certain kinds of evaluative attitudes that fall outside of a purely designative language use, while not appealing to metaphysical objects. In this way, Humean expressivism is locally restricted. It only deals with certain aspects of language use. Price's first step to reconciling the two strands of expressivism is to abandon the local restrictedness of Humean expressivism. By unrestricting the role of expressive language and making it global[62], the bifurcation thesis loses a lot of its purpose. In fact, unrestricting this role also modifies the scope of expressivism in terms of the placement problem. The modification of the scope of the placement problem, which is one of the motivating factors of Humean expressivism, shows how Humean expressivism is surpassed. Unrestricting this form of

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[62] In his work this move towards a global expressivism, and his reflections on the bifurcation thesis will push him to distinguish two separate notions of representation. One, internal, or *i-representation*, articulates the linguistic roles of our cognitive architecture, and the other external, or *e-representation*, describes our environment tracking capabilities in that same architecture. While I think that he may be right, for the scope of this chapter I do not need to go into that distinction. Here it suffices to say that unrestricted expressivism abandons the bifurcation thesis as it applies to the classic philosophical position of representationalism, which according to Price confounds these two notions of representing.

expressivism already moves it closer to German expressivism. However, Price does not jump headlong into German expressivism because he wants to save elements of Humean expressivism.

One of the key elements that Price hopes to maintain is the minimization of metaphysical entities, and even if Herder's narrow expressivism also minimizes metaphysical entities this is far from being the case in German expressivism widely understood. He will thus be insisting on this element as he advances to show that the two forms of expressivism can be reconciled. And indeed this is the point that needs to be reconciled, because once Humean expressivism has become a global expressivism, possible metaphysical commitments are the only thing that keeps these two forms of expressivism from being the same. Price focuses on the place of metaphysics specifically in Brandom's form of German expressivism. What Price suggests is that, at least in Brandom's case, the project is far less metaphysical than it seems (he may have made less of the criteria of minimizing metaphysical entities if he had also treated Herder's expressivism). Price's claim is that Brandom mischaracterizes his own project when he defends a metaphysical position. In fact Price says that all this hangs on what we understand by metaphysics. Price argues that if we understand metaphysics as a description about the *deep nature* of extra-linguistic entities then there is good reason to be a Humean and not German expressivist. However, if we understand Brandom's metaphysical project anthropologically, as Price clearly does, and as an "account of the *attribution of terms* – 'truth', 'reference', 'represents'" (2011) and not as revealing the deep nature of truth, reference, and representation, then the Humean expressivist has far less to object to[63]. Price reconciles the two positions in tension, but only by modifying certain key commitments in order to find a new position[64]. By changing the scope of both projects, Price is able to reconcile them, and thus present a type of global expressivism that minimizes the need to resort to metaphysical entities.

Weil's project shares certain aspects of Price's project, because even though he rejects classic Humean expressivism, his position is far less metaphysical than classic German expressivism. He rejects Humean expressivism, because for Weil, representation and designative language use is subordinate to expressive and evaluative language use and not the other way around. In other words, Weil supports a global expressivist project, but he

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[63] It is significant that that a similar type of anthropological reading prevails in Weil scholarship. Cf. (Savadogo, 2003; Guibal, 2011) for explicit defenses of the idea that Weil should be read as giving an account of what we do when we argue from a content, and not giving us a description of that content itself.
[64] In this way, we can say that he sublates both positions in order to defend a new modified position.

differs from Price because he also carves out a greater place for representation in it. Likewise, Weil limits all metaphysical commitments to the functional roles they play in different philosophical categories. Representation plays the greatest role in certain ontologically driven categories, namely those between *The Object* and *Personality*. Like all metaphysical categories, representation has a different scope based on the philosophical categories, reprises, and the general order of explanation of the discourse that employ it. Metaphysical categories are a consequence of the stances and commitments that we take in discourse and thus do not uncover the deep nature of reality, but rather present an anthropological character: our understanding of nature is tied to our capacity to grasp it in discourse. In this way, the fortunes of metaphysical concepts change from discourse to discourse. Sometimes they are minimized and deflated, sometimes they are eliminated altogether. Their presence is a consequence of the explanatory needs of discourse and they are born in discourse to grasp the world. They are not the eternal and really real substrata of existence. In this way, we can say that Weil ends up with a similar position to Price's, but that he comes at it from the other direction. Price holds a deep commitment to Humean expressivism and tries to generalize it using the insights of German expressivism. Weil on the other hand is an heir to the German expressivist tradition but elaborates certain commitments that bear a similarity to Humean expressivism, namely a deflationary approach to metaphysics and a clear-sighted recognition of the placement problem.

Weil's approach to the placement problem becomes clearer as we try to situate him in the German expressivist tradition and try to decide if he should be considered a broad or a narrow expressivist. German expressivism is a global program. It hopes to explain all language use according to the expressive paradigm. Because of its unrestricted scope, the German expressivist program does not face the bifurcation thesis, but it has its own difficulties. By claiming that language is initially expressive and not representational, Herder and Hamann (reacting to Kant) saw no need to make a clear distinction between descriptive and non-descriptive language, but German expressivism does still have to make a distinction between expression in language and other forms of expression. Broad expressivism puts all expression onto the same plane, whereas narrow expressivism seeks to hierarchize the types of expression. As we saw in the last chapter, by completely unrestricting the notion of expression as well as unrestricting the notion of language use, broad expressivism risks trivializing the notion of language. Everything that is expression is language. In other words, it does not face the bifurcation thesis and has a less restricted approach to the placement problem, but in doing so it also risks losing some key features that we normally associate

with language, namely representing and referring. The tension between broad and narrow expressivism asks what restrictions we should place on the notion of language and where we should place them.

I have already stated that Weil should be considered a narrow expressivist. I will thus be examining how closely Weil's philosophical project fits into narrow expressivism such as Forster describes it. As a reminder, Michael Forster gave three criteria for narrow expressivism, the dependence of thought on language, the rejection of metaphysical entities to explain meaning, and the sensuous origin of meanings. In the last chapter, as I looked at contemporary forms of narrow expressivism, I also insisted on the notion of thresholds. This is something that Forster touches on as a consequence of narrow expressivism, but which I want to bring more fully to the forefront as an element of Weil's expressivism. Narrow expressivism denies non-linguistic forms of expression full autonomy. All other forms of expression depend on the instantiation of meaning in language to be *seen* as meaningful. This also means that under a certain threshold one has to wonder whether one can speak of meaning at all. This is a controversial topic, and as the sciences advance, more and more conceptual capacities are attributed to non-human animals, because of their capacity to anticipate changes, their ability to demonstrate moral capacities such as altruism and trust, their ability to make their needs known. So here we must tread lightly and be rather conservative in our claims. According to Herder's expressivism, what animals share with us, and what allows us to be seen as being in continuity with nature, is the third criterion, the sensuous origin of language. In order to see how this fits into Weil's expressivist program we must therefore clarify this aspect of Herderian expressivism.

There seems initially to be a tension between the idea that thought is dependent on language and the idea that meanings have a sensuous, empirical origin. At first blush, we are tempted to rush in headlong with Locke and Hume and have this sensuous origin impress itself on us with externally formed atomic conceptual content. If we read this to mean that thoughts are thus indistinguishable from ideas then thoughts themselves become the very type of metaphysical entities that the empirical origin of ideas is supposed to refute. In any case, Herder is not proposing a simple theory of mental causation. Herder is claiming that the content of our sensations and the content of our thought are mutually dependent. As our cognitive lives proceed, we distinguish differences that we then *form* into the content of meaning. We do so thanks to language. In this way, what we feel is partially determined by what we think and what we think is partially determined by what we feel, and language is the way that individuals act upon these two things. It is mutually dependent, but now we also

see that it is also mutually structuring. Thanks to Herder's first criteria, that thought is bound to language, we can see meaning as usage based. But this meaning thus starts vague and becomes finer and finer. It does not start from discrete elements that are clear and that only then become confused when combined. We grope around for meaning from the get go. This implies two things. One, there is no privileged path to meaning. Individuals must mobilize a whole variety of contextually sensitive and pragmatically respondent criteria not only in order to understand each other, but also in order to understand themselves. Two, individuals are deploying meaning before they know what they mean. So other forms of expression are meaningful, but they require language to be seen as such. There is no autonomy before the instantiation of meaning in language. This ties in well with Sellars's claim that one must have a whole battery of concepts in order to have one, it means that what is identified and identifiable as meaning is so because we have crossed that threshold, however, it also means that we are able to attribute meaning to gestures and acts that would not autonomously have it, however, and this is important.

There is a concept that underlies the notion of expressivism and the notion of thresholds, and that is the notion of freedom. In an entirely determined model, there is no need to explain novelty, spontaneity, individuality, etc. The tension with which the early Humean expressivist struggle is how to square the representational model of language use and a correspondence theory of truth with moral language. By focusing on the problem of human freedom we can easily see why *fully* representational models and correspondence theories of truth struggle so much with the placement problem. In fact, if we were able to work out all the consequences of these theories, they would eliminate any discussion of freedom. The gap of indeterminateness that allows for possibility would be shown to be false, and thus inoperative. However, if it is shown to be false, it would, according to their model, always have been false and thus the problem of freedom should never have even become visible *as* a problem. Thus what was a convenient way to maintain the designative model of language use, with its representational underpinnings, while accounting for moral language in the Humean case is the root of freedom in the Herderian case. Expression is freedom of expression. The unboundedness of thought and expression is the field that discloses freedom to individuals. They understand themselves because they can apply the negativity of their thought to anything. They can say no. The notion of thresholds only makes sense in relation to this notion of freedom. Weil's philosophical project is based on freedom, and it is understood thanks to expression. He calls a specific discourse in a specific situation the "form" of meaning. He notes that discourse does not create this meaning, but merely

organizes it. It is created in the individual's spontaneous expression of their sentiment. In other words it is born of violence. It is, as he notes, "violence which, age after age, provides itself with what it can negate in discourse and which, grasping itself as freedom in its discourse and, at the same time, against its discourse, produces philosophy" (LP 75). Violence thus creates the specificity of the human situation that individuals can raise themselves up against, and it is the violent refusal of violence that is the step towards the kind of meaning that we traditionally deal with. In this way, non-violence is the first of a series of thresholds that Weil highlights in order to show how content develops, how concepts form, and how thought and sentiment mutually depend and structure each other through language.

4.6   The Necessity in Discourse and Narrow expressivism

Weil's nuanced position concerning human freedom is central to his philosophical project and it is also what allows us to see the thresholds that define his narrow expressivism. Freedom is, in a certain sense, the goal of his project. Weil freely seeks to present freedom in such a way that each individual can see freedom as the goal of action (in Weil's particular political sense), where each individual can access a real autonomy through discourse. However, it is only if philosophy is grounded in freedom that the philosopher can find freedom at the end of discourse. Weil thus seeks to show that all discourse presupposes freedom, even when they deny it (as is the case in *The Condition*). It is the presupposition of freedom that makes it an achievable goal for philosophy. Discourse shows the human individual what they already possess implicitly in their deployment of discourse, or as Weil notes "what is first in itself, the foundation and the essential, is the last for us in the order of discovery" (Weil, 1973: 51). It would however be a mistake to see Weil's conception of freedom as metaphysical. There is no freedom unless the individual realizes it thanks to discourse. In this way its full grasp derives from discourse. But because it is found in discourse it can be seen as always having been present. Weil's project thus seeks a discourse that opens the path to freedom for others. The achievement of this goal is what allows the individual to understand themself as conditioned, as embedded in social structures, as natural, but also as free. Free, because philosophy is future-facing. It turns towards the past to understand the present, and it situates itself in the present to act upon the future. Philosophy brings the individual to the acting presence of the present. This is one of the central reasons that Weil relegates representation to a back seat and why he places his

expressivism at the wheel. It also reinforces the claim that Weil's position should be understood as a narrow form of expressivism. So, what is Weil's position of freedom?

We have already stated the reasons why Weil starts from the transformation of dissatisfaction into error, and why fallibilism understood as openness is central to his order of explanation. This is going to be the first way that Weil refuses the Enlightenment dependence of representation. According to Enlightenment thinkers, there is a duality that exists in nature, between the objects and subjects, precisely because subjects are apart from nature. This thought takes to its fullest form in the theoretical work of Kant[65]. According to this picture, there is the reality of things out in the world, and there is the representation of this reality that happens in subjects as the form of phenomena, which nonetheless are insufficient to give subjects any access to that reality because humans are unable to *represent* it. We thus have no access to the reality of things in themselves even though they are in some way supposed to be causally effective thanks to our intuition of representational phenomena. There is an aspect of this thought that is often overlooked even though it has been central to many debates that try to make sense of the question of freedom, that aspect is the determinism of representationalism. Representationalism tries to *fix* reference so that there is a single monist description of the world that holds in all situations. Once that reference is fixed, the things that can be said about the world are also fixed, and that *determines* what is considered to be true and false. When truth-conditionality is placed at the center of the explanation, the specific Humean version of the placement problem comes rushing back in with full force. How do we explain what falls outside of representation? We do so by claiming that representations are a lesser, defective form of reality. This allows us to reduce false statements to errors in the subject and not in the object. This is done to *save* reality from human error. But this inverses the real goal. This move is not trying to save reality, it is trying to salvage human knowledge by guaranteeing that it corresponds to the objects in the world. Weil however thinks that reality needs no saving from human error. Humanity is a part of nature, and it is only as it is human that nature is interested in humanity. He doubts that extra-human nature can even be called nature, and to the extent that it can be, it is indifferent to humanity. This is not to say that there is nothing outside of humanity, rather it is claiming that the concept of nature is a historic concept that has a human timeline.

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[65] However, as I have already said, Kant, as a transitional figure, both is the fullest expression of certain Enlightenment positions and a step beyond them. Weil's position is to place Kant's most important moves as on our side of that transition, thus to see him as the birth of modern treatments of the question.

So representationalism has a tacit underlying commitment to causal determination that expressivism is able to circumnavigate. What shape, according to Weil, does this give to human freedom? For Weil, negativity is at the center of human freedom. Because we can express negativity through our dissatisfaction, we can start the positive project of setting goals and eliminating contingencies. We are free because there is nothing necessary about the way that we express that dissatisfaction, or that we express it at all. In fact, understanding the way that Weil characterizes necessity is helpful in order to contextualize his position on human freedom. This is a theme Weil comes back to again and again outside of the *Logic of Philosophy*. In his short essay "Philosophie et réalité" Weil makes the following claims, 1) the philosophical tradition, at least since Plato has seen philosophy as dealing with necessity head on; 2) this same tradition has claimed that philosophy is conceived of as a formally coherent discourse whose "principle task is to separate what is essential from what is not, to reject this inessential into the realm of shadows, of illusions, of epiphenomena" (PR.I.26). In other words, the philosophical tradition fixes what is essential and determines necessity from that essential. However, when things are relegated to illusions or epiphenomena, discourse is not seen as being a part of reality, but as being a separate thing. It is seen as an inessential addition to the real. For Weil whether discourse is seen as part of reality or as an add-on to it has deep consequences. If discourse is an add-on to reality and necessity is in the world, then everything is determined, and we are merely clarifying things in order to ease our consciousness, but it is unclear what effect discourse is supposed to have on our actions. If discourse is a part of reality and if necessity is only found in discourse, then our discourse matters, and it matters because it influences what we see as possible and as necessary, and thus how we act. For Weil, necessity is a quality of judgments, not of facts or events, except derivatively (PR.II.42). This again highlights the difference that Weil makes between metaphysical and philosophical categories. Within a discourse, thanks to a metaphysical category, things *are* seen as necessary. If a wire is made of copper, then it necessarily conducts electricity. However these claims depend on this discourse and nothing requires that an individual hold a discourse that affirms the material implication of copper's conductivity. In fact, for Weil, one is only bound to this deontic status if they hold a discourse that instantiates it. It is defined by the presuppositions of coherent discourse and thus is not experienced "naturally" so to speak, rather is conditioned by the discourse that individuals hold. Weil notes that "animals know constraint, but they don't know necessity given that they are immediate to their surroundings" (PR.I.27). Mediation starts, for Weil, as soon as the individual leaves the attitude of *Truth*, it is conceptualized in the jump from *Certainty* to

Discussion, and is realized in *The Object*. This does not mean that earlier discourses didn't grasp the separation between the object and the subject, but again, they didn't explicitly conceptualize it. It is within the explicit conceptualization of this distinction in *The Object* that the mediation that places a wedge between the subject and the object becomes a problem to be overcome. By doing so, it uncovers the difficulty that representational systems face head on. It nonetheless ignores that this wedge is a human product. Weil states, "Animals do not have the abstract negation at their disposal, they do not think what is not as such (they can have dreams and hallucinations, but this is not thinking what is not, it is feeling this as what is) they do not think the possible (although they have, but for our eyes only, possibilities at their disposal and know how to take advantage of them) the necessary is complementary and opposed to the possible, as that which cannot be." (PR.I.28) The abstract negation is thus, for Weil, a threshold that allows us to distinguish between non-human animals and human animals. But as with all thresholds, there is an element of rupture *and* an element of continuity. This is what Herder defends in defending the sensuous origin of language. We can thus situate the rupture at the level of the *abstract* negation, of speaking about what isn't, but this, as I have already defended is born out of the *pragmatic* negation of being able to refuse anything that is presented to us. The pragmatic negation is what allows us to establish continuity with the natural world whereas the abstract negation is what allows us to differentiate what is specific and special about human language use.

For Weil this holds two major consequences, first, it means that philosophy does not deal with what is necessary, but rather with what *is*, what the individual finds before them in their life. Second, this means that the individual is free because they are conditioned, because they find the world before them they are free to act upon that world. These two consequences are at the center of Weil's expressivism. Weil claims that there is no necessity *as such* in philosophy, but that necessity is a consequence of the structural architecture of the individual's discourse. This discourse however is not pulled out of thin air, rather as Weil notes, it is found and it is historical. This allows Weil to refine his notion of language. Language is both the space of human freedom and the depository of human freedom. It is the space of human freedom because it is language that allows individuals to be future-facing in our specifically human way, because it is language that pulls us out of the flow of experience and into time. Weil here is not speaking about planning for the future and anticipating the future, other animals do that, but as seeing the future as the space of human action. It gives meaning to human action because it allows that meaning to come about and to be a continuation of beliefs and goals. It is also the depository of human freedom because

language holds the sedimentation of individual human acts of freedom. It holds the sedimentation of the ways in which human individuals have raised themselves up against the world and opposed it. It holds and collects the ways that individuals have imposed their negativity on the world by saying no to the condition and the ways they have tried to elaborate coherent discourse to justify that negativity, to justify that no. Weil notes that the philosopher:

> does not start thought, thought preexists him and precedes him, insufficient, primitive, mythical, but always prior to his personal undertaking, a condition that is as much restricting as grounding. The freedom of those who have preceded him has been deposited in language, in the discourses that he accepts of refuses, but that he could not even refuse if he did not find them in his world: whether he thinks with the others or against them, he cannot avoid referring himself to what is (PR.I.32).

This extract helps us to situate the two levels of Weil's position. There is no necessity without discourse because discourse imposes necessity on the world. However, discourse itself depends on something that is larger and deeper than itself. Thus, language encompasses discourse, because it is the domain in which all these discourses make sense.

Language is the domain of freedom and discourse is the domain of necessity. Once discourse has been put into place, the logical development that allows for necessity opens the possibility of philosophical discourse. It is there, in this possibility, that reference and representation can take on the role that philosophy gives them. They allow us to correct our discourse by referring to the way that others grasp the world, by taking error into account, by grasping the formal aspect that can be shared discursively, that is, by representing. When we correct our discourse we do not correct the world, we rethink the world, but we can only do so once we have taken up position at the interior of a discourse. This is why, for Weil, all the attitudes that precede the category of *Discussion* present themselves to us as certainty. Without the elevation of the law of non-contradiction to a central structuring role in our discourse, necessity cannot take hold.

Expression is more conceptually primitive than representation for Weil because representation and necessity only make sense based on other commitments. These commitments form the philosophical categories that govern metaphysical concepts like representation and necessity. There is thus a plurality of shapes that representation and necessity can take based on the different philosophical categories and together this plurality makes up the sedimentation of language that each individual finds. This expression however is not independent, it depends on the articulation of discourse to disclose its meaning. Weil's

expressivism thus gives discourse a structuring role because it is discourse that progressively shapes the expression of language and sentiment, just as the creative spontaneity of language and sentiment constantly push back against discourse. This mutual pushback is mutually structuring. This lines up with Herder's notion of the mutual dependence of feeling and language. This is also why Weil presents the logic of philosophy as a suite of categories. Each new category, by adding something new and irreducible to our understanding can be seen as an independent threshold that enriches the way we speak and the way we feel. Reference and representation are central features of this account, but they are not primitive features of it.

Representation and reference, as I have mentioned have an implicit determinism, and this is also one of their most important functions. It is thanks to representation and reference that we can make claims of necessity that hold for every individual, and it is thanks to these structures that we can act upon nature and change it to suit our needs. Thanks to representation and reference we can make objective claims, the type of claims that hold up in science, we can predict the behavior of the world. But this is exactly why Weil places expression at the base of his understanding of language. We cannot deduce human actions. We cannot deduce the questions individuals will ask. Any new action, any new question can surge up at any moment. Anything can be refused, even something that never had been refused before. This brings us back to Weil's fallibilism. The failure to deduce future events or future action puts what we know into doubt and relativizes it. It requires us to be open to this novelty. It is what creates the possibility of reevaluating theories and changing them. Philosophy is future-facing because, standing in the present, it looks to the past to act on the future. This also means that the future is undetermined. No quantity of knowledge about the past can allow us to deduce a free human act. This is because it is born of the *no* that any individual can present to any situation, and it develops with the discourses that individuals elaborate to justify their no[66].

One of the corollaries of Weil's treatment of necessity is that because there is no necessity outside of discourse, there is no necessity in the individual's choice of discourse either. Science and philosophy are only necessary for those that have chosen them, and only for as long as they are what the individual chooses. Science and philosophy are both born of human expression, just as art, religion, and society are. They are born there, but once they

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[66] The ability to say no highlights the dialogical nature of the argumentative structures that I will be developing out of Weil's work. Although one can scream no out into the emptiness, or oppose one's self to the totality of nature. These extreme acts are themselves exaggerations of the more measured no's that happen in dialogue.

are born they are reduced to the conditions that humans find in the world. Nobody needs to refuse violence, nobody needs to elaborate discourses, no one needs to refuse their condition as unsatisfying and work to change them. No one needs to become a philosopher and no one needs to stay one, except for the person who builds that necessity into their own discourse. Weil thus identifies expression as what allows individuals to make the free choice to understand the meaning they find and the meaning they create, and all other commitments are downstream from there.

4.7   A Case for Inferentialism

4.7.1 Weil's Critique of Reference

In presenting Weil's position, we have insisted that he accords representation and reference important places in his theory but we have also noted that he refuses to present them as conceptual primitives. I have thus argued that Weil gives expression a more primitive status in his order of explanation than representation. This is where I think it is particularly fruitful to look to Robert Brandom's inferentialism in order to better understand the place that Weil gives to reference and why he refuses it a place as a conceptual primitive as well. Brandom's position is articulated around the notion of discursive commitment just as Weil's is. In the last chapter I insisted on Brandom's use of David Lewis's notion of scorekeeping and how it allows us to track entitlements, commitments, and endorsements in the language game. I also insisted on his use of Wilfrid Sellars "space of reasons" to define how discourse only makes sense inside of a normative space of giving and asking for reasons. These are two moves that allows Brandom to explain reference in terms of inference and thus allows inference to be seen as the more conceptually primitive of the two. What I will suggest is that the philosophical categories of the logic of philosophy play a similar role. They can be defined as the different spaces of reasons that are structured by the commitments, entitlements, and endorsements that follow from their central commitments. It is in this context that the concept of reference should be defined.

There are several major moves that Weil makes that allow us build a case for an inferentialist reading of the logic of philosophy. I will highlight three of these moves in this section. First, there is a critic of the kind of direct reference that is the bread and butter of representational models of language use. Second, there is a positive claim about what reference does do and how it is built into other claims and commitments. Third, there is the notion of responsibility that Weil develops in defense of the normative character of

philosophy. Together, these three moves allow us to look at the development of the suite of categories in the logic of philosophy under a different light. I have already argued that each category presents new thresholds that allows different concepts to become visible. What we can add here is that some of these concepts play important inferential roles. By reading the development of the categories as containing the development of different inferential concepts, this will allow us to look at the importance of incompatibilities to the articulation of meaning and will build us a bridge to seeing what Weil's theory can add to inferentialism.

Weil's critique of direct reference is two-pronged. He presents the classic designative model of language use as being built on the notion of pointing to things out in the world and labeling them. The first prong of Weil's critique is that, under this model, language use itself would cause us to continually falsify language, and second prong is that if pointing and labeling were the ultimate goal of language use, we would have little to say. The first point is part and parcel of what the Humean expressivist is trying to overcome with their solution to the placement problem. Since pointing the things out in the world and labeling them is not the only thing we do with language, the designative model has to find a way to explain what we do with the language that does fall outside of pointing and labeling. As long as we stay in the limits of these goals, all other language use either falsifies or corrupts language. Weil notes that for theories of direct reference:

> all judgment that isn't a judgment of identity (and who formulates such judgments?) is a lie, when we take it as a judgment and not as an expression of a human sentiment, of a desire, of a passion, of some interest: a lion isn't a feline, it isn't even a lion, it is *that there*, and to speak that lie that it's a lion only makes sense to refute that other coarser lie according to which *that there* would be an eagle in the snake family (LP 8).

Because the classic model of direct reference assumes that there is some conceptually whole content that comes to us in perception, that is given, Weil claims that language that isn't a judgment of identity forces the speaker to go beyond the limits of correct language use. This falls into line with Sellars's critique of the given that I highlighted in the last chapter. Weil is not critiquing the role of perception in the acquisition of conceptual content, because the use of indexicals *this* and *there* implies the intervention of perception. Rather he is critiquing that this content be already *given* as such in the perception itself. He shows that from an initial perception of an object, which seems to fall under the concept of LION we are dependent on *inferential relations* that are not themselves given in the perception. In order to have knowledge of the lion and then to be able to categorize it correctly we cannot depend

on the perception alone. Rather, we have to pull from other background assumptions that accompany the judgement:

x is a lion therefore *x is a feline.*

Without inferential relations, all perception can provide is a bare observation of a unified object in a specific piece of space, a *this there*. However the thing must be determined by noting the incompatibilities in what is said. It is not positively built up from this bare observation, without incompatibilities the string of things *this there* could be is endless. Thus Weil highlights the way that we use incompatibilities in order to eliminate or exclude more problematic inferences. In this way, even the *this there* draws on inferential relations, because as indexical, *this there* depends on contextual and pragmatic indications that are put into relation with other commitments in order to identify what the *this there* is. This is in part the structural role that the categories fill, it puts things in their place. In other words, the individual does not have unmediated reference to the world because they are always imbedded in a social, historical, and normatively structured world, in a *pseudo-nature*, that is part of the dialectic between a discourse and a situation. For Weil, the confusion is born out of the fact that this pseudo-nature presents itself to us as given precisely because we have carved out our understanding of the world in its terms. What Weil critiques in direct reference is thus neither the role of perception, nor the fact that things are "given" in experience, but rather that perception provides us with a conceptually autonomous, a-temporal content. This critique of direct reference shares certain aspects with C.I. Lewis's articulation of the pragmatic *a priori* that I presented in the last chapter (as Sellars's critique of the given also does). Like Lewis, Weil thinks that thought needs some ground in order to be determined, and also like Lewis, he rejects that this ground be in some way outside of the world or unknowable. The ground that Weil defends is historical and cultural: it is the sedimentation of discourses and practices that are present in the life of the community.

The second prong of Weil's critique of direct reference asks why we speak. Throughout his work, Weil maintains that when language is used in its specific tool-like function, as soon as the task at hand is completed, we set the tool aside. In other words, when we have said what we had to say, we fall silent. Direct reference is based on the tool-like function of pointing and labeling. For Weil, this means that whenever someone points to something or labels something, they should exhaust the task and thus fall silent, however most times people do not stop speaking. This is because the pointing and labeling, the role

of direct reference, is only understood within the larger context of reasoning and judging. We do not stop with reference, rather we use reference in judgments that allow us to continue to discuss, to justify, to question. Because reference only makes sense in the larger context of judging, we never even exhaust language's overall tool-like function, we only ever exhaust specific tasks. Language as the tool of our negativity, allows us to express what dissatisfies us, to change our gregarious behavior into discourse, and thus to produce a constant stream of new tasks. This is why for Weil "man's life is lived in discussion" (LP 138). Discussion is where these new tasks present themselves. Reference plays critical roles in language use, but it can't be the whole story. This is why Weil claims that reference and representation only make sense inside of a discourse that is already structured and only within a limited scope. Direct reference is thus a very specific confined use of language and not its most fundamental building block. In fact, for Weil, referring to objects in the external world is not even the most conceptually basic form of reference.

Weil's positive claim is that the most basic form of reference does not point to single items out in the world but rather points to commitments and claims that are found in discourse. For Weil, direct reference only makes sense once discourse is already structured. Direct reference points to something outside of discourse but discourse determines what will be pointed at and how, precisely because of the way the thing pointed at is used as an element of judgment. Weil notes that, "[l]ived reflection has shown (it has not demonstrated, as it does not demonstrate anything) the importance of language. It shows, moreover, that language refers (taking this term in the most formal and vaguest sense) to the situation, because man, speaking of nonsense and living it, *takes a position*." (LP 100). Thus, the most primitive form of reference that Weil defends is not to a given out in the world but to what he calls the situation[67]. Remember, the situation is one side of the "form" of meaning, which is the grasp of a concrete situation in a concrete discourse. It is a complex of commitments, goals, satisfactions, dissatisfactions, question, hypotheses, theories etc.… It is built into a social world and a natural world that the individual grasps in order to overcome. It is the overlapping of multiple points of view that are found in this social world and that make us aware of our differences. In this way, all involved define the situation together. It holds coherent discourses. It holds determined refusals of discourse and its absolute refusal in

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[67] The formalization of the concept of *the situation* is one of the essential resources that existentialism (specifically Sartre's existentialism) adds to discourse and while Weil sees existentialism position as legitimate, he also sees it as insufficient (LP 61-64). In the useful glossary of terms in her translation of *L'être et le néant*, Hazel E. Barnes describes Sartre's use of the situation as "[t]he For-itself's engagement in the world. It is the product of both facticity and the For-itself's way of accepting and acting upon its facticity" (1992: 806).

violence. It is partially coherent, meaningful *and* riddled with nonsense, but with a nonsense that can be transformed into meaning. For Weil language always refers back to the situation and to its complex of commitments, because this is what structures the judgments and reasoning that use direct reference. When one disagrees with something pointed at in direct reference, they rarely resort to just saying the same word and pointing to something else. They refer to other commitments. They refer to the complex of inferentially articulated moves that allow the judgment to happen in the first place. Reference and representation are thus deployed within the inferential relationships of the discourse that an individual holds, based on the stance they take in it, based on the category that guides it and the collections of reprises that are put in place. In other words, it is in discourse that the individual grasps a situation, and it is thanks to the situation that an individual has a discourse. Thus reference does not point to something in an a-temporal world that is deformed in discourse, but points to the reality that is structured by discourse and that discourse is a part of, a reality that Weil calls the situation.

If discourse is real and if it plays a role in structuring reality then there are real consequences to discourse. In other words, we are not the passive patients of something that is *really* real and that we grasp in a deficient form, rather we are active agents in reality itself. This, for Weil, is important because it means that discourse conditions the freedom that we exercise in language. This leads to the third move that Weil makes that can be read as inferentialist, which is to highlight the specific kinds of responsibility that are found in discourse. Because discourse conditions the freedom that both we and others exercise, we are in a special way responsible for our discourse, this as I have said is the lesson that *Personality* teaches. It is a responsibility that we give to ourselves by organizing, hierarchizing, and purifying out discourse. In his distinction between sapience and sentience, Brandom also highlights the role of responsibility in the normative character of concept use. For Brandom, what separates us from other animals is our sensitivity to rules, the fact that we can give reasons for what we do, and the fact that we ask for reasons from others, that we take on responsibility for what we say and do and that we demand that others do as well (1994: 275-277). Weil shares the importance of the notion of responsibility, but adds that this is the case because we see ourselves as a legitimate source of values. For Weil, there is nothing necessary about language, no one needs to speak. But once one speaks and once one wants to say something true about the world, they submit themselves to specifically governed argumentative practices that is defined by the individual's conflict with others. The individual creates and defines the necessity that will guide their thought and their action.

Again, for Weil, all necessity is found at the interior of discourse, it is built into conditional judgments, and as such is inferentially articulated.

We are defined by the responsibility we take in discourse, by the premise and conclusions of our judgments, by what we say and how we say it, but we are defined this way by ourselves. Thus this responsibility starts deeper for Weil, it starts in the free choice to speak and to understand. He notes that once that choice is made (which no one knows that they are making) we find ourselves sifting through the essential and the inessential in order to make a coherent discourse that holds up. But he also notes that this necessity only holds up as long as the free choice to speak and to understand is upheld. Remember, a key aspect of Weil's theory is that the individual can always quit reasonable discourse, but they always do so in a world that is defined by discourse and that is structured by discourse. This is what gives a special character to Weil's notion of responsibility. Responsibility is not born of necessity but of possibility. It is only because the possibility of throwing off the constrains of discourse—of no longer submitting oneself to the normative weight of better reasons— exists that individuals can hold themselves responsible. They are responsible for what they say and do because they could just as well not say and do it. Philosophy can be thought of as the continued effort to shoulder the responsibility of our discourse, to refuse meaninglessness and to seek to explain and justify what we do in the world. The responsibility that we take on starts from the free choice to organize one's discourse coherently, to excise contradictions and to eliminate incompatibilities. This gives credence to an inferentialist reading of Weil.

Recognizing inferential relationships means recognizing networks of commitments and entitlements that structure the normative stance that each individual takes to render their discourse coherent. For Weil, we freely choose a ground, and then we work to unfold the consequences of that conceptual ground, and we commit to these consequences. We are thus not the patients of meanings that are in some way independent of discourse, rather we are the participants (and the heirs of other participants) in the gradual and dialectically articulated production of meaning. The main difference between these two positions is that if we are merely a patient of meaning, the meaning itself is already structured independently of discourse and that meaning enters into discourse through reference and representation. In this case, we understand the whole of meaning immediately, and in the second we do not. As participants in the production of meaning, we grasp meaning but we do not fully understand it. In order to understand it we must work through it, and in doing so we modify the meaning that we have grasped. The second, inferentialist, model reminds us that the

initial creation of meaning is only subsequently understood *as* understanding when it is made explicit in discourse. We are the agents of this initial creation of meaning that we grasp thanks to our negative use of language, but that does not mean that we will immediately grasp that meaning nor understand our dissatisfaction. Weil's critique of reference and his defense of the role of discursive responsibility thus puts him in a good position to be read along inferentialist lines, however this is just one aspect of a possible comparison between inferentialism and Weil. The other is a rereading of the first categories, not only as the development of pure attitudes, but also as the development of the resources of coherent discourse. What this reading suggest is that these resources can be understood as inferential concepts.

4.7.2 The Development of Inferential Concepts in the Initial Categories

The development of the logic of philosophy is the development of different forms of coherence based on their central organizing concept. These different forms of coherence define the way that individuals will grasp their situation in order to understand it. By way of his critique of direct reference, we can see that it is not far-fetched to read Weil as an inferentialist. By showing that there is a special type of responsibility that we take on in discourse and that this responsibility (which only becomes fully clear in the category *Personality*) shapes the types of inferences that follow from our free choice to understand, we can characterize the logic of philosophy as a catalogue of different spaces of reasons. These spaces of reasons (the philosophical categories) are each defined by the inferential scope of their central concept, their response to the placement problem, and by the ensuing concepts that they make visible. In other words, we can see the philosophical category as an inferential concept. Each philosophical category defines the types of inferences that are permissible or incompatible in a discourse. Thus the resources that the initial categories add to discourse can be understood as a development of the specific inferential concepts needed for a full-blooded reflexive philosophical discourse.

As already noted the first two categories, *Truth* and *Nonsense*, are the backgrounds of all discourse that can be described as its *yes* and its *no*. In this way they form a type of logical framework that allows us to understand the *Logic of Philosophy* as the structured grasp of progressive unities of meaning and their determined refusals. By claiming that *Truth* is the *yes* of discourse, Weil is already starting from a non-representational point of view.

He reminds us that there "there is nothing that 'corresponds' to truth, that is its 'other'" (LP 90). In other words, from this first category there is nothing that refers to the external world, that points outside of discourse, it is discursive claim of the grasp of an attitude. The most basic reference is to the complex that make up a situation, and here Weil refers to the attitude of the individual in unity with the concrete situation of their life. As Weil notes, this category does not itself develop a discourse, it has no doctrine that is discursively articulated. At most, the entire content of its doctrine is a single word: *truth*. I have already mentioned that the logic of philosophy as a whole can be understood as the inferential unfolding of this word, by looking at the initial categories as steps in developing inferential concepts, we will be able to see how this plays out.

Following this argument, we can see *Truth* as placing the origin of discourse in a pragmatic attitude. The attitude of *Truth* is unbounded. It accepts everything that *is* as it is. Because it is unbounded, it has no determined content. This is why the category can't propose an articulated discourse: the contents of discourse are built in opposition. Nothing is outside of *Truth* and so it is without contour. Truth presents itself as empty. This empty character shows how important negativity is to Weil's theory. Endless things are permissible as long as incompatibilities and limits have not been established. Incompatibilities define spaces of reasons by being the opposition that gives discourse determined content. This opposition is found in the category of *Nonsense*. By opposing itself to *Truth*, *Nonsense* can be thought of as the birthplace of incompatibility, but again as a purely pragmatic negation that is found in the attitude of *Nonsense*. In *Nonsense*, incompatibilities are not yet seen as such since in its opposition, *Nonsense* merely refuses all content. Remember, I said that the pure attitude of *Nonsense* is the pragmatic refusal of the world and of all determined content as meaningless. This pragmatic negation is yet not necessarily discursive. That is, it does not yet need to take the form of the abstract negation that for Weil separates us from other animals, and that allows us to give determined refusals to determined content. It nonetheless remains the birthplace of incompatibility. Incompatibilities give definition to the space of reasons by limiting which inferences are permissible, but it does not yet try to organize them. In order for this to happen the idea of scope is needed.

In its pure form, *Nonsense* refuses *all* determined content. Therefore, no inferences are permissible. In *The True and the False* this changes however. Some inferences are permissible and some are not. This is because here, "[t]ruth and nonsense interpenetrate each other in language" (LP 102). While it does not reflect on what it does, *The True and the False* nonetheless uses the abstract negation to fix the notion of judgement that is present in

inference. The abstract negation is different from the pragmatic one in that it is anchored in language and so is not just negative but is also positive. It does not merely refuse meaning to see the world as meaningless, but it has the tools to transform the individual's dissatisfaction into determined content. This is why the scope of discourse is so important, it is only thanks to the capacity to fix incompatibilities that permissible inferences grasp a concrete situation in its singularity *and* in its universality. With the abstract negation the individual changes the given character of discourse and grasps what is universal in *their* situation. They negate previous discourses and then turn to language in order to elaborate a new discourse that grasps the world. This transformation, from negativity to the negation of negativity, is, for Weil, what allows individuals to be "reasonably reasonable" (LP 10).

By sorting through the essential and the inessential, by identifying incompatibilities, *The True and the False* establishes the scope of permissible inferences. But just as the *Nonsense* is the root of incompatibility that is not yet understood as such, *The True and the False* is the root of inferential scope without yet seeing itself as such. Further developments are needed. In fact, I would argue that it is only in *Discussion* that these developments take on full-blooded logical roles. *The True and the False* cannot yet see its development of inferential scope because the notion of commitment has not yet been fully developed. This does not mean that there is no commitment in these early categories. In fact, the *yes* of *Truth* is already a commitment, but it is not until the category of *Certainty* that the concept of commitment become explicit. Scope allows us to see what shape a discourse has, it allows us to see what is permissible and incompatible in discourse, but the notion of the essential and of commitment have not yet taken hold.

Certainty is what Weil calls "the constitutive category of the world" (LP 108). In *Certainty* individuals commits themself to the content of their discourse, by grasping "the essential as essential" (LP 107) and their commitment to their discourse is what defines them. In other words, the individual is bound to the scope of their discourse in *Certainty*. The individual declares the certainty of *their* certainty "in the middle of uncertain opinions" (LP 108), and in doing so commit to the goodness of their discourse. Once the essential is grasped and this central concept allows the individual to organize their discourse, permissible and incompatible inferences allow the individual to orient their activity, because they know what they are committed to. This is also why the paradox of certainty takes the form that it does, certainty only appears in doubt. For this early category, other certainties only appear as aberrations, and not yet as another possible reasonable content. Nonetheless, the commitment that is developed in *Certainty*, when it is reprised by other categories, makes

other commitments explicit thanks to the scope that is defined by its permissible inferences and incompatibilities. It is however, *Discussion* and the transition to *The Object* that show how these concepts come together in a way similar to inferentialism and show how Weil's critique of direct reference has an inferentialist background.

Discussion's primary mission is political: it seeks to recast the community that has fractured through the relativization of its content and the ensuing doubt that this relativization brings on. In this way, *Discussion* not only thematizes the dialogue of two opposing contents held by two opposing people, but also the whole of the community that judges. For Weil this takes on the form of establishing procedural rules that allow the positions of different adversaries to be heard and that allow all the whole community to decide (LP 127). *Discussion*, because it is political, follows the model of political trials that establish the scope of rights and property between opposing parties. Rights and properties help to determine what share an individual has in and of the community and thus is useful for tracking what individuals or parties are responsible for. In this model, individuals form and use discourses in order to bring the members of the community to agree that they are right in their determined complaints against their adversaries. For Weil, the individual does this by demonstrating where they stand, by showing that they are a good citizen, that they defend and uphold the tradition and that their opponent does not. (LP 126) The goal of procedural rules for Weil is to bring out and make explicit what the *actual* commitments of individuals are, through legitimate questions and response. However, even though its goal is political, we can see these procedural rules as being analogues to deontic scorekeeping.

Remember, scorekeeping is a model that allows us to understand how individuals track commitments and entitlements across speech acts. We are constantly keeping score and altering that score based on what people say. By basing *Discussion* on the political trial where what is at stake is each individual's share of the community, we can easily transpose Brandom's scorekeeping model. In Weil's model, individuals keep track of the share of the community all other individuals have and whether or not this share is legitimate. Discussion before the community alters the judgment of the legitimacy of the individual's stake in the community and thus of their commitments and entitlements. Together, individuals decide the *status* of those that are presenting their claims. Here we can benefit from the presentation I gave of Wilfrid Sellars "Myth of Jones" in the last chapter. One of Sellars's moves was to explain inner speech as being modeled on overt speech acts that people learn to manipulate in order to make sense of reasonable behavior that lacks such overt speech. Here, we can in some sense see Weil making the same move.

The overt behavior that, in a trail before the community, establishes statuses, rights, and obligations can be used to understand the way individuals judge. Trials present a model of understanding how individuals establish and track statuses, rights, and obligations without there being a jury of their peers. In trails, rights, obligations, and statuses are made explicit in order to judge a conflict, however, the real conflict, which will come back in *Personality* happens in the individual, in me, thanks to the existence of the "others in me" (LP 293). Thus, from our point of view, the public trail that is present in the community in *Discussion* provides a model to understand how we internalize judgment, but which will only be complete in *Personality*, precisely because in *Personality* there is no third-party that can judge. In the *Logic of Philosophy* this is a sophisticated logical development that depends on ruling out violence, recognizing others as equals, recognizing the productive roles of difference, doubt, *and* certainty, and taking positions. In our own lives, this same development is just as sophisticated and depends on many social and cognitive factors. By seeing Weil's development in *Discussion* as an analogous development to scorekeeping we can also see this category as opening a process analogous to the game of giving and asking for reasons. It is where individuals take themselves and others to be responsible for what they say in language and what they do in the world. The political model of trials is helpful not only because it allows us to see how Weil's notion of discussion and dialogue is normatively articulated from the get go, but also because it allows us to see how, for him, this leads into the development of formal logic and to an order of explanation that gives inference a more basic conceptual role that reference.

Certainty is a category of value systems, of organized social labor, of certain modalities of the resolution of conflicts but, because for us it predates *Discussion*, its language use is found in modes of fabrication and modes of organization, in different rites and rituals that act on the world. In *Discussion*, because the language of trials acts on individuals and not on the world, the individual does not need to leave language in order to establish their rights and lay claim to their share of the community (LP 129). Rather the individual needs to study language so that only "the pure identity of words […] [remains] in the pure identity of their relations" (LP 129). This pushes the inferences found in predication towards those found in conditional judgment. Weil notes that the type of relations that are studied are the "this is that" of an assertion and the "this is not that" of a counter-assertion. (LP 129) He goes on to note however that this assertion and counter-assertion teach us nothing (LP 129). We can however modify this claim based on what he has already said about judgments of identity in his critique of direct reference. These indexical assertions and

counter-assertions do indeed teach us something, they teach us the commitments of the individuals speaking. This is essential for discussion to start, nonetheless it remains insufficient to bring discussion to a close. A new relation is needed, that of conditional judgments. Conditional judgments allow us to draw out what is essential to our claims, what qualities we are looking to highlight, what our goals are, to anticipate similar conditions in order to determine terms by limiting them. In other words, the inference that is present in predication is codified thanks to conditional judgment. However, through conditional judgments the *Discussion* transforms the tradition that it is trying to salvage. The substantive values of the tradition are deployed in order to defend individual interests. Thus in trials, conditional judgments lead to diverse interpretations of the tradition itself. However what it at stake in these interpretations are the substantive values themselves. In his attempt to stem this transformation by seeking to reconstitute the community's fundamental values, Socrates becomes *The Discussion*'s central figure. He institutes a formal coherent discourse based on non-contradiction, but this discourse is unable to decide the conflict present in trials precisely because this formal discourse bears on conflictual grounding principles. This is one of the great differences in the transition between *Certainty* and *Discussion*. *Certainty* holds commitments but its language is obscure and protean, in *Discussion* language is clarified but its commitments are not.

In *Certainty*, because it appears to us as the category of magical thinking and as a closed system of values, only the initiated have access to a language that acts on the world. In *Discussion* equals square off against each other before their peers and thus effective language is in the purview of every citizen, but *Discussion* does not make language effective, commitment does. This has tremendous consequences. For Weil, *Discussion* is born in the dissolution of *Certainty* that is the dissolution of tradition. It is because the tradition and the convictions that go with it have been undermined that the presence of differences can give rise to doubt. The goal of discussion is nothing other than to reestablish conviction, to give people true commitments that allow the community to hold together. Initially though things are merely hypothetically posited in order for the ancient certainty to have enough room to discuss principles and goals. This is why for Weil, in *Discussion* Socrates "discovers the possibility of formally coherent discourse in language" (LP 132) but that he does not succeed in grounding it. Discourse bears on everything, it is valid for everyone, but these two conditions do nothing to guarantee that discourse be true or that it come to a successful and satisfying conclusion. The failures of language show that everyone can agree and still be wrong. As was the case, for example, with Socrates' execution. The conditional judgment

of the *Discussion* thus becomes: *if* error is in language *then* there must be something outside of language that grounds it. The elaboration of a discourse that transforms dissatisfaction into error is, for Weil, at the start of all philosophical projects. It is essential to his order of explanation, and this transition, which in the order of the logic is the transition from *Discussion* to *The Object*, marks the beginning of western philosophy. I have said that *Discussion* is at the genesis of the philosophical attitude of understanding, but that as a transitional category, it merely points towards the possibility of philosophy. *The Object* marks the free choice not just to understand but also to explain the world coherently starting from the ontological correspondence between external reality and discourse. It seeks to ground discourse and thus assigns direct reference a philosophical role and in doing so creates philosophy (and science) out of the recognition of error and the effort to overcome this very error by coming up with an order of explanation that permits a coherent grasp of the world.

4.8   Conclusion

By looking at the initial categories as the progressive development of inferential concepts, we can see that Weil poses *Truth* as the initial grasp of the *pragmatic* character of discourse, starting from the concept of the individual who lives their life as a meaningful unity, but a discourse that has not yet developed the content of this unity. Further categories will be needed for content to be developed. This development, this movement, requires another pragmatic category to set it off. This is what the pragmatic negation in the category *Nonsense* provides. These two initial pragmatic positions are transformed into the inferential roles of permissibility and incompatibility in *The True and the False*. *Certainty* adds the concept of commitment and *Discussion* brings these developments together in order to create procedural rules that bear strong similarities to Brandom's game of giving and asking for reasons. All these developments are already in place and prefigure the development of reference and representation that is brought on in the categories that develop concrete content. These semantic categories, from *The Object* to *The Absolute*, are the different shapes that the philosophical attitude of understanding takes on based on different specific grounding concepts. All categories are used in language and in philosophical discourse. Nonetheless, reprising these initial categories (which are primitive precisely because of the concepts they ignore) as the development of inferential concepts and the later categories as the *specific* shapes of *philosophical* discourse reinforces Weil's goal to understand both

philosophical language and discourse and to understand the language and the discourses that are neither in themselves nor for themselves philosophical. This shows that Weil's critique of representation and direct reference is not tied to the use that philosophy has given it, but to the scope that it has. This fits in with his fallibilism (understood as openness) and his expressivism. Reference and representation are essential to specific types of discourse but they are insufficient to ground the totality of language. The logic of philosophy allows us to trace the scope of these concepts by seeing the types of discourse, the types of spaces of reasons, the types of philosophical categories that require and depend on reference and representation, but when this reference and representation faces conflict or incompatibilities, one must appeal to the human possibility of creating a discourse that transforms their dissatisfaction into error and one must thus look outside of reference and representation. The source of this conflict itself is grounded in the human capacity to express dissatisfaction. This capacity, for Weil, is regimented by discourse (which can be referential and representational) but is born of human spontaneity. This spontaneity is at the heart of what I have called the fundamental entanglement between language and violence. In this chapter I sought to articulate Weil's theory in a way that connects it to inferential expressive pragmatism. In the next chapter, I will develop what Weil's theory can add to inferential expressive pragmatism.

Chapter 5   THE LANGUAGE OF CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

5.1   Introduction

In the previous chapters, I proposed that both Weil and the strain of pragmatism that I am defending here should be understood as presenting us with an underlying theory about orders of explanation. According to this position, these theories, by starting from a certain conception of orders of explanation, place the emphasis on discursive commitments and thus do not look outside of discourse in order to ground themselves. Orders of explanation matter because they define the kind of explanatory force a discursive commitment will have. I went on to argue that both Weil and this pragmatism defend fallibilist positions, that is, an order of explanation based on the possibility of error (or the transformation of dissatisfaction into error). Additionally, I have asserted that both Weil and this pragmatism place an emphasis on how these discursive commitments are initially implicit, and that the work of philosophy is to make them explicit. For Weil, this is the distinction that he makes between attitudes and categories, for Robert Brandom, this is found in his inferential semantics. By linking fallibilism with the slow drawing out of implicit content (content that is lived in our lives without a reflexive grasp of it) into the light of a structured discourse, these two positions place a great deal of emphasis on how discursive categories play an essential role in structuring our cognitive experience in the world. Discursive categories are seen as structuring the content of our beliefs, either as spaces of reasons in the case of the post-Sellarsian tradition in pragmatism, or as philosophical categories in Weil's case. From there, I worked out how these two orders of explanation favor specific types of positions. This is helpful in two ways. One, it shows how orders of explanation play an essential role in understanding philosophical positions, and two, it shows how Weil and the strain of pragmatism presented here develop their own orders of explanations which justify why certain aspects of a commitment are weighted differently than others. We can exploit this similarity, the shared emphasis on the characterization of orders of explanations, in order to better distinguish the divergences in Weil's and pragmatism's orders of explanation.

One similarity I have been looking to draw out of the two orders of explanation is the claim that an expressivist and an inferentialist model of language use has greater explanatory force than a representational and designative model of language use. This is because the key representational and designative insights can be captured thanks to an expressivist inferentialist model, but that on the other hand, a representational designative model

struggles to capture what is right about the expressivist and inferentialist model. Now I will present what Weil's discourse allows us to grasp comprehensively that pragmatism does not, namely violence and the radical refusal of discourse. Violence is a concrete expression of human spontaneity. In that capacity it is fundamentally entangled with language. Language and violence are two of the forms that the creative production of meaning can take. In this chapter then, I will focus on the divergence between Weil's position and the pragmatism that is exemplified by Brandom's inferentialism. I specifically want to argue, following Weil, that the philosophical tradition that sees the individual as an essentially rational being overlooks the fundamental entanglement of language and violence and that this entanglement is a blind spot in modern inferentialism.

Modern inferentialists (Sellars and Brandom, as well as sympathetic commentators such as Price and Peregrin) for all the strength of their positions do not see the limit to discursive reason that Weil does in violence. However, as I will also argue, this is not a weakness of their theory, because the whole philosophical tradition has missed this point with the exception perhaps of irrationalist theories, which grasp the importance of violence but only obliquely because they do not take coherent discourse into account. Weil refuses irrationalism, but nonetheless he grasps the importance of its critique against the rational tradition, the importance of concrete violence and he tries to respond to these things. The conceptualization of the fundamental entanglement of language and violence must be seen as Weil's greatest contribution to philosophy. Thus, I do not argue that this blind spot is a fatal flaw in inferentialism. Rather I argue that, by formulating the theory in terms of explaining semantic content by an appeal to discursive practices (namely commitments, as they are understood with endorsements and incompatibilities), inferentialist are in a better position to absorb Weil's insights. However, as I will show, it is the fact that they are so well-positioned to absorb these insights that inferentialist positions highlight the full force of the critique that Weil provides. In other words, by formulating discursive practices in terms of commitments, inferentialists must face Weil's problem head-on, they cannot sidestep it. With that in mind, I will present three major arguments in this chapter. They will show that:

1. Brandom's inferentialism is vulnerable to Weil's critique specifically because of the way he reads the distinction between sapience and sentience.
2. The language of commitments and entitlements does not dodge this problem, but rather runs into it headlong.

3. The space of reasons is a nebulous concept in its present form and that without further definition its usefulness as a metaphor may wane.

These arguments have two goals: first, to provide a critique that I think inferentialism must answer, and second, to highlight what Weil's theory can add to inferentialism. While this solution may seem a little too facile, I think it is not. If Weil's philosophy provided a critique that only inferentialism had to answer, and then provided the answer, indeed that would be too facile. However, Weil's critique applies to the philosophical project in general. What his critique adds to the philosophical project is the tools to understand how to properly grasp violence in philosophical, logical, and semantic terms. Thus, the fact that Weil's answer fits so easily into an inferentialist program is a merit and not a demerit of inferentialism, given how fatal Weil's critique is to so many other programs. Both Brandom and Weil insist on discontinuities in their work, what I will argue is that the main difference, the difference that counts, is where they situate these discontinuities, and nowhere is this truer than in the scope and status of sapience. In fact, the greatest divergence between Weil and Brandom is to be found within the scope and the status accorded to sapience. On these points, I will defend Weil's order of explanation over Brandom's while at the same time showing that incorporating these changes would not weaken Brandom's position, but would rather strengthen it.

5.2   Sentience and Sapience

Eric Weil does not use the pair sentience/sapience since it is a pair that came into the philosophical mainstream after his time, however these terms are anchored in a tradition that he does exploit. This is the tradition of characterizing man as a rational animal, as an animal whose reason overlays its animality. Weil nonetheless modifies that traditional usage and from the beginning places the emphasis on a certain model of language use. He reformulates the tradition's characterization and states that the tradition understands man "as an animal endowed with reason and language, more precisely endowed with reasonable language" (LP 3). This modification might seem slight but it is important because it highlights the way that Weil, like Brandom, traces the discontinuity between an animal and a human existence according to discursive practices. For Weil, reasonable language, a language that aims at coherence and universality, a language, to use Brandom's terms, that is regimented according to the logical roles of conditionals and incompatibilities, has been used throughout the philosophical tradition to define the human being and to mark what distinguishes us from

other animals. It is, according to that tradition, the most important dividing line that we can draw in the sand. By describing sapience as something that overlays our sentience and something that clearly distinguishes us humans as the manipulator of concepts from other things that do not do so, Brandom is placing himself clearly in this tradition. This is precisely why Weil's top to bottom reformulation of philosophy in relation to violence touches Brandom's position. Thus, the first thing I will do is to present Brandom's characterization of sapience and then show where Weil's characterization diverges.

To understand Brandom's use of sapience we must not only contrast it with sentience but also with what he calls "reliable differential response dispositions." Brandom uses these three concepts in order to create a hierarchy that allows us to characterize human sensitivity to reasons and to understand what is distinctive about this sensitivity. As I have already noted, Brandom's philosophical position contains the sophisticated nesting of progressive discontinuities in order to identify qualitative thresholds that allow us to characterize different phenomena as autonomous at different grains of fineness. Thus, in order to correctly characterize sapience (which is his goal), he must distinguish the different concepts that are contained within it but that are also comprehensible as autonomous at other grains of fineness. Brandom uses the concepts of reliable differential responsiveness, sentience, and sapience in order to respectively distinguish between things that respond to their environment, things that are aware of their environment, and things that can conceptualize their experience of their environment. It is important to note that human beings are all of these things, but that all the things that respond to their environment, or are aware of it, cannot do what humans can, which is to grasp their experience discursively. In this way, reliable differential response dispositions and sentience are contained in sapience but are insufficient to explain it (1994: 87).

According to Brandom, reliable differential responsiveness is nothing more than the characteristic of responding to an environment or to changes in that environment in reliable and thus predictable ways. This capacity is an important aspect of sapience, insofar as the reasons that sapient things mobilize include what Brandom calls non-inferential reports, but these non-inferential reports are in no way limited to human beings. Brandom notes that a thermostat will give a reliable report of the temperature of a room (2001: 167), and in fact, it is trivially true that everything is constantly a reliable reporter of different aspect of its environment. Iron responds to humidity by rusting. Water responds to changes in temperature by freezing and evaporating. Ears respond to sounds by vibrating, and so on. What makes these responses salient is when they are mobilized by conceptual beings that

can use the temperature of a room to decide to put on a sweater, to use the solidity of the ice as an indicator of whether or not it will support their weight in order to go skating, or whether the pain caused by the vibrations of sounds at a concert are reason enough to put in earplugs. Sapient things also have the capacity of making claims that are sharable with other sapient things based on these observations, they can advise someone to put on a sweater, not to go on the ice, or to remember their earplugs when going to a metal concert. Thus, there is clearly a great gap between just differentially responding to things in a reliable way, and responding to specific things, and further using these things inferentially as premises and conclusions.

While reliable differential responses are contained in sentience and sapience, sentience is a threshold that adds something new to the *disposition* to react reliably to an environment. It includes a level of irritability and arousal (2001: 157) that is linked to being "aware in the sense of being awake" (2001: 157). This, for Brandom, is merely a "factual matter of biology"(2009: 3), and thus is also different from the kind of thing that sapient things can do, such as being able to characterize sapience from inside of sapience itself, for instance, which is not merely a consequence of our biological irritability and arousal. Certain animals for instance can be trained thanks to their sentience to reliably respond to *specific* aspects of their environment, such as Brandom's example of the parrot that reacts in the presence of red things (2001: 48). What matters here is that Brandom places both reliable responsiveness and sentience on the far side of sapience, precisely because what interests him is what is particular about sapience. For Brandom, the properties of a thermostat make it respond to the environment and the parrot can be trained to respond reliably to the presence of red things. Neither are capable however of connecting these reports to judgments and reasonings, because that implies an additional awareness, an awareness of normative force and of the inferential articulation of concepts. Again, Brandom is highlighting the way our own responsiveness to our environment is a necessary condition for sapience but is far from a sufficient one. This is because for Brandom, what matters is not just our awareness of our environment, but rather this additional awareness of concepts and the awareness of how concepts hold sway over us. This is what is particular about sapience for Brandom. Human concept users mobilize their differential responses and their natural awareness of their environment in a way that artifacts and sentient beings do not. Sapient things are sensitive to conceptual content and to its inferential articulation and they mobilize these inferential articulations. The conceptual is a realm of laws that cannot be reduced to the natural. Sapient things transform non-inferential reports arising from their responsiveness and their awareness to their environment by bringing them into this realm of laws as the premises and

the conclusions of judgments. These are the salient differences that separate us from the mercury we use in thermostats as an indicator of temperature and the irritability and arousal that can be trained in parrots or other animals to respond in a reliable manner in the presence of *specific* stimuli. Sapience highlights our capacity to submit ourselves to reasons, to take on normative weight.

Thus Brandom separates sapience from sentience and from reliable differential response, however, inside of sapience he makes another key distinction, he assimilates sapience to rational behavior. Brandom initially focuses on the way, for Kant, being rational "means being bound by rules" (1994: 50), but as he develops the more historical aspect of his thought he starts to more clearly distinguish between *Vernunft* and *Verstand*. For Brandom, these two ideas are what he calls meta-metaconcepts where the difference is one between conceptual thinking (*Vernunft*) and representational thinking (*Verstand*) (2019: 7). This distinction is important because, following Hegel, it allows us to think of the "determinateness of conceptual content in terms of […] a *process*, rather than in terms of the *property* of having sharp complete boundaries" (2019: 7) and allows us to see *Vernunft* as "a dynamic account of the *process* of determi*ning* those contents" (2009: 89). This is different from the merely static relationship between contents that, for Brandom, is found in *Verstand*. Brandom claims that *Vernunft* is a specific type of *expressive* rationality that contains inferential and historic rationality and that involves giving and asking for reasons. Inferential and historic rationality is thus used to make conceptual content explicit. Once this content is explicit we are able to see the inferential and the historic use of reasons as the "progressive form of the gradual, cumulative unfolding into explicitness of what shows up retrospectively as having been all along already implicit in the tradition" (2002: 12). In other words, *Vernunft* is seen as a rational retrospective reconstruction of the history and use of reason itself. There is however another way to read the distinction between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, which is between the rational and the reasonable. Brandom admits this possibility when he drolly notes that despite the fact that he places the emphasis on rationality "[o]ne might object that 'reasonable' and 'rational' are not synonyms in English. Being relentlessly, excessively, or inappropriately rational can be a way of being *un*reasonable (Just ask anyone who lives with a philosopher!)" nonetheless he insists that even though the rational and the reasonable have "different dimensions of normative appraisal, judgments of how rational a belief, commitment, action, or person is do nonetheless have normative consequences" (2009: 2). He thus seems more worried to show the normative dimension of rationality than that of reasonability and because of this it must be asked whether he authentically speaks

from *Vernunft* or whether in speaking of *Vernunft* he remains in the language of *Verstand*. Whatever the response to that question, it is exactly along these lines that he and Weil diverge.

Weil clearly separates the rational and the reasonable, and his separation focuses on the human individual insofar as they are a moral being. Without taking this moral dimension into account, Weil thinks we miss something essential about judgment and about action. It is because the individual seeks rules that they can give to themselves to guide their action that they are led to moral reflection, and it is thanks to this moral reflection that they can give themself rules. Weil notes that:

> [a]n amoral being, a being who not only is ignorant of the concrete rules of a given moral, but also of the concept of a rule, will merely be, from the point of view of morality, an animal, man being defined at this level as the living being who possesses, or at least, seeks a rule that allows him to choose between the possibilities that present themselves to his action (PM 19).

Thus, for Weil, if we obscure the reasonable (moral) dimension of action we miss both why people act and how they act. This also leads us to miss the possibility of refusing determined norms in determined situations as well as the radical possibility of refusing all normative constraint. Normative constraints are something that the individual gives to themself and that they thus determine, but for Weil, they only become aware of this through moral reflection. In Weil's model the rational is born in our conflict and competition as both natural and social creatures, but the reasonable plays the role of an all-important threshold that allows this conflict and competition to be resolved according to rules. This is why, for Weil, the progressive rationalization of society along the lines of means and ends is in conflict with the reasonable reflection of the *individual*. For Weil the social second nature of the individual is a matter of "acting rationally and determining oneself reasonably" (PP 103). It is however the capacity to determine oneself that is seen as more conceptually primitive than our rational activity, because the history of human rational activity is downhill reasonable self-determination. Self-determination falls under a reasonable (moral) reflection on the universal which "gives a meaning to the reasonable life of the individual" (PP 105), and it is according to this meaning that the individual determines what would be rational and reasonable to do in this or that situation. For the individual who has not gone through moral reflection, the reasonable and the rational intermingle in the ambient norms of the concrete determinations of their historic situation. But for the individual who thinks through their moral possibilities, who demands what they *should* do in a world determined by the past and

by other potentially reasonable beings, it is not only a question of being rational, but also (and above all) of being reasonable. In other words, it is only a reasonable moral individual that can ask the question of meaning for themselves and who can seek to understand and understand comprehensively thanks to that meaning. Without this dimension, rational effectiveness is not just hollow, it is deadly (as the example of any efficiently organized genocide shows). In a sense, the rational is our first contact with the universal, because society asks us to act rationally, however it is *for ourselves* that we act reasonably within an open community of reasonable beings and thus it is through our reflection on reasonable action that we *understand* the rational demands of our social situation. In other words, we decide for ourselves in view of a more human world. In this sense rationality is derivative of reasonability. This does not mean that Brandom does not try to capture this element, he does, this is why he reflects on the different ways of formulating rationality. However, by focusing on rationality he obscures or ignores the threshold that Weil thinks moral reflection adds to conceptuality, namely that understanding is the organization and consideration of multiple reasonable concrete possibilities against the background of violence.

Weil would agree with all that Brandom says, he would agree that Kant's emphasis on the boundedness to rules is critical to understanding the philosophical project. He would also agree that is the dynamic conceptual nature of *Vernunft* is more fecund than the static representational nature of *Verstand*. He would agree that the type of normative appraisal that goes along with the rational is essential. However what he would disagree with is that we can focus almost essentially on the rational at the expense of the reasonable. In fact, the way he characterizes violence turns on the way he distinguishes between the rational and the reasonable. The reasonable is nothing other than a meta-commitment to situate difference and doubt and to settle conflict through reasoned argumentative practices. This meta-commitment is also present in Brandom. He notes:

> [c]ritical thinkers, or merely fastidious ones, must examine their idioms to be sure that they are prepared to endorse and so defend the appropriateness of the material inferential transitions implicit in the concepts they employ. In Reason's fight against thought debased by prejudice and propaganda, the first rule is that material inferential commitments that are potentially controversial should be made explicit in claims, exposing them both as vulnerable to reasoned challenged and as in need of reasoned defense (1994: 126).

Nonetheless despite noting this meta-commitment, he seems to think that making problematic inferences explicit is enough to bind people to good inferences. Weil's critique of the rational tradition shows that this is not the case.

Perhaps it is Brandom's focus on the rational that allows us to understand Rebecca Kukla and Mark Lance critique which states that Brandom has a tendency to reduce commitments and entitlements with the space of reasons to a *Platonic space* built around "some abstract normative structure" (2008: 217). Brandom gives us a robust structure in which to understand normative behavior, however, he passes over in silence the fact that "[w]e cannot engage in normative practices at all unless we are the sorts of beings who can recognize the claims of norms, but this is not possible unless we can transgress or fail to live up to these claims, because the binding force of norms makes sense only in the face of a possible gap between what we do and what we ought to do" (2008: 285). Everything turns on the interpretation of this gap. *Either* it is because of error, which is an insufficient capacity to participate in the game of giving and asking for reasons, *or* it is a knowing refusal. In other words, even though beings capable of sapience are the only ones that understand the meaning of the normative, they are also the only ones that can knowingly reject normativity. This gap is thus the key to understanding why Weil prioritizes the reasonable over the rational and why his critique of the rational tradition is so forceful.

Brandom's characterization of sapience focuses on human beings as discursive beings, as the kinds of beings that deploy reasons and are sensitive to reasons. He notes that sapient things are "rational agents in the sense that their behavior can be made intelligible, at least sometimes, by attributing to them the capacity to make practical inferences concerning how to get what they want, and theoretical inferences concerning what follows from what" (2001: 157). This means they must be *able* to do more things than just respond to their environment (1994: 87). Weil is in full agreement with this. He agrees that this has been what mattered most for the philosophical tradition's explanation of animal gifted with reasonable language. However this is not necessarily the definition that matters most for the concrete individual, and if philosophy wants to understand itself it must understand the resistance of the concrete individual to philosophy. With this in mind, we can now say that Weil's disagreement turns on the notion of possibility. Brandom says that sapient things have the *capacity* to make their behavior explicit through discursive practices, that they *can* do so if they want to make their activity reasonable. Weil's critique highlights that this capacity does not mean that they in fact do so. The concrete individual can refuse to do so and they can refuse to do so knowingly and not through ignorance nor through the weakness

of will. There seems to be an underlying tendency in Brandom's claim to say that because sapient things can make their behavior intelligible through inferences, and because they do actually do so part of the time, they *are bound to* do so (in both sense of the expression). He notes that he is focusing on paradigmatic cases of conceptual behavior, however his normative claims, precisely by focusing only on paradigmatic cases may be too strong. Weil notes that reason (coherent discourse in situation) is one of man's possibilities but the interest of Weil's project lies in the way that this possibility interlocks with man's other possibility (the refusal to be bound by all norms), and the effect this other possibility has on discursive practices.

By defining reason as one of man's possibilities Weil notes that "this designates what man *can*, and man can certainly be reasonable, can at least want to be reasonable. But it is only a possibility, it isn't a necessity, and it is the possibility of a being which possesses at least one other possibility. We know that this other possibility is violence" (LP 57). This does not mean that Weil abandons the normative character of reason. He notes that while it is merely a possibility and that, for there to be a possibility, there must be at least one other choice, he also admits that as an animal that is endowed with reasonable language, in order to be fully *men*, individuals must exercise that reasonable language (LP 5). *Man* is thus for Weil a term that defines the full exercise of reasonable discourse, but one that we also apply derivatively to those that have that capacity even when they don't exercise it. In this way *Man* shares a similar status in Weil's work as sapience does in Brandom's. The main difference is how the scope of these two positions is accorded. Weil always contrasts *Man* with the concrete action of concrete individuals. Thus, reasonable discourse for Weil, is the dividing line between human animals and non-human animals, just as it is for Brandom, but for Weil it is not something that is solidly acquired once and for all and thus able to be taken for granted. It is a (a-reasonable) choice and the normative horizon that is ever receding at our approach. This is a simple distinction. The surprising thing about Weil's critique is the way that this simplicity belies its radicality. It causes him to reformulate the entire philosophical tradition in terms of violence while still insisting that violence is only meaningful to this tradition, which he characterizes as "the refusal of violence" (LP 58). Weil notes that this refusal of violence, this non-violence, is "the starting point and the final goal of philosophy" to such a point that "philosophers often forget that they are dealing with violence" (LP 59). This is the heart of Weil's critique, philosophy places violence outside of itself and thus forgets about it and tries to reduce the world to a world without violence. Philosophy forgets that reasonable behavior only makes sense against a background of

violence. It is reasonable behavior that appears amidst violence that allows the violence to become visible, but it is the irreducibility of violence that allows action to be reasonable. This is because reasonable action is predicated on the refusal of violence but rational behavior is not, precisely because one can be rational in their exercise of violence.

Weil focuses on reasonability because the violent individual can be sensitive to both rationality and reasonability and be unmoved. The violent individual can even knowingly use this sensitivity and the recognition of this sensitivity in others to their advantage. That is, the violent individual can deploy their instrumental rationality, can calculate means and ends, in order to destroy the normative force of reasonability itself, thanks to the sensitivity of others to rational and reasonable behavior. This is the lesson that Nazi Germany taught Weil, but this is also a lesson that is being taught to us right now with the rise of radical forms of nationalism and xenophobia. The political leaders that foment the discontent of social groups that feel threatened or marginalized by changes in the social makeup of the political landscape are making great use of their instrumental rationality while not holding themselves to the meta-commitment to reasonable (non-violent) behavior. In this case technical rationality is the condition of their success and they use this rationality as they see fit without taking others into account as real dialogue partners.

The simplicity of Weil's critique does nothing more than remind us that reasonable discourse is a choice. It's radicality is that it forces a reevaluation of the entire philosophical tradition. By focusing on rational discourse, the philosophical tradition has constantly reduced violence and the world to discourse, to life understood and not life lived. Weil's critique shows that violence is an aspect of human freedom that is irreducible to discourse, and that this irreducibility can break discourse in its refusal. To transpose Weil's critique into Brandom's language, Weil recognizes sapience as the discontinuity that is essential to understanding what we do as concept users, he affirms the place of *Vernunft* over *Verstand*, and he recognizes the priority of rationality within sapience as being the necessary condition for binding oneself to normative behavior, nonetheless he asks if that condition is sufficient. Weil's critique highlights that what is special about reasonable discourse is that it is a choice and thus any account of this choice must see the other possibility as also being real. Sapience is not a natural status. As Brandom notes, there "were no commitments before people started treating each other as committed; they are not part of the natural furniture of the world" (1994: 161). Weil would agree with him, but for Weil it is born of an a-reasonable (unjustified and unjustifiable) choice that uncovers another choice.

As a normative status, sapience has conditions of success and of failure. Within sapience, there are different types of norms that fall under rational and reasonable behavior. Both types of norms can be refused but the consequences are radically different. According to Weil's use of the distinction between the rational and the reasonable, when rational behavior is refused, the individual is refusing instrumental norms of success, for example all consequential reasoning that involves means and ends. The consequences of this type of reasoning is present in the fact that the individual can choose to die of hunger, of cold, to engage in dangerous behavior knowingly. People can refuse rational norms for reasonable ones, they can risk their life to save somebody else's. They can also prioritize reasonable norms in such a way to modify rational ones, thus when an individual goes on a hunger strike as a form of moral resistance, they abandon the rational norms necessary for their individual survival as a *rational* strategy meant to bend the resolve of their adversary. This is different from choosing violence. Choosing violence is the abandoning of the norms of reasonable behavior in order to no longer feel oneself as responsible to them. Weil's critique reminds us that any individual can refuse any normative status. As I have said, this may seem slight, however, when it is stated it the terms of continuities and discontinuities, it is this difference that makes all the difference. It implies two things. First, it implies that there is meta-commitment to reasonable behavior that is implicit in Brandom's theory and in the game of giving and asking for reasons in general. If the goal is to make what is implicit explicit, this must be brought out. Second, it implies that the individual is *always* in a relationship with the world and with discourse that falls under the spontaneous creative production of meaning (understood as *poiesis*).

For Brandom, the goodness of normative statuses depends pragmatically on the practice of undertaking and acknowledging commitments and entitlements. Semantically, they depend on the contents that are taken to follow from good inferences and those that are taken to be incompatible based on the other contents to which one is committed. Weil's critique claims that pragmatically one can refuse to acknowledge any and all commitments and entitlements and thus the person who refuses commitments and entitlements is indifferent to the semantic goodness of inferences and incompatibilities. Brandom acknowledges this *pragmatic* possibility without seeing the radicality of what it includes. He states that:

> It is not that one *can*not undertake incompatible commitments, make incompatible assertions. Finding that one has done so is an all-too-common occurrence. But the effect of doing so alters one's normative status: to undercut any entitlement one

might otherwise have had to either of the incompatible commitments, for each commitment counts as a decisive reason against the entitlement of the other, incompatible one (2010: 120).

Brandom rightly notes that what is changed by ignoring discursive rules is an individual's normative status, he misses however that the violent person not only has no worry about their own normative status, they fly in the face of all normative statuses in general. This individual can thus knowingly undertake commitments that are incompatible with any other position. Because they ignore what their normative status *ought* to bind them to, they are able to ignore the norms of conditional reasoning, while nonetheless still engaging in that conditional reasoning itself. What's worse, this is not something they are passively ignoring, it is something they are actively refusing. What they choose in the place of reasonability is violence. As I have already said, this does not however mean that they refuse language, they may still speak, they may even use language as an instrument to rouse others, what they are refusing is to be bound but what their language says. And they refuse this knowingly.

The possibility of refusing all normative constraints is the heart of Weil's critique put into inferentialist terms, and the language of inferentialism is particularly vulnerable to this critique. This is clear if we look at Jaroslav Peregrin's insightful reflection on normative constraints as it is expressed in rule-following behavior. Peregrin claims that the (post-Kripkean) tradition has focused too much on what it means to follow a rule. He thinks that this is a mistake and that this is not the best way to understand normative constraints. Indeed, for Peregrin this fundamental confusion implies both unsavory metaphysical conundrums (what is a rule?) and a regress that demands a rule for following a rule for following a rule for following a rule, *ad infinitum*. Peregrin suggests that instead of speaking about rule-following we speak about "bouncing off rules" (2014: 72). Peregrin's point is that if we look at rules not in their prescriptive sense, as of telling us what to do, but rather in their restrictive sense, as guiding us not to do certain things (*ibid.*: 72), a lot of the dead-ends of "rule-following" disappears. By starting from rule-following there is the idea that rules are fully articulated, and of course some are. Fully articulated rules even help to provide a model for understanding normative practices in general, nonetheless the notion of bouncing off rules reminds us that the force of fully articulated rules is derivative of the kinds of normative constraints we only implicitly grasp in our practical behavior. This does not mean that rule-following should only be understood as restrictive, rather, it means that looking at rules in their restrictive sense adds something philosophically illuminating. In fact, Weil presents a similar distinction, although instead of thinking of the two sides of rules, he looks at the

restrictive and the prescriptive dimensions of rules as articulating the tension between social constraint and the individual in their self-determining reasonable reflection. In fact, in this sense, it is the constraints that are present in the normative practices of a given community that define the specificity of the concrete situation in which the individual will determine their rules of action for themself. The rules that we bounce off of help the productive character of the individual's self-determination to be exercised. Weil himself notes that the "passage from one form of life and of work to another is not made without the intervention of constraint" and that it is "constraint that introduces rationality, this first universal by colliding into the reasonable but particular universal of historic morality" (PP 204). Following the argument that has been sketched, we can say that the normative dimension into which individuals collide or off of which they bounce is the sedimentation of the human production of meaning, but that it is a constraint for the individual precisely because it defines the world in which they are unsatisfied and which they need to give meaning to *their* activity through their own self-determining activity.

Peregrin states that looking at rules in this sense "allows us to see that through limiting us in what we may do they also *delimit* some new space for our actions." (2014: 73). This new space, which Peregrin adapts from Sellars's space of reasons and which he calls a "space of meaningfulness" (*idib.*) is the space where we transform limits and barriers, that we run into or bounce off the normative borders that meaningfully govern our behavior. In this case, violence, the disregard for normative rules, can be understood as an act whereby the individual refuses to bounce off a rule but rather decides to break through it. This nonetheless allows the individual to create boundaries that they recognize as their own and gives shape to their activity as their own, precisely because others find themselves constrained to respond to the violent individual. Thus, bouncing of rules and breaking through rules, understood as an activity, allows us to understand the progressive and particular creation of meaning as being non-mysterious. However, this also shows why the particular creation of meaning is always so underdetermined. The more well-defined certain rules, the easier it is to see activities that inscribe themselves within these rules as meaningful.

Within a set of rules, other things matter, such as for instance, creativity and talent, but this creativity and talent becomes meaningful because it is applied within a set of rules. Thus, an exceptional basketball player depends on the conditions and the rules of basketball for their talent to be realized, just as an exceptional violinist depends on the musical rules for their talent and creativity to be realized. Were there no basketball and only music, the

person whose talent and creativity would be maximized by the practice of basketball may never come to see themself as talented and creative. Peregrin thus suggests the meaningfulness of a concept is defined and refined by the way its field of possibilities is delimited. In this way bouncing of rules plays a constitutive role in meaning because the limit (rule) that we bounce off of restricts and thus guides us in the way we give meaning to our actions and our utterances.

By speaking of bouncing off of rules, Peregrin's treatment helps us better understand how we become sensitive to limits and barriers. If we look at the way that children test boundaries, we can see them as progressively grasping what they are allowed and not allowed to do, by showing the normative consequences of following the rule or disregarding it. Peregrin notes that "thinking, speaking, and acting […] is spontaneous, creative, and unpredictable" (2014: 71) and that one of the things that helps determine this spontaneous behavior is the limiting of it in order to give meaningfulness the shape that it has. For Brandom these constraints are expressed in the normative force of incompatibilities and conditionals. If we look at Weil's insistence on the role of specific refusals of specific determined contents, we can postulate that pragmatic refusals are transformed into the incompatibilities (abstract negations) that guide conditional reasoning. This is what we can call the role-functional use of the human possibility of refusing any determined content. It falls in line with the conceptualization of our physical limits, various social friction, and the possibility of the world striking back. But it is, for Weil, born out of a much more radical possibility, that of refusing all normative constraint.

Looking at rules in their restrictive function brings us back to the placement problem, and Peregrin's notion of bouncing off rules allows a characterization of this problem that is similar to Weil's. Discourse grasps limits, road-blocks, and conflicts as threats to our central commitments. In order to shore up these commitments, we separate what these limits imply out of discourse as what is *essentially* inessential. This essential inessential is the incompatibilities that must be ruled out in order to preserve the discursive attitude from which the individual is acting and speaking, and which defines the scope of permissible inferences, of their positive discursive content. This does not mean that all the inessential of a discourse can be reduced to incompatibilities, such as for instance, the causally structured discourse of experimental science is inessential to the pure category of the moral conscience. Nonetheless *The Conscience* recognizes the importance of this discourse and builds itself off of it, by recognizing its constraints and looking for new ways to articulate them. The essential inessential is not just those things that don't matter to a discourse, it is those things

that *must* be characterized as being secondary in order for the discourse to be considered coherent. Thus, for example, in *The Condition*, values are an essential inessential, they must be considered as secondary for the discourse to remain coherent (which gives rise to the form that the placement problem takes for this discourse and, as we have shown, to Humean expressivism). Weil defends the existence of multiple irreducible discursive centers, and I have argued that different discursive positions yield different responses to the placement problem. We can now add that different restrictions open different spaces of reasons. Remember, Weil presents a two-stage conception of negation. First there is the pragmatic negation that is present in the capacity to refuse any discourse or any normative constraint and then there is the abstract negation that treats these refusals as incompatibilities at the interior of discourse. Both of these negations are of a piece with the radical refusal of discourse, which is not just the capacity to refuse any determined discourse, but is the concrete refusal of all reasonable discourse. Looking at Peregrin's characterization of bouncing off rules I would argue that the first negation is constitutive of discourse in the way that it opens up possibilities through the *negativity* of the act. It presents a *human* force that limits and guides possibilities. It is only once this new space of meaningfulness is opened with its new determined possibilities that the *linguistic* abstract negation takes hold. The abstract negation however is guided by the pragmatic considerations that are expressions of an implicit essential and its essential inessential.

Discourse does not invent meaning. It organizes a non-discursive meaning that is expressed as an attitude, in the fact of living one's life as oriented and meaningful. This is why the pragmatic negation is so important, it explains how meaning takes shape. It defines what discourse will transform into claims of incompatibility precisely because of that content's threat to the solidity of our implicit central commitments. These incompatibilities delimit the shape of the space of reasons and ground its unity and coherence. Any individual can live in contradiction, but it is the philosophical gesture of understanding that seeks an absolutely coherent discourse. It is the philosophical gesture that deploys incompatibilities in order to make a coherent discourse that can grasp an attitude and the world. It is this philosophical gesture that worries about how different facts (moral, scientific, esthetic) fit together in a discursive whole, and thus it is this philosophical gesture that creates the placement problem and that looks to resolve it by defining incompatibilities. Weil's main insight transposed in the language of placement problem is that anyone can refuse coherent discourse at any moment, and thus can refuse to worry about how different kinds of facts fit together. The radicality of Weil's critique however also hides another subtler problem. The

absolute refusal of all discourse is a grounding problem for philosophy, but it is not the form of refusal that most of us encounter in our daily lives (even if we regularly do encounter indifference, the banal form of the radical refusal). The more common form is the specific refusal of specific discourses. This ability is essential for the development of coherent discourse, however the specific refusal of specific discourses and the definition of incompatibilities in no way *has* to be in the service of coherent discourse. It *can* be used for coherent discourse, progressively and positively, to purify discourse and when it is, it allows us to see the limits of our discourse and it hopefully allows us to recognize when one discourse takes precedence over another. It can however also be used to shield one's central commitment from all critique with no worry for coherence, despite the fact that coherence is the greatest form of protection against this possibility that discourse can offer.

The placement problem is an attempt to explain recalcitrant phenomena by finding where to place them in relation to central discursive commitments. However our central commitment, what is essential to our attitude is often invisible to us, and the only way of making it clear, is through a meta-commitment to reasonable argumentative practices. Weil's elaboration of the philosophical categories shows that the response will be different based on different central discursive commitments. What I have called the subtler problem asks how to resolve conflict within discourse when it is precisely this plurality of spaces of reasons and its plurality of responses to the placement problem that create conflicts. There would be no conflict without incompatible claims, and there would be no incompatible claims if people could not commit to things come hell or high water and this is what Weil's critique shows. There is no necessary reduction of difference into unity, discourse cannot on its own bind us to overcome conflicts, the only thing that can is our won meta-commitment to reasonability. I would like to combine Weil, Brandom, and Peregrin's insights here to develop the second argument of the chapter, which seeks to show how the language of commitments and entitlements allows us to clarify the possibility of conflict and violence only because it runs into it headlong.

5.3   *De Dicto* and *De Re* Ascription in a Platonic Space

Brandom tacitly recognizes the possibility of violence when he speaks about the problematic inferences in "[h]ighly charged words like 'nigger', 'whore', 'Republican', and 'Christian'" (1994: 126). While he argues that these "inferences have seemed a special case to some because they couple 'descriptive' circumstances of application to 'evaluative'

consequences" (1994: 126), he is quick to add that these problematic inferences are not unique because "*any* concept or expression involves commitment to an inference from its grounds to its consequences of application" (1994: 126). Rather what is at play in these concepts is the way that they have a substantive content that we are not ready to accept. One of the major roles of Brandom's game of giving and asking for reasons is that it "permits the formulation, as explicit claims, of the inferential commitments that otherwise remain implicit and unexamined in the contents of material concepts" (1994: 126). Thus, what is problematic about the highly charged words that he presents is the way that "non-logical concepts can incorporate materially bad inferences" (1994: 125). The notion of material inferences is of central importance to Brandom. Material inference, for Brandom, following Sellars, do not depend on their logical form but rather on their content. In fact, this is because the "*formal* goodness of inferences derives from and is explained in terms of the *material* goodness of inferences" (2001: 55). Thus paradigmatic material inferences such as that from "'Pittsburgh is to the West of Philadelphia' to 'Philadelphia is to the East of Pittsburgh'" (1994: 98) help us to make explicit what is involved in the concept of EAST for example, that is the way it contains the concept of WEST within it and thus what the content of the above claim is.

The mastery of the concept is in this case the mastery of geographic directionality. In this model, a materially good inference is "treated as good in virtue of its form, with respect that vocabulary [the logical vocabulary of subjunctive conditionals]" (1994: 104) that govern another vocabulary, whether it be esthetic, theological, zoological or any other. In the concept of EAST the vocabulary that is important is that *of* geographic directionality. New concepts are constantly being deployed in order to enrich existing vocabularies, and with problematic terms, this newness is not what Brandom takes issue with. He takes issue with the goodness of the content that is to be found in the conditions of applicability of pejorative terms such as 'Boche' or 'nigger'. When one uses these terms they are implicitly committing themselves to applying these terms to cruel and heartless Germans in the case of Boche or to lazy and violent African Americans in the case of nigger (to lean on the ambient clichés that accompany these terms). The problem is that these terms then come to be seen as defining characteristics of *all* Germans and African Americans. As he says himself, "[t]he problem with 'Boche' of 'nigger' is not that once we explicitly confront the material inferential commitment that gives them their content, it turns out to be *novel*, but that it can then be seen as indefensible or inappropriate" (1994: 127). Again, Brandom seems to think that once the inappropriate character of the application of this content is understood

by making it explicit people will be brought to stop using such terms. While this certainly can happen (if it could not, we could not change our position on matters), there is no necessary reason that we *do* in fact do so.

In order to see the lack of necessity in a reasoned use of reason, the space of reasons cannot be seen as a *Platonic* space of idealized commitments but must instead be seen as a conflictual space of concrete commitments. There must be an articulation of different substantive contents in order to understand *why* people hold commitments that may be seen as inappropriate or indefensible from another point of view. Without this possibility, a normative position that describes what we should believe and how we should act gets no traction. Weil's theory, by articulating the different types of content that follow from different conceptual grounds provides an articulation of different substantive contents. It thus rehearses what one is held to by holding certain *concrete* commitments. Brandom recognizes this need, because he asserts that differences in points of view matter and he recognizes that philosophy's goal is to resolve these differences. He also recognizes that it is these differences that are so important to the representational dimension of speech. By insisting on the social context of the game of giving and asking for reasons, he recognizes that this context is both irreducible and necessary because this game "from which inferential relations are abstracted, involves both inter*content* and inter*personal* dimensions" (1994: 496-497). However, what will be argued here is that because he articulates these different dimensions in a Platonic space of idealized commitments (at least in *Making it Explicit*), he flattens the conflict that Weil thinks is so important to understanding the philosophical project. For Brandom, the representational dimension of speech is to be understood according to *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions. In order to show this it is not necessary to show the entire sophisticated elaboration of *de dicto* and *de re* ascriptions that he puts into place. In fact, in the scope of what he is trying to show he does so masterfully. Rather, what is argued here is that there is still something missing.

Brandom notes that these ascriptions are used to help us to distinguish the *aboutness* of propositional content. He notes that traditionally these ascriptions are used to distinguish what is being said about something from the thing itself. Thus in this way "[a]scriptions *de dicto* attribute belief in a *dictum* or saying, while ascriptions *de re* attribute belief about some *res* or thing" (2001: 170) So to use his example of the claim "The president of the United States will be black by the year 2020" (*Ibid*.) there is an ambiguity. Is the person who is currently the president of the United States (at the moment this is being written, Donald Trump) supposed to become black in the year 2020? This clearly seems an impossibility.

There is little chance that Donald Trump will be transformed in such a radical (and probably for him, unpleasant) way. Thus in order to give a *de re* reading of this proposition it is necessary to modify the phrase (or as Brandom says, to regiment it) in order to bring out what is being spoken about. Thus a correct *de re* reading requires us to add *of* and *that* to bring out the meaning of the phrase. Part of the reason for this is that being the president is holding an office, and the holder of that office can change every four or eight years. To take these changes into account it would be necessary to say, "I believe *of* the person that holds the office of president in 2020 *that* he (or she) will be black." In the first proposition the belief being attributed is about Donald Trump, whereas in the second proposition the belief being attributed is about the person that will hold the office of president and thus (because elections are around the corner) that it will be about his successor. We are thus ascribing two different beliefs when we read the first statement as a *de dicto* ascription and as a *de re* ascription. Brandom thus notes that the regimentation of natural language—which in itself is often frustratingly ambiguous—allows us to clear out this difficulty. He states that according to this change:

> the *de dicto* form
>
>> S believes that φ(t)
>
> Becomes the *de re*
>
>> S believes of t that φ(it) (1994: 502).

What this regimentation of the form of the two different types of ascription shows us, for Brandom, is that "it is the *de re* propositional-attitude-ascribing locutions that we use in everyday life to express what we are talking and thinking *of* or *about*" (1994: 502). In a *de dicto* ascription we are no longer talking *about* the thing, rather we are trying to see "*how* things are represented by the one to whom the belief is ascribed" (1994: 503) This line of thought will be followed, but in order to do so an ambiguity in the term attitude must be cleared up.

When Brandom speaks about attitudes he speaks about normative attitudes, propositional attitudes, deontic attitudes, alethic attitudes, etc. These are different from Weil's use of attitudes (although all of the attitudes in the Brandomian sense can be thought of as being constitutive of attitudes in the Weilian sense). Propositional attitudes, for example, describe the relation that an individual has towards the content of a proposition, thus the propositional attitude that is being ascribed in the first example is that of belief. But other propositional attitudes are found when we doubt a proposition, hope the proposition is

true, etc. To take another example, deontic attitudes focus on the way that we hold commitments or ascribe them and not at the content of the proposition. They focus on the fact that beliefs (understood as doxastic commitments) are attributed and undertaken. The *attributing* and *undertaking* of doxastic commitments with their concomitant statuses are the two principle deontic attitudes that Brandom treats. All these attitudes are linked to our normative attitudes, that is "what we practically *take* or *treat* ourselves or others as responsible for or committed to" (2019: 13). However, again, they should be considered different from Weil's use of attitudes. To understand why this is we can look at the distinction that Weil makes between metaphysical categories and philosophical categories. Philosophical categories structure an individual's discourse and thus govern the use of such metaphysical categories as cause and effect or representation. It seems that we can make a conservative extension of this distinction and say that because a philosophical category grasps a pure attitude or to say it otherwise, grasps a coherent way of being in the world, these attitudes (in Weil's specific sense) must govern the local attitudes of which Brandom speaks. Thus someone in one (Weilian) attitude will deploy their propositional attitudes differently from someone in another (Weilian) attitude. In other words they will be willing to believe some things that are presented in discourse but not others, hope some things presented in discourse are true, but not others, fear some things presented in discourse but not others. Thus, following Weil's distinction between philosophical and metaphysical categories *but* applied to attitudes, we can say that propositional, deontic, alethic attitudes can be considered metaphysical attitudes whose functional roles are analogous to the metaphysical categories like causality and representation. They are important insofar as they are used in actual communication and insofar as they allow us to grasp attitudes in the sense of the *Logic of Philosophy*, but it should be noted that this specific Weilian use of attitudes takes precedence over the metaphysical use.

To return to *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions, Brandom notes that they are an essential part of communication and of interpretation. We accord him that. However, it is specifically in his treatment of more problematic ascriptions that the Platonic character of his usage of the space of reasons becomes clear. Again, Brandom affirms the "essentially perspectival character of conceptual contents" (1994: 586) however, in affirming this, Brandom is worried about establishing the possibility of communication despite the essentially perspectival character of conceptual content. He does this well. However, it remains unclear how, just because communication is possible, it actually takes place, or why just because

someone recognizes statuses and commitments they should see *themselves* as being held to them. This is the gap which Rebecca Kukla and Mark Lance speak about between the recognition of the binding force of norms and the actual adoption of that binding force for oneself. This can be shown through Brandom's example of the "seventh god". Brandom imagines a case of an interaction with a shaman. The shaman says "the seventh god graces us with his presence" (1994: 514) and Brandom notes that in this situation a person with different cultural baggage would be at a loss to understand what the shaman is trying to say. This person has to interpret what the shaman means in order to understand what the shaman is committed to and whether or not they can endorse the shaman's statement. By making the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions we are able to understand that what the shaman is speaking *of* is the sun and that when he speaks *of* the seventh god's grace, he is speaking about the fact that the sun is shining (1994: 514). Thanks to a *de re* ascription we can make the content of the shaman's claim explicit. We can note that the shaman "claims *of* the sun that it is shining" (1994: 514). However, just because we can interpret what the shaman is saying does not mean that we would endorse what follows from this claim. In order to see whether this is the case, we have to understand what the shaman takes to follow from that commitment. Imagine that our shaman knows full well what he is committed to by speaking of the seventh god, that by holding the belief that the sun *is* the seventh god he is committed to killing all those that blaspheme and claim that the sun is anything other than the seventh god. It may be that we communicate with our shaman and we communicate that the sun is shining. Imagine that we explain to the shaman that, for us, the sun is not a god, it is the impersonal, luminous, gaseous, astronomical object that our planet turns around. Imagine now that the shaman has a knowledge of astronomy and understands what we are saying and what we ourselves are committing to. The problem that Brandom obscures is that there may be no problem of communication between us, the shaman may have all the concepts needed to understand what we are telling him, but he may nonetheless hold in his philosophical attitude that to talk of the gods as concrete objects is to blaspheme and that all blasphemers merit a painful death.

In this way, ascriptions *de re* and *de dicto* help us to understand what other individuals are speaking about but they do not necessarily help us to understand what they are committed to by speaking that way. Rather what is needed is a similar mechanism in order to understand the *material* inferences that are being employed. This is exactly what Weil's use of the reprise is conceived to do. Remember, in its simplest form, the reprise is the grasp of the pure attitude under the language of another category. If we accept the

characterization of categories as an inferential concept, then each category is the grasp of the material inferences and the substantive concepts that go along with its specific philosophical attitude. Following this, the reprise is what allows for the introduction of new inferences within the concept that is being modified (especially in justificatory reprises) because it takes into account the changes in the conditions of applicability to specific conceptual content. It is also what allows for the evaluation and justification of these new inferences. This is because the reprise allows us to understand the changes to the conditions of applicability and to the practical consequences of the content of inferences. *De re* and *de dicto* ascriptions thus seem to be contained in the reprise, because part of what the reprise looks to explain is how communication is possible, but it also seeks to explain the changes that content itself undergoes. In Brandom's use, it is unclear how *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions change commitments. They make them explicit yes, but part of what Weil hopes to explain with the concept of the reprise is the way that making commitments explicit modifies them. When categories are reprised, the interplay of reprises allows us to evaluate or justify commitments, but because this does not happen in a Platonic space, but happens with the content of concrete conceptual commitments, grasping reprises modifies which commitments *should* be accepted and which *should* not.

It should be noted that Brandom himself goes a long way towards correcting this perceived Platonism concerning spaces of reasons in his book, *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (2002) specifically in the chapter entitled, "Pretexts". Therein, he is explicit about the fact that the *de re* ascriptions that he is presenting in his work are his own, and that they are up for debate, and that they should even be debated. What is interesting to note is that in this text, when he presents his commitments about interpreting and reading the tradition, he comes to a position that is very similar to Weil's. He notes that material inferences "that articulate the conceptual contents expressed by ordinary, nonlogical sentences are in general *multipremise* inferences" (*ibid.*, 95) and that meaning emerges from a dialogical process (*ibid.*, 93) which entails a type of pluralism whereby the "semantic interpretation one undertakes in specifying the content of a commitment one ascribes to another" must remain *open-ended*. In this case, especially when reading texts from the philosophical tradition, he claims that the way to advance is to try to interpret which claims are central (*ibid.*, 112) to other positions in order to reconstruct all the permissible and incompatible inferences. For Brandom, the goal of " getting clear, crisp versions of the concepts and claims that have, by an exercise in differential emphasis, been picked out as central, is to see how many of the more specific doctrines can then be *translated* into this spare but controlled idiom" (*ibid.*,

113). As I read Weil, this is exactly what he is proposing by presenting categories and reprises. I agree with Kukla and Lance's critique that there is an underlying impression of Platonism in *Making It Explicit*, but I also think that this was important for what Brandom was trying to accomplish. His historical writing is far more sensitive to this problem and he even shows how to overcome it. In doing so however, I see him as coming a position that lines up with Weil's.

Categories are structured in such a way as to bring out all of the inferences that define (or express) a central concept. They thus help us to understand what individuals are committed to *and* what substantive claims they will be willing to make. It is in this sense that I claimed that the categories from the *Object* to the *Absolute* were semantic concepts. They describe the substantive content that goes along with different grounds by showing the commitments that are endorsed by this ground, the commitments that one is entitled to, and what is incompatible with these grounds. Thus, if someone's discourse is structured by *The Condition* they will see facts as being under the purview of quantifiable causal conditions, and thus will only be able to endorse values if they are expressed as psychological, sociological, historic, or other types of quantifiable conditions. Values on their own are not seen as contentful and thus are not seen as something the individual is entitled to nor as something that they can endorse, precisely because the articulation of values is incompatible with their central commitment. Thus the fact/value opposition in *The Condition* will be seen as insurmountable. The problem for Weil is not the perspectival character of communication, Weil accepts this, this is why he argues that there are multiple coherent discourses. The problem is that without a meta-commitment to the reasonable resolution of conflict through argumentative practices, these multiple positions are not merely conflictual, but are incommensurable and thus insurmountable.

5.4   Discursive Commitments and Conflict

The language of commitments and entitlements does not dodge the problem of violence. In fact, the language of commitments and entitlements is particularly vulnerable to this problem precisely because of the way that commitments and entitlements are present in conflict. They make the differences of content explicit. Brandom claims that commitments and entitlements are coordinate concepts, that is, they function together. One is needed in order to make sense of the other. In fact, for Brandom, "[d]oing what one is committed to do is appropriate in one sense, while doing what one is entitled to is appropriate in another"

(1994: 159) and thus these concepts are excellent tools for understanding the normative force of language games. What is important about the language of commitments and entitlements is that it allows us to capture the intersubjective social articulation of normative *deontic* statuses. It allows us to see ourselves as players in the game of giving and asking for reasons and to keep score of our deontic statuses and that of those around us. Thus, in theory, once we commit to a content, if we are entitled to it, others should recognize our status. However this scorekeeping is not an abstract structure, it is articulated in concrete commitments. Nonetheless, the radicality of Weil's critique can be transposed into a Brandomian idiom. Brandom's presentation of the game of giving and asking for reasons focuses on cooperative games, what Weil's critique shows is that there not only also exists conflictual games but these conflictual games cannot be ignored, and more seriously, that in order to fully understand cooperative games, conflictual games must be taken into account.

Given the differences between Weil's and Brandom's theories, we can look at conflictual games at two different levels, one at the level of language, and the other at the level of discourse. Conflict is present at the level of non-philosophical language precisely because of the ways that individuals misattribute commitments and entitlements. In philosophical discourse conflict is present, not necessarily because of misattribution, but rather because of the recognition of different grounds. It is present in the disagreement between the different types of conceptual language that individual speak when they develop a discourse, in the language in which they give their reasons and the language that they want others to speak when these others give their own. Committing is thus an essential feature of recognizing the commitments of others. However, by committing, individuals take on some commitments as being incompatible with other ones, and unless an incompatible commitment is shown to be reducible to another compatible one, these incompatible commitments are a source of conflict. Using this vocabulary, we can thus look at a whole assortment of ways that conflicts are present in the way we ascribe commitments and the way we conceive our entitlements in discourse. Conflicts are however present in a different way than pure violence is. In order to clarify what I mean I am going to make a distinction between latency and implicitness[68]. Violence is latent in all discourse because violence and language are fundamentally entangled. In other words, they are both present in the particular

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[68] Weil himself notes that it is the insecurity of our situation that always exists "in a latent state: potential" (PM 23). Given that this insecurity exists as the possibility of violence it seems correct to apply the notion of latency to violence in general. Weil himself seems to confirm this when he notes that "politics always deals with man insofar as he is always potentially violent" (EC.I.416). In both of these cases, potential is a translation of *en puissance* which in French refers to the pair potentiality/actuality in the Aristotelean sense.

creation of meaning. Conflict is implicit in concrete discourses based on what is incompatible with its central discursive commitment. That is, conflict is implicit in the content of discourse and in the different contents of different types of discourse. Brandom notes that his goal is to make explicit in discourse, in the language of rules, what is implicit in practices. From this goal we can note that implicitness plays an *active* but underdefined role in our behavior. This is different from latency. The notion of latency that I will be using is that of a present potentiality. What is latent in discourse may never be activated but it can be at any moment by any individual. What is latent is discourse is human spontaneity and violence. This latency only becomes clear in the opposition between philosophical discourses, precisely because the choice of the ground is free.

In its purest form, the conflict that is born of discourse reveals the latency of violence because it is born when two people hold incompatible substantive commitments and they correctly attribute the incompatible commitment to the other person and they acknowledge the incompatibility. This leads to conflict precisely because the two individuals are at an impasse. Unless they find a way to reformulate their commitments in order to dissolve their incompatibility or unless they take on another commitment that is more important, such as a commitment to non-violence, this conflict translates into violence. Here we can think of the way that Eric Weil characterizes the contents of *Certainty*:

> it doesn't follow that, between the different contents, there be discussion; on the contrary, the man of certainty knows only one manner of behaving towards he who doesn't share his truth: if the sermon doesn't force the adhesion of his fellow man— it is still necessary that the content allows conversion—, there remains only the destruction of the infidel who, by his very obstinacy, has shown that he is man only in appearance and in reality is the most dangerous of animals (LP 113).

There are two things that need to be drawn out of this extract. The first is the way that Weil's articulation of certainty allows us to better understand how he understands the discontinuity between sensing creatures such as animals and creatures that deploy reasons such as humans. The second is what is implied by individual's commitment to the content of their certainty. These two aspects are linked insofar as an individual can, because of their commitment to a certain discourse, refuse to see other human individuals as *fully* human. In other words, individuals can consider an individual, or the members of a group, as an animal, because this other individual does not adhere to the *true* discourse, that is, the discourse that allows that

person to be seen as a full-fledged member of the human community[69]. In other words, the aptitude for rational language, is not *prima facie*, a sufficient criterion. In this case, the individual demands that those that have this aptitude participate in the practice of a concretely determined form of rational language, their own. As long as the content of an individual's certainty matters more than discussion, or more than the resolution of a problem, the person anchored in their certainty (in their discursive commitment) seems to have two options. Either they must bring their adversary to see the truth of their content or they must eliminate them precisely because their existence poses a continual menace. This however is the pure case, there are also myriad mixed cases where, although the people believe they are being reasonable or acting in good faith, the way they attribute and understand commitments and entitlements can bring out the conflict implicit in commitments. This will show the way that Weil's critique touches the entire rational tradition of characterizing man as a rational animal, even in its modern iteration that focuses on the role of sapience in our human conceptual capabilities.

I will look at three types of discursive exchanges in order to bring this point home that conflict is implicit in discourse. The goal of these examples is to show how exploiting Brandom's technical language can help us understand the way commitments and entitlements bring out the implicit conflict in language and how this implicit conflict can activate the most latent human violence. This is a purely logical analysis of the way that the language of commitments and entitlements hold the notion of conflict within them. This means that the logical steps must be charted. I am of the opinion that critical analysis is woefully underdeveloped in our real-life practices and so that moving from implicit conflict to violence is actually a much smaller step than this analysis would suggest, specifically based on the kind of hold substantive normative commitments have on us. The examples will thus take two forms, the first form will be imagined scenarios, but imagined scenarios that have enough verisimilitude in order to show how Weil's critique comes to bear on the language of commitments and entitlements. The second form will draw from actual conflicts in philosophy in order to show how philosophical opposition allows us to understand the latency of violence. The first type of imagined discursive exchange will characterize the misattribution of commitments, the second will characterize the correct attribution of a

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[69] It may also be that when people renounce reasonable behavior they are relying more on their sentient capacities than their sapient capacities. That is, they are allowing the things they have come to recognize as filling non-inferential roles to excite their irritability and arousal without demanding if they have reasons to react in the ways that they do.

commitment and a disregard for this specific commitment based on other commitments, and the third will be the disregard of a commitment because of a misattributed entitlement. The primary goal of the imagined scenarios is to show that, because the possibility of conflict is present in the taking on of commitments, any theory that seeks to understand what humans do in language must face this possibility. The secondary goal is to provide some concrete material to the reader so that their own imagination can get traction and can create, compare, or contrast these examples with their own. Nonetheless, these three types of discursive exchanges will not yet contain the radicality of Weil's critique precisely because these examples take for granted that individuals are seeking to be reasonable, which means they maintain the central commitment to non-violence. The commitment to non-violence that Weil develops in his presentation of *Discussion* is, for him, the central commitment to reasonable behavior, but this is exactly what Weil's critique highlights. By framing reasonable behavior in the terms of a (implicit) commitment to non-violence, Weil highlights that there is nothing mysterious about it. It is a commitment, and like other commitments it is a commitment that one can abandon. Individuals can always give up their commitment to reasonable behavior.

Reasonable behavior is a commitment to non-violence, this seems to be a relatively simple commitment, this does not mean however that what reasonable behavior is will always be clear to individuals. Because of the variety of commitments individuals have and the way that commitments interlock, there are many times in our own lives where we think we are presenting perfectly reasonable positions, or acting for good reasons, and because of conflict we come to see that we were not. Conflict thus plays a key role in the relativization of belief that allows us to refine our reasons. This ties in with the role difference and doubt play when we abandon our naïve certainty in order to work towards mature certainty. In this way, the conflict of commitments, like doubt and difference, is not a problem. In fact, it plays a central role in the universalization of our concepts. The problem is when these conflicting commitments (which allow us to have reasonable doubt because of reasonable differences, and which can inspire the kind of sapient behavior that is paradigmatic of discussion), are the reason that discussion ends. Conflicting commitments in discussion play a central role in the universalization of concepts, however that is only as long as people discuss. The conflict that can awaken the latency of violence is precisely the conflict that ends or frustrates discussion. One of the simplest ways the conflict of commitments ends discussion and has violent effects is through the misattribution a commitment. When one misattributes a commitment to someone, they are thus misattributing a specific normative

status and the kinds of things that follow from this discursive commitment. When commitments are misattributed individuals have a hard time being able to see that person to whom they misattributed the commitment as a genuine dialogue partner. This is because they may not even acknowledge that other person's capacity to offer dialogical controls. This happens quite frequently in interpersonal relationships, we misattribute a desire or a project to somebody and thus we don't want to bring up the subject to avoid conflict, however, by trying to avoid a conflict based on a misattributed commitment, this can lead the two individuals to the conflict that they were hoping to avoid. There is also the violence that goes along with the way that a misattributed commitment can limit one's autonomy. This is the violence of somebody telling us what we think or what we want and thus taking away our ability in this interpersonal relationship to define our own commitments and goals.

For this scenario imagine a romantic couple. In this couple one person has decided that they do not want to have children. Let's call this individual Hortense. Hortense has decided for a number of reasons that she doesn't want to have kids. She is however convinced that her partner Colleen wants to have them. This could be because of indications in conversations or because of a real commitment that Colleen has previously stated. Whatever the case, imagine that Hortense is not the best when it comes to communication in a couple and so avoids bringing up the topic because she wants to avoid the conflict with Colleen. Because she is convinced that Colleen wants children, Hortense is also convinced that the disparity in the way they want to organize their lives will lead to a conflict and in the worst case, to the end of their relationship. As long as this relationship is going well, neither partner wants to bring up potential differences and so let this misunderstanding fester. Hortense can begrudge Colleen a commitment that she herself has misattributed to Colleen. Imagine now that, still without ever having spoken about whether Colleen wants kids or not, Hortense uses it as one of her justifications when she decides to leave Colleen. Imagine that, years later, after all of the interpersonal differences that the two had have been overcome, they succeed in talking about this commitment and Colleen reveals that her commitment was never as strong as Hortense had believed. Maybe she was lukewarm on the idea of children, or that she wanted them, but that they were secondary to her commitment to Hortense, or that she had never wanted them and that the hints that came out in discussion where merely the hypothetical musing that can go on between two people who talk intimately at length. In any of these possible scenarios, Hortense would have hurt Colleen based on a misattributed commitment. This example is telling because here it is assumed that these two people, precisely because they are in such an intimate relationship, share similar commitments, and

a similar center of discourse with shared values, thus the first place that implicit conflict appears is in the disagreements that happen within the same category. This conflict however is much less serious than that between different discursive centers.

The second example characterizes the type of conflict that arises when individuals come to understand that their discourse has different central commitments than that of their interlocutor. In this case, the problem is that the individual disregards a correctly attributed commitment. In this scenario one correctly attributes a commitment to someone else, but disregards that commitment because they see this commitment as not being of the same worth as other commitments or as of being of no worth at all. This type of scenario happens frequently in deeply partisan political debates. It is similar to the pure case that I have mentioned but is nonetheless subtly different. In the pure case, individuals are seen as adversaries from the get go, because they recognize the incompatibility of two different commitments. They do not enter into discussion because their conflict is clearly defined. Here, when a correctly attributed commitment is disregarded, this commitment is not merely seen as incompatible with the other one, rather it is seen as not being a commitment that a reasonable person could actually hold. In the pure case there is a conflict of two ways of seeing the world, of two ways of life. This is in some ways an extra-discursive or pre-discursive conflict. The incompatibility of commitments is recognized and the threat precludes the individuals from entering into discussion. With a disregarded commitment the individuals or group are either actually considered dialogue partners or *should* be considered so, as members of the same community, for example, or as partners in a shared project. In this case the disregard for a correctly attributed commitment takes away the other person's ability to be an *equal* dialogue partner.

In the United States of America certain commitments are correctly seen as incompatible with others, this is normal for all discourse, but instead of seeing opposing commitments concerning a topic as being a valid point of discussion, one side refuses to take the other commitment seriously. In this way, with hot-button issues we can see how the attribution of the commitment can be correct, but how the very correctness of the commitment causes it to be overlooked entirely. Take the example of gun-control and climate change. On both sides, because the partisans of a commitment correctly attribute certain commitments[70] to their opponents, they disregard their opponents as dialogue

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[70] I am by no means saying this is an all-encompassing problem and that the whole political spectrum can be reduced to this type of behavior, rather what I am saying is that one can rather easily find cases of this kind of behavior on throughout the political spectrum.

partners. The reason that this is different from the pure case is that in the pure case adversaries are seen as adversaries from the get go. Here, they are seen as dialogue partners as long as they don't have *this or that* untenable commitment. Thus, the individual in the discussion about gun control or climate change says, "we can come to a reasonable agreement as long as you don't hold this specific unreasonable commitment (where unreasonable is taken to be coherent but unacceptable), and if you do, you are clearly someone who I can't speak with reasonably." A correctly attributed but disregarded commitment transforms the person from a dialogue partner into someone that can't be reasoned with. In such cases, it is the disregard for the other person's position that opens the door to conflict and violence. Individuals dig their heels into their own commitment and when they do so they refuse to acknowledge the possibility of error on their part, or the possibility of modification to their position. To take our examples, people on both sides of the gun debate and the climate-change debate progressively see their position as more and more non-negotiable. In fact, they don't even see it as a debate, they see it as obvious, and thus it is inconsequential if someone isn't on board because "them's the facts". This is where Weil's analysis of the paradox of certainty comes in handy. We must take position; however, we also can run the risk of anchoring this position so deeply into the fabric of our cognitive experience that it is impossible to unravel it. This scenario slides the most easily into the pure position of incompatible commitments that lead to conflict. The progressive hardening of a position leads people who hold certain commitments to be grouped together as enemies and thus as something to be eliminated.

The third scenario that shows how conflict can be adequately described in the language of commitments and entitlements is linked to the second. In the second scenario, a correctly attributed commitment is disregarded because of another commitment. When this happens, the individual sees themself as correctly entitled to their position, and disregards the opposing position based on this entitlement. In the third scenario, the conflict is not born because an individual disregards a commitment but because of an incorrectly attributed entitlement. Having an entitlement allows us to act on a commitment. We see ourselves as having a legitimate latitude of action because we know what our commitment entitles us to. In this way, entitlement can be described both according to the notion of rights and that of desert. In fact, this concept is important to make sense of the positive aspects of rights and desert, but it also helps us to understand the degeneration of these concepts. According to our entitlement we have the right to certain things and thus we also deserve to get those things or be treated in a certain way. What misattributed entitlements do is distort the correct

scope of these rights and desert. An example is the vandalism or violence that people engage in because they feel that others ignore the entitlements they take to be natural. For instance, people have stumped and protested for protected bike lanes. They see this as a good way to fight climate change, to encourage healthy activity, and to make cities more agreeable. In cities where bike lanes are protected, but where the infrastructure has not changed to also support these changes, motorists park in bike lanes, or stop in bike lanes. This raises the ire of cyclists, and they feel that they are entitled to not follow the laws that are put in place for cyclists because there is an underenforcement of laws for motorists and this underenforcement puts cyclists at risk. In fact, certain cyclists have gone further than just disregard the laws that apply to cyclists, they start to disregard other laws and have taken to vandalizing cars that park in bike lanes, because according to these cyclists, motorists *need* to learn that this is not done. In this case there is a core entitlement that is correct, the right to a protected bike space. What is different is that because of the validity of the core entitlement cyclists attribute themselves an additional entitlement to teach others how to act. The importance of this case is that people go from a correct entitlement to attributing themselves an incorrect entitlement. Cyclists have earned the entitlement to a protected space, however the fact that this entitlement is not recognized by others lead cyclists to attribute themselves an additional entitlement that they do not have. In these cases, an entitlement can lead an individual to feel that they have the right, or more importantly, the obligation, the necessity to defend the commitment that they feel allows the misattributed entitlement.

What these different cases show is the way that conflict is present in discussion and that without the effort to universalize our concepts this conflict allows the degeneration of commitments and entitlements. In fact, what is important in all these cases is that the continual poor attribution of commitments or entitlements can transform them. That is, if a commitment is continually misattributed and an individual's autonomy is limited by another, or if a commitment is continually disregarded and a person is not seen as a legitimate dialogue partner, or if an entitlement is misattributed and people either do not respect the entitlements of others or on the other side, overstep their entitlement and see themselves as entitled to something to which they are not, these commitments and entitlements change. Continual misattributions lead individuals to see commitments and entitlements as incommensurably incompatible. In this case, dialogue partners, or those that should be dialogue partners, become adversaries, and adversaries that present an existential threat to one's commitments and entitlements. In other words, the reasonable conflict that is

238

necessary for the universalization of discourse can become the pure conflict that can only be resolved by violence. There is also another more pernicious possibility that we can characterize as the reprise of move from *Truth* to *Nonsense*.

The attitude of *Nonsense* is born when the individual refuses to see the world as meaningful, when the individual no longer sees the world and their life in it as a meaningful whole. What this means in a theory of discourse is that there is a depreciation of all the meaning that was immediately and thus non-critically grasped in the attitude of *Truth*. If we analyze this same possibility in the language of commitments and entitlements, we can analyze the person who slips into *Nonsense* as the individual who sees the commitments that are present in the world as being meaningless. When *Nonsense* is reprised because someone is continual confronted by a dominant discourse that disregards their commitments and entitlements, the individual may reject *all* the commitments and entitlements of that dominant discourse, and thus seek to destroy or subvert this dominant discourse. They see their entitlements ignored and they see themselves as subject to the overreach of the misattributed entitlements of others and this continual misattribution, disregard, and overreach undermines their faith in the normative goodness of commitments and entitlements in general. The language of commitments and entitlements is thus meaningless to them and they have no need to see themselves as bound by normative constraints, because it is precisely this language that has failed them. What is important to add is that this is the logical analysis of how the language of commitments and entitlements explains this specific reprise of *Nonsense*, this is not how the individual living the experience understands it. In fact, it is precisely because the individual moves into the meaningless of *Nonsense* that they cannot see this. This analysis is for them just one more barrage of empty words.

It may be that reprises depend on these misattributions (especially evaluative ones) and these conflicts in order to make different philosophical discourses explicit. In this way we can look at the reprise as the method by which, on the one side, misattribution is transformed into understanding. By constantly reprising discourse in order to make commitments explicit, individuals see what follows from the content of these commitments. But on the other side, it is also the way that individuals can see their content and their commitments as applicable to their action. Philosophers are always individuals before being philosophers, and it is as individuals facing their dissatisfaction with a determined discourse that they become philosophers by raising themselves up against the dominant discourse in order to create a new one. One of the differences between philosophers and non-philosophers is that philosophers self-consciously speak from discourse. Thus it is also important to show

how conflict is present in Weil's position. The history of philosophy provides keen examples of this that Weil's categorial progression takes into account. Kant for example, understands the discourse of modern empirical science that is present in *The Condition,* but he is unsatisfied with it. He chooses to ground his discourse in something that the philosophical discourse of scientific positivism misses. Fichte's modification of this position provides further clarification.

Gilbert Kirscher (1989) insists on the importance of Fichte for understanding Weil's position in general, and Patrice Canivez notes that one of the most illuminating ways of tackling Weil characterization of the conflict between different discourses is found in "the Fichtean reconstruction of transcendental philosophy" (2007: 171) Canivez points to what Fichte says in the *Introduction* to the first *Wissenschaftslehre* concerning the conflict between idealism and dogmatism. Fichte presents this conflict as unresolvable precisely because there is no agreement about grounding principles. In fact, for Fichte, the "object of philosophy" (1992: 12) is different according to idealism and dogmatism. For idealism, it is the independence of the "I in itself" (1992: 13) and for dogmatism it is "the independence of the thing"(Canivez, 2007: 171). Both positions defend the independence of their object and thus "[n]either of these two systems can directly refute the opposing one: for the dispute between them is a dispute concerning the first principle" (1992: 15). In other words, a refutation of idealism from a dogmatist point of view falls on deaf ears just as the refutation of dogmatism by idealism does. Idealism only convinces someone who has adopted the grounding principles of the freedom of thought and the self-positing subject. Fichte accepts this gap even though he is convinced of idealism's rectitude. However, he can also show that idealism surpasses dogmatism, precisely in the way that idealism can grasp dogmatism comprehensively dogmatism cannot grasp idealism in the same way. Thus for Fichte, (and for us) the idealist arguments are better, that is, more convincing and more comprehensive, but that does nothing to eliminate the problem. For either side to come to an agreement they would first and foremost have to agree on grounding principles, and this is exactly what dogmatism refuses to do, idealism does not in this case have to abandon its principles because again, it is able to grasp dogmatism, but in order for dogmatism to grasp idealism it would have to abandon or modify its principles. There is thus an asymmetry in this conflict which, for Weil, is also present in every new category that surpasses an older one. However, here is the paradox, it is because the dogmatist is free that they can stick to their principles, and thus they act from a freedom which they nonetheless do not see. In other words, even though Fichte notes that if "the first principle of either system is conceded, then it is able to

refute the first principle of the other" nothing requires that this happen. If it does not happen, neither side is refuted through argument, rather both sides refuse the position of the other. Because of this, as Canivez notes, we are faced with "two systems between which there is no possible dialogue" (2007: 171), however because both correspond to a fundamental philosophical attitude, the individual can stand in either coherently.

In terms of Brandom's theory, this is to be understood as two self-consciously chosen positions that imply different commitments and entitlements. Clearly, Weil situates himself on the side of Fichte. For Weil, the structure of human freedom allows individuals to refuse to recognize any and all normative deontic statuses. The individual can pragmatically refuse any meaning just as they can refuse meaninglessness and seek to form a coherent discourse. These for Weil are the fundamental human possibilities, the violent choice of violence and the a-reasonable choice of reason. But the example of Fichte also shows something more. Here, Fichte is not claiming that all discourse must be refused, but rather the specific claims and commitments of a specific determined discourse. Thus, there is a conflict between these two positions. What the example of Fichte shows is that even on this side of the radical refusal of all discourse and of all normative constraints, even on the side of the choice of reason, the language of commitments and entitlements holds the structure of conflict within it. This free choice is what uncovers the latency of violence. Because the choice of a ground, the choice of a coherent discourse, under reflection, reveals itself to be a choice, it shows that there is another choice that is present that the individual can always take up. Thus violence is always present as a choice for the individual, even if this present potentiality is never taken up by the individual themself.

Together the language of commitments and entitlements and the shapes of content present in the categories allow us to understand something new, namely how violence, taken as the concrete grasp of particularity as particular enters into discourse. The conflict that is implicit in language is revealed by making commitments and entitlements explicit. However, because once these commitments are made explicit, it may be that individuals hold on to these commitments *despite* their potential for conflict. This puts the individual face to face with their own capacity for violence. When individuals dig down to the bottom of their commitments they get to the ground of their discourse. As long as the individual holds this ground for certain without taking on the meta-commitment to the reasonable (non-violent) action found in argumentative practices, different discourses are seen to be incommensurable. One of the ways that individuals deploy their discourse while maintaining its incommensurability with other discourses is to reprise their concrete particularity under

universal forms. In this way, they can deploy the entire history of discourse in order to defend their particular position. Individuals can reprise *The Condition* for instance to justify a racist discourse. They present race as one of the conditions that define the intelligence of trustworthiness of individuals and instead of trying to find a way to overcome the contradictions in this position in order to find a discourse that allows the value of the individual to be described more universally, they double down on their already held particular belief and use that to justify their belief. They claim universality while nonetheless refusing to see others as real dialogue partners. The universality they are presenting is defective because it is used in the defense of particularity and yet it is used by the individual to justify not just their belief but their action. Here we can see different forms of racism, sexism, and nationalism as operating under this reprise. People build a discourse in order to deny universality to individuals who under other conditions would be granted it. These defective uses of universality are problematic not just because they lead to conflictual discourses, but because they themselves can push people to deploy violence.

5.5   The Use of Violence

The analysis of conflict is a step towards seeing how the progressive undermining of commitments and entitlements can lead to violence. Philosophical inquiry is difficult. And the type of critical examination that goes along with philosophy is often rightly seen as a danger. People that enter into this kind of exercise often abandon quite a few of their key beliefs as being historically, culturally, or socially contingent. Any examination may thus entail a radical reconceptualization of one's place in the world. There are so many material difficulties to philosophical inquiry and to reasonable discussion that it is often seen as far easier to forego such examination and to merely disregard any overture that leads to it than to engage in it. Discussion is a vast field with large subjects, it takes a long time, there are lots of things for individuals to put into perspective in order to see their opponent's position. There is nothing that guarantees that discussion will come to an end, much less to a satisfying one. Couple this with good old-fashioned stubbornness, suspicion, indifference, fear, and a variety of other things that block the passage of reasonable discourse and the problem of violence starts to become clearer.

There is no necessity in the pragmatic relationship one takes towards discourse, Weil ironizes that this is clear in the fact that every time anyone is willing to die for an idea they are also willing to kill for an idea (PR.I.280). Taking a stand is of a piece with having

conceptual content, what Weil's critique highlights is the way that this same stand and commitment opens the door to violence. However, it is important to note here that Weil does not proscribe the use of violence. He himself joined the French army under a fake name in order to fight his own former countrymen because he was committed to stand against Nazism. Rather, what Weil does is note that *if* one wants to be reasonable, *then* one must do so within the realm of reasonability, which is traced by the refusal of violence. The choice of violence means leaving the realm of reasonability, even when it is a choice made reasonably. However sometimes it is the violent individual that imposes the choice of violent means on others. There is a moment where all the means of discussion are exhausted and where even the most ardent supporter on non-violence must judge and commit, and there have been examples in history where a commitment to non-violence produces violence. A pacifist may find themselves in a situation where their refusal to take up arms allows communities and peoples to be placed under the yoke of those who have made a radical commitment to violence. In this case, the pacifist must accept the consequences as one they are partially responsible for. Patrice Canivez provides us with a telling example of this when he notes that "with the man who refuses even the idea of a coherent discourse, there is no discussion possible. With Gandhi's means one can defeat the English, but not the Nazis" (1999: 77).

Taking position means that there are fundamental commitments that will lead individuals to quit reasonable behavior from within reasonable behavior in order to protect or promote a position or to destroy or damage a threat to that position. However, if they do so, they will face the problem of the legitimacy of that action once they enter back into the realm of non-violence that individuals seek to reestablish once the dust has settled and the violence is over. The question becomes whether the reason for which the individual acted, or for which a nation acted, can be seen as legitimate and can safely renounce violence after the choice to leave discussion has run its course. Weil characterizes this problem in his essay "L'état et la violence". He notes that:

> the government born of revolution will also itself be obliged to work towards the elimination of violence, and in particular, of its own, unless it wants to renounce the modern form of labor: rationality, the distinguishing feature of any modern society, presupposes everybody's collaboration, a collaboration that is only obtained when all find interest and satisfaction therein. (EC.2.384)

Here Weil characterizes this problem in terms of the State, however what he says can also be applied to the interaction between individuals and groups. For a revolutionary

government to succeed, it has to know how life can get back to normal after the revolution is over, it has to help people return to the everyday business of living. When individuals use violence on each other it must, in Weil's sense, only be defensive, measured, and as a last resort. In other words, if violence is undertaken to defend something there also has to be a reasonable reflection on the cost of the use of this violence. When it is used at all cost, violence mines the legitimacy of any resolution that is to come out of its use. The less this violence is defensive and measured, the more it will be seen as arbitrary.

For Weil, language and violence are entangled at their deepest articulation and this is part of the latency of violence. It can crop up at any moment, but this is not a problem for the average person. The average person recognizes violence in the world and recognizes its naturalness. This is a problem for the philosopher, for the individual who has devoted their life to reasonable discourse, to the individual who believes in reason. It poses a problem not only because this individual must try to overcome violence, to understand violence, but also because the violence that is always present is their own. Each philosopher's position is built out of a commitment and what we have seen is that commitments and entitlements hold the grain of conflict within them. It is implicit at the level of everyday non-philosophical language and it is explicit in the articulation of different philosophical discourses, however what marks philosophical discourse is the meta-commitment to reasonability. When conflict is explicit in discourse without this meta-commitment these conflicts are understood as potentially violent. What this means is that even the most reasonable person can abandon reason. We feel responsible to our commitments and thus we feel entitled to act because of and for our commitments, but what to do when our commitments are unjustified, indefensible, or more simply, just wrong? This is why fallibilism is so important to a theory of discursive commitment. It is fallibilism that allows us to constantly reaffirm our commitment to reasonable discourse. We can be mistaken and we can be dissatisfied. We can make inferences that don't follow from good commitments. We can make inferences that follow from bad commitments. We can be faced with a decision that is not resolvable in its actual state. Fallibilism (particularly according to the Weilian articulation of it as openness) is a meta-commitment to maintain our commitment to reasonable behavior, and that means evaluating and adjusting our other commitments in order to do so. This is the opposite of what seen in *The Work*.

The Work, in its refusal of discourse can also be understood (for us, from the inside of a discourse that seeks to be reasonable) in terms of a commitment to a *purely* pragmatic relationship to discourse. *The Work* is modern in the sense that it is the heir to reasonable

discourse, and thus understands what concepts do, they act on normative beings. This is also what the individual inside *The Work* refuses to see themself as, a being bound by norms. Thus, the individual in *The Work* deploys the resources developed by discourse while nonetheless seeing these resources as having no hold over them. But for us, it is seen as a commitment to refuse all discursive norms (while nonetheless using its other resources). This individual (again, for us) commits to a world without discourse, to a world where discourse has no bearing on them as an individual or on their world. It is a commitment that dissolves all necessity and normativity because it commits to the struggle of violence. From the interior of discourse there is a "natural" rebuttal to this position: the individual committing to violence still commits and thus is still under the sway of normativity and necessity, not to mention the necessity of eating, of breathing, the necessity of nature, and the normativity that violence can impose upon us. Weil faces this objection when he writes:

> it is not him [the violent individual] who speaks this way; for him, speaking of the essential would be exposing himself to the critiques of philosophers: if he made distinctions, if he recognized that certain things mattered, that others can and must be neglected, he would finish by renouncing violence, too occupied separating the essential from the incidental. It's our way of seeing that makes of the violent a man of thoughtful consciousness in himself, and which demands what he *wants deep down*. He himself doesn't want *deep down*, he wants nothing: there are things that he doesn't want. Nothing keeps us from interpreting his acts and his actions and noting that in fact, he accepts *this* and refuses *that*, that in his action an essential and an inessential can be distinguished; but we would prevent ourselves from understanding him if we transformed this difference into distinction made by him in his consciousness, if we made of his negating and (for him) purely negative action, an ontological discourse. For him, what appears to us as the essential of his existence can't be formulated and announces itself precisely in silence, not in an absolute silence, but in the silence of reason which is supposed to be coherent, not in a renouncement of all that, in everyday life, we call theories, but in the renouncement of all *theoria*, of every view and of every attempt at a unique view of the whole. Violence is a problem for philosophy, philosophy is not one for violence, which laughs at the philosopher and which sets him aside when it finds him bothersome and in him senses an obstacle on the path without tracks that is, for itself, its reality. (LP 58)

The radical commitment to violence is thus a real possibility. What Brandom's theory helps us to do is to better understand this possibility at the level of language. What Weil's theory helps us to do is to understand this possibility at the level of content, of discourse. Together these two theories allow us to show with greater ease what the relationship that violence has to meaning is, and how violence figures into the individual's relationship to discourse. Violence is present in the pragmatic negation that opens up a space of meaningfulness when it opens up a space that recognizes the normative weight of better reasons and thus allows us to understand how we bind ourselves to this normative weight as well as the modal claims of necessity that happen at the interior of these discourse.

I have sought to show that the language of commitments and entitlements is felicitous to understanding Weil's position because it allows us to make sense of the full force of Weil's critique and I have sought to show that the that the articulation of philosophical categories and of the reprise help us to enrich Brandom's position by allowing us to add the concrete content that seems to be missing from it. Commitments and entitlements can be interpreted as key functional concepts within categories. Within a category, an individual commits to certain contents and the permissible and incompatible inferences that accompany these commitments. They deploy these commitments within the structure of their communication with others, in order to get to the bottom of things. This shows the radicality of *The Work*. The key commitment for the person in *The Work*, from our point of view, is a commitment to refuse all normative commitment. Thus from this individual's point of view, they aren't committed to anything unless it is a faithfulness to themself and to the effectiveness of their instrumental use of language on others in service of their own wants and desires. They understand what argument is, they know the difference between good and bad arguments, this is what allows them to instrumentalize argumentation itself. What is different from all the other categories, is that for this individual this recognition does not *bind* them, it doesn't commit them to anything.

By framing the discussion in these terms and showing how they do not preclude violence, commitments and entitlements help us to better understand the mechanics of certain forms of violence. Conflict is implicit in the language of commitments and entitlements, and the *Logic of Philosophy* helps to understand how different irreducible discursive centers lead to different types of commitments, and entitlements and thus allow us to make that conflict explicit as material incompatibilities. This implies however a multitude of spaces of reasons. The question then is, how do these spaces of reasons fit together and are they reducible to a single space? The first part of the answer, as already

given, is through a meta-commitment to reasonable discourse understood as the refusal of violence and the use of argumentative practices to settle conflict. The second part, as I will argue through the rest of this work is that they are only reducible to a formal unity. Brandom's presentation of the idea of the space of reasons places all of these discursive centers on the same level. Weil's suite of categories highlights the irreducibility of certain spaces. This brings me to my final point about what Weil's philosophical project can add to inferential pragmatism. The space of reasons, despite its usefulness as a metaphor, lacks a structure which a logic of philosophy adds.

5.6   Violence and Spaces of Reasons

The metaphor of the space of reasons allows us to understand the shape that an individual's commitments gives to their conceptuality. By formulating Weil's critique of the philosophical tradition in the language of commitments and entitlements we can see how conflict is already implicit in our workaday language. What I would like to suggest is that for the metaphor of a space of reasons continue to be useful in the face of Weil's critique there needs to be further definition of what theses spaces imply and how they interact. In other words, in order for the metaphor of the space of reasons to continue to be not just operable, but fecund, the types of *contents* found in different spaces of reasons need to be articulated. This is exactly what Weil's theory provides. By reading categories as the inferential structures that make commitments explicit according to different grounding concepts, the categories allow us to see what someone commits themselves to if they are arguing from this or that specific central commitment, including Brandom himself. By focusing on a *Platonic* space in which scorekeeping happens, Brandom has been able to explain certain essential mechanisms of *language,* and in doing so, he explicitly calls on the resources of the philosophical tradition. He is even clear about why he calls on certain resources such as Hegel, Kant, and pragmatism and not others[71]. However, all that this means from a Weilian point of view is that in developing his philosophy he stands in an attitude (in the specific sense of the *Logic of Philosophy*) that has a certain constellation of reprises (which may be the *Absolute* reprised under *The Condition* and mediated by *Conscience*), precisely because of the way he is trying to explain the totality of discourse as it fits into the natural world starting from judgment). This also means that he has a concrete determined

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[71] There are others of course, but these others are reprised by the way that Brandom reads them as mediated by certain central commitments. This is clear in the way in which he reads Frege through the lens of Kant, for example.

discourse that will not be accepted by people who are standing in other attitudes with different clusters of reprises. Weil's goal is not to explain this kind of possibility. It is to understand the possibility of different contents as they appear in the world and as peoples live them, to understand what kind of commitments lead to this or that kind of problem or conflict. Thus Brandom and Weil's theories in a way complete each other. Brandom's theory allows us to refine the analysis of language and to fill a need in Weil's theory, whereas Weil allows us to understand the articulation of concrete discourses that actual are deployed in real conflicts. This opens up a framework for a theory of argumentation that allows individuals to face conflict and violence reasonably. Given the possibility of violence, it becomes evident that there is tension in the idea of the space of reasons if there are multiple spaces of reasons and if these spaces, based on the landscapes carved out by the initial pragmatic negations, imply radically different positions.

I started this chapter by saying that I would argue that there were three major advantages that can be picked up out of Weil's position in order to help an inferentialist position. The first was to look at the notion of sapience and see how Weil's critique of human reasonability applies to it. Weil thinks that individuals *can* be reasonable, but nothing requires them to be so except their own choice to bind themselves to the normative structure of discursivity. Here I claimed that although Brandom has the resources to treat this problem, he does not deal with it face on. The second major advantage is that Weil's way of framing the question of reasonability leads him to account for human violence. By putting Weil's theory and inferentialism together we see how these positions are mutually beneficial. They allow us to finetune our understanding of conflict and violence and our understanding of human reasonability. Reprising Weil's position in a Brandomian language clarifies certain aspects of Weil's theory and Weil's conceptualization of violence allows us to see the blind spot of conflictual concrete commitments in inferentialism. The third advantage that I see by putting Weil's theory in dialogue with an inferentialist program is to clarify an ambiguity in the metaphor of the space of reasons. A logic of philosophy does this by showing how different categories interact and, through the notion of the reprise, what the consequences of different orders of explanations are.

As already mentioned, Brandom takes up the notion of the space of reasons from Wilfrid Sellars, and while Brandom tends to imply that there is only one space of reasons, this is not true throughout the post-Sellarsian tradition. Remember Sellars claims that "in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of

justifying and being able to justify what one says" (1997: §36). What is at stake here is the epistemic force of discursive conceptuality. The space of reasons is a space where the achievement of discursive knowledge takes place. According to Willem deVries and Timm Triplett:

> We can think of the logical space as determined by the categorial structure that we use to carve up the world conceptually. There are categorial distinctions among objects, events, and properties; and within those categories, there are physical objects and abstract objects, and first-order properties (properties of objects) and higher-order properties (properties of properties). Sellars does not assume that there is only one possible logical space: Different logical spaces are, at least as far as we can tell, perfectly possible, and each will have a slightly different categorial structure. (deVries, Triplett, 2000: 60).

This extract uncovers an ambiguity in the scope of the concept of a space of reasons. By speaking about the strucure of conceptuality in general, there is a sense in which the reading of deVries and Triplett tends towards Weil's use of the philosophical category, however, by focusing on objects, events, and properties, there is another sense where they seem to be using it along the lines of Weil's use of metaphysical categories. All categorial structures seem to be governed by inference, however, the distinction between philosophical and metaphysical categories allows us to clarify the ambuigity between the categorial structures that give form to human conceptuality and those that do not. It also helps us to understand how within a single formal space of reasons, their can be multiple different concrete ones. This is because within the philosophical categories, the scope is defined by the ground that governs the different inferences, whereas with metaphysical categories the scope is defined by their application. deVries and Triplett recognize the different spaces but they neither investigate the tension that this implies nor how these spaces fit together. What Weil proposes in the *Logic of Philosophy* is an analysis of the categorial structure of different forms of discursive commitments and the conceptual tools to see how they interact. This seems to be the next analysis needed to bring out all the strength of the metaphor.

If we focus on the structural aspect of spaces of reasons that follows from different grounds we can see how the spaces of reasons are to structure human conceptuality. The individual defines all of their inferences in terms of their central commitment. If we link this idea together with Peregrin's idea that the social normative space is constituted not by following rules but rather by bouncing off (understood here also in the Weilian sense of the conflict between society and the individual in their self-determining reasonable reflection)

them we have all the elements necessary to see why Weil's analysis is so important. Starting from a mix of Peregrin's analysis and deVries and Triplett's analysis, we find ourselves with the metaphor of a space that defines what meaningfulness is, but that also implies a fracturing of differences. Meaning happens at the inside of this space, and bouncing off of rules is one of the things that can lead to the dissatisfaction of the individual that will provoke them to develop a new discourse. This however also implies that there are as many starting points as there are individuals and that we grope forward haltingly while constituting a social space that takes the normative limits that other propose into account. deVries and Triplett's analysis is that these categorial structures can be different and depend on how we organize them. If we recognize that this is a social public process, then we have the notion that our social space creates a realm within which reasons take a central importance because we see the reasons as defining the social space itself and thus as defining our capacity to be reasonable.

What Weil's analysis shows is that there is nothing that requires people to place their activity into the space of reasons. People justify because they have a commitment to being reasonable, a commitment that is upheld and developed through social argumentative practices and through the limits and constraints that people take on or present in these same social argumentative practices. What Weil's critique shows is that individuals can refuse this commitment. They can also seek to destroy the efficacy of social argumentative practices because they do not want to submit themselves to the normative weight that spaces of reasons imply. This is the violence that is latent is all discourse. In its most radical form it is seen as a rejection of the modern rationality which obscures or suppresses the individual[72]. Because this violence can be activated by the conflict that is implicit in different commitments and because different commitments give different shapes to spaces of reasons, there has to be a fine-grained analysis of how these different spaces interact.

Once we recognize what different spaces see as essential, this allows us to recognize the types of inferences they will see as permissible, which they will see as necessary, which they will see as satisfactory. This will allow us to compare, judge and hierarchize these different spaces. This brings us to what we could call a *logic* of these different spaces of reasons, or, in other words, a *logic of philosophy*. Without a similar analysis, the metaphor of a space of reasons or spaces of reasons can be seen as ambiguous. Rebecca Kukla and

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[72] Weil notes that "a partial discourse only produces a partial negation and a partial silence: pure violence only opposes itself to absolutely coherent discourse. Thought needs to be pretty advanced for someone to be able to declare that he reaches for his revolver the moment he hears the word 'civilization'" (LP 60).

Mark Lance, in their book *'Yo' and 'Lo': The Pragmatic Topography of the Space of Reasons* (2008) go a long way to correcting this lack, as does Huw Price, in his discussion of pluralism (Price, 1992). The first by giving a detailed analysis of how individuals make normative demands on others in order to bring them into the space of reasons and the second by showing how different discursive centers interact. I will come back to Price's position at length later in my discussion of pluralism, therefore I do not need to treat it here. In Kukla and Lance's position what I want to highlight is the way they see "membership in a discursive community […] [as] a precondition for normative agency" (2008: 190). This is important because this means that it is only concrete normative relations that can bring us into a discursive community. These discursive communities thus have *conceptual* borders, some of which can even keep these communities separate, and even though they critique Brandom for reducing these different concrete communities, they themselves still reflect on whether there is a single *conceptual* space that defines the discursive community. This is what I see as the main ambiguity in the concept of a space of reasons that Weil can help us to answer. In answering this question, despite their focus on the pragmatics of the space of reasons, they miss exactly what Weil's critique points out, that there are pragmatic borders that can be put in place by individuals or by societies in order to separate communities. That is, there is always the possibility of refusing to recognize the pragmatic, discursive and normative stances of any interlocutor. This is important because it can go a long way to answering their dilemma of how to conceive of the conceptual space. In asking about the conceptual space they wonder whether there is "a single public world" that everyone can enter into and where reasons are given the same consideration, or whether there is "one, fundamental, discursive community" that nonetheless has "provisional and derivative discursive communities" (*ibid.*, 196) within it. Weil's critique shows that the first option has trouble getting off the ground, precisely because individuals can refuse to enter into discursive relations with others. However, Weil's characterization of the formal category of *Meaning* can be understood in terms similar to the second option[73]. There is a single *formal* discursive community that allows the possibility of discussion and explains the reality of different meanings, however this does not guarantee discussion and understanding. By presenting that possibility, Weil's critique reminds us what exactly is at stake in these differences. What is at stake is the possibility of reasonable discourse itself, and the stakes are high, because he sees the other possibility as a world where reasonable discourse has

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[73] In reality they propose three options, the first of which is philosophical relativism. They do not see these as a serious threat to their position, and I will not treat it here because I do so elsewhere.

little or no hold, where people choose to live in their violence. He sees these discursive spaces as being carved out by individuals who have sought to grasp their world coherently as an organized whole, who have sought to make explicit all the implicit inferences that are opened in a normative space through the pragmatic negation. He then offers us criteria, coherence and universalizability, that allow us to understand the comprehensiveness of the inferential scope of these different discursive spaces. This is an important step in order for the emphasis on difference not to fold into relativism. Weil thus recognizes the plurality of spaces in the form of different categories, and he insists that these spaces are irreducible one to another but commensurable, that this plurality can be judged, organized and hierarchized. This is an important result, first because it will be important to my development of the theory of argumentation that we can draw out of Weil's work, and second because without it, the space of reasons risks disintegrating into a frenetic melee of differences.

5.7   Conclusion

This work hopes to show what Weil's project and the type of thought that is born out of the inferential pragmatism have in common, it also hopes to show how these two projects can mutually inform each other and create a new field of analysis and discussion. What I have hoped to show in the last chapters is how Weil's project can absorb Brandom's insights and in particular his pragmatic metavocabulary. These insights will hopefully allow researchers that are working in a different idiom from Weil see the pertinence and the importance of his project, specifically in philosophy of language, argumentation theory, epistemology. But this work hopefully has more widespread consequences, specifically because of the way that Weil's project allows us to conceptualize the social space as a space of conflicts. Thanks to this conceptualization we can analyze and recognize the logical structure of different forms of conflict and their material consequences. Maybe even those that specifically lead to violence. This has wide ranging effects in moral and political philosophy. Indeed, one of the next steps for an inferentialist program is to show how its insights range over a wider domain of topics. This is an essential step for any philosophy that claims to be systematic, it must show how it brings together the different branches of philosophy. By showing how Weil's project fits together with an inferentialist program, hopefully this will allow researchers to enter into this territory.

In this chapter I have tried to show that that relationship is not merely unidirectional. I have tried to show how Weil's project helps us to better understand what is at stake in the

game of giving and asking for reasons and why taking it seriously matters. As long as individuals want to live together and be able to settle debates without recourse to violence they must submit themselves to the normative weight of better reasons. Weil's analysis indicates however that this desire is not necessary. Nothing binds individuals to settle conflict reasonably outside of their own commitment to reasonability. The ways I tried to show this was to highlight a key difference between the way Weil and Brandom conceive of certain distinctions within sapience. For Weil sapience is a possibility that the individual has to choose, however the individual only realizes that it is a choice once made and once they start to seek to understand the conditions of this choice totally. For Brandom, because he glosses over the distinction between rationality and reasonability, he seems to reduce sapience to a human faculty. This difference has deep consequences, most importantly it changes the way we look at commitments and at the space of reasons. By looking at sapience as a choice it allows us to explain the real consequences of conflicts and violence instead of flattening them in order to understand how the faculty functions. Commitments are thus seen as implicitly conflictual, and this indeed plays a functional role. The problem is how commitments, and the conflicts they imply in their incompatibilities with other discourses, can lead to violence.

Weil gives us the means to understand what people hold as essential, and how that commitment leads them to see other positions as incompatible. Weil's notion of the reprise allows us to see how these different categories can and do interact, and thus how through argumentative practices we can bring individuals to see the validity of different reasons while still seeing these reasons as conflictual. Despite the importance of the reprise, Weil clearly indicates that argument itself cannot force an individual to change their categorial position. Rather, the individual has to commit themselves to argumentative practices, all the while knowing that this commitment may change their attitude, and thus change their relationship to the world. In other words, for argument to take hold, individuals must have a continued commitment to the possibility of overcoming difference and conflict through argumentative means. We are taught the importance of this throughout our lives and Weil's theory implies both a theory of argumentation and a theory of education[74]. It will unfortunately be outside of the scope of this work to look at Weil's theory of education or

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[74] Weil elaborates his theory of education across his work, most clearly in *Philosophie politique*, as well as in various articles such as "Education as a Problem for Our Time" (1957), "Humanistic Studies, Their Object, Methods and Meaning'(1970), as well as those collected in *Valuing the Humanities* (1989) and *Cahiers Éric Weil IV* (1993)

the literature on this subject[75]. However, it is in the scope of this work to look at and develop Weil's theory of argumentation. To that end, in the next chapter I will look at the elements that Weil puts in place in order to justify his position that reasonable action is the action that seeks to bring people to reason through argumentation.

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[75] Cf. (Soetard, 1984; Canivez, 1985; Buée, 1989; Perine, 1990; Nguyen-Dinh, 1996; Perine & Costeski, 2016; de Assis, 2016; Castelo Branco, 2018).

Chapter 6   THE LOGIC OF PHILOSOPHY AS A THEORY OF ARGUMENTATION

6.1   Introduction

In the preceding chapters I presented how Eric Weil theorizes violence, what violence means to his theory, and how his manner of theorizing violence throws down a challenge which philosophy must answer if it wants to be comprehensive and reasonable. He shows how violence bookends reason, understood as coherent discourse in situation, and how violence is fundamentally entangled with language as both are concrete expressions of human spontaneity. This, I argue, forces us to re-examine the rational tradition that characterizes the human individual as a reasonable animal. For Weil, the individual *can* be reasonable, but only because they can *also* be unreasonable, only because they can refuse the normative weight that reasonable discourse places upon individuals. In other words, this normative weight holds only as long as individuals see themselves as submitted to it. This I have said leads us to read the *Logic of Philosophy* (but also, the entirety of his work) as a theory of argumentation. What is meant by this?

The last three quarters of a century have seen an explosion of argumentation theory. The early isolated and independent efforts of Stephen Toulmin's *The Use of Argument* (1958), Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's *Traité de l'argumentation* (1958), and Charles Hamblin's *Fallacies* (1970), as well as the collective efforts of the German "schools" in Erlangen (centered around the work of Paul Lorenzen, Wilhelm Kamlah, and Kuno Lorenz) and in Frankfurt (centered around Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel) have inspired a teeming field of research both inside and outside of philosophy[76]. These early developments are important because they look to reinsert the *practical* aspect of argumentation into reasoning, notably by looking at the way that arguments imply a dialogue between different people. This lines up with one of Eric Weil's constant affirmations: philosophy is a dialogical process. In fact, Paul Ricœur has noted that for Weil, philosophy is merely an ideal case of dialogical processes, and that in fact all "speaking is entering into a relationship of argumentation" (Ricoeur, 1991) with an interlocutor where violence is ruled

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[76] Cf. (Wohlrapp, 2014: xxxii-lviii) for an excellent discussion on the development of the different currents of argument theory and the way that they started to constitute a more or less unified field of study. Nonetheless, to my knowledge, the history remains to be written detailing why Germany, in the wake of Second World War, produced so many thinkers who dealt with argument head on. The question concerning the intellectual climate that led so many people to ask the question of argumentation remains open. Because Weil was trained as a philosopher in Germany just before the War, and because his results seem so much of a piece with these developments, I would certainly place him in this intellectual context, with the second generation of the Frankfurt School and the Erlangen School.

out. This assessment is accepted by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. They use their reading of Eric Weil, and his insistence on the refusal of violence, as a prerequisite for the possibility of argumentation and as part of the starting point of their own theory. In line with their reading of Weil, they note that "argumentation is an action that is always aiming to modify a state of preexisting things" (1958: § 13). This is one of the key elements of understanding the *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argumentation. According to this reading, Weil presents philosophy as a fundamentally dialogical enterprise that looks to transform the world through reasonable action (even if it does not in itself exclude possible recourse to counter-violence). This reading holds another key to understanding Weil's work as a theory of argumentation, namely its horizon of action. The horizon that this dialogical enterprise aims at is "the advent of a world where both individuals and communities will be able to assert and exercise their rights by exclusively non-violent means, of a world where the action through the exchange of arguments alone will be effective" (Canivez, 2013b: 55).

Reasonable action thus, for Weil, takes the form of a certain type of philosophical practice. It is to be understood as the deployment of arguments, not just in order to understand the natural world but in order to shape the social and political space, in order to act on humanity and on human discourse, as the means of understanding reality as a whole. In this way, Weil's theory of argumentation has much in common with Frankfurt School of argumentation, notably with Jürgen Habermas's "theory of communicative action" (1984, 1985)[77]. This has even led to the proposal of reading Weil's political philosophy as a *Diskursethik* (Bizeul, 2006: 147-151), and has led multiple studies that investigate this relationship (Deligne, 1998; Ganty, 1997; Bobongaud, 2011). While the relationship between Habermas and Apel's philosophical projects and Weil's is interesting and philosophically important, I will not be dealing with it here. Instead, in this chapter, I will sketch the place of non-violence in establishing the domain of argumentation and how within that domain Weil makes a difference between two registers of argumentation, namely discussion and dialogue. These differences will lead me to discuss what Weil sees as the goals and as the horizon of argumentative practices, the advent of a world where reasonable action is not only possible but effective. This horizon, however, can only be understood by developing certain concepts that Weil puts into place in order to flesh out his theory of argumentation, notably the concept of orientation and its neighboring concepts of

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[77] However there is also a main difference, namely that Habermas inscribes his theory in an immanent rationality of discursive exchanges, whereas Weil shows the way that language can be used to reject the rational and above all the reasonable.

satisfaction and contentment. Once these concepts are understood I will argue that as a theory of discursive commitment, the *Logic of Philosophy* transitions into a theory of *political* action. In other words, the reasonable action that philosophy describes becomes the actual action of the individual that has passed through the circle of understanding of the *Logic of Philosophy*. This implies acting on a world that holds the teeming multiplicity of the "irreparable fragments"[78] of discourses that aim at meaning.

The admission of multiple discursive centers in Weil's work brings him to elaborate the notion of the reprise. This concept must play a key role in any development of a theory of argumentation that can be drawn out of Weil's work. With that in mind, I will then look at the importance of the hermeneutical role of this concept in the *Logic of Philosophy* and present the analysis, by way of example, of the concept GOD that Weil presents through the interplay of various reprises. This will help demonstrate the hermeneutical importance of reading the *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argumentation and will lead me to look at Weil's notion of discursive openness that reprises help us to grasp. By focusing on the openness to possible discourse, Éric Weil's philosophy allows us to formulate a strategic hypothesis on how to use different reprises in order to bring others into argumentative practices. In fact, reading the *Logic of Philosophy* in this way will allow us to tie together what we have seen so far and will place us on a path to understand the way that the logic of philosophy can help us tackle contemporary philosophical problems and will show the originality of this reading.

6.2   Serious Conversation, Dialogue, and Discussion

The theory of argumentation that we can draw out of Weil's work is tightly linked to his critique of the rational tradition. In fact, the emphasis Weil places on the *possibility* of the reasonable behavior that only exists side by side with the possibility of violence allows us to complete Weil's own order of explanation. This possibility is grounded by a choice to be reasonable and a decision to stay reasonable facing the irrationality or a-reasonability of others. This is Weil's central discursive commitment. It is a decision, an act, that grounds discursive commitments, it is an entry into discourse and to being reasonable. Thus Weil's order of explanation starts from a free act to enter discourse that is counter-balanced inside of discourse by his fallibilism (understood as openness). Fallibilism is not a visible starting

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[78] Paul Ricœur uses this turn of phrase to describe the state of discourse in Weil's work while attributing it to Pierre-Jean Labarrière (1982).

point, it is a result that people come to and that Weil sees as essential component of an individual's capacity to remain reasonable. Fallibilism is the expression of the choice to be reasonable at the interior of discourse facing multiple conflicting contents. This however means that it is not the explicit starting point of reasonable behavior (which is a slow and long historic process that is still unfinished) but is rather a reflexive analysis that allows the individual to grasp the choice and thus to continue to labor towards reasonability.

In fact, for Weil, individuals are domesticated into reasonable behavior through their families, their education, their community, their surroundings. This is what allows reasonable behavior, because families, education, communities are built from the sedimentation of the history of other reasonable behavior. But this is also what slows the development of reasonable behavior. Families, education, communities all also hold the structural presence of violence. This double presence of reasonability and violence is what allows individuals to refuse any given, even behavior that claims to have a monopoly on reasonability. Something they will do all the more forcefully when they belong to social strata that have been excluded from full participation in society or when their own experience is grounded in violence. Thus, bringing people to see the value of reasonability is always a pressing matter. It is only once the individual has become aware of the possibility of reasonability and once they have committed to that possibility that fallibilism has any weight. This lines up with Weil's definition of the "task of philosophy" which is to create a dialogue between diverse opinions, points of view, and commitments. (PR.I.17). In fact, he notes, "philosophy can only begin its undertaking if such an undertaking is necessary, if the situation is such that contradictory 'wisdoms' exist in reality, and if these 'wisdoms', these absolute convictions are such that a conflict between them becomes possible" (PR.I.17) which implies that the plurality of discourses not only exist, but have good reason for existing, because these discourses organize a plurality of ways of life and of human existence. In this case, philosophy cannot disregard any of these *attitudes* but must see what is true and good in these diverse positions and see whether they can be organized together.

The reality of the plurality of discourses and attitudes leads Weil to see discourse not as establishing a relationship between the world and a mind, because there are always already implicit understandings of the world, which reveals themselves to us through the plurality of discourses and through the plurality of oppositions that we use to make that understanding explicit. Rather, Weil sees discourse as the means by which individuals orient their action. This practical orientation in the world is inseparable from our understanding of the world and of what is meaningful in it. This is why no relationship to the world needs to be

established, it is always already there. Here, what reading Weil's position as a theory of argumentation adds is that, for Weil, any explanation of discourse must start from discourse itself. What we act upon when we act reasonably is our discourse and that of others. Making claims of truth or of objectivity, justifying points of view, all of the bread and butter of philosophy, implies that there are multiple claims to truth, that objectivity is not yet secured, that points of view need justification, and all this starts and progresses through argument. In other words, "the plurality of theses is essential for philosophy, a plurality that, if it is not overcome in dialogue and in reasonable discourse, makes violence an authority, of course not of judgment, but nonetheless of decision" (PR.I.12). As the category of *Discussion* shows, it is only when dialogue and reasonable discourse fail that individuals look outside of discourse to ground it, in order to hold back the violence that lies in wait. In fact, the path of the *Logic of Philosophy* teaches us that all the attempts to ground discourse, whether in an object in the world, in the individual's sentiment, in God, in the empirical observation of the quantifiable sciences, in the moral conscience, in the free activity of the human intelligence, in the uniqueness of the individual in their struggle with others, even in an absolutely coherent discourse itself, start in argumentative practices. They start in argumentative practices that are witness to the capacity of individuals to ignore arguments. It is this capacity, recognized in others, that leads individuals to become aware of the social nature and the social importance of argumentation. The refusal of coherent discourse makes us become painfully aware that this capacity is latent in even the most reasonable discourse as the exercise of human freedom, which can oppose itself to the truth that argumentation is working to establish, by enclosing itself in a single form of coherence. This refusal shows that discourse *is* grounded in argumentative practices, practices wherein the individual is aware of the finitude of their own position and their own life, but wherein they embrace that finitude instead of forgetting it, ignoring it, or fearing it. It starts in argumentative practices that see argument as the reasonable action that can inscribe *legitimate* changes in the world and in reality.

This reading thus presents the *Logic of Philosophy* as an interactive and dynamic model of argumentation by showing how the different categories present different aspects of our human life as irreducible. This irreducibility allows individuals to create a multitude of coherent discourses from any of these aspects. However, because Weil understands each aspect as irreducible aspects of *human* experience, they all exist together in the same individual. Weil notes that:

in action, all the categories of reflection meet, as in their completion, with those of the Absolute and the absolute revolt. The *personality* grasping itself as sentiment facing the *Absolute* which is *God*, but a God revealed absolutely as the coherence to be realized, has found its *work* [*œuvre*] in its *finiteness*: it is the *free conscience* that imposes itself on the *condition* in order to transform it according to its *interest* that it now knows to be unique and essential and in virtue of which it can *interpret* what is. (LP 413)

In other words, these are the reprises that Eric Weil proposes to create a holistic image of the individual embedded in the natural world, interacting with their fellow humanity. It shows an image of the individual as the junction between Reason, Freedom, and Being, as a potentially reasonable individual with a discourse that can act spontaneously according to their sentiment in the world in order to change that world. This however for Weil is only possible because of social articulation of reason. This is because reason is not monological but dialogical. Speaking, for Weil, is participating in this "dialogue that is human language: monologue and silence are born of dialogue" (PR.I.280). But because this dialogue is itself a consequence of legitimate conflicts and differences individuals must overcome, and overcome reasonably if they want to remain reasonable, they must find a reasonable way to settle these conflicts.

Reading the *Logic of Philosophy* this way focuses on the hermeneutical as well as the strategic aspects of the text, because these aspects allow individuals to grasp other forms of coherence than their own, both in order to understand them and in order to act upon them. These aspects are already present in the passage just cited. The individual in their sentiment aims at a unity that allows their action, defined by their interest, to be meaningful and to be interpreted as meaningful. Here the criteria for meaningfulness is a unity not just of thought, but of thought and action, of a life seen as a whole, as an individual embedded in a *kosmos*, embedded in a meaningful reality filled with others. This, for Weil, is the criteria for meaningful action, seeing one's action (both in the political sense and in the inter-individual sense) as having an effect and as being meaningful. When this does not happen, one is again led to degenerate forms of discursive commitment such as cynicism, skepticism, nihilism, etc. These forms are degenerate not because they don't exist, or because they can't be held concretely but because they are not autonomous. They are derivative forms of commitments in that they only exist in relation to another substantive discursive position. Thus as I have noted, every coherent discourse has its cynics, it's skeptics, and its nihilists. They refuse, they doubt, they despair of the possibility of a coherent and universal meaning, but only

because they are dissatisfied with the discourses laid out before them that claim to be coherent and universal. They capitulate before the contradictions and difficulties of elaborating a coherent discourse that grasps itself. Thus, they lead to the degeneration of the content of other discursive commitments. The irony though is that in their refusal of meaning they nonetheless create a unity of meaning that allows the individual, who is a cynic, a skeptic, or a nihilist, to orient their thought and action. Even though this unity contains an internal contradiction which creates a structural incoherence in their position, it is nonetheless sufficient to orient their activity. In this way, these forms of incoherent coherence have real pragmatic effects: people act because of them. In order to understand how this happens, and to understand what Weil sees as the structure of argumentation and reasonable action we must develop three technical concepts that Weil uses in his theory of argumentation. These are serious conversation, dialogue, and discussion.

Weil develops his notion of discussion and dialogue in a text called "Vertu du dialogue"[79] but he only uses the term serious conversation once in the *Logic of Philosophy*. Nonetheless, based on the way that he uses the adjective "serious" throughout the book and the rest of his work there is good reason to think that he uses it in a specific technical sense. Seriousness and serious conversation are used to characterize a specific aspect of language use. In the *Logic of Philosophy* Weil speaks of the dialogue that concerns serious problems (LP 24), the weight of serious questions that we are unable to grasp and formulate (LP 38), the serious claims that are opposed to poetic irony (LP 250), the serious activity and the serious game that the intelligence finds in human interest (LP 275), the constitutive act of the personality that takes itself seriously (LP 303). It quickly becomes clear that all these examples of seriousness fall in line with "serious conversation, that is to say, all conversation destined, in principle, to lead to an agreement" (LP 23). Thus for Weil, serious conversation is a specific assertoric form of language use that aims at agreement. In other words, serious conversation is the term Weil uses to define general argumentative practices. In this way, both discussion and dialogue are subspecies of serious conversation. If we accept the hypothesis that "serious conversation" is Weil's term in order to characterize general argumentative practices it becomes clear that it is dialogue and not discussion that fills the

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[79] This text is posterior to the *Logic of Philosophy*, nonetheless Gilbert Kirscher (Kirscher, 1990) makes a convincing case that the distinction is already present in the *Logic of Philosophy*. Kirscher argues that what Weil presents as discussion in the *Logic of Philosophy* corresponds to what he will later call "*dialogue antique*" which is best translated somewhere between "archaic dialogue" and "the dialogue of antiquity" and which corresponds to the public resolution of differences through argumentative practices in order to assure the social cohesion of the city-state.

ideal of serious conversation. Weil notes that "dialogue will only last if it is serious, if it takes place in the face of a possible action, in view of a result" (PR.I.289), this lines up with Patrice Canivez's interpretation of the place of discussion and dialogue in Éric Weil's work whereby dialogue represents an "ideal of communication with interlocutors aiming at consensus based on the force of the best argument" (2020). This differs from discussion, which is for Weil a political concept. In fact, the difference between dialogue and discussion is a difference of goals. For Weil, "dialogue is always about the manner according to which we must live" (LP 24) and thus in this way governs the substantive normative content that makes up the background of our decisions and our lives. It looks to get to the bottom of our values and our beliefs in order to correct and modify them. Discussion on the other hand is at the same time both the defense of one's interest by discursive means and the debate on the meaning of values (which in its fully articulated political form is not the discussion between individuals but is between institutions, and states through representatives). However because discussion also includes the defense of one's interests, it can always devolve into a form of bargaining or haggling in order for one's interests to prevail. This leads to a situation where "decisions are made based on a sometimes laboriously concluded compromise, rarely under the form of a consensus." (Canivez, 2020). With this in mind, we can look at what Weil sees as the regulatory and constitutive laws of dialogue (PR.I.282) in order to understand what the ideal of serious conversation is and to better understand Weil's conception of argument. These laws are not exhaustive, rather they are the minima needed for serious conversation to take place. These laws are:

      1. the ruling-out of violence,

      2. the acceptance of the *method* of discussion itself,

      3. grounding principles

            a.) a criterion of truth,

            b.) the agreement of what constitutes a fact,

      4. facts (PR.282)

These laws are the minima, but even these minima have, throughout history, been difficult to establish. Part of the reason (which will remind us of the placeholder concept of metaphysics defended in this work) is that the object of serious conversation can change and can turn into a discussion on the goodness of the grounding principles (what truth is, or what facts are). When these minima are met, they do not however guarantee what the content of dialogue will be, but this content inscribes itself in human history and in this way is part of its dynamic movement of that same history. Thus, what the notion of truth that people start

from or what fact people accept is inconsequential. Dialogue has to get off the ground before it can settle anything. Should this not happen, dialogue does not exist. As Weil notes, there is:

> no dialogue between men who are convinced to possess truths that are both absolute and concrete: it is only so long as their truths are not absolute but formal, or that their truths are concrete, but not absolute, that they can come to an agreement or at least understand why they don't understand each other. To summarize in a single sentence: there is no dialogue unless each participant admits that the other participants are as reasonable as they are. (PR.I.283)

Weil sees these laws of dialogue as constitutive and regulative precisely because they depend on and constitute dialogue's major presupposition, namely the existence of a community. However, the ambiguity lies between the notion of a *discursive* community and other forms of community. In terms of a theory of argumentation it is the discursive community that matters. This minimal criterion for agreement happens inside of a *discursive* community, which is to be understood as one where violence has already been ruled out as a way of settling conflicts. Different forms of communities exist one next to another and are only distinguished by additional features. It is nonetheless important to note that for Weil the community is born of a pre-political form of organization, thus all initial communities were discursive communities built around shared values, the same criterion of truth, the same conception of facts. This pre-political characteristic is what distinguished the community from the State, which is the political form historic communities take as they organize themselves in such a way to make conscious decisions that aim at "assuring the long-term existence of this historic community" (Canivez, 1993, 174-175). From our contemporary point of view, political communities are themselves internally differentiated into different social strata, that themselves may be in conflict, however, in principle they remain discursive communities to the extent that, again in principle, violence is ruled out in their interactions. Modern political communities are also to be distinguished from modern society, which Weil sees as the globalizing (though not fully globalized) organization and rationalization of different working communities (PP 61-92) into an interconnected whole. Modern society is not a single discursive community precisely because violence is not, as a principle, ruled out in these interactions. As we pile on additional criteria we are able to distinguish pre-political communities from the global society and from different states and thus to see how discursive communities are interwoven into these different forms of association. This also allows us to identify the discursive community as the space of serious conversation because it is in therein

that the object of serious conversation is decided. The State, for example, is the discursive community where the discussion between different parties, different social strata, and different unions of interest takes place (PP 209), which allows this community (both political and discursive) to collectively become aware of its conflicts and problems. This awareness of the collective and shared nature of these problems acts to ground the community.

This requires however that we distinguish between different levels of language use. Reading the *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argumentation requires specifying what kind of language use is implied by Weil. As I have said, serious conversation, because it seeks to create an agreement that matters, can be seen as the assertoric language use that makes truth-claims. In other words, it is a specific type of language use with a specific type of goal. For Weil, it is born out of contradiction and is "destined, in principle, to lead to an agreement" (LP 23) by confronting "the convictions that are present in the historic world" (PR.I.292) What does it mean that it is born out of contradiction? It means for Weil that when we discuss with others we are made aware of the partiality or the fallibility of our theses because other people say other things. That is, argument is born out of a "natural" plurality of claims about the world. If philosophy wants to resolve this problem it must take it into account. However, for Weil, this fact is obscured because, as social creatures, our situation always presents itself as the constitution of the community itself. This social reality is taken to be natural and thus the scope of contradictions is actually already relatively limited. Weil notes that:

> Logic, the science of dialogue, applies itself to what is common to the two interlocutors, it only serves to eliminate the *remaining* contradictions, thus helping them to put together a coherent discourse on a given subject, pushing them to get rid of the contradictions that they hadn't remarked between the different affirmations they have held up one after another and that they find themselves now obliged to maintain at the same time, with the result that they will abandon one of them or they will demonstrate the possibility of the reconciliation of the two. Logic doesn't constitute discourse; it constitutes it as coherent discourse by purifying it of contradictions. (LP 24)

The dialogue of which Weil speaks is a specific *Socratic* form of the public exchange of reasons, just as the logic of which he is speaking here is a specific *Aristotelean* conception of logic. Thus it remains to be seen how exactly this position fits in with modern formalized logic. Nonetheless, his conception of contradiction, throughout the *Logic of Philosophy* changes, and thus the contradiction that is found in the category of *The Discussion* is not the contradiction that matters to Weil's overall theory of argumentation but something deeper.

The Discussion recognizes a shared principle, and thus the contradictions that are to be eliminated are the *remaining* contradictions. However, as the *Logic of Philosophy* progresses, it becomes clear that it can no longer be a matter of eliminating remaining contradictions, but must be a matter of facing the fundamental contradictions that arise because people situation themselves in different categories, and thus have different grounding principles. Thus any theory of argumentation that can be drawn out of the *Logic of Philosophy* must focus on the means of coming to an agreement through the exchange of arguments that aim at modifying grounding principles (and thus permissible premises) and at transforming substantial beliefs at the level of people's attitudes.

This clearly starts from a minimal agreement that is necessary for serious conversation—assertoric, truth-claim making language use—to happen. However, because there are concrete different grounding principles that stand in the way, there is in some sense always also, a minimum disagreement, or at least a minimum confusion. In other words, if there were not a minimum disagreement born from the natural plurality of points of view, we would have no need for serious conversation. Again, for Weil, serious conversation is where we make the claims that govern the normative aspects of our lives. In other words, serious conversation responds to the question of what one *should* take to be true, how the community *should* be organized, how one *should* act, what one *should* do, etc. It may in fact be that philosophy, serious conversation, is not always clear to itself. This is because people flit in and out of serious conversation. This is evident in the claims we have been making that reasonability, for Weil, is an exceptional state. Philosophy for Weil is centered around certain types of language practices, in other words it depends on assertoric language use or what Brandom calls language's "downtown" (1994), but Weil's critique shows that people can in some sense live in the suburbs and never go into town. In fact, the majority of our language use may be closer to a discursive form of social grooming that allows us to maintain and reinforce our connections to each other and not make claims of anything, what Weil calls *speaking without saying anything* and which I will come back to later in this chapter. Weil agrees that the rational tradition has given pride of place to assertoric language use, and he admits that it is central to the organization meaning (though not of its production), however what his critique of this same tradition warns us about is the underlying risk that philosophers are guilty of self-importance when they take assertoric language use as being of greater *dignity* than other forms of language use because of this importance. For Weil, language in its spontaneity is the depository of *all* uses and discourses. Weil notes, "All discourse possesses a meaning and thus participates in meaning" (LP 54) and here what we can add that all language use participates in it as well. This does nothing to change the fact

though that Weil is attacking this question as a philosopher and thus is principally interested in serious conversation.

The line of demarcation between types of language use is at best fuzzy, but probably worse than fuzzy, is only clear in critical moments. Indeed, the fact that individuals flit in and out of serious conversation actually shows the depth of agreement that actually exists. We only need it by moment in order to correct a ship that is for the most part cutting straight through the water[80]. In other words, our attitudes are shot through with every register of language, of all types of prosodic effects, all types of pragmatic considerations and the goal that serious conversation gives to itself is to reduce the fuzziness of our concepts. This is important. It opens up a perspective which will be a practical result of Weil's model of argumentation. Namely, multiple strategies are needed to bring people to discourse. These strategies aim at showing people what the consequences of their commitments are and then asking them whether they are willing to face these consequences or not. Certain commitments have unsavory consequences, but nothing can keep people from accepting those consequences, nonetheless, by making these consequences explicit, and then by presenting other reasoned options, a Weilian theory of argumentation aims at showing people what they have to gain from being reasonable while recognizing their human spontaneity, their resistance, their questions, and their doubts as expression of their freedom. Bringing people to see this is bringing them to see their freedom *as* reasonable freedom[81]. The kinds of strategies that are needed look to bring people to see this even when they do not see any interest in it, or when they refuse the interest because they think that no agreement can be reached, or more seriously, when they refuse the interest knowingly and explicitly because they want to remain in their particularity. But when they seek to be reasonable, when they do seek to give expression to their doubts, questions, and interests, it is because they are oriented.

6.3   Orientation, Satisfaction, Contentment and Action

The individual always finds themselves in a community. This is what makes dialogue possible. The state of this community's institutions, of its science, of its art, all of these

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[80] The corollary to this is that, our level of disagreement is also for the most part well defined. Every individual has someone, whether a group or individual, with whom serious conversation is not even worth the time, because they feel that they would get nothing out of the effort. This is a consequent of the material incompatibilities revealed in discursive commitments and the free decision to take on commitments.
[81] Weil analyzes this development at length in *Philosophie politique*, notably in the relationship between the individual and society (PP 93-128). In these pages he shows how the modern individual, who is fundamentally dissatisfied, grasps their dissatisfaction and their freedom under the form of the ethical life (in French, Weil uses the term *morale vivante*, which is his way of formulating *Sittlickheit*) which they judge in order to modify. Their judgment is "universal and reasonable" because "it aims at the positive freedom of individuality both in its universality and in its historic situation" (PP 105).

things give the individual a naïve sense of orientation. The individual knows what they are *supposed* to want based on their pre-reflexive grasp of the structures that surround them and that form them as individuals[82]. However, one of the characteristic developments of modern society is that it untethers individuals from the force that traditional claims place on them. This, for Weil, has been the long slow work of human negativity. The movement of the *Logic of Philosophy* is defined by the dissatisfaction of the individual. Here, what we can add is that by giving their activity an orientation, the individual postulates the kind of satisfaction that they can hope to find in the world. In this way, orientation is a key aspect of Weil's theory of argumentation. He is not the sole thinker to see this. In *The Concept of Argument*, Harald Wohlrapp links the notion of theory with that of orientation and notes that together they play a central role in argument. Wohlrapp makes this move because, for him, theory is "not a representation of reality, but orientation within it" (2014: 18). Eric Weil does something very similar. For him, the role of discourse is "to allow man to orient himself in the world" (LP 335) in order to act. Here Weil modifies the notion of *theoria*, of a total view, of a "pure sight of the eternal in its positive being" (LP 49). It is no longer *theoria* that allows us to act, but rather, *theoria* is grounded on reasonable action that aims at the organic unity of life and discourse, attitude and category. In other words, this is the way that Weil takes back up and reformulates the Greek notion of a *kosmos* but as a kingdom of ends[83] where the individual sees their life as a meaningful unity and lives it as such. Weil's reading of Kant hinges on the idea that the third *Critique* discovers the existence of meaningful facts, or said different, of the fact of meaning, where the world, nature, the *kosmos* appears as a well-ordered whole to the moral subject. This is because it is in this world that the individual orients their moral action, which because it is theirs is meaningful. The individual however is forced to recognize that they live in a fractured *kosmos* because this kingdom of ends is ever but a project. This opens a problem between philosophy and theory that Weil develops in the text "Philosophie politique, théorie politique" (EC.II.387-420) between the multiplicity of the points of view of action. In other words "theories are true and they are at the same time particular, that is, they don't provide all the truth" (EC.II.412).

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[82] I would argue that this pre-reflexive grasp of possible orientations is shaped by bouncing of the normative constraints that are present in any given social setting. In this way, it opens a space of meaningfulness whereby the individual knows what orientations are available to them and what their *uncritical* horizon of meaningful action is. This uncritical horizon is exactly what the free choice to understand bucks against (Cf. the last chapter for a discussion of how bouncing of rules works).

[83] In the *Logic of Philosophy* Weil explicitly calls the kingdom of ends the "true cosmos" (LP 49) in his presentation of the way that Kant's transcendental logic subsumes violence under the logical role of contradiction. In his article, "Sens et fait" (PK 55-107) Weil credits Kant with rediscovering the notion of a *kosmos* (understood as the way that modern subjectivity grasps the unity of life and discourse) in the third *Critique* but also accuses him of obscuring this fact by expressing the problem and reality of meaning in the language of being (PK 105). Cf. (Canivez, 2020) for a clear reading of Weil's interpretation of the third *Critique*.

For Weil, philosophy, because it deals with the possibility of understanding, is formal insofar as it must account for the multiplicity of points of view that exist in the world, and insofar as it must provide a formal description of the possibility of this multiplicity. However, as he notes in the *Logic of Philosophy*, for the individual, in their finitude, philosophy also plays an essential historic role in helping them to decide, to take a stance, to orient themself. It makes itself concrete in the individual's action. This is because to have an orientation one must know, if not what they want, at least what they don't what and what they won't stand for (LP 8). This assessment has far-reaching consequences for Weil's theory of argumentation. Weil notes that:

> [a]ny global theory has always consisted in developing the contradiction between the traditional way of doing things and the necessities of the situation, the requirements of that reality in which desires must be satisfied, but which are only satisfied at the price that reality requires: if you want this, you must accept that; if you don't want to accept that, you must submit yourself to the consequences of your refusal, which nonetheless you don't desire. (EC.II.402)

There are several key distinctions to unpack in this extract. First, in theory there is a tension between particular points of view of individual people in individual situations that require individual solutions and between the naïve claims of universality and objectivity that the tradition holds. This is because the tradition is the culmination and residue of previous successful attempts of finding a way of orienting life in the world. This success however is only ever partial because it is adapted to a situation that has now disappeared. This creates a tension in the present, but only for the individual who makes *claims* of universality or of objectivity. Only a partial view can aim at a total view. It is what Weil calls "the necessities of the situation" that place the naïve orientations that are available for individuals to the test. This is exactly what theory does, it aims at leaving particularity, with its singular situation and its necessities, to provide a global orientation that can be applied by everyone. It looks to describe the state of things in such a way that all can act in that state and use the orientation that is elaborated in order to inform their own. What is interesting here is that Weil links the notion of orientation and theory with that of discursive commitment. In order to orient oneself, one elaborates a theory by committing oneself. This however implies that there is already an implicit orientation or attraction towards a position, because as Weil notes, "[t]heories in themselves develop the consequences of different premises, they do not say, if they understand their own limits, whether one must accept these premises or refuse these consequences" (EC.I.405). In other words, theory says nothing about the choice of commitments, of the form of coherence that they imply, nor whether the individual is ready to accept the consequences. The only thing that affirms this choice is the *act* of choosing.

This act comes down to the free choice to understand that any individual can make, that is both conditioned and a-reasonable and arbitrary. In fact, the orientation that individuals have is, for Weil, based on the retrospective goal of justifying the choice they didn't previously understand they made. This is what Weil calls the "the hidden and unconscious stance" (EC.I.407) that individuals take.

The dissatisfaction that moves the *Logic of Philosophy* forward is thus counterbalanced by the satisfaction that is posited in theory and that orients the individual's research and activity. In other words the concept of orientation is given in the formal concept of universality, but as a formal concept, it is without content. In order to see how orientation is deployed (how it acquires content) in the theory of argumentation that we can draw out of Weil's work, we must develop the neighboring concepts of satisfaction and contentment. This is because, as we have noted, argumentation looks to alter a state of things. For Weil, this state of thing that theory (above all political theory) aims at is one where, "violence, even when legitimate, is superfluous because everyone finds themself satisfied in their deep and true aspirations" (EC.I.404) in their life. This means that it is a vague dissatisfaction that orients the individual to elaborate a notion of satisfaction that (implicitly) only makes sense within a global theory that unites discourse and life into a reasonable whole.

According to Weil, for behavior to be reasonable, that is, for it to be action, it must be directed by an individual that is able to hierarchize their goals and understand the means of realizing these goals as well as give direction to that individual. In this way, goals and orientation depend on discursive commitments, and reasonable action is the mobilization of these discursive commitments to act upon other discursive commitments. In other words, the starting point of all action (understood as reasonable activity) is discursive and the goal of action is a stable agreement built out of discourse. When this action is effective it modifies individuals' naïve orientation. Naïve orientations are presented to individuals in the residue of reasonable behavior that has been deposited in the tradition and that makes up the social human second nature, however it is through argumentative practices that individuals break away from this naïve orientation in order to formulate a new mature orientation. While the concept of orientation runs like a bright thread through the entire *Logic of Philosophy*, it is important that Weil's first substantive presentation of the concept is in category of *Certainty*. This is because, as I have said in my inferentialist reading of the initial categories, *Certainty* is the category that develops discursive commitment. In this way, whenever anyone takes on a discursive commitment and orients their activity they reprise *Certainty*. The individual always lives in a world, each world fixes the goals of those that live in it, each individual must thus navigate the goals that are presented to them as given. The way they do so is to evaluate whether these goals, against the background of other possible goals and discursive

commitments will provide satisfaction. In this way the notion of orientation is inseparable from the notion of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and contentment. The individual identifies what is unsatisfying in the orientations and descriptions to which, thanks to the tradition, they are heir. This identification allows them to elaborate new satisfactions, which through argumentation they can claim apply to the whole world. The problem however, according to Weil, is that this process is interminable. New satisfactions constantly unearth new dissatisfactions. Thus it is necessary to elaborate the notion of contentment, which is the satisfaction of living in a meaningful world, which gives meaning to the diversity of one's action in this world. This form of satisfaction fills the individual's desire for the freedom to live a life in a meaningful world and a meaningful community.

Given the place that Weil gives to negativity in his theory, to the pragmatic negativity that opens semantic possibility, to the capacity to negate any and every given, it should not be a surprise that here again negativity rears its head. Taken as a positive result, satisfaction must pass through the dialogical controls that argument provides to be considered valid. Valid satisfaction, if achieved in the concrete existence of an actual life, is a result. In theory, it is merely a hypothesis. Thus, for Weil, we orient ourselves through our dissatisfaction and from that dissatisfaction we propose possible satisfactions that orient our activity. The orientation that a *possible* satisfaction provides, while necessary, is for Weil, insufficient. This is because a satisfaction of a specific object or thing (as opposed to contentment) does nothing to exhaust dissatisfaction, all it does is leave the place open to a new determined desire that creates a new determined dissatisfaction that needs to itself be filled. A sudden desire for Hawaiian pizza, is only satisfied by a Hawaiian pizza. This will both satisfy my hunger and my specific desire, but my hunger will return and may create a desire for madras curry. We can understand this movement of dissatisfaction and satisfaction in Weil's theory by comparing it to the Hegelian model of bad, or spurious, infinity. According to this model, spurious infinity is "the negation of the finite"(2015: 109/GW 21.124). In other words, in a series of finite determinations, an individual can always posit the said determination's negation of "one more" in order to continue the series. This series is infinite because the series is determined by the possibility of continuing. It is spurious however because it proves itself infinite but does not grasp itself as such. It cannot guarantee that this continuation itself is infinite. Hegel notes that there are infinite new determinations but with each one "we are back at the previous determination, which has been sublated in vain." (*ibid.*: 112/GW 21.129).

According to this comparison, satisfactions are the negation of a dissatisfaction, but following the model of spurious infinity, all this does is reveal a new dissatisfaction that requires to be sated anew. For Hegel, spurious infinity is born out of the Dialectic of the

Understanding which separates and determines. This is opposed to the Dialectic of Reason that creates true or good infinity which comprehends (in both senses of the word) all determinations. If we interpret Weil's notion of satisfaction along the lines of Hegel's spurious infinity, each satisfaction is merely followed by the existence of another satisfaction, and so there is no satisfaction of satisfaction so to speak. This requires a different concept, a concept of freedom from dissatisfaction understood as all-encompassing, and as being stable in the face of the continual resurgence of satisfaction and its accompanying dissatisfaction. Weil formulates this notion of freedom from satisfaction according to two terms, contentment and presence, which he understands as fundamentally being the same[84]. Contentment unites satisfaction and dissatisfaction the way that true infinity unites the finite and the infinite in a dialectic that encompasses them both. Here, reason as contentment and presence is the final and absolute formulation of the goal of the *Logic of Philosophy*. It is what orients Weil's thought and is his claim of what the orientation of thought is. This falls in line with the temporal analysis that we gave to Weil's position, that philosophy is future-facing. The future is not fixed. If we were just the playthings of necessity we would have no need for argumentation, but it is because we see our action as having real effects on our lives that we act. We see ourselves before a variety of different choices that will have a variety of different outcomes, and thus we seek to be the agents of those outcomes. But we face the resistance of the world and of others, so we need to understand that resistance in discourse and if we are to overcome that resistance it is thanks to discourse.

Turning, in the present, towards the past in order to understand *how* to act for the future, is the reasonable activity of philosophy. Contentment would be the achievement of this. However, there is also a modification of this notion. Because Weil presents the philosophical possibilities after Hegel, contentment for him is no longer the infinity of reason that finds itself in the world through its own conceptualization of itself. In other words, it is no longer contentment full-stop that thinks, it is the individual as an individual, and not as a philosopher. Thus contentment would be the stable situation wherein the individual no longer needs discourse because, having passed through it they know how to act, they know how to understand the world and their place in it, where there is no more exteriority. Here, it would be the fullness of reasonability and sapience where every action can be said to be done for reasons and where all behavior has become action. In contentment the individual is

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[84] He calls contentment "the silence filled with presence" (LP 13) and presence "contentment in freedom" (LP 419)

the plaything of nothing: instinct, history, necessity are all understood as making up the individual just as the individual is seen as having a hand in making instinct, history, and necessity. While this is the orientation of the *Logic of Philosophy*, Weil is very clear that most individuals' orientations do not seek contentment but satisfaction. This is because most individuals don't need to seek to see their life as a united whole in the united whole of nature, because they already find it. They find it their life lived, in their mixed attitudes that are partially implicit (as the tradition that is neither questioned and nor facing any crisis) and partially explicit (in the social and political institutions that structure their lives, in this social context's literature, religion, philosophy, and culture). This sense of a life lived as a united whole in a well-ordered and meaningful world can be more or less contradictory, precisely because contradiction does not prevent anyone from living, and most people are even happy in their contradictions because it saves them the work and worry of making choices. However, for the individual that wants to make choices, who wants to understand themselves as free in good conscience, they can only find contentment in a fully developed discourse, precisely because contentment is what discourse aims at.

Because a fully developed discourse aims at contentment, it may seem counter-intuitive to place so much emphasis on the individual's satisfaction, but in fact, it reveals how the orientation of Weil's reasonable action is supposed to work towards a world where reasonable action is effective. The *Logic of Philosophy* aims at showing the reader how to think their own situation as a situation, but any historical concrete philosophy, any religion, any ideology, all historical and social sciences also do as much. They all allow the individual to think their situation or to contribute to its modification. What is specific about Weil's position is that it aims to do so by making explicit all of the resources of discourse that allow thinking situations in general. Thus the only positive result of the *Logic of Philosophy* would be found in the fact of an individual who leaves it to think their own experience, that is, to make it real and effective by struggling to make it coherent in face of other individuals and to bring other individuals to see the *value* of shouldering the same effort for themselves.

Now that the elements of theory, philosophy, action, orientation, etc. are all in place we can see why Weil never calls his position a theory. He, to quote Georges Santayana, "stands in philosophy exactly where he stands in daily life" (1955: vi.) and thus the *Logic of Philosophy* is not a theory for him but is a description of the meaningful unity he found in his practice, it shows that he is oriented and that he is acting reasonably by trying to create a world where violence is superfluous. In other words, Weil claims that philosophy must not only understand itself as a theory of free reasonable action in order to understand itself, it

must *be* the exercise of that reasonable action. This point has led multiple interpreters of Weil's work to emphasize the transition from "first" philosophy to political philosophy that the category of the *Action* opens (Sanou, 2008). In this way, Weil's project is the "philosophical justification of political engagement" (Savadogo, 2003: 15) the orientation of which aims at the "real unification of humanity, […] the inauguration of a global society where the individual will be immediate and where they will enjoy an effective recognition of their rights" (Canivez, 1993). Thus for Weil (as well as for Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca), the state of things that is transformed is historic human reality and the means of transforming that reality is argumentation. This means two things: one, that Weil sees his work as participating in the progress of free reasonable action and two, that a key to understanding free reasonable action is in his work. In order to justify this, we have to see the way that Weil's own position is present in the category of *Action*. This is also where the reprise enters back into the story. For Weil, transforming the world into one where every individual can see their action as reasonable and where they can see violence as superfluous requires that one take into account the actual discourse of others. This is what Patrice Canivez means when he notes that the *Logic of Philosophy* grounds a practice of philosophy as well as a theory of the *reception* of discourse (Canivez: 2013a). He notes that for Weil "[t]o understand is to analyze the reprises" (*ibid.*), and thus this implies analyzing the organization and structure of one's own discourses (and the hierarchy of commitments) as well as that of one's interlocutor. It is through this analysis that argumentation can be effective. It is in this way that a state of things is changed, while the reality that is to be changed is a *political* reality.

In the domain of non-violence, where violence also exists, but where the individual can turn away from violence in order to try to overcome it, the individual binds themselves to an orientation and to specific satisfactions. This orientation and these satisfactions are the coherence they are seeking for themselves. However, they also come to understand that their satisfactions are understood only in relation to their embeddedness in a social context. Thus they realize that the only way to have satisfaction is to open the path to satisfaction to others, through education and argument, all the while being aware that this path can be refused, that the individual can refuse satisfaction such as it is proposed. This is where the importance of the sequence of categories and the concept of the reprise become all important. For the individual that has adopted the orientation of the logic of philosophy, that is, for the individual who has adopted the goal of working towards a world of contentment through discourse, and who wants to bring people to this contentment by reasonable means, it is

essential to be able to identify the central discursive commitments of the person before them. Thus the different ideal-types presented by Weil, with the type of permissible inferences that each category allows, provide a framework for understanding the kinds of arguments that may work to bring the interlocutor from one category to the next if they have the meta-commitment to reasonable behavior (understood as choosing reason over violence). This is where the hermeneutical and the strategic aspects of reading the logic of philosophy as a theory of argumentation start to come out.

The categories can thus be understood as a catalogue of arguments that have successfully made claims of coherence, and that, at their level, for the person that lives inside of it, can make a claim of comprehensiveness, or of good infinity. I have already stated that for Weil, the categories are to be seen as governing the kinds of permissible inferences that, starting from a specific essential discursive commitment, structure thought. Here we can now add, that in the context of a theory of argumentation, the categories can also be seen as framing devices that provide orientation. That is, they provide a structure of valid claims. In this way, each category will provide a collection of valid orientations that allow the individual to see their life as meaningful. We have already underlined how the categories are ideal-types. Weil goes on to note that it is only through the reprise that they are applied to reality. The reprise is thus a key concept to understanding Weil's position as a theory of argumentation. In the first three chapters I insisted on the importance of orders of explanation. Here, this importance becomes salient to understanding the categories as fundamental orientations and the interplay of reprises (that is, the orders of explanation that presents themselves as different hierarchies of commitments) as hermeneutical and strategic tools in argumentation. In a word, it allows us to understand the types of arguments our interlocutors deploy and how to make argumentative choices ourselves.

6.4   The Conceptual Analysis of the Reprise of *God*

In order to bring out the hermeneutical tools found in the *Logic of Philosophy* I will give, by way of example, as analysis of the different reprises of the attitude/category of *God*. Any attitude/category could have been chosen, nonetheless *God* seems a fitting choice for multiple reasons. It is a category that marks the transition between Antiquity and Modernity and thus the outlines of the concept remain easily visible in both the categories of Antiquity and Modernity. Also, the presence of the reprises of *God* have had an enormous influence of the western philosophical tradition and the western civilization in general. This makes this reprise particularly revealing of the hermeneutical importance of the *Logic of*

Philosophy. This importance has long been recognized. Outside of the deep influence that Weil had on Paul Ricœur[85], one of the principal hermeneutists of the twentieth century, the hermeneutical aspect has been underlined by multiple interpreters, whether comparing Weil's work to a single hermeneutist like Gadamer (Breuvart, 1987; Buée, 1987) or to multiple (Stanguennec, 1992). Luis Manuel Bernardo also provides us with an important investigation of the hermeneutical role of Weil's distinction between language and discourse (2003). In its hermeneutical role, the logic of philosophy deploys the categories and different orders of explanation to show how specific discursive positions are organized and understood. It develops the notion of individual interest and allows us to recognize different discursive positions as real human attitudes. These human attitudes are the result of taking a discursive position which affirms an interest and an orientation in the world. Because this central discursive commitment determines an individual's interest and orientation, they see (or feel, or hope, the language here is inconsequential) it to be fundamental. This in turn defines both the kinds of inferences that are seen to be permissible as well as those that are seen to be incompatible. This commitment allows the individual the possibility of seeing their life and the world as a *kosmos*, that is, as a meaningful whole (there are nonetheless categories that refuse the possibility of contentment and thus also refuse the grasp of the world as a *kosmos*, these are notably *Nonsense*, *The Condition*, and *The Finite*). As an individual looks to enter different concepts into this meaningful whole (which can be interpreted here as a space of reasons), they must make these concepts fit with their central discursive commitment. This organization, and constant reorganization, these reprises, determine the shape of individual concepts by determining the scope of permissible inferences and incompatibilities. Reprises thus allow us both to understand different possible positions (our own and those of our interlocutors) and to see what kind of arguments can be used in such cases. Understanding our own positions and those of others is a matter of excavating what discursive commitments are present both in our language use and in our acts. This allows us to give reasons for what we do and what we say.

One central aspect of the *Logic of Philosophy* is the claim that certain kinds of discursive positions are irreducible and that people can anchor themselves into these positions and refuse to leave. As a hermeneutical tool, the logic of philosophy allows us to see what is essential to different positions, and gives us an order in which to interpret these different positions. What this means is that even if certain positions are irreducible, there is nonetheless a certain "natural" proximity and distance between them. It is the identification

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[85] Not only did Ricœur come back to Weil's work over and over in order to enrich his own, in an interview in the journal *Alternatives Non-violentes* Ricœur notes "how much he loved Eric Weil" and how important Weil's influence was to his work (Ricoeur, 1991). Cf. also (Roman, 1988; Marcelo, 2013; Valdério, 2014) for investigations of Weil's influence on Ricœur.

of this "natural" proximity that allows Weil for instance to take *Conscience* by the hand and lead it to action, by passing from an ethic of conviction to one of responsibility (which is one of the goals of the *Logic of Philosophy*). Of course, again this only happens for the moral consciences that allows itself to be so led. If this is true, it should be easier to bring someone to see another discursive position if that natural proximity is respected. In other words, getting somebody to see the importance of the free interplay of the intelligence should be easier if that person already accepts the freedom of the moral conscience than if that person sees the world exclusively as a causally determined realm known only through empirical experience or if that person sees the world as the union of reason and sentiment in God. Seeing the logic of philosophy as a hermeneutical tool thus allows us to interpret the kind of interest and orientation that goes along with different concepts. It also allows us to make sense of Weil's own position. If we go back to the understanding of the individual that Weil advocates we can see how this takes place. Remember, he states that the individual in action is:

> The *personality* grasping itself as sentiment facing the *Absolute* which is *God*, but a God revealed absolutely as the coherence to be realized, has found its *work* [*œuvre*] in its *finiteness*: it is the *free conscience* that imposes itself on the *condition* in order to transform it according to its *interest* that it now knows to be unique and essential and in virtue of which it can *interpret* what is. (LP 413)

This shows that for Weil, in order to see the individual as a meaningful whole, multiple categories need to be reprised. It can thus be argued that these are the reprises that Weil himself uses to build a normative position about how the human individual in their concrete human experience *should* understand themself. However, this normative position defended by Weil does not undermine the different ways that the human individual can understand themself and their own concepts. All the concepts in this normative presentation can therefore undergo signification transformation based on the category under which they are being reprised and the order of explanation that is being used to understand the concept. Coming to our example of GOD, this concept and its place in Weil's theory has elicited enormous interest from the commentators[86], most often investigating the status of the category in the book, or the status of religion in Éric Weil's philosophy. While these questions are interesting, they are not the ones I will be asking. Instead I will look at the way that the place of this concept in different categories present different reprises and thus different ways to understand God. This will help to understand the hermeneutical role the

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[86] Cf. (Vancourt, 1970; Bouillard, 1977; Guibal, 2013) just to name a few.

categories and reprises play when we read the *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argumentation.

In the extract from the category of *Meaning* cited above, Weil creates an identity between *God* and the *Absolute*, but this is a very specific God, not one that is the realization of ontology thanks to the idea of totality, but rather one that realizes totality through discursive coherence. This is part of the anthropological shift that Henri Bouillard recognizes in Weil's work and notably in his interpretation of God (Bouillard, 1977). This helps to explain why the union of reason and sentiment in *God* can be lived as a human attitude. In *Meaning*, Weil presents it as the unity of subject and object (the *Absolute*) which presents itself as the totality of reality, but a reality that has not yet been completed but is to be brought into existence. It is brought into existence by the individual who comes to understand and defend their interest in the world and then works to make reality adequate to their interest, however the individual does so only facing their own finiteness, and realizes that their interest can only be realized as the interest of humanity. So, Weil's understanding of the meaning of GOD is as concept that individuals use in order to have a coherent grasp on their life in the world thanks to the way that the idea of totality is mobilized. This is not however the same way that other categories understand the same concept. This version of God is a far cry from the dominant Abrahamic God of the Western world. This is also a far cry from the different ways that God is understood according to different categories and different orders of explanation. God' hermeneutical usefulness in the *Logic of Philosophy* thus rests on it being a general concept that has a long and deep history, which because of that, Weil treats repeatedly in his presentation of the different reprises. In this way, we can look at the development of the concept in different categories in order to see how the concrete content of this formal concept changes according to the central categorical commitment that an individual takes on and the way that afterwards they hierarchize their commitments through reprises. This development will thus show how this hierarchization of commitments changes which inferences are permissible and which are incompatible in a single concept.

In the category of *Truth* for example, God is a term that could potentially provide "a sense of universality and of the absolute" (LP 93), but because of this, it loses its singularity. BEING and TRUTH provide the same service. However, like BEING, GOD leads to possible confusion precisely because of how historically charged the reprises of the concepts GOD and BEING are. This is also important, because in tracing the different reprises of GOD we will better see what Weil's choice to start the logic of philosophy from TRUTH implies. In the early categories, before GOD is understood in its categorial purity, TRUTH, GOD, and BEING are tangled in a confusing semantic, ontological, and metaphysical bundle. It is only as these different concepts are separated that the full force of a logic of philosophy becomes clear. In

its own development, GOD culminates in the category that bears its name as a unity of reason and sentiment, however BEING and TRUTH are still interpreted as part of this unity. After this category, GOD is reinterpreted according to human concepts while BEING and TRUTH continue to mingle. When BEING culminates in the category of *The Absolute*, where the subject and the object meet in a rational identity, TRUTH pulls away and allows additional coherent categories to form. This is why Weil starts from TRUTH, the culmination of this concept surpasses the felt identity in GOD and the thought identity of BEING. TRUTH culminates in an understanding of the reality of meaning that is found in the possibility that presents itself as the meaningful unity of a discourse and a life.

The *Logic of Philosophy* recognizes this reality because each new category, as Gilbert Kirscher notes, "deals with the meaning of what the preceding category recognized as truth: it detaches meaning from the truth" (1989, 387). Thus, the intermingling of TRUTH, GOD, and BEING becomes clear in the fact that before the presentation of the category of *God*, Weil makes scant mention of the concept. He notes in the category of *Nonsense* that we "are dominated by a theory of history" that has its origins in Christianity (LP 99) whereby "history, as the order of human evolution, has a beginning and an end, and every event has its place" and that the "historical order and the logical order" coincide in God. Weil however is only derivatively interested in the historical order because history, like God, logically has no beginning and end. Historically, no beginning and end can be precisely nailed down, because the recognition of this possibility implies that it has already always been there. He notes in the category of *The True and the False* that GOD is explained according to "an ordinary bit […] of monist ontology" as being one and eternal (LP 103) but precisely because of that it is still tied up in BEING, the concept is inapplicable (like BEING) because we cannot capture it in language "we can only speak of the impossibility of speaking" (LP 104) and thus we must fall silent or speak only to "reject every predicate, since every attribute, being only attribute, is false" (LP 104.) This difficulty is further illustrated by the fact that before the category of *God* the concept GOD continues to be caught up with similar ontological and metaphysical concepts. For instance, even though the God of *Certainty* is "always and always present in everything" (LP 114), the way this being is bound up in the make-up of reality changes depending on the culture and the school of thought in archaic certainty. This God/Being is water or fire or spirit, or whatever other ontological totality is postulated. The struggle to define the role of God (or of gods) is present and is brought closer to the fore in the category of *The Discussion*. In this category, whether God is present in everything or not becomes inconsequential, precisely because this is no longer a sufficient ground for decision. Reason (the formal agreement of convictions) becomes the only arbiter of action and of the tradition. In this way, the tension in the concept GOD that will later characterize the category

God (between the existence of God as the ground of reality and His absence in human life that is only mediated through faith), can already be felt.

Because of the way the problem is announced in *Discussion* we can skip over the cursory remarks that Weil makes concerning the concept GOD in the categories of the *Object* and the *Self* and go directly to the category of *God*, where the concept is defined as the unity of reason and sentiment in a perfect being. We have already stated how Weil takes the category of *God* to be a decisive step in the development of our own historical situation. This is not just because the development of western philosophy passed through the Abrahamic concept of God, but because of *how* it passed through this concept. For Weil this category is the "origin of total reflection" (LP 186). That is, it is "under the category of *God* that, for the first time, man sees himself and interprets himself in the totality of his life" (LP 186-187). This aspect of totality is clear in the development of the way that other categories are reprised under that of *God*. The category of *God* claims to range over all other concepts and thus when concepts that are born under other categories are reprised under that of *God* we can clearly see the way these concepts are modified by different hierarchies of commitments. We can see this both in non-categorial concepts (in the sense of philosophical categories) such as ORIENTATION and in categorical concepts such as THE OBJECT. As we have already noted, ORIENTATION becomes clear for the first time under the category of *Certainty*, even though this concept is to be found in every category. In fact, in different categories, as we have noted, the individual's orientation will be different. This is because the kinds of goals that are available to an individual are drawn out of the category itself. In the category of *God* ORIENTATION takes on a specific dimension. The category of *God* allows for the conceptualization of totality specifically because it subsumes everything else under itself. Orientation is thus here not thought of as a choice that the individual makes, but rather as being something that is given to the individual by God, thus showing the individual that they have a place in God's plan and that their life is understood as being part of God's will. Weil notes that according to this modification of ORIENTATION "if man wants to guide himself in his life, he must then grasp this world inasmuch as it is God's expression" (LP 192). In this way the individual understands thanks to God, but what they understand is their faith. This is evident in the way that the category of *God* reprises *The Object* so that God can be seen as a "subject" and as "man's only object. The world, life, man himself are understood in Him." (LP 200). This plays a key role in the transformation of the ontological science of the Greeks. In *The Object*, the individual has a place in an organized whole and the aim of their science is to arrive at the placid observation of that whole as the participation in reason. According to this new conception man is separated from the whole because:

> Science must find the infinite in the finite: God is in His creation, nature in its totality is the total expression of God. In scrutinizing the works man finds God in it. He finds him because this creator is absolutely reasonable, because each of His acts is related to the whole and, though that, to the Good. (LP 200).

The individual is separated from God but reality is nonetheless a knowable totality that is organized by rational rules because it is in this reality that the imprint of God is visible. God thus "guarantees natural laws" (ENHP 16) while uprooting the individual from the natural place that the Greek *kosmos* was supposed to also guarantee. The individual is freed, but free, they are abandoned.

The hermeneutical role of the logic of philosophy allows us to understand different discursive positions by allowing us to identify different hierarchies of commitments. This becomes even more clear as we continue to follow the concept of GOD as it moves into the more "modern" categories. Indeed, Weil has called the category of *God* a philosophical turning point and "the most modern of the categories of antiquity, the most antiquated of the modern" (LP 188). Weil defines this passage into the modern categories as a loss of faith. This does not mean that faith disappears (indeed the reprises of *God* show that the category itself is irreducible) rather it is that "God no longer signifies anything when it concerns life" (LP 203). What this means is that the concept of GOD has been surpassed by more coherent discourses that allow the concept to be reprised. This shift is evident in the transformation of the posture of the individual facing God from the category of the *Condition*. Weil notes that for the individual of the *Condition*, who has left the category of *God*, the belief in the existence of God does not pose a problem. In fact he states:

> Let man believe in the existence of a God, guarantor of the social order, this is useful, even indispensable. But let him cease counting on God's intervention: the prayers, the rites, the offerings do not exempt him from effort, he must take care of his own fate himself, he must obtain knowledge of nature himself, for there is neither revelation nor miracle. Between God and man, there are no other relations than those of morality, and man's piety comes down to his respect for the omniscient and absolutely just being. Defending God's "interests" is not the law's role: he doesn't have any, and those who attribute interests to him are thinking of their own and upset the peace of labor. Maybe God will judge men's acts after their death; the belief, if it has low probability, if, to tell the truth, it is false — for science doesn't imagine a soul separate from body — does a great favor, provided that the precaution is taken to limit religion by social utility, aiming at humanity's progress in light of science. (LP 217).

In this way God is seen as a strictly social phenomenon that helps to keep the mass in place. It is no longer seen as a confusing analogue to Being nor as the ground of human reality. In fact, this social role is highlighted even further when the concept of GOD is reprised under the category of the *Condition*. This reprise creates "progressive theology, explaining and understanding progress as continuous revelation of the divine plan aiming at the education of humankind, or, using secondly that of the *self*, the theologies of man's unhappiness in an atheist and heartless world, etc.…" (LP 230). This shows not only that there are simple reprises (one category under another), but also that reprises can be stacked one upon another in order to continue to modify the concept. This stacking is exactly where the order of explanation comes into play. Because as Weil notes different reprises in different orders give different conceptual contents. This is because the hierarchization of commitments that is implied in reprises provide different permissible inferences.

The category of *The Conscience*, for instance, refuses the exclusively societal role that *The Condition* gives to the concept and transforms it to guarantee the moral order that is grounded in the moral nature of God. This is because for Weil, the purity of the category of the *Conscience*, which was discovered and described by Kant, insists on the individual's moral vocation. Weil notes that:

> In the idea of a just God, the moral law exists for the man who is free, but unconscious of his freedom, just as the idea of the science dominating the conditions represents — but represents only for the conscience — reason's spontaneity, just as that of the universal kingdom of law prefigures the free determination through the suppression of individual interest, as that of wisdom announces the total reflection of the *self* in the *I* (LP 255).

Here it is because the individual:

> and nature are both created by God that he can possess a science. There is a harmony between the general conditions of knowledge and reality that allows him to pass from the general idea of an object of knowledge to the particular laws that come one after another and fit together in order to form a system: nature is not only knowable in principle, it is knowable in fact. (LP 258).

Up through the *Conscience*, God is taken to have a fundamental relationship to the world, that is, the concept GOD is mixed up with the foundation of reality in some way. However, what the category of the *Intelligence* does for the concept GOD (and for all other concepts and categories) is to present the content found in the various articulations of the concept as being different ways to articulate human interest. Here, the hermeneutical aspect of the logic of philosophy comes out for the first time, and this is normal, because the *Intelligence* is the

category that brings the need for and the structure of interpretation out in all its clarity. Nonetheless, and this is critical, the concept of the reprise, as a concept, is not itself born out of the category of the intelligence. The concept of the reprise is born out of the logic of philosophy. That is, it is born out of the attempt to understand philosophy philosophically and to use that understanding to act upon the world. In this way, *Intelligence* can only understand GOD as a presentation of human interest, and not as girding the world and the activity of the subject together as a single concept. This is precisely because *Intelligence* seeks to understand the plurality of worlds that present themselves as concrete human interests, that is, as the cultural differences and the worldviews in which the individual establishes themself. Thus it can (correctly) interpret how *The Condition* reduces the *belief* in God to a superstition that either gets in the way of progress or that serves as a regulatory social mechanism. It can also interpret how for *The Conscience*, the moral conscience "proves" the existence of GOD and guarantees the effectiveness of moral action. However, it interprets GOD (or belief, or concrete religions with their dogma, their rites, and their texts) and its reprises as making up these worlds or cultures in which individuals live, and which are their own creations. This shift from the metaphysical underpinning of the universe (from a first principle outside of human reality that nonetheless grounds human reality) to a human attitude is essential, because this allows us to understand the transformation that the concept GOD undergoes in the category of the *Personality*.

Weil himself highlights the particularity and the historical importance of the reprise of the category of *God* under that of the *Personality*. The category of the *Personality* is the category of self-creation, of conflict, of the overflow of human expression in the choice of how the individual lives their life. The reprise of *God* takes up these elements but presents God as being the source of creation and expression. Weil claims that under this reprise: "The personality is God […] because God is the absolute conscience: man is a conscious personality, because God is and because man is his image" and that "He has ceased being the absolute ground of a Being that would need to be accessible to reason and that is only felt by man; He is the present future that has submerged the past" (LP 314). What it is important for Weil is that this shift in the conception of GOD is also a shift in the notion of God's will. It is no longer what grounds the human projects that are to be brought into the world, it is the source of the conflict of the individual in their struggle to realize themself. In fact, for Weil, within the development of Christianity there is "a dialectic of God and man" (LP 316) where nothing is outside of Christianity, and the whole world has to be understood through the concepts presented in Christianity. Even though we are focusing on reprises of *God* in this analysis, it is important to note here the way that the development of Christianity operates an unconscious reprise of *Personality* under *God*.

In Christianity, Jesus Christ becomes the divine personality whose conflicts are paradoxically always present and definitively resolved. These conflicts of life and death, past and future, are present in the figure of Christ but he transcends them and thus provides a model for the rest of humanity. This conflict, where the human individual finds their salvation, which is "won in suffering" (LP 178), is defined by the resolution of the conflict that nonetheless does not go away, but which is understood in the figure of Jesus Christ himself. Because it is in Christ that "God has truly come down to earth, he has truly made himself into a man" (LP 315) the human individual "no longer has any personal conflict, which has taken place in God" (LP 316), nonetheless, Weil also notes that this reprise does not "constitute Christianity (which *can*, after the fact, understand itself as the religion of the personality/God): it enters entirely into it, but neither exhausts Christianity nor its dogmatic system" (LP 315). Thus despite the importance of this reprise, Weil notes that "[a]n analysis of the historical phenomenon of Christianity would have to take into account the importance which takes back up, in relation to prophetism, the mythical element of the tradition, that is, the importance of the reprise of *certainty*" (LP 314 n. 11). What is important to a theory of argumentation in this analysis is to note the way that the conflict that presents itself in Jesus Christ and that was essential to the development of Christianity and to the western tradition, shows that individuals can live in or with contradictory meta-commitments, which in the case of Christianity is the internal struggle (represented in the figure of Jesus Christ) of two different central concepts that both make claims of coherence and that both play the role of organizing discursive concepts. This is why Weil also notes that this dialectic and thus the development of the individual as a source of their own creation and a source of their own values "draws to a close and finishes in the personality" (LP 316). It draws to a close because as Weil notes, for this reprise "man deep down *is* a personality, that is, he always has been: his history is the path that leads him to discover this." (LP 316). This analysis of the reprise is important. In fact, we can lean on it in order to further understand the life of concepts in discourse.

These different ways of conceiving of the concept are a consequence of how different hierarchies of commitments organize permissible inferences. Each different essential concept dominates how this hierarchy is articulated, but additional reprises will continue to modify the permissible inferences and the incompatibilities of the concept. As I have already noted a concept is irreducible when it can be used as a central discursive commitment that can make claims of coherence and can govern what inferences are seen as permissible or prohibited. Coming to this irreducible character is what Weil means when he claims that the history of a concept draws to a close. For the category of *God*, the dialectic of sentiment and reason unite with Being to draw to a close in the concept GOD, which individuals in the

category do not see as a concept but as the ground of reality. However, the concept PERSONALITY shows that this dialectic can give way to another history. The individual who is seeking to explain and understand their experience in the world through their own self-creation and as a source of their own values, and who thus only sees the dialectic of sentiment and reason as drawing to a close in a human attitude which is necessary to lead to what, for them, *actually* grounds reality: the individual personality in the choices that it makes in its personal conflict in the world. The struggle of self-understanding in the creation of values in the *Personality* is seen as valid both for the believer and the atheist. This is one of the ways that the concept shows itself to be more comprehensive than the category of *God*. But for the believer, they see the personality as the conclusion of the dialectic of God and man, whereas for the atheist (and for the agnostic), they see this development as being made out of the reprises of their own personal emotional and intellectual history. In fact, it is this personal emotional and intellectual history that allows them to understand their individual struggle and to understand the choice that they make in the world to affirm their values and their goals. This position lays the groundwork for the place of the reprise of the concept of God in Weil's normative view of the human individual, where God is seen as the Absolute. This is because in the category of the *Absolute*, the category best exemplified by Hegel's mature philosophy:

> reasoning and sentiment, object and subject have disappeared, and there is no longer any *other*: science and freedom are no longer opposed, for in this science Being knows itself to be Reason, and Reason knows itself to be Being. Reflection's circle is traveled, and man in the totality of his being has recognized himself as Being in its totality, as the un-folding of God (LP 334).

God is understood in coherent discourse as the *Absolute* coherence of this discourse, as an onto-theology, where the relationship to philosophy and religion is reversed. Philosophy is no longer the servant of religion (what allows thinking religion), rather religion is merely one of the forms under which the *Absolute* thinks itself in philosophy. This also allows us to add that this is one of the ways that Weil differs from Hegel. Weil keeps the idea of absolute coherence while evacuating the idea of the self-interpreting system as an onto-theology.

The Absolute should be understood as the terminal point of what we can call, following Jean Quillien, the logical evolution of the discourse on being. This discourse is characterized by a first-level assertoric language use that tries to fix conceptual content to things in the world, as being the actual reality of the things that are being spoken about. *The Absolute* is seen as the terminal point because in *The Absolute* individuals are unable to conceptualize life outside of discourse, to see discourse as an option and not just as the armature of meaning in the world. This, as I have argued, presents the problem of the

individual's relationship to discourse. This is an important development not only in order to understand arguments as having a pragmatic function, that is, moving people to act, (they move people to see the world according to their discourse), but also because it allows us to better understand the hermeneutical function of the *Logic of Philosophy*. We can now see discourse as trying to capture all phenomena and all discourse in order to make the world intelligible, and here even the recalcitrant phenomena that had previously remained problematic are grasped, because, thanks to the development of discourse (and outside of the discursive commitments to nihilism, cynicism, and skepticism) the world is seen to already being intelligible. It is however the development of the category of *The Work* that brings out the pragmatic function of discourse clearly. This category presents itself in the individual who, in their individual sentiment, refuses the coherence of *The Absolute*. It is the revolt of the individual who does not want to understand but who wants to feel and who wants to grip tightly to the feeling that they find in their sentiment.

Weil explicitly states that different categories have tried to capture this notion of sentiment and have thus tried to do so through different concepts, he states:

> Up to now, sentiment signified, for us, a relation of the man in the world to the essential of the *world*, be it *God*, or *freedom*, or *conflict*; it was the silence in language, it was what was *indicated* in the middle of what *appeared*, it was particularity's *for-itself* in its indomitable stubbornness, and as such, it was understood in the absolutely coherent discourse. Yet, after this discourse, all these forms reveal themselves to be *mediated* by what they oppose themselves to. This sentiment was not feeling, but speaking of the sentiment: if it had been any different, man would not have wasted his time justifying himself, he would have created; he would not have sought satisfaction, even less so the possibility of his satisfaction, he would be satisfied. (LP 354).

By characterizing the individual's relationship to discourse, Weil will be able to show that discourse plays a transformational role in how individuals understand the world and that this transformational role is structural: it is discourse that defines the kind of content that individuals have, because action is understood through discourse. The category of *Work*, however does not yet provide this. In the category of *Work*, the project, the work itself, is merely personal, it does not yet make any claims to universality, in fact, it does not seek to convince anyone as an equal partner in dialogue, the *Work* resists the notion of dialogical controls. If it involves others as a material necessity, it does so through ruse or force, but only so that the individual can further their own personal project. The category of *Work* thus reprises that of *God* under the notion of a sacred mission that has to be carried out. This

mission can remain personal or can be politicized, as is shown by the totalitarian leader in *The Work*. When it is politicized the individual must create followers by acting on the sentiment of dissatisfaction of others in order to bring them to help achieve this individual's goal. Whatever the case, when the individual applies the category to themself, they see themself as the only competent person that can correctly carry out the mission that they have given to themself, and which they see as necessary in order for the world to be meaningful. According to Weil, this person sees themself as:

> a *genius* who realizes freedom, he is the *historic figure* of his era that sets up the way-stops on the path to progress, the *personality* that brings conflict to an end by writing a new tablet of values, etc.; in short, he is the chosen one, and herein resides the importance of the category of God: the other categories, before being able to serve justification, must be reprised under this category, so that the relation can be established between a level of the world (as a formal and empty idea, since revelation has disappeared) and the work [*œuvre*] of man, who in this way takes on, and in this way only, the double role of a creator and of a source of revelation. (LP 366).

In its personal articulation the *Work* is the category of solipsism and in its political articulation it is that of the unbridled megalomaniac. There will always be individuals ready to see the world and themself in either of these riles, but this is unimportant for the development of the concept of GOD that is presented here. What matters is that the development of Weil's normative position takes this into account.

The mission that the individual gives to themself in *The Work* is understood in the category of *The Finite* as being a personal mission, but a personal mission among other personal missions, and one that is bound to fail. To place this development that I trace through the concept GOD into the larger development of Weil's philosophical position, the category of the *Absolute* gives birth to the notion of categories in Weil's specific sense, as the centers of a discursive commitment that organizes the totality of permissible inferences and incompatibilities. In the same way, *The Work* clarifies the concept of the attitude (which first appeared in *Intelligence*), again in Weil's specific sense, as the stance that an individual takes up in the concrete existence of their actual life. These two concepts are seen as irreducible, but also as coordinate. That is, attitudes are only understood thanks to categories and categories are only understood thanks to attitudes. By using the notion of discursive commitment we can show how this happens. The individual takes a stance in their life, they inhabit a specific attitude because they are able to express their dissatisfaction with the world, at the most primitive level by the resistance that they offer in what I have called the

pragmatic negation. However, this stance only makes sense because it is a stance that accepts or resists conceptual *content*. This content is itself described by the kind of material inferences that the central categorial concept allows and that allow the individual to understand themself thanks to them. In other words these two positions combine the dialectic of the particular and the universal. In this way, a discursive commitment is both pragmatic and conceptual.

To continue along the path of the singular concept that we have taken, the western Abrahamic concept of GOD, the god that for Weil is one of the roots of occidental culture, we can see that the concept disappears after the category of *The Absolute*. It may not disappear for the individual who has passed through these categories (and in fact, it has not for those that identify with this culture) but it has nonetheless been transformed and the things that this concept is trying to capture have been doled out to other concepts, totality, revelation, meaning, are no longer the exclusive domain of God. In this way, the concept GOD, under any of the other categories, is seen as a reprise, as a specific discursive commitment that helps the individual to organize their world in a coherent manner in order to guide and organize their action on the world. According to the *Logic of Philosophy*, God is real insofar as people act from the concept, but it is as real like any other discursive commitment is. Here the hermeneutical aspect of the *Logic of Philosophy* anchors itself firmly in a theory of argument in the sense that is makes explicit the kinds of arguments that individuals (and communities) advance. Discursive commitments are seen as real human possibilities. However, to see if they are discursive possibilities that *we* ourselves as individuals can take up and use, we must interpret how they fit in with our other beliefs, how they fit in with our understanding of the structure of the real and of our experience.

The *Logic of Philosophy*, with its conceptual distinction between categories and attitudes, and thanks to its conceptual innovation of the reprise, aids us in this interpretative act, by allowing us to create a hierarchy of discursive commitments, and by showing how commitments once held can fall into the world, with real and sometimes violent consequences. It is in this way that the *Logic of Philosophy* provides an important hermeneutical resource. It allows us to see the discursive centers that people argue from and it also allows us to see how their order of explanations fit together. However, the logic of philosophy should not merely be seen as a type of philosophical enigma machine that takes an input of arguments, places the permutations of the different reprises they present into the different attitude and categories, and produces an output of a central discursive commitment, a hierarchy of commitments, and an order of explanation. Yes, it allows us to interpret and understand the goals of others, and what their orientations are, but these things are not always clear. Rather it is a slow dialogical progress where we say things, correct them, learn from

them, take them back, modify them and, if and when we are lucky, in real dialogue, come to see what the actual commitments actual people have are. This is also not clear, because people are rarely in dialogue, they are rarely engaged in serious conversation.

The *Logic of Philosophy* is part of a model that allows us to understand how this works, but it also allows us to understand the difficulties that exist in real human attitudes. Individuals learn to handle and understand conceptual content only because they are embedded in a social context in which they learn how to interpret and understand others before they learn to understand and interpret themselves. According to this model, the hermeneutical aspect of the *Logic of Philosophy* is doubly important. First, it is important because it allows us to interpret what others say, and see if their reasons fit in with our own, and secondly, because it allows us to understand that the internal monologue that individuals have with themselves is a possibility that is born in dialogical practices themselves. In other words, argumentative practices are learned with others and thanks to them. So the hermeneutical mission of the *Logic of Philosophy* in a certain way replaces introspection. We interpret others *and* ourselves, and when we reason, we are internalizing the reasons of others in order to help us to interpret ourselves. Internal monologue in fact should be seen as a dialogue with a virtual interlocutor with whom we stage a plurality of positions and possibilities. Thus this model sees the reflexive nature of self as being tied up in inferential relations that only become clear by making different reprises explicit. That being said, it would be reductive to read it only according to its hermeneutical aspect. Reading the *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argument also insists on the strategic aspect of the logic of philosophy, otherwise it merely would be a theory of interpretation.

Let us look back again at the normative position that Weil presents of the individual. He states that the individual is:

> The *personality* grasping itself as sentiment facing the *Absolute* which is *God*, but a God revealed absolutely as the coherence to be realized, has found its *work* [*œuvre*] in its *finiteness*: it is the *free conscience* that imposes itself on the *condition* in order to transform it according to its *interest* that it now knows to be unique and essential and in virtue of which it can *interpret* what is. (LP 413)

Even though it is possible to read the *Logic of Philosophy* as a catalogue of arguments with a primarily hermeneutical mission, this would be to miss part of Weil's point. He notes that the individual is a personality, that is, a source of values and of creation, who is filled with their sentiment, something that is non-discursive but that is shaped by discourse, facing the notion of universality as a mission to be brought about, and that shapes discourse by being the source of human dissatisfaction. Here this personality, this individual, has to make a decision concerning the kind of project they want to bring into the world, which they

understand can fail, either because of the shortness of their individual life, or because they, as an individual, fail to universalize it. Nonetheless, this individual, when they seek to universalize their project, does so by making it into one that others can take up as well, which thus can change the second nature that defines the human condition. In other words they can advance reasons that others can use as their own. This is how the individual comes to interpret and judge other projects, other claims of universality, other arguments, by opposing it to their own, by fitting it with their own, by making it a project for humanity.

Following this interpretation we see that the individual's action that changes the world also changes their second nature, that is, the social structure in which they find themself. However, here we are faced with the definitive problem of the *Logic of Philosophy*, namely the initial agreement that governs the domain of argumentation. Community is based on a permanent agreement, however, just because that is logically true does not mean that individuals see this, nor does it mean that what is considered to be a community actually includes those that ought to be full-fledged members. With this in mind, the question becomes one of how to bring an individual to see the importance of their continued participation in the community. In other words, what is to be done facing people who are not convinced of the value of being reasonable and not violent? This brings out a paradox in the strategic aspect of reading *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argumentation. We cannot convince someone of this unless they are already convinced. All we can do is present something *as* valuable. Every individual must however take the step to enter into reasonable practices. This means that sometimes non-argumentative means, such as defensive counter-violence, are necessary. Weil himself notes that "violence exists, and there is no *argument* against violence, if the violence is consistent. The only means of fighting violence—but this means is strictly non-philosophical—is simply to fight it" (PR.I.22). The root of the paradox of any theory of argumentation is that there is no single preferred argumentative strategy, because philosophy, or reason, or argumentation, at this moment they are all identical, can start from anywhere. There is no privileged start to philosophy, and any claim to a privileged start has the inconvenience of automatically ruling out those that struggle to understand from another point of view. It also shows that although philosophy aims at unity, there are a plurality of irreducible positions, and thus that the only way to achieve any level of unity is to bring others to recognize the normative weight of better reasons.

6.5   Argumentative Strategy in the *Logic of Philosophy*

The interpretation given here of the strategic paradox the *Logic of Philosophy* is that any argumentative strategy can only be painted in broad strokes. The question of the start of argumentation must in fact resist any tentative to give overly precise mechanisms because precise mechanisms only function when discursive centers already have great overlap of agreement. What the *Logic of Philosophy* provides us with is a theory of how to bring distant discursive centers closer. Weil shows this in multiple points in his own work. In the *Philosophie politique* he shows the way that the pure, formal, moral point of view comes to surpass itself in order to adopt that of political action (PP 27-57). In the terms of the *Logic of Philosophy* this shows how the moral philosophy found in the category of *The Conscience* steps over the other intervening categories to land squarely in the category of *Action*. This is also found in the organization of the *Logic of Philosophy* itself, in the way that Weil inverses the historical order to favor a logical order. In this way he shows the way in which *The Conscience*, exemplified in by part of Kant's philosophy and in part by Fichte, develops essential elements needed for a full understanding of the development of *Intelligence*, exemplified by Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Bayle. Similarly *Personality*, exemplified by Nietzsche, helps us to understand *The Absolute*, exemplified by Hegel. This is because the *Logic of Philosophy* develops the criteria of coherence and universality that allows us to decide to what extent different philosophical discourses satisfy the requirement of a comprehensive grasp of meaning. Because its goal is to develop these criteria and to show the shapes of comprehensiveness, any strategic role that the *Logic of Philosophy* has will at most be pragmatic and heuristic. In this way, when a good strategy works, it does not work once and for all, but rather for that specific situation. The strategic role is thus linked to a type of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom in situation. The strategic role piggybacks on the interpretative role of the *Logic of Philosophy*. It is only once the discursive commitments and the order of explanation of an argument are understood that a strategy can look to the *Logic of Philosophy* as a catalogue of arguments that leads to greater forms of comprehensiveness. This catalogue of arguments can then be deployed strategically to pinpoint the closest arguments to the interlocutor's discursive center, arguments which can navigate their hierarchy of commitments. This is the best the strategic role can do. The choice to take up reasons as one's own remains a free choice for every individual.

Using the metaphor of the space of reasons to understand this, the best that we can do in argument is bring an individual to the edge of their own space of reasons by drawing out all the permissible inferences and incompatibilities in order to show that their position remains problematic. In other words, argumentation in this sense aims at leading one's

interlocutor to clarify their position in such a manner that they find themselves between an explicit choice where *either* they must renounce some (or all) of their premises *or* they must accept the consequences of their position (including the violent conflict that can follow)[87]. Once we bring them to the edge of their space of reasons though, we cannot bring them to jump into another one. This is only done by an individual who is ready to modify their central discursive commitment and order of explanation. Because of this, the choice to enter into argument often depends on non-discursive means and thus also on a plurality of different strategies. Paul Ricœur reminds us that, "it is not certain that the problem of violence is resolved only through discourse" (1991) and Weil himself notes that in order to bring people to dialogue, it may be necessary to return to older techniques, to "the guarded expressions, the allusions, the seemingly banal theses that the audience must combine in order to see their scope" (PR.I.290). This is one of the strategic roles of the reprise, it allows each discursive center to act on others by expressing themselves in their language. In other words, at this level a variety of means are needed to bring someone into dialogue, into the argumentative practices that aim at agreement. As already noted, dialogue is the gold standard of communication, but which best describes individuals that already make up the same community. In other words, argument is not present everywhere. Most cases are far too conflictual. Weil recognizes this. He insists on the fact that discussion is born when an adversary can neither be destroyed nor ignored, but must be reasoned with. At the individual level, there may in fact be no exhaustive list that can be presented to explain *how* individuals come to discuss, as there may be no exhaustive list of how discussion passes to dialogue. It can be interest, curiosity, desire, frustration, boredom, a dare, and so on. This is thus different from Plato's position where philosophy starts necessarily in wonder or perplexity, just as it is different from Descartes' position where philosophy necessarily starts in doubt. Philosophy can start anywhere. It can also stop anywhere for any reason. This is the particularity of Weil's position and one of the most difficult aspects to understand.

He insists over and over on serious conversation, but he also recognizes that ordinarily the individual *speaks without saying anything* (LP 91). Just as Weil uses seriousness in a technical sense, he also uses the idea of *speaking without saying anything* in a technical sense. Weil settles on this expression most likely because it allows him to translate the Greek phrase οὐδεν λέγει, which is found for instance in the play *Wasps* (Aristophanes, 1996) and exploit the common French expression *parler sans rien dire*. For Weil, the most basic aspect of speaking without saying anything is found when the individual

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[87] An example of this choice presents itself in the formal abstract reflection of the pure moral conscience which refuse all strategic rationality. The consequences of refusing all strategic rationality can include leaving the field of action open to the pure technicians of power and to the violent subjugation of the community.

admits that they are speaking without paying attention to the rules of logic or of demonstration. In this case, they must be brought to admit that while their language use hasn't "demonstrated anything" (LP 22), they nonetheless speak. This brings two distinction to the forefront. First, it means that implicitly philosophy looks to language use to say something substantive, and two, that this is not the only type of language use possible. It is meaningful that, outside of the presentation in the *Introduction* of the conflict that speaking without saying anything has with logically structured argumentative practices, Weil uses this expression in three categories, *The Object*, *The Condition*, and *Action*. In *The Object*, the expression is used to contrast this new category with *Certainty*, or in other words to contrast the new ontological science with the pre-philosophical language of the tradition. In the other two categories, which each also rely heavily on a reprise of *Certainty* in the elaboration of their discourse, he uses it to situate the presence of this attitude in the reprises. Each of these categories characterize a progressively richer level of material action on the world, *Certainty* as our naïve action on an already meaningful world, *The Object* as the ground of the Greek notion of science exemplified by Plato and Aristotle, *The Condition* as the modern scientific positivism exemplified by August Comte, and *Action* as a dialectical and materialist science of human action as exemplified by Marx.

In these categories there is an evolution of what speaking without saying anything means. However, because of this, it also shows the ways in which individuals are not *necessarily* bound by serious conversation. Each category gives criteria of what counts as serious conversation and thus also what counts as speaking without saying anything. In other words, these are the technical analyses that Weil uses in order to understand the placement problem in terms of argumentative practices. In *The Object*, Weil notes that speaking without saying anything is a real possibility that we face because of the failure of the ancient content of *Certainty*. What *The Object* learns from this failure is that error is a possibility. It is this possibility that transforms the individual into an *individual*, because he learns that "his speech doesn't separate him from his world, in which he remains and acts. His error is only transformed into an individual error, separated from the world, knowing that language isn't a natural force, that he can speak 'without saying anything'" (LP 139). This starts to show why the strategic role of the *Logic of Philosophy* takes the form that it does. In *Certainty* the individual takes their language for a statement of fact, in *Discussion* they become aware of difference and doubt, and they thus understand that any statement of fact must be grounded, but they only realize this precisely because they can speak empty words, they can have conversations that are not serious, they can say anything and everything. This realization is felt in full force here precisely because *The Object* is the first category that consciously tries to ground its discourse. Thus, it is the category that discovers the possibility of speaking

without saying anything and why this is problematic. It is necessary to characterize anything that is not serious conversation as error in order to keep the discourse coherent.

This problematic aspect continues in *The Condition* where the *ideal* that guided *The Object* is seen to be to be absurd. Weil notes that:

> if science is defined in this manner [that of *The Object*], man will never know what grounds things — because this so-called ground doesn't exist. If one wants to speak of an object — and the expression is convenient —, it is necessary to speak of an object of knowledge, not of reason or of a subject: reason is its own ground, and speaking of any other thing that would be located, who knows where, behind the phenomena, marked out and measured by science, is speaking without saying anything. There are sense data, qualities, there is the "object" of science, to which this science reduces these data and qualities, in other words, the functions connecting and constituting measurable factors, and that's all. (LP 222)

Thus in this new category, speaking without saying anything is modified. It is ridiculous to speak of anything besides facts, everything else is empty filler (a droll contradiction). This is exemplified in the fact/value divide we have already seen and that I have said the emotivist strains of moral expressivism is trying to grasp. Moral language is empty, people can speak it, but it doesn't actually characterize anything unless it is reformulated in a language that is sensitive to phenomenal facts, to expressions of desire or disgust for instance, expressions that can be characterized in a psychological or better a physiological language. This was the paradigmatic case that allowed us to understand the placement problem. We speak of moral facts, but it is merely a way of speaking. Thus, in *The Condition* all serious conversation bears on scientific matters, people can still employ language in other ways but this usage remains secondary. However, as we have shown, this is exactly what the next category, *The Conscience* will refuse. Interpreting speaking without saying anything along the lines of the placement problem allows us to understand how different categories interpret the discursive commitments of language use that falls under another category. The reason that Weil restricts this expression to the "scientific" categories is precisely because these categories speak of the world and demand testable results. In this way, the language of these discourses is supposed to unite everybody. Nowhere is this clearer than in the category of *Action*.

Action interprets itself thanks to a reprise of *The Condition* precisely because the "categorial consciousness of *Action* "belongs to the active minority, and that minority, because it is conscious, acts on the mass by translating what it thinks into the language of the world of the condition. For it is this language that binds men, being common to all" (LP 405). In this way, for Weil action is materialist in its activity and:

idealist when it comes to reason's "role": nothing, for action, is outside of reason, nothing is inaccessible to knowledge, and speaking of substances that do not exist *for* reason is, for action, speaking without saying anything. But the question itself is poorly posed; the theoretical philosophy of action is that of the *Absolute* (what distinguishes the two is not a theoretical difference, but that between theory and realization) (LP 407).

Here, *Action* has excised the troublesome aspect of *The Condition* in that it is post-Kantian and post-Hegelian and thus not positivist, but it is also resolutely non-metaphysical. It accepts the reflection on the conditions of possibility and on the role of an absolutely coherent discourse, and here any discourse that ignores such things speaks without saying anything, however, *Action* aspires to articulate its discourse and to act through a "science of action" (LP 405) which can be both correctly and falsely conducted. This science though is best thought of as anthropological. It is the action that aims at acting on the world, but on a social world, and therefore on human discourse. This is where the analysis of speaking without saying anything plays a strategic role in argumentative practices. Weil's interest is serious conversation. He wants to understand how to act on human discourse. However, in order to do so, one must recognize that so much of our language use is not philosophical. Thus it is not certain that serious conversation will lead to serious conversation. As part of an argumentative strategy, the analysis of speaking without saying anything underlines both the way that, most of the time, people speak outside of philosophy and also the way that, when people do want to enter into serious conversation, they must face a plurality of discourses, which their own discursive commitments may not be capable of seeing as making up serious conversation. In other words, along the lines of our analysis of the placement problem, each discursive center can always be seen to speak without saying anything by another. This is why multiple strategies are needed, on the one side people need to be shown the importance of serious conversation and on the other they have to be willing to see even the farthest discursive commitments as holding something reasonable within them (even it is only the meaning that an individual gives to their own life). Weil clearly understands this because he notes that the science of action must:

be addressed to those who do not understand it and struggle against those who partially understand it. To the extent that it spreads through the masses, that it educates the masses, it then becomes impoverished from a philosophical point of view (reprises of the *Absolute* and, more often, of the *personality*, of the *intelligence*, of the *conscience*, etc.): an impoverishment that is an enrichment of the poor reality (LP 405).

Thus, strategically *Action* must address itself to different people using different means to get them to see the value of argument. It is only once this initial minimal agreement is met that other more precise mechanisms can be put in place. Philosophy can start anywhere, goals only make sense in a situation, and Weil insists that this situation is structured. However, he is sensitive to the diversity of situations that have actually appeared in human history. Instead of trying to reduce them to any single contemporary understanding, he takes them as freestanding but permeable. They are freestanding because individuals can live in them and find their goals meaningful thanks to them, but they are permeable because people can be brought to see the limits and advantages of different discursive positions *as if* from the outside. Here it is important to be careful. It will always be possible that some aspect of our experience is not captured in discourse, however, what we understand reflexively about our experience we understand *in* discourse and so we see the trace of this understanding all over the human enterprise that is history. In other words, the history of discourse is the repository of human action.

The corollary to this argument is that we must take the way discursive commitments structure coherent discursive positions seriously. The reason for this is banal, but it is nonetheless a reason that has defeated many a great enterprise. If we didn't take discourse seriously why should we care otherwise? In other words, why should we so doggedly put so much effort into overcoming skepticism, relativism, nihilism, if we did not see the effects they have on human action, if they were not real possibilities? We would not need to argue against a position if it did not have real consequences. Imagine monism to be true, and imagine that we can have a direct (that is non-inferential and immediately grounding) access to some sort of supersensory. Were this the case, even the Platonic position whereby philosophy is a corrective that slowly brings individuals to find the reason they already have would be excessive. The intellectual intuition of the whole of a reasonable reality would already be present as given to us and would suffice, a total and complete knowledge of the universe and of humanity's place in it would be known. However if the real can be grasped in numerous ways because phenomena can be grasped in discourse in multiple ways and because there are a variety of real goals that individuals can adopt, as history itself has shown, then the way these grasps of phenomena and history can be understood matter far more than what the extra-human foundation of reality is. They define the kind of action we will have on the world and define how the world itself is to be described and understood. Here we can requote a passage that we have already used in Chapter 1:

> [The individual's] action (and his discourse, to the extent that it forms an integral
> part of his action) reveals to the observer what he pursues *deep down*, what the
> center from which he orients himself in his world is. But to his own eyes, this center

doesn't appear as such, it doesn't even appear at all, no more than man sees the spot where he puts his feet. He always speaks of it (for the interpreter), he never formulates it: as soon as he would have formulated it, this principle would have been able to be called into question and would already be eccentric in a world whose center would have changed by this discovery's very fact, just as the ground that I see is not the one that supports me. (LP 82)

This poses the main problem of a theory of argumentation for Weil. All action is action for reasons, that means that it is oriented. This does not mean that all reasons lead to action. This is not the case, they give individuals the disposition towards action, however there is nothing that guarantees that this disposition will be activated, there is also nothing that guarantees that when the moment comes, what one thought to be their reasons won't prove false, or insufficient, or modified. This means that our reasons for action are not necessarily visible to ourselves, but rather that they can become so, and when they become so, we interpret who we were, who we have become, and what we have to do to become who we want to be.

The problem with an argumentative theory such as Weil's is that often, in discussion, in argument, we do not ever dig deep enough to arrive at the reserve that holds our actual position, the one that governs all the other inferences that are in place. So while argumentation must account for the transitivity of reasons, it must also account for the fact that most arguments treat epiphenomenal claims as opposed to treating core commitments. The reason that this is important is that it implies that local arguments have a hard time touching the global structure of conceptual commitments and because of this, there is more resistance to the transitivity of reasons than openness to them. Thus Weil's goal is to open people to the openness that is required for the transitivity of reasons to hold. The strategic goal then is to help individuals to come to see what their own core commitments are as well as those of others, with the hope that once this is done, these same individuals will be led to make the continual reasonable choice to overcome difference reasonably, that is, through argument. This is what Weil means when he says that philosophy has to understand itself philosophically. This is the work of a person with a coherent discourse in a concrete situation that understands the choice they have made to be reasonable in the face of all that is unreasonable or differently reasonable. It is the concrete individual who understands that this choice is itself a-reasonable, but that by coming to understand themselves and their choice retrospectively they can grasp themself in the world as downhill from that choice. Serious conversation (dialogue and discussion) is only possible based on some common ground but

this can be as minimal as two interlocutors that agree to search for a substantive common ground without recourse to violence.

The more entrenched disagreements are, the harder it will be to bring people to this minimal agreement, and for that reason a variety of means will need to be deployed. Once that has been done, individuals can pass to discussion, that is, to the defense of their interests and beliefs, without necessarily looking for deeper agreement, without looking to understand and to reform what their source of conflict is. Should this happen though, should two (or more) interlocutors seek to get to the bottom of things, to understand how things really are, then dialogue can start. In this way, we also transform the way we represent our adversary. In deep conflict we are faced with someone who is not understandable despite the fact that they "possess human features" (LP 24). We see them as only minimally part of the same category as us. They are adversaries, hostile enemies, but if we see them as limitedly rational, they are people we can only have limited tense relations with. This is different from those with whom we can dialogue, those that we see as equals, that we see as making up our community. For Weil, the goal is to bring ourselves to see more people as making up part of our human community. To shift to a Sellarsian idiom, we can say that the goal of argumentation is to build what are called *we-intentions*, in other words a type of collective agency that not only allows us to act in groups, but also allows us to understand the intentions of others as being identical to our own. Sellars notes that "it is a conceptual fact that people constitute a community, a *we*, by virtue of thinking of each other as *one of us*, and by willing the common good *not* under the species of benevolence – but willing it as one of us, or from a moral point of view" (1992: § 132). We can say that the goal of Weil's theory of argumentation in the transition from a minimal agreement, through discussion, and into dialogue, is to constantly enlarge and enrich our notion of who belongs in that community, who makes up part of *us*[88].

This is a modest and very human goal, but it is one of the utmost importance, because it modifies our top to bottom understanding not just of philosophy but of ourselves. In other words, reading the *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argumentation means that one must abandon the a-temporal target that philosophy has so long aimed at in exchange for what

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[88] Richard Rorty shares this goal and this deployment of *we-intentions* is built off of his analysis of the solidarity. Solidarity in this sense is not an appeal to trans-historic absolute values but is rather an insistence on a constant re-description of the notion of *us*, who we, in a given community, consider to be participants with an equal place at the table. This amounts to "reminding ourselves to keep trying to expand our sense of 'us' as far as we can" and that we should try to "extend our sense of 'we' to people we previously thought as 'they'" (1989: 196).

Gilbert Kirscher calls "the openness of philosophy" (1989). This is the final commitment that is found in the *Logic of Philosophy*, it is the formal possibility that characterizes the category of *Wisdom*. For Weil this openness is present when the individual "knows that discourse grasps all meaning and that all concrete meanings constitute discourse, that he is open to the world in Truth, as the world is open to him in the action that is the creation of the meaning of man by man in the concrete completion of meaning" (LP 439). This openness is thus an openness to the fundamentally problematic nature of philosophy. Philosophy reveals few truths and it provides few solutions. Rather, it reveals problems and conflicts in the form of different ways of grasping the world, which are nonetheless all present in reality. This for Weil is the consequence of what he calls "discourse's deepest duality" (LP 442), that between freedom and truth. To quote Gilbert Kirscher:

> The interplay introduced by freedom in reality and in discourse—negativity— always prevents philosophizing from vanishing into truth; it creates the distance that makes truth visible. By discovering the radical function of freedom, the category of *wisdom* thus returns to the category of *truth*, but by characterizing what separates it from it for itself. The philosopher and finally the sage have always dealt with truth. Truth escapes the grasp that wants to nail it down and that forgets itself; it is never present without freedom, even when freedom forgets itself. The entire path of the *Logic of Philosophy* appears to us as a progressive grasp of a self-awareness of freedom. In the beginning, in the category of *truth*, the free decision for discourse is completely obscured by the meaningful content that it assumes is there. At the end, in the category of *wisdom*, this free decision is aware of itself, thinks itself, reflects itself in the discourse of the sage, a discourse that itself is lived and is aware of itself as discourse and as life in truth. (1989: 389-390).

This is what allows the possibility of the reasonability of action (LP 442), but a possibility that only exists in the face of the multiplicity of discourses that make up reality and that express human freedom. For this reason, the possibility of discourse must take all concrete discourses into account. This is also why the last two categories are formal, they must account for this possibility. All concrete discourses are normatively structured, the most any discourse that wants to give a non-normative description can do is give a *formal* transcendental description of the possibility of meaning and of the possibility of meaningful action in a life that is lived in a holistic unity. In fact, this is what should be understood when we talk about transcendental arguments, they are attempts to give formal descriptions that account for all the concrete (normative) possibilities. These descriptions can be challenged

(and should be). Nonetheless, their goal is to allow individuals to understand their own meaningful and reasonable activity. It succeeds as long as it helps individuals understand why they choose to be reasonable and shows how that commitment is possible.

6.6   Conclusion

The hermeneutical role of the *Logic of Philosophy* allows individual to understand their own discursive commitments and what those of their dialogue partner are. This hermeneutical role helps individuals to use this understanding to judge the discursive commitments and orders of explanation in front of them, and to try and line up previous argumentative strategies with their current situation. That is, through argument, the individual can test different orders of explanation and different hypothetical central commitments in order to judge the inferences that their dialogue partners see as going without saying. This in turn gives way to the strategic role of the logic of philosophy, it allows us to line up an order of explanation and give a description of our central discursive commitment so that our dialogue partner sees the full weight of it, that is, so that they can see it as a real human possibility, as being reasons that they can make their own. Again, it is important to insist that there are no knockdown arguments, there is no single strategy that will convince everyone. Rather, reading the *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argument reminds us that being reasonable is a continual choice, but that it is the best choice we have to put aside violence. This reminder in a way radicalizes the notion of commitment, because it places the meta-commitment to reasonable discourse in the foreground. Reasonable discourse is a meta-commitment towards the universal understood as the form of coherence. It is only once someone makes this choice that they are entitled to be considered someone that has *something to say* (that has a substantive content) and it is only inside of this choice, and for the duration of this choice, that the individual considers themself responsible to their other commitments. These other commitments, including the commitment to the content of their discourse, are subordinate to this meta-commitment. This is because without it they no longer see themselves as responsible for what their commitment holds them to. The consequence of this type of theory of argumentation is that it modifies how other philosophical programs and how other philosophical commitments are seen and understood. In the next chapter I will show two paradigmatic cases of how reading Weil as a theory of argumentation changes the way we approach philosophical positions. The first is justificatory, and the second involves the debate between relativism and pluralism.

Chapter 7   JUSTIFICATION AND PLURALISM IN THE *LOGIC OF PHILOSOPHY*

7.1   Introduction

Reading the *Logic of Philosophy* as opening up the possibility of an interactive and dynamic theory of argumentation implies a reflection on the practice of philosophy as the junction between contrasting and conflictual theses about reality, about the Good, the Just, the Beautiful, about what makes a life worth living as a meaningful whole. These different theses all aim at being taken seriously, as establishing some sort of consensus and authority that ranges over communities, that act upon the individual. However, what the *Logic of Philosophy* shows us is that there are multiple positions that make naïve claims to certainty and that provide a naïve orientation, this naïve certainty and orientation are inherited from the tradition by the fact that an individual belongs to a community, however as soon as the individual is faced with the diversity of positions and theses that may exist in the beating heart of their own community, the individual must, if they want to establish mature certainty and a mature orientation, seek ways to establish the authority that leads to consensus.

In argumentative practices this is done by creating an order of explanation that justifies one's position and one's theses. This implies creating a philosophical system that allows the individual to understand their life and their action and their beliefs as unified and meaningful whole. This is because, from Weil's fallibilist position (understood as openness), mature certainty and mature orientation are *always* in the process of making readjustments, corrections, modifications to the positions, because mature certainty and mature orientation take place in a meaningful natural and social reality that contains natural and social novelty. Bringing people to see and understand this so that they shoulder this effort themselves is, for Weil, the horizon of argumentative practices. The diversity that presents itself to the individual in their lives implies that there are different types of argumentative strategies, this also means that there are different levels of justificatory strategies in order to bring people into the horizon of argument, which is the coordinated reasonable action between people with different theses and different positions. There is nothing that implies however just because this *can* happen that argument moves inexorably towards that finality. According to Weil's understanding of human freedom, individuals can always turn away from reasonable action and argument. This possibility places an enormous amount of strain on the classic characterization of justificatory practices, which according to this characterization, aim to establish knockdown arguments about what ground our beliefs and thus what guarantee the

authority that certain beliefs, understood as doxastic claims, are supposed to have. Because of this strain on justificatory practices that the diversity of different theses has, it is a legitimate question to ask if this diversity can be brought together under a unity. If it cannot be, does that mean that there are no good doxastic claims at all, or if we accept that each person can make good doxastic claims and that each person does in fact make some good ones, does that mean that each of these claims are restricted to a tight circle that is traced around each individual and their subjective experience? In other words, does not Weil's position, despite what I have argued in earlier chapters, leave us open to skepticism and relativism? In order to correctly answer that question one must look at the kinds of justificatory practices that are present in Weil's work, and look at the way that seeing philosophy as an activity that is practiced reasonably implies.

This chapter will thus aim at showing the fecundity of reading the *Logic of Philosophy* along pragmatist, expressivist, and inferentialist lines by showing how the tools developed in these diverse positions can be brought together in order to tackle some of the most recurrent philosophical problems, skepticism and relativism. In order to do so, I will be presenting stripped down versions of the skeptical and the relativist positions. As stripped-down versions, it could seem that I am in fact presenting strawmen versions of skepticism and relativism (as well as certain major justificatory live options) in order to more easily knock them over. However, my intention is different. By presenting stripped down versions I am, in line with Weil's own practice, looking to operate a critical reduction of appearances in order to get to what is essential about these positions. In fact, the critique would be fair if I were not presenting the most stripped-down versions of these positions. What Weil has taught us is that only the barest bones positions are irreducible. Any position that looks to answer to specific critiques involves multiple reprises precisely because it does so in real discussion and dialogue. To respond to legitimate critiques we combine multiple conflicting interests to keep our position coherent. In this way the most articulate, most sophisticated versions of these stances depend on multiple reprises, and thus while sticking to their basic premise (the irreducible central claim) they are in fact defending a mixed form of justificatory practices.

The chapter will thus start by establishing the kind of justificatory practices that accompany reading the *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argumentation along pragmatist, expressivist, and inferentialist lines. Fully developing Weil's theory would require us to extend the analyses found herein to his moral and political philosophy. This is outside of the scope of this work, nonetheless the direction that such an analysis should take can be

sketched by giving a single example, that of the tension between relativism and pluralist, that is in the purview of Weil's moral and political philosophy. With this in mind, this chapter will apply the type of justificatory practices that go along with reading the *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argumentation to the specific relationship between relativism and pluralism. While this case will not exhaust Weil's practical philosophy, it will hopefully show how this practical philosophy is deployed in a concrete case.

7.2 Eric Weil's Three Tier Notion of Justification

7.2.1 Foundations, Coherence, and Contexts

The *Logic of Philosophy* as a whole does not elaborate an overt theory of knowledge or of justification, but Éric Weil does provides with numerous elements necessary in order to understand what kind of structure justification has in his work. Theories of knowledge are found in specific categories, such as *The Object* and *The Condition*, nonetheless, these theories of knowledge cannot be said to be *completely* representative of Weil's own position. Because each position develops essential resources for discourse, they are locally valid, however they thus also present points of view that are surpassed in the *Logic of Philosophy*. The theory of knowledge presented in *The Condition* is of critical importance for our grasp of physical causal phenomena, but it cannot be applied to the human sciences, which are grasped thanks to the discourse that is developed in *Intelligence*. By being surpassed in this way, *The Condition* is reduced to a reflection on a certain type of knowledge and can no longer be transformed into a (materialist) metaphysical position that can ground a comprehensive grasp of the world *and* human life seen as a unity in this world. This may be because, for Weil, the term *knowledge* implies the relationship between subject and object, however he sees his own philosophical project as surpassing that relationship to focus on thinking, to focus on comprehension, which characterizes not the relationship between subject and object but rather the finite and the infinite in thought. In this way for Weil, the grasp of the real in a coherent discourse does not look to be objective in the same sense that the grasp of an object does. However, thanks to the way that the *Logic of Philosophy* develops and organizes the different resources of discourse, he is also able to grasp and deploy the type of knowledge that is traditionally grasped under this term.

We can say that Weil separates the question of justification on two levels, that of the object-level discourse which is interested in knowledge, and that of a meta-discourse which is interested in comprehension. This two-level distinction explains why Weil's fallibilism is

not just the recognition of error, but is the openness to the possibility within each person of transforming their dissatisfaction with a determined discourse into a new discourse that will grasp the object of the previous discourse *as* error. Error, is not some predetermined truth, it is structured by discourse itself. Despite this modification, the goal of the argument will be to show that in both cases epistemological concerns turn around a notion of authority. Both the pragmatist tradition that I have presented[89], and Eric Weil highlight the way that epistemic authority is born out of discursive practices, the main difference is that for Weil, these discursive practices are articulated into multiple meaningful coherent centers that are conflictual. Because of this, it is only in shared, that is social and discursively articulated, practices that individuals can make claims to objectivity at the first level, and to comprehension at the second level. In the spirit of a theory which defends that sapient argumentative practices are the best way to overcome or avoid the kinds of conflict that can lead to violence, I will show how the goal of justification is to settling conflicts by establishing epistemic authority to which individuals bind themselves.

Here it will be useful to give an overview of the way in which I read the main competing structures of justification, foundationalism, coherentism, and contextualism[90], before situating Weil's thoughts on justification. This will help me to deploy these terms in a homogenous way and to thus show what exactly the structure of justification defended here is trying to do. This is also important because normally these different structures are presented as having some form of mutual exclusion. Because this overall work is not a work of epistemology, I cannot go into all the different varieties of these positions. Indeed, contemporary philosophy is replete with sophisticated versions of all these different structures, positions that respond to critiques by continually qualifying and tweaking their claims. And they are right to do so. I hope to even show why they are right to do so. With that in mind, I will present broad stroke versions of these positions[91]. As I have said, they, like strawmen could easily be knocked down, but my goal here is not to defend any of these

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[89] Cf. (Kukla, 2000; Kalpokas, 2017) for analyses of the role that epistemic authority plays in Sellars's philosophy. This is important because, as I have said, Sellars is seen as a key figure in the reading of pragmatism defended here.

[90] It is inessential to my argument to look at reliabilism and other naturalized forms of justification, or virtue epistemologies, etc. While a work on Weil and contemporary epistemology would be of great interest, this is not that work.

[91] In order to paint these positions in broad strokes and to get to their irreducible core, I have drawn from numerous works, notably from (Annis, 1978, 1982; Davidson, 1983; BonJour, 1985, 2009; Chisolm, 1989; Haack, 1993; Williams, 1995, 2001; Koppelberg, 1998; deVries, Triplett, & Sellars, 2000), nonetheless the exact formulation of these problems is my own.

positions in themselves, but rather situate what I see as Weil's argument-motivated form of justification.

Starting from the first form of justification, foundationalism, we can say that at its core there is the idea that there is at least one basic belief. This belief is basic because it is both atomic (that is discrete), and because it is primitive (which means we can go no further down than that). In a sense, with such beliefs we hit bottom. There have been numerous candidates for basic beliefs across the history of philosophy such as the *cogito*, God, sense-data, etc. What is important in foundationalism is that this belief is used to ground other beliefs. Because it is used to ground other beliefs, it is basic in a second sense, it is seen as the minimal unity used as a building block of other beliefs. Because of its basicness, its primitiveness, and because it is supposed to be immediately and non-inferentially known, this basic belief is seen to have a special status, called epistemic authority. Epistemic authority does two things. First, it establishes the well-foundedness of a claim, and second, it confers that well-foundedness onto claims that follow from it. Thus in foundationalism it is supposed to be the discrete, primitive, immediate qualities of the candidate of basicness that is supposed to establish its status as being epistemically authoritative. This is what allows individuals to infer their other beliefs from this basic belief. This is what Wilfrid Sellars calls the given. According to his critique of the given, whatever the candidate, it is supposed to be immediately available to the subject and thus immediately authoritative. The very existence of this belief is supposed to ground and guarantee knowledge. In these terms, the merely recognition or presence of the candidate of a basic belief is supposed to be sufficient to ground all the beliefs that are inferred from it. Thus we can say that the broad strokes version of foundationalism is as follows:

1. A belief is basic if and only if it is used to ground other beliefs but requires no ground itself.

2. A basic belief is grounded and needs no ground if and only if the mere appearance of the candidate for grounding is sufficient for the ground to hold.

This is markedly different from the classic broad stroke position of coherentism and contextualism.

Foundationalism is traditionally based on a single candidate that is sufficient to ground *all* other claims, and thus the classic critique of foundationalism is of an infinite regress. The infinite regress, simply put, highlights that we can always ask 'why' one more time. In other words, in a linear model of justification, the end point seems arbitrary, any ground, no matter how secure it intuitively seems, needs another ground in order to establish

its authority *as* a ground. The classic charge against foundationalism demands of the foundationalist that they explain why grounding stops where it does, with their candidate. What is the special character of this thing that is supposed to bring an end to the regress of why? In fact, it is even safe to say that the perceived insufficiency of candidates to provide a sufficient ground and the attacks of arbitrariness that are mounted against such candidates are what brought about the search for a second candidate. This second candidate, coherentism, abandons the idea of some ground having special nature that separates it from the other knowledge claims and instead claims justification rests on a set of beliefs that are reinforced by their own internal coherence. This, in theory, allows epistemologists to overcome the search for some special characteristic, because no single belief is special, it is the strength of the whole that secures the well-foundedness of justification. The only thing that defines certain beliefs is how deeply embedded they are in the set of beliefs, that is, how many inferences depend on this or that belief to justify their place in the set. And indeed, early inferentialists who rejected the foundational picture of knowledge often flocked to the coherentist camp, Sellars included. In this way we can define coherentism as follows:

1. A belief is justified if an only if it fits into a coherent set of beliefs.

However, just as the coherentist is often disappointed with the foundationalists claim that some belief must have a special status that is sufficient to ground other beliefs, the foundationalist is often disappointed by the coherentist structure as also being arbitrary. This form of justification is attacked for lacking empirical grounding and thus leading to the danger of philosophical relativism. If the only criteria for coherent justification is that a knowledge claim *p* fit in with other beliefs, there is nothing to guarantee that this set of beliefs be true, nor is there anything that puts a set of beliefs *necessarily* in contact with the world of everyday experience. Thus, not only can a set of beliefs not be true, there is no way to decide between different sets of belief. This lack of decidability is thus seen as opening the door to relativism.

Relativism is not however the only major problem with coherentism. There is an underlying suspicion that it folds into foundationalism despite its claims that it avoids the foundationalist pitfalls. This critique goes as follows: according to coherentism, beliefs are justified by the way they fit into a coherent set of beliefs, thus beliefs acquire derivative authority by their place in the set, however this thus gives a special status to the belief that a coherent set is sufficient to pass authority onto other beliefs. In other words, according this critique coherentism is merely be second-order foundationalism or, as Michael Williams calls it, "foundationalism in disguise" (2001: 134). The battle between foundationalism and

coherentism raged for much of the twentieth century in analytical epistemology, and because of this, people started looking for a *third way*. Here, I will only treat contextualism, one of the main candidates. The idea behind contextualism is that there are situational considerations that must enter into the justificatory picture precisely because justifying is a social affair. This implies that in different situations different individuals are better qualified to give justifications for knowledge claims. Thus, I am more likely to believe my friend the arborist about the classification of a live oak than I am my friend who is a medical doctor who has only ever lived in urban areas. The interest in and sensitivity to trees is often much lower for those who live in cities than those who live in the country, and somebody who is a medical doctor may have a deep knowledge of arboriculture, but that has to be established in a way their knowledge of the human organism does not (being a medical doctor is one of the means of establishing their authority concerning the human organism). This implies, to uses Susan Haack's phrase, that there are different "epistemic communities" (1993: 20) and that there is a contextual and situational recognition of what counts as a well-founded belief as it fits into a given epistemic community. According to this characterization:

> 1. A belief is contextually basic if and only if it is grounded by being asserted in the appropriate context by an appropriate epistemic community, and it is that context that grants it epistemic authority.

Contextualism supposes that we can identify epistemic authority, and that in the cases that matter, that authority will be seen to hold, precisely because of the way that we attribute epistemic authority. However, unlike foundationalism, this authority has to be established discursively, and is not in some way outside of justificatory practices. Here, we can however apply the same critique of coherentism to contextualism. Does not contextualism just fold into coherentism, are epistemic communities not just other ways of understanding coherent sets? In this case, would contextualism not face the same problem as coherentism, that is, being caught between relativism and foundationalism. If this is the case, this seems to fold into another ancient problem, just dressed up differently, the choice between foundationalism, relativism or skepticism. We seem stuck with either an ultimate coherent set that is able to be distinguished because there is *at bottom* a criterion that allows this distinction, or there is no criterion because there are a multitude of different equally valid sets, or there is no criterion because well-founded knowledge is a chimera. This is a difficult question to answer, so getting at it the roundabout way might be useful. Each of these positions use different strategies to attribute epistemic authority, so perhaps instead of

attacking these strategies head on it may be useful to unpack the notion of epistemic authority.

7.2.2 Epistemic Authority

In the last chapter I spoke about the transitivity of reasons, this expression is meant to capture the way that we humans are uniquely sensitive to reasons: reasons act on us, we allow them to affect us, and change us. Epistemic authority is used to explain the transitivity of reasons, it allows us to understand why claims should be shared and thus also why others should use these claims as their own. Epistemic authority, however, because it explains the transitivity of reasons, is something that only happens in discourse. Individual representations, intuitions, ideas (of the self, of God, of the unity of nature), all these things can make up the background of claims of epistemic authority, but none of them are autonomous. In other words, no one's representation, intuition, or idea can be taken up by another unless they recognize (even if only tacitly) that person's epistemic authority. This is because in discourse people don't take your word for things, but they do take your words. Epistemic authority matters because of its role in establishing the transitivity of reasons and because of the way we see good reasons to act upon our understanding of the world. It is thus a character that is ascribed to claims, (or people, or situations, or any another candidate) that allows, in the context given, a conflict to be settled. It establishes the ways in which one claim (person, situation) holds over others, that is, how it presents its authority, but it also establishes that the content of the claim can be taken up by another person in their own reasoning. It authorizes an individual to use that content as being good, thus establishing the well-foundedness of a claim (person, situation, etc.). This version of epistemic authority leans heavily on the notion of achievement words as found in Gilbert Ryle's *Concept of Mind* (1966) as exploited by Wilfrid Sellars in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" and on Sellars's own discussion of authority through this work. Ryle notes that there are verbs that signify achievements, that they "signify not merely that performance has been gone through, but also that something has been brought off by the agent going through it" (*ibid.*: 130). In this way, for Ryle, as for Sellars, knowing (along with a lot of other things humans do) is an achievement that engages both conceptual and sensual capacities that allows the subject to "have the world in view" to again use John McDowell's useful turn of phrase (2013).

Joining the notion of epistemic authority to the notion of an achievement shows both that the authority of our knowledge claims and that knowledge itself are achievements. In fact, in some ways we can read the classic definition of knowledge as justified true belief as being the conjuncture between this specific type of authority (the justification) and of the achievement (connecting a belief to truth). In this way, knowledge should be read as the result of the process that brings about the achievement of epistemic authority. Perceptual knowledge thus seems, at first blush, to be the most basic form of knowledge, because our perceptual experiences are often taken to be in some way basic. However, the way that Sellars, and I will argue, Weil, present authority reminds us that things are not so simple. First off, Sellars, insists over and over the way that attempts to link authority to bald perceptual experiences is tied to what he calls the myth of the given. For Sellars, this naïve form of epistemic authority already brings forth our conceptual capacities in order to judge how a bit of the world should be approached, taken, and absorbed into the rest of our information about the world. The idea that there is some candidate that, just by its presence, counts as justifying a knowledge claim, and that an individual can non-inferentially and immediately recognize both what the thing is and the way that it should justify a knowledge claim, is for him wrongheaded. In fact, he highlights the way in which epistemic authority is a second-order status. It is conferred through reflection. In this way, knowledge claims are inferentially articulated, that is, they are mediated by other claims. One of the key claims I have made throughout this work is that discourse affects and shapes our conceptual landscape. This is what is behind the notion of the space of reasons (understood as a categorial meta-concept), as well as what is behind Weil's notions of categories (which takes philosophical categories to be meta-conceptual). Here, in the context of epistemic authority, we can see how this plays out.

As a reminder, Sellars has called the space of reasons a space "of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (1997: § 36). To this notion we can add what we will call, following McDowell, the *Sellars line*. As a reminder, McDowell argues that in defining the space of reasons Sellars was trying to point out that:

> the conceptual apparatus we employ when we place things in the logical space of reasons is irreducible to any conceptual apparatus that does not serve to place things in the logical space of reasons. So the master thought as it were draws a line; above the line are places in the logical space of reasons, and below it are characterizations that do not do that (2013: 5).

Bald perceptual experiences are, for the empiricist, supposed to be enough to establish epistemic authority, and defended this way they are of a piece with the foundationalist account of justification. However, according to the myth of the given, foundationalist accounts of epistemic authority discount the socially articulated way that this status is accorded, endorsed, and shared. As I read Sellars here, in line with the priority of discrimination over association, knowledge is a social achievement that is brought out by an initial claim and thus is refined through the concomitant claims that go along with it and against it. It is whittled down before being reconstructed, and thus it is not reconstructed out of already discrete units. This highlights however one of the most troubling things about epistemic authority. Because it is social, no single person is responsible for it, therefore, no single person can verify and check all of it. We depend on others to know.

By developing the notion of the inheritance of authority, Robert Brandom provides us with the tools to overcome this problem. Here, we can bring back in the role of commitments and entitlements in the game of giving and asking for reasons. Commitments and entitlements allow us as discursive scorekeepers to judge what content an individual is committed to when they say something, and furthermore, both what they are entitled to affirm *and* what they are obliged to affirm based on their initial commitment. The structure of commitments and entitlements allows us to flesh out the shape of an interlocutor's space of reasons by allowing us to see what further content it commits them to, based on their original claim, as well as what one is entitled to say based on that commitment. However, by recognizing the goodness of an individual's claim, we, as their interlocutor, are embedding ourselves in a structure of authorization and acknowledgement. This allows us, by acknowledging the goodness of their assertion, to recognize the justification of our interlocutor. In other words, when we see them as correctly navigating the space of reasons, we can adopt their claims as our own. Brandom has noted that these two structures, the inferential move from commitment to commitment and from the claim of one individual to the claim of another individual are the ways that commitments are inherited (1994: 176). For Brandom, the notion of inheritance is built into what he calls the default and challenge model of entitlement. According to this model, "when a commitment is attributed to an interlocutor, entitlement is attributed as well, by default" (*ibid.*: 177). This means that Cartesian hyperbolic doubt, for instance, does not stand because it does not provide an appropriate challenge, rather it sweepingly challenges every claim. According to Cartesian doubt, we must demolish all our beliefs until we reach some bedrock that itself cannot be put into doubt. But, just as Peirce has shown, doubt itself must be justified. Therefore, individuals

are not obliged to open themselves to all doubts, rather only to appropriately presented ones. In fact, by starting form a social model of the inheritance of entitlements, the majority of our commitments have a default status, and it is only when an appropriate and reasoned, that is a justified, challenge presents itself that the doubt ought to be entertained.

From Descartes and Hume, up to modern authors like Barry Stroud (1984), there is the idea that there is something natural about philosophical doubt, that it is a type of abyss into which everyone falls the moment they start asking themselves questions from a philosophical point of view. If that is true, I argue, that is because there is the naïve impression that *all* we do when we justify something is dig down to the belief that grounds it. When we get to that belief, we are supposed to find something indubitable that allows us to prove what we say. However often, we are left perplexed. We are perplexed because we find nothing but another belief. There is thus a structural correlation that seems to exist between accepting foundationalist justificatory strategies and skepticism. Or as Michael Williams notes "Cartesian scepticism presupposes substantive foundationalism" (2001: 187) because such skepticism also "*presupposes* the general priority of experiential knowledge and is thus no argument for it" (*ibid.*: 189). Skepticism is tied to foundationalist accounts precisely because it makes demands of some immediately known ground but is frustrated that, in these terms, we never seem to get down to bottom. Weil highlights this problem when he notes that philosophy fails to find a *single* non-discursive ground that can nonetheless be articulated discursively. He states:

> none among the great philosophers believed it possible to rid themselves of that reality above everything that we call real or at least of the idea of a reality which transcends every given — and this means *every* without any restriction, on the plane where we can form sums and sets. The One, the pure act, God as He in himself is, Substance, archetypal intellect, Reason: philosophers have always ended up (if they haven't started by this) with *what isn't* because *this indescribable super-being,* this *unspeakable* (it isn't by accident that these terms come back endlessly, and always in their etymological meaning) appeared, to them, to ground all description and all discourse and all being. (LP 6-7)[92].

Thus, for Weil, there has been a tendency throughout philosophy's history to try to get to this simple unique thing that grounds our experience and our knowledge, that endows our claims with authority, however, when this claim is made, the thing that grants authority is

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[92] The recognition of falsity of any assertion precisely because it is unable to say the whole truth and thus is ungrounded characterizes, for Weil, the jump between the category of *Truth* and that of *Nonsense*.

itself to be in some way different in character from *discursive* authority precisely because it is unspeakable and indescribable. Nonetheless foundationalist justification *does* capture a specific aspect of our justificatory practices, the fact that any challenge is first off, a challenge to a single claim found in real discursive practices.

We then abstract away everything that does not enter into the justification we are trying to establish, we indeed do try dig down until we find something that grants our claim, *or* our challenge, authority. We are often however unsatisfied with our attempts. This, I argue, is because this is not *all* we do when we enter into justificatory practices. The fact that individuals start from different discursive centers has the consequence that any discursive center can present a reasoned challenge to another. Any attempt to project all of discourse onto a single unique plane runs into this problem precisely because it runs into this plurality of reasonable discourses. The problem though is that, because we have a structure of default entitlements, we take so much of our experience to already be justified. Here, in order to understand how that happens, we can look at the way Weil theorizes something similar to the default and challenge model of entitlement in his characterization of *what goes without saying*.

7.2.3 Naïve Authority and What Goes Without Saying

For Weil, as long as an individual is in a situation, that is, in a natural and cultural context with a largely shared public discourse, there are a variety of things that are taken for granted, that *go without saying*. What goes without saying is thus the body of facts that are present in any given situation and which no one in the community even *sees*, precisely because it is so evident that it is invisible. This is the source of the naïve certainty and the naïve orientation that is given to the individual by the accident of their birth into a certain historic period, a certain community, a certain class, sex, race, etc. It is, in other words, the stuff of each human cultural tradition, and because it has succeeded up to this point in allowing individuals to orient their lives it has a naïve inherited authority. In the context of justification, this situation, with its content that goes without saying provides a default position into which individuals can enter claims. It provides the structure of goodness of claims. This default position nonetheless can itself be questioned. For Weil, this happens when the individual does not find satisfaction in their situation. This dissatisfaction (which I have already compared to Peirce's notion of reasoned doubt) is the itch which will not allow the individual to accept the consequences of the discursive category in which they

have become aware of their singularity. It is this dissatisfaction that is shown to be the source of reasonable challenges to the default structure of the goodness of claims that are ambient in the cultural context. In terms of the default and challenge model of justification, one sees their dissatisfaction as providing sufficient grounds to challenge the epistemic authority of a commitment that has been given by default.

Nothing requires the individual to challenge their cultural context, and they can even reinforce their central commitment and ignore any contradictions, in order not to leave it. When a person does challenge it though, it is because they are seeking to make their discourse coherent[93]. The possibility of challenging discourse discursively comes up when a person has a strong grasp on their own discourse, and is able to identify where challenges holds. This implies the desire to examine and judge the coherence of one's own claims. It requires being willing to see how well claims and inferences fit together, being able to evaluate the global level of one's claims.

For Weil, doubt is "natural" only when individuals are faced with multiple reasonable options. In other words, we do not, for example, naturally doubt the world around us, precisely because the world is one of the things that goes without saying. When individuals have a discourse and have orientation, the philosophical problem may come up, but does not hold. The "naturalness" of philosophical doubt is thus linked to the way we put our discourse and our orientation in parentheses in order to evaluate multiple reasonable options, however when we are in a real crisis of orientation and discourse our doubt, for Weil, is not philosophical in the Cartesian sense, but is philosophical in a practical sense. Weil notes that "philosophical eras are eras of crisis (χρίνειν = to discern) where the questions are as ambiguous as the responses" (LP 431). Thus, for him, true philosophical doubt is not to doubt everything, but instead to be faced with multiple reasonable choices and to have to discern and choose what to do. In fact, following this diagnosis, we can again underline the way doubt plays a "natural" productive role in our belief formation, in the formation of our discursive commitments, and that radical doubt is merely an overzealous misuse of the more measured doubt that plays a salubrious role in belief formation. It is a consequence of trying to build a coherent discourse out of the discursive commitment to doubt. The fact, that for

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[93] For Weil, this possibility is found in the tension between the particular and the universal. The individual becomes aware of their particularity when they try to square the formal abstract *universal* character of moral reflection with the concrete determined *particular and private* character of the meaning they find present in their ethical life (PP 105-128). For Weil, this conflict is resolved, for the individual, in the transformation of their moral reflection into political action through "the passage of the understanding of action from the point of view of action itself" (PP 114). This passage reinforces the idea of reading Weil's work as a theory of argumentation. It is through reasonable argument that the reasonable individual acts on others.

Weil, there is no category of skepticism, and that each philosophical category has its own skeptics is proof that he views this commitment as a failure. In this way, for Weil, skepticism is a derivative position.

The best analysis of the interplay between radical doubt and the normal or non-philosophical life is to be found in Hume. When he separates the philosophical and the vulgar he is providing different regimes in order to defend the pessimistic claim that philosophical inquiry leads to skepticism. His optimistic solution is to claim that life takes over and that we are unable to remain skeptical because we are unable to remain in a posture of philosophical analysis. Using the notions put together so far, we can provide a different analysis of the skeptical predicament. What philosophical inquiry shows us is how our beliefs are inherited. It shows us that this or that intuitively natural way of establishing a bit of knowledge through our own experience depends on the social articulation of knowledge and that when we reach bottom we are shown that all we have is a more or less coherent system of inheritance. These inheritances, because they are inferentially articulated, allow us to doubt even the existence of the external world. However, precisely because the meaning of claims, for Weil, only makes sense in the larger context of the meaning of a life, (a life with orientated action and satisfactions that aim at contentment) the orientation of our life for most part overrides the problem of the inheritance of our commitments. We leave discourse to act, and in doing so stop worrying about skeptical claims.

Skepticism thus becomes a problem because of its practical consequences when it is converted into other commitments such as to cynicism and to nihilism or when it leads to an experience of meaninglessness. In these cases, it is a problem because skeptical conclusions can lead to the desire to undermine the discourse of others, either by sowing doubt for its own sake or by provoking violence. Thus, as I have already highlighted, the skeptical conclusion as applied to philosophical argumentation matter, but it matters in the context of a conception of philosophy that is a future-facing practice which helps individuals judge how to act against the background of contingency. We are not worried about skepticism because of its status as a belief but because of its practical consequences. If this were not the case, epistemologists would not be worried about skeptical conclusions. Either we would accept them as true, and move on (which is Hume's position) or we would refuse them as unsatisfying (which is the lay position). The fact that epistemologist feel that we can provide a reasonable challenge to them highlights the practical consequences of skepticism. These possibilities nonetheless show how a theory of argumentation that is based on discursive commitment and that places an explicit emphasis on orders of explanation helps to overcome

the skeptical dilemma. Skepticism is seen as a possibility that can undermine the possibility of reasonable action, but also as a possibility that can be overcome by good argumentative practices. In fact, because for the most part, individuals have sufficient orientation in their lives, the dilemma is overcome naturally so to speak, that is tacitly and without further ado.

However the question nonetheless remains, (which at the end of the day is the skeptical question) how does one ground epistemic authority? The answer is one of the key aspect of critiques of the myth of the given, and a key aspect of Weil's theory. Epistemic authority only makes sense and thus is only grounded *in* discourse. In fact, Weil states, that one of the discoveries of the category of *Discussion* was that:

> The laws of language (or of thought) that have emerged over the course of this Socratic research are therefore valid for everybody, and, since there is no knowledge that be sheltered from inquiry and since there is no authority, the research which aims at the Good is revolutionary: the community that wants to cling to the tradition has no content and scatters, because each, tugs this tradition towards his side, pursues what he believes to be to his advantage without any preliminary examination. Man must therefore understand that he can be satisfied only through reason and through language (λόγος), not in his personal being, but as a universal element of the community, as a thinking individual (LP 133).

By framing justification in terms of a theory of argumentation, we can see the criterion of universalizability as a way to present epistemic authority. That is, universalizability is something that hopes to provide knockdown arguments and to close the debate once and for all. Weil claims that the logical evolution of being, (the history of discourse from Plato to Hegel), turns on the possibility of creating an identity between the subject and the object. In other words, the history of philosophy is largely concerned with fixing a single discourse about the world for which truth conditions hold. What Weil tries to show however is that philosophical understanding outruns this type of identity precisely because having a philosophical understanding of philosophy implies understanding the individual's relationship to discourse. Weil's characterization of the individual's relationship to discourse implies a plurality of reasonable claims and in this context epistemic authority is seen to be the result of good argumentative practices that take this plurality into account. This is a key aspect of reading the *Logic of Philosophy* as a theory of argumentation: it allows us to see how epistemic authority is established.

For Weil, epistemic authority is established through a free (a-reasonable) choice to enter into discursive practices and to submit oneself to the normative weight of the authority

that is already present in these practices. But it is only established there because it is only within these discursive practices that it becomes a problem. This definition of epistemic authority holds when, in the confrontation between two different beliefs, one of them is seen to be authoritative over another. It is thus not for all time and outside of every context, but is anchored in actual argumentative practices. Thus, what counts as epistemic authority is historically and socially articulated. This however does nothing to lessen its authority, precisely because *everyone* who enters into these practices and who makes the continual choice to stay in these practices equally submits themself. In fact, this highlights another key aspect of the skeptical dilemma. We become skeptics when we are shown that our knowledge should be framed as knowledge claims, which in fact would be better categorized as beliefs (doxastic commitments), and which don't immediately hold because their epistemic authority is seen to be merely discursive. Reading the skeptical dilemma this way, we can see that it is implicitly structured by another doxastic commitment, namely that epistemic authority must in some way be non-discursive (this dovetail with Williams's claim that skepticism and foundationalism are structurally linked). Skepticism is a consequence of finding no single knockdown argument once and for all. Faced with this kind of problem, philosophers provide candidates that are supposed to overcome it by providing some non-discursive ground. However, what a theory of discursive commitment shows is that this is not a viable solution as long as the goal is reasonable discourse. The shifting sands of epistemic authority is a problem internal to the structure of argumentation. Epistemic authority is only found in discourse, because it is only in discourse that claims about of universality and objectivity make sense.

7.2.4 Justificatory Strategies and the Evolution of Authority

Sellars rejected a foundationalist empiricist picture of epistemic authority. However, as I have already said, foundationalism does capture something about our epistemic experience. What I argue is that foundationalism holds at the level of the local confrontation between individual propositions that are grounded by the same central discursive commitment. When local justification doesn't hold, it signals a possible difference in the conceptual space from which individuals are working. What does this mean? In the context of the theory of argumentation that I presented in the last chapter, the initial problem is to ground and maintain the initial agreement to reasonable action through discussion. I also claimed is that philosophy can start and end anywhere. Following this argument, I

highlighted how, in a context where individuals have spaces of reasons with only minimal overlap, non-discursive means play a greater role than discursive ones. What this also means is that a plurality of argumentative and thus justificatory strategies needs to be deployed in order to create epistemic authority. This plurality aims at creating *durable* authority. As Weil acknowledges, and as history has shown, violence can itself be used both discursively and non-discursively as a justificatory strategy. However, violence is unsatisfying. Even if it has already proven to be an effective *temporary* strategy to force agreement and to impose some (political) authority, violence does not itself provide durable and thus genuine epistemic authority. In fact, it is the strategy that is the most susceptible to the types of determinate negations that can undermine positions. Like violence, foundationalism also fails to establish durable authority because it assumes that there is a single unified discourse that is readily available and actually in effect which is somehow at the same time non-discursive but everywhere identical.

Foundationalism thus responds to the first level at which we are confronted by the need for justificatory strategies. It is facing a single claim that our beliefs are initially tested. It is the reasonable challenge to an individual claim, or to an individual experience, that creates the first reasoned doubt, that presents possibilities that must be confronted and chosen between. For Weil, philosophical categories are born out of the attempt to bring irreducible elements of human experience into a coherent discourse. When specific concepts succeed in being coherently articulated, it is because individuals lead sufficiently coherent lives according to the conceptual structure of commitments, entitlements, and incompatibilities that accompany that concept. In order to understand the pull of the foundationalist's claim, it is important to see that our initial argumentative strategy will always be to use the immediately available inferences that belong to the dominant category in which the belief is situated. This is what is meant by a local level of justification. It is local not only because the resources needed to overcome the conflict are seen as locally available in the category, but also because any epistemic authority that is established treats proposition as discrete meaningful units (which they are, but in Weil's theory this shall prove to be insufficient). In other words, in terms of Weil's theory, foundationalist justification works for in-category justification. This is the kind of justification that works when one's interlocutor has a significant amount of overlap in their space of reasons or dominant categories. This is also why regress arguments work against foundationalist justificatory structures. The regress argument exploits the local, propositional level of justification.

This also means that the agreement that allows for argumentative practices to hold is so well-established that only minor correction to any given claim is needed. Because all of us are not only part of linguistic and cultural communities, but also of epistemic communities with a certain amount of overlap, we tend to see what we do as justified. And often, given the overlap of these communities, it is. This overlap, for Weil, is found in the different *floors* of discourse. Remember, *The Discussion* is the floor of Antiquity, and *The Condition* is the floor of Modernity. What this means is that in our historical context, the discursive commitments and the discursive tools articulated in *The Condition* is available to everyone. However, because *The Condition* is not the last category, there exist reasoned refusals to this discourse. Reasoned doubt, the disagreeing for reasons, the itch that irritates our belief, is grasped in these reasoned refusals. However, when we are speaking of commitments that hold at the same level of discourse, they can easily be resolved. Precisely because the majority of our interactions happen in shared linguistic, cultural, and epistemic communities (that all share the same floor of discourse), our belief in the universality of our discursive position is constantly reinforced. Take our example of live oaks. If I am with a friend who is an arborist, and I misidentify a tree as a live oak and she corrects me, I will easily accept her correction because I recognize her authority and because the question at hand is placed in a domain where the authority that I recognize makes sense. The structure of justification is foundational here precisely because she is able to present certain claims that rest on her authority and thus all we have to do is arrive at that claim for me to recognize it. However, there are also experiences which bring us out of this comfort. As soon as we find ourselves confronted by different philosophical categories, different domains of competence, or different spaces of reasons, the foundationalist strategy quickly becomes insufficient. As the overlap between the space of reasons diminishes, certain background assumptions, *what goes without saying*, in Weil's specific technical sense, also no longer hold. This shows the importance of reflection to establishing epistemic authority.

The kind of reflection that comes into play is one that allows the individual to relativize their claims and to compare them against each other. This demands that the individual put claims of truth on hold and compare different discursive centers and their permissible inferences. What this provides is the capacity to judge their constellation of discursive commitments against that of their interlocutor. What I want to stress however is that, in the context of Weil's theory, this jump between different types of justificatory strategies, and between different claims of epistemic authority, must be freely taken. And it is not easy. The foundationalist justificatory strategy is outward facing. It takes one's

position for granted and then defends it. When the position doesn't hold, reasonable argument demands that the position be changed. However, the snag is that this central discursive commitment is seen as being what provides the orientation and meaning in one's life. Any real seismic shift in one's central discursive commitment can thus be accompanied by doubt, anxiety, and insecurity. This is an often-ignored aspect of justificatory strategies. Philosophers hope to provide knockdown arguments when providing reasonable justificatory strategies, however, they often forget that when discursive positions are being confronted in argument, in discourse, or in our everyday conversational practices, they are the real discursive positions of concrete individuals who have a vested interest in defending these commitments. It is not enough to show the goodness of an argument, rather the interlocutor must recognize the value of acknowledging the goodness of the argument. This is precisely because these commitments fit into a space of reasons that defines an individual's action and the way they see their lives as meaningful. Thus, it takes a fair amount of intellectual maturity to be able to evaluate the totality of one's beliefs in this way. Kenneth Westphal provides the kind of intellectual maturity that we need in his analysis of "mature judgment" in Hegel's epistemology. Mature judgment is made up of "cardinal intellectual values" which include identifying problems, distinguishing the relevant elements of a problem, accommodating the competing considerations bearing on issues, all in order to make reasonable decisions (2003: 48). While Weil's model of argumentation certainly looks to develop mature judgment, it is the way that his justificatory strategy characterizes the accommodation of competing considerations that is really important. Even though local (foundationalist) justification accommodates competing considerations, the role of accommodation ratchets up at the level of global justification because individuals must put more and more of their commitments on hold in order to see how well they hold together. Thus, it is at the global level of epistemic justification that individuals are able to identify and judge *other* categories against their own according to the criterion of universality and of coherence that leads to greater levels of comprehensiveness.

Now, this does not mean that they will be able to see other categories that have shown themself to be more comprehensive and as having a greater universal scope as indeed being so. But this does allow individuals to see the possibility of another way of organizing their world and their beliefs as a human possibility, that is, as one that could actually be their own. Weil notes that this difference forces us "to acknowledge that there exists at least one other way of life and that this way, though not mine, is human in the strongest sense of the word, i.e., that it *could* be mine" (1953: 107). This is, as I have said, a second-level practice of

justification. It is a level of justification that requires greater reflection, but this only guarantees partial or instable epistemic authority. The piece of epistemic authority it does provide allows interlocutors to explain why their reasons hold given their other beliefs. For instance, when a Kantian is faced with utilitarian moral commitments, it is the strength and coherence of the utilitarian position that forces the Kantian to evaluate the totality of their own commitments in order to test their coherence. If the Kantian finds their position coherent faced with utilitarian commitments it reinforces the Kantian's commitment to defend their position. They see their position as authoritative because it is coherent. This form of epistemic authority however is unstable for two reasons: first, because the global level of justification is reflexive and thus only looks to internal criteria. It always suffers from the relativity of its claims. And second, because an individual can be moved by the internal coherence of their position, they may recognize reasonable critiques and be unmoved by them. Both problems are serious but it is only relativism that is specific to this form of justification. The problem of the individual who is unmoved by reasons cannot be overcome by epistemic authority alone and so this problem touches any attempt to ground it, thus rendering all forms of authority at least partially unstable.

The epistemic authority second-tier reflexive justificatory practices provide is to the individual evaluating their own beliefs and not to the person providing a reasonable challenge. In order to bridge the gap between these two different levels, the local level of individual claims, and the global level of the coherence of sets of beliefs, individuals need a "polycentric" structure of justification that operates at an explicitly intersubjective level, where one not only puts their individual claims and the coherence of their set of claims into doubt, but also puts their very claim to epistemic authority on the table. In other words, the plurality of forms of coherence must be taken into account and justificatory practices must put them into relation, starting from their overlap. This contextual level is an outgrowth of the recognition of the limits of a given set of beliefs that happens in reflection. It is a response of the individual who sees that there are multiple possible discourse and that there may be no immediate way to settle once and for all the problem of this plurality of divergent discourses. In this case, the polycentric structure of justification implies another jump. The first was from discussion to reflection the other is from reflection to mature judgment.

At this last level of justification, it is the core beliefs of an individual that are being examined. This touches the deepest, most hidden, discursive commitments that often go unknown or unrecognized. Here the individual's whole way of seeing the world must be placed on the altar of doubt and perhaps be sacrificed. Most defenses of contextualism put

the emphasis on the fact that different epistemic claims hold in different contexts that are defined by epistemic communities. In other words, context of each situation matters. However, the defense of contextualism here is not just that of recognizing the context in which different claims hold, it also looks to create a new context in which interlocutors see themselves as actual dialogue partners and thus as subject to the dialogical controls of others and to the normative weight of better reasons, even if that means abandoning their core commitments. This kind of justification demands multiple reprises and a fair deal of trust. A polycentric structure of justification thus tries to bring together different and perhaps opposed discursive centers. This is the moment where the non-discursive strategies spoken about last chapter come into play. Epistemic authority is an accomplishment, it is something that is tested and that requires being recognized by all parties concerned and what it accomplishes is the movement towards dialogue. As I have stated before, it is something that is established in discourse and by discourse. It is only thanks to argumentative practices in dialogue that epistemic authority is stably and durably produced but it may be non-discursive means that bring people to see the value of establishing epistemic authority together.

The problem with foundationalism is that it presents a single candidate with some special quality that can guarantee epistemic authority. In seeking to create static certainty, foundationalism ignores the productive role of certainty. In terms of justification, the productive role of certainty is what allows us to disagree for reasons, to make reasoned challenges to default positions thanks to a reasoned doubt that is produced by a dissatisfaction with what a position allows us (and doesn't allow us) to grasp. The problem with coherentism is that, even though it provides for the more dynamic nature of justification, it still creates a point that is supposed to hold in every condition, that of a coherent set. Weil critiques the possibility of a concrete absolutely coherent discourse. His critique of the possibility of a fully coherent concrete set of beliefs that provides epistemic authority is in fact far more radical than the traditional critique of philosophical relativism that applies to coherentism. He does not argue that certain beliefs cannot be judged because they are incommensurable, rather he is claiming that certain beliefs can be made incommensurable knowingly by the refusal of individuals to accept them into argumentative practices. They refuse them and refuse them knowingly precisely because they understand what being drawn back into argumentative practices implies. It implies seeking to establish a dialogue that aims at the universal. In other words, the individual can always choose their particularity, and decide to dig their heels into it and to ignore reasonable discourse, worse,

to destroy reasonable discourse. With this in mind, the type of contextualism defended claims that a polycentric justificatory structure only holds when individuals recognize others as genuine dialogue partners, when they take on the effort to judge the coherence of other sets of beliefs, and when they see their own set of beliefs as modifiable. It is a practice. This falls into line with Michael Williams critique of what he calls epistemological realism. According to this critique, the error of epistemological realism is to take epistemological objects for being real objects, and thus as static. That is to say, it takes knowledge, justification, belief, etc. as things that are separated in one way or another from the act of knowing, the act of justifying, the act of believing etc., with their own metaphysical or ontological existence (1995: 108-109). What Weil hopes to show is that it is only through the justificatory *activity* that stable epistemic authority is established, and that the path of epistemological realism is the path of skepticism and despair. The polycentric picture of justification that we can draw out of Weil's work must be seen as a dynamic and open practice that seeks to establish epistemic authority. However, this authority is something that is created and is something that is always itself partially unstable. This brings us back Weil's notion of the openness to discourse.

Epistemic authority is established through a dynamic and open practice that allow individuals to separate, in their discourse, what is contingent, arbitrary, doubtful, and false from what is necessary, reasonable, certain, and true. In this way the goal of justification and of establishing epistemic authority in Weil's theory remains bringing doubt to an end, just like in classic models of justification. However, because Weil claims that it is dissatisfaction that leads individual to elaborate a discourse that can transform this dissatisfaction into error, this transforms the resolution of doubt as well. Doubt is resolved when someone finds a satisfactory discourse. However no discourse is satisfactory once and for all. We can place our trust in collective argumentative practices that bring the individual to see the worth of the cardinal epistemic virtues that make up mature judgement, but unless we are open to reasonable dialogue, and unless we see the person in front of us as providing genuine dialogical controls, we risk enclosing ourselves in a single form of coherence. Thus, epistemic authority cannot be fixed by a given, or a closed set of beliefs, and it cannot be fixed exclusively in the external world, but is born in discourse and must be fixed in discourse, and in a genuine discourse with others. The individual that sees this thus sees themselves as embedded in these practices with the rest of humanity, and it is only through the kind of action that brings others to see their own activity as a free activity that *can* participate in the establishing of epistemic authority that epistemic authority can *indeed* be

durably secured. This is why, for Weil, after a certain point in the evolution of humanity, violence can no longer provide a durable base for any type of authority (epistemic or otherwise). After the discovery of human freedom and autonomy, the individual sees themself as a legitimate source of value, therefore no external force can permanently hold. This also explains why even before the conceptual articulation of the concept of autonomy, violence could only temporarily provide some form of authority, (here, it is unimportant if that authority be epistemic or political) because individuals could always be pushed to the point where they would rather die than submit to or suffer under what they come to see as a contingent injustice. Before and after the discovery of human freedom, individuals could always answer violence with violence. Eric Weil faces this possibility, but as we have noted, he presents philosophy as a possibility that refuses that option and that takes a stance against it.

The contextual strategy takes on a polycentric structure to face the real difficulties in establishing epistemic authority. Different categories provide an authoritative ground to those that live inside them and when faced with a different discourse they can look to make their discourse as strong as possible by showing the scope of its comprehensiveness. However, Weil's claim is that when individuals justify, and when they evaluate different discourses responsibly, they mobilize all the discursive categories. Thus they do not merely look at a single claim or the coherence of a set of claims but they look at both of those things along with many others. Thus the difficulty of establishing epistemic authority demands the interplay of reprises. Some people may accept reprises of *The Condition* and of *God*, but not of the *Personality*, or of *The Conscience* and *The Absolute* and *The Finite*, but not of some other configuration. Some people may shut out somebody as soon as they have said a single phrase or word that raises their epistemic hackles and puts them on the defensive. This can be about immigration, sexual equality, the environment, or any number of other questions that at any given time, in any given group, counts as making up part of a discourse that is to be refused. In this sense, single words, phrases, or even manners of speaking, can become representative of entire spaces of reasons and can thus lead an individual to dismiss them out of hand. This is why a justificatory strategy grounded on the *Logic of Philosophy* must be polycentric and contextual, because authority is established together between people. If certain groups or positions are dismissed out of hand, the stability of authority is severely limited. This is the greatest problem to the establishing of epistemic authority. An individual can refuse a discourse because they know what it implies. Weil theorizes this possibility and reminds us that "man can push back discourse knowingly" (LP 56).

Weil's use of the term "knowingly" highlights why one cannot ascribe a purely coherentist strategy to the forms of justification present in his work despite his continued instance on the role of coherence in the elaboration of the philosophical categories. As we have noted pure coherentist strategies base epistemic authority on a set of coherent beliefs, but for Weil it is also linked to the notion of an absolutely coherent discourse, one that seeks to establish an identity between the subject and the object. However Weil is painfully aware of human finitude and human freedom. Pure coherentist strategies do not work, for Weil, because the individual can always in their finitude and freedom choose violence. Thus the choice that the individual faces is between two radical possibilities, philosophy and violence[94]. Contextual polycentric justification focuses on entering freely into genuine dialogical practices, choosing shared principles, and working to get to the bottom of things together. Nothing forces this choice (although many things can encourage it), but without this, justification is merely a defense of one's own interests. For Weil, facing the double possibility of reason and violence "the philosopher now devotes himself to philosophy *knowingly* and *without a guilty conscience*, […] [where] he wants to understand without looking for the impossible justification of understanding predating understanding" (LP 64). In this way, for Weil, philosophy is a choice and an act, to be open to the possibility of reasonable discourse coming from anywhere, to be open to the possibility that our own discourse holds within it its share of arbitrariness and contingence and that this element can only be drawn out by the reasonable protest of another discourse (this in no way insures that the reasonable protest is correct in a given situation, merely that it is reasonable). Without this awareness, any claim of knockdown arguments is only knockdown because it doesn't end in arguments but rather ends in blows. But since philosophy here sees itself as the choice to overcome difference and conflict through reason, that is, through coherent discourse in situation, the only way to establish an authority that is truly epistemic does so through discourse. Thus, an individual engaged in argumentative practices must be able to sift through the different reprises and to identify them, and once identified they must seek the right way to act upon them. This justificatory practice is contextual precisely because different reprises are needed in different contexts. Justificatory practices change according to whether the context is political, ethical, scientific, metaphysical, or otherwise. It also

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[94] Weil acknowledges a third choice in pacific silence, but he has refused this choice from the get go because he is interested in understanding not how certain individuals can take themself out of the world, but rather how individuals act and what they are committed to when they are committed to staying in the socially articulated second-nature that governs a shared human existence.

changes depending on what the constellation of one's interlocutor is. Not only can these different contexts not be flattened, people do not immediately *know* when and how these different contexts hold. It is something that they have to learn to identify, and when they do, it is a true accomplishment.

7.3   Relativism and Pluralism as Discursive Commitments

7.3.1 The Shape of the Problem

As we have seen, the theory of justification that is defended here is born out of the idea that what a theory of argumentation establishes is epistemic authority. However, this same theory comes up against a problem. Epistemic authority is not a fixed state. It is based on a minimal agreement that allows serious conversation to get off the ground but it in turn discovers that this minimal agreement is also what is needed to establish epistemic authority, and thus any stable justification. This creates a tension that any theory of argumentation must confront. Two of the major consequences of this tension are skepticism and relativism. Skepticism and relativism are thus here seen as actual discursive commitments that can partially orient a life. They are also seen as unsatisfying in a theory that fixes the horizon of philosophy as a fully orientated life understood comprehensively in a concrete situation thanks to a coherent discourse. One of the goals of justification and of argumentative practices is thus to give voice to the dissatisfaction of individuals while also bringing them to see the value of choosing to seek a coherent discourse on their own. With that goal in mind, Weil, rejects skepticism and relativism. I presented a three-tier model of justification that tries to capture the different goals of some of the major live justificatory options and to show how different justificatory structures are needed to overcome different problems. This three-tier model is supposed to compensate for different levels of shared background commitments and the scope of the agreement between divergent discourses. Because there are different levels of shared background commitments, the overlap between discursive spaces is not perfect. Rather, they initially present themselves as relative. Relativism is thus a real discursive possibility when faced with divergent discourse and when we argue against relativism we do so because we recognize its pull and its potential consequences on our action. But we argue against it because this action (like any action) will itself become sedimented as part of our social second-nature that defines the horizon of action that other people will see as being before them from the get go. With this in mind, my goal is to show that while relativism—like monism and pluralism—is a real possibility, it is unsatisfactory.

Monism, relativism, and pluralism are not just real options, they are positions that overlay our justificatory forms. In other words, monism, relativism, and pluralism are here seen as the kind of commitments people take on when they stop in specific justificatory models.

Monism seems to be the initial vision that we have of our discursive practices. If this is true, it is linked to foundationalism. The formal goal of justificatory practices *is* foundationalist. Justificatory practices seek to bring people into the same discursive space where a shared order of explanation can ground epistemic authority and where people can settle dispute exclusively through discursive means. In the same way, the formal goal of discursive practices is to form a monist space of reasons, but this formal goal must itself face the historic weight of different discursive possibilities, as well as the possibility that novelty. Thus, while monism is the *formal* goal of argumentative practices, I argue that pluralism must been seen as the *concrete* goal. With this in mind, a philosophy that sees itself as a future-facing endeavor must also see the goal of discursive practices as the overcoming of relativism by transforming it into pluralism, that is, into a position that makes the best of the historic moment and that nonetheless sees that individuals can enter into meaningful discursive relations with others.

Each person starts from their subjective and particular point of view, with the naïve certainty and orientation that they have established through their interpretation of their concrete historic situation. Because of this, real material and historic difficulties bar us from establishing a single monist image of the world because any concrete form of monism depends on the *real* instauration of a universal and coherent discourse. But these material and historical difficulties are the background of contingency and failure against which we act. What I will thus argue is that concrete monist positions ignore these difficulties whereas relativism and pluralism do not. However, relativism and pluralism should not be put in the same basket. Relativism looks to the contingency and the failures of the past as informing the difficulties of the present in order to act and to understand. But in acting and in understanding, relativism ignores the possibilities of the future. It sees the failures and the differences that present themself in the analysis of the past as being insurmountable. If however philosophy *is* future-facing, then it must look to the future. Pluralism, like relativism, looks at the failures of the past and the difficulties of the present, but instead as seen them as insurmountable, pluralism seeks to elaborate the possibilities of the future and bring them about. Looking at philosophy this way allows us to establish the major normative claim of this whole work: if philosophy *ought* to concern itself with how to bring discourse

together, how to resolve problems, then it must be a fallibilist (in the sense of openness), pluralist, future-facing endeavor.

Here, it is important to show how a pluralism built out of a notion of discursive commitment plays out. In order to do that, I will have to present what is meant by monism and by relativism in order to show why this notion of pluralism is the *goal* of a theory of argumentative practices based on discursive commitment. In order to do this, I will mobilize the helpful distinction made by Huw Price between horizontal pluralism and vertical pluralism, and show how Weil's position can be understood as a species of vertical pluralism and also show how Weil's distinction between language and discourse can provide a useful completion to Price's theory. This adjustment will also allow me to reinforce the value of reading Weil's philosophy along pragmatist, expressivist and inferentialist lines, and show how Weil's theory dovetails with many of the commitments of the thinkers working in these idioms.

7.3.2 Monism and Relativism

I am taking the default assumption in discursive interaction to be monist. When people talk, when they discuss, they assume that what they are saying is meaningful and that it is understood by their interlocutor because they take themselves to be saying something true about the world. The monism that thus structures our naïve conception of the world is at the same time ontological, metaphysical, and discursive. When somebody speaks they speak the truth about what is and about what the structure underlying it also is. As I have argued throughout this work, this naïve position is quickly complicated in our social discursive practices. Our condition is marked by the variety of different discourses that provide a variety of different ways of carving up the world and a variety of structural explanations of why the world should indeed be thus carved up. Monism, at bottom, is a reductionist position. All diversity and variety must be boiled down to a single principle that allows individuals to explain that diversity, and to have that explanation match perfectly and eternally to that diversity. In doing so, that explanation will be said to have uncovered the fundamental laws and structure of what is and thus to explain all diversity as a totality. So, *either* discursive monism folds into ontological and metaphysical monism, *or* it unfolds, at least, into a minimal plurality that separates what is and what underlies what is from what we say about what is. For Weil however, ontological and metaphysical monism cannot be

discursive. It is in only in discourse and in language that differences are disclosed. In order to live in an ontological and metaphysical unity with the One, the individual must be outside of discourse and language. Weil notes that life without reason (coherent discourse in situation) is "known under two forms, that of the animal and that of God"[95] (LP 416) and it is under these two forms that we as discursive creatures can from the outside conceive of true monism. In these two forms, there is no separation from the world. Animals are united with the world because the difference that discourse discloses does not yet trouble them (they are in-themselves) and God, because he would exist at the Archimedean point where discourse cannot trouble him (he is for-himself). For Weil, humanity differs in that it is the "the movement of the in-itself towards the for-itself" (LP 417). To reprise Weil's claim in Brandom's idiom, monism is either the sentience that has no capacity for sapience, or the pure sapience that has no need for sentience. Weil highlights how we live in a *between* (LP 417). We are between the future that we don't know and the past that we do, we are between our sentient existence that makes no claims of epistemic authority, and that we exist in, and our sapient existence that makes strong demands of epistemic authority that we create for ourselves. Thus here already we can see the way a theory of argumentation comes into play.

By showing that our lives happen in the meantime, in this between, Weil shows how the demands that discourse make concerning epistemic authority mark the way in which we understand ourselves. Monism is marked by its foundationalism and its absolutism, and because of this, monism is in a weak defensive position. All its opponent has to do is show the goodness of any other possibility for monism to fold into relativism. The monist must show that their discourse can either absorb this other possibility, or show that their discourse is true and that the other is false. This is a tall order for the monist. Because monist claims are absolute in the sense that they must be true and that all other true claims must reduce to this fundamental monist claim, monism and relativism are structurally linked. As argued all the way back in Chapter 3, relativism is the nihilism of failed monism. It accepts the reality of other discourses yet also refuses to abandon the goodness of its own claims. In order to protect its claims, the relativist insolates them from all attack by asserting that discursive positions cannot be compared. According to the three-tier structure of justification defended here, nothing requires somebody to make the jump from one justificatory structure to another, and in the same way, nothing requires anybody to leave their naïve monism. Here

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[95] Weil also notes that it is not any God that is monist but a very specific one. He says that this God is "not the God of the pure category, but his reprise through the *object* and the *conscience*: the God of Greco-Christian theology"(LP 416).

we can understand those that cling to their naïve form of monism in terms in recalcitrant forms of religious fundamentalism. The meaningfulness of the world for the religious fundamentalist depends of the reality of *their* discourse, it is the objectivity that their subjective belief secures for them that holds their world together, and their faith shows that anybody who doubt this belief was either put here to test them or where put here as their mission[96]. Non-believers must be converted. This explains the role of proselytization in certain fundamentalist communities. The only way to guarantee the kingdom of God is to save the non-believer, even if saving those that deserve a place in this kingdom requires building mountains from the bones from those that don't.

The threat of the failure of one's beliefs, and the refusal to pass from certainty to discussion, to relativize one's beliefs sufficiently in order to put them to the test, is an initial junction where pure violence can irrupt. The recognition of the possibility of violence can make the move to relativism seem to be a sensible one[97], precisely if relativism is supposed to guarantee the tolerance for other discourses. This is exactly what Weil highlights in the category of *Intelligence* which presents Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Bayle as paradigmatic historic cases of the defense of philosophical relativism. For this category, relativism is a key aspect of the concept of human interest (which is always relative to each individual). Because relativism is sufficient to ground a coherent discourse, it differs from skepticism, which, as already noted, is always parasitic on *another* coherent discourse. However, as I will show, relativism does not guarantee tolerance. This is because relativism, while being a consequence of a failed global monism, nonetheless remains a local form of monism. This is evident in the way relativism posits the incommensurability of different discourses.

For relativism to develop, the monist has to be forced to recognize the existence of other discourses, however this does not mean that the relativist will be ready to give up on the absolute character of their own discourse. The relativist thus posits an infinity of absolute discourses that exist but that are in no way comparable. For the relativist, even though we may use a common language, the source of our discourse is individual and subjective. Here is one of the main reasons that the role of authority and the idea of externalism and

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[96] Religious fundamentalism also clearly shows the way that Being, God, and Truth, comingle in discourse. They are all the same thing *because* the discourse of the fundamentalist cannot grasp their differences.

[97] It is historically significant that the elaboration of relativism was an essential move to diminishing some forms of violence. The critique of relativism that is presented here does not want to minimize that historical importance, rather it wants to highlight the way that relativism also gives way to *aporia*, difficulties, and new forms of violence that it can neither dissolve nor understand. Thus relativism is seen as a historically and discursively significant put ultimately insufficient commitment.

discrimination are so important. There is a naïve pull towards an internalist and associationist image of our experience. This is because we have to internalize our experience in order to break it into discrete units and we have to break it into discrete units in order to compare and contrast it. However, what I have tried to show—by mobilizing Sellars attack of the myth of the given and Weil's separation of attitudes and categories—is that internalist and associationist models ignore how important the social formation of our conceptual landscape is. In fact, the problem of relativism (like the problem of skepticism) is structurally linked to a model whereby epistemic authority must be granted from an internalist and associationist model. As long as these models dominate, there is always a recurrent threat of arbitrariness and subjectivism, with its linked problems of solipsism and skepticism concerning the external world[98]. Relativism does nothing to assuage these problems, in fact it leaves them as is, and lets everybody (including the skeptical solipsist) operate in their own little corner of the world.

Jean-Pierre Cometti has noted that to a certain extent, every discursive position must admit a normal level of relativism (2001). What this means is that we must necessarily relativize our claims if we want to communicate with others. This, Cometti notes, is very different from the philosophical position of relativism. The philosophical position takes a strong stance that implies not just a general relativization of our discourses, but an incommensurability between different types of discourses or between the discourses of different people. This incommensurability states that *no* criteria could be provided in order to put these discourses into relation. This is the position that is seen to be philosophically unacceptable[99] and this is what is to be kept in mind in arguments against relativism. As already mentioned, Weil has argued that the move from the category of *Certainty* to that of *Discussion* creates the relativization of beliefs. In the *Logic of Philosophy*, this happens when differentiated communities are brought together (usually violently) into a single political union or into a stable political relationship. Internally this differentiation is found when the relativization of the *sacred* of each community must be articulated within a single legal framework in order to establish social bonds between these different communities. In this case, the dominant tradition (the ethical life of the community) is transformed into a religious, cultural, and moral syncretism that concedes place to the different sacreds of each

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[98] These models will probably always be present precisely because association and internalization *do* provide thresholds of meaning and of concept manipulation. In this way I am not denying their importance, I am denying the primitiveness.

[99] This does not mean people do not defend these positions. In the modern context, J.L. Mackie's defense of moral relativism in *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977) immediately comes to mind.

community. Externally, this happens when a single political community finds itself obliged to create stable relations with foreign communities that can neither be eliminated, subjugated, or ignored. These people thus cannot not be written off as barbarians or as inferiors precisely because the community is obliged to uphold a relationship with them. In this way, the "relativist" position develops under specific historic, social, and political conditions. From our point of view however, because of the intimacy of the interactions in a (partially) rationalized globally articulated modern society, differences are obliged to coexist and cooperate, whether between different states, within the multicultural divisions in these states themselves, or through the relationship between different social strata or cultural communities.

Because the modern situation has already generalized this coexistence of differences, this allows us to interpret the jump between *Certainty* and *The Discussion* as a jump that is constantly reprised at the level of the individual consciousness. In other words, as soon as the individual starts to present belief not as certainty, but as belief, that is as a second-order commitment that involves a certain level of reflection and that demands criteria, the individual becomes aware of the possibility of relativism. This is structurally linked to the demand for coherence. It is only facing dialogue partners who provide the appropriate controls that we learn to evaluate our discursive commitments. Remember, we have said that discursive spaces can be understood thanks to rules of permissible inference and incompatibility, and also that there are a variety of discursive positions that can be sketched thanks to their central commitment and their order of explanation[100]. To understand exactly how the awareness of the relativity of our beliefs comes about we can again look at what Jaraslov Peregrin says concerning "bouncing off rules".

We have already noted how, for Peregrin, "[l]ooking at rules in their restrictive, rather than prescriptive, capacity allows us to see that through *limiting* us in what we may do they also *delimit* a new space of reasons […] thus the rules of language also open up a new space: a space of meaningfulness […]."(2014: 71). This space of meaningfulness is the space in which we place our statements and our claims as well as our orientations and our goals. This is what allows Peregrin to note that "rules have an inner and an outer face. From the outside they, and the spaces they create, can simply be *described* […] [h]owever, from the inside the spaces are *inhabited*." (*ibid.*: 89). It is from the inside, from an inhabited space that our statements and orientations make sense as being ours. This intimacy allows us to

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[100] This can be either pure positions that define the category or mixed positions that imply numerous reprises and which are the shape that actual concrete discourses take.

clarify the way that different spaces can be seen as an existential threat and thus why relativism is proposed. We have already endorsed the idea that discursive spaces are lived in and that when it is us who are in them, bouncing off incompatibilities gives sharpness and definition to our concepts. However, Peregrin makes a distinction between habitation and description. What this means is that just because we can describe and perhaps even understand different discursive spaces, we cannot necessarily imagine them as live options for ourselves. This is because our own conceptuality is always sketched from the inside. Meaning in this sense is downstream from goals and orientations, from the shape of our own space of reasons. In fact, this highlights the importance of argumentative practices, and the importance of a polycentric structure of contextual justification. This allows us to consider other positions *as if* from the outside. Real dialogical practices with others help us to see what kinds of inferences others make based on other central commitments. They provide dialogical controls by providing a real alternative. However, if we were in different spaces of reasons, our lives and our goals would be different, our orientation would change.

When we stick to description we cannot imagine these other spaces as possibilities because our goals and orientations are not at stake, but when we enter into justificatory and argumentative practices with people from different spaces the integrity of our own space is precisely what *is* at risk. This is also why, for Weil, it is not argumentative practices themselves that lead to the recognition of difference, it is certain political and social situations that force us to cooperate with people that we have poorly understood, where we cannot "agree to disagree" precisely because the disagreement is a deep source of conflict that keeps people in these political and social situations from cooperating. In other words, in these situations, relativism only holds when individuals have nothing to agree on, as is the case concerning private faith in secular political communities. In this case, faith can remain a private affair. However, when this faith spills over into public affairs and individuals need to agree on things, on the content of education, on family planning, etc. this relativism becomes inoperable. In these cases, we must be willing to establish the minimal agreement that leads to argumentative practices, we must imagine these spaces as real spaces we could inhabit. When we do so, these practices themselves can help us to progressively take our dialogue partners more seriously and to see their way of life as a concrete possibility. Entering into argumentative practices is hard, precisely because we inhabit a meaningful space. However, modern society forces us into them again and again as a prerequisite for the success of our projects because our projects rely on this internal and external differentiation. No person is an island, and no project that that seeks recognition from others is strictly

personal. This does not mean that the individual cannot refuse technical success as it is articulated in society. Individuals may even decide that their success holds only in the refusal of this society. Nothing requires us to enter into argumentative practices and the awareness of other spaces may keep many people from doing so.

Weil notes that when people do not want to abandon their way of life but want to reinforce it, they commit to what he calls *traditionalism*. This is important for the practical character we are giving to our analysis of relativism. Weil notes that finding agreement is insurmountable when traditionalism "emerges as an active conscious force." (1953: 110). For Weil it is exactly this active force that can keep people from following the course of sound certain argumentative practices. He notes that:

> as traditionalists we do not evaluate our tradition through the mirror furnished by other traditions, we establish a theory of action. When we become conscious of tradition we develop a double personality, looking at ourselves from the outside so to speak. But as traditionalists, we decide not only to study ourselves in relation to other people, but we choose to maintain our tradition, to stick to it whatever the difficulties and the temptations, to be what we were, to be ourselves without any change or deviation. Only traditionalism we affirm, can save us, for we have arrived at a point where we shall lose our soul if we do not revert to that which makes us precisely ourselves (1953: 110).

By highlighting the choice, the moment of decision to dig our heels into a tradition that has disappeared or changed, Weil also highlights how all incompatibility implies a moment of decision, whereby the individual chooses either between violence or discourse[101]. The choice of violence presents itself as the choice to ignore incompatibility and to prefer to live in a form of contradiction precisely because it is meaningful and to refuse the choice to adopt the meta-commitment to reasonable action that may change or invalidate this meaning, without any promise that a new meaning will be developed. It is at this level of the evaluation of different coherent discourses that relativism, like skepticism, rears its head. However, relativism poses the problem in different terms than skepticism. This also highlights the way that order of explanation gives shape to different spaces of reasons, and how the inferential relationship based on single commitments can be sketched.

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[101] We ignore for the moment the variety of non-violent but silent stances that individuals can take on. It is enough to say here that that non-violent silence can be either rebellious towards or complicit in the dominant discourse.

The difference between skepticism and relativism here is that skepticism claims that it is impossible to establish epistemic authority (despite itself making such as an authoritative claim). By contrast, relativism claims that there is a multitude of discourses that each have an equal claim to epistemic authority. I want to note in passing[102] that here relativism, by claiming that these multiple discourses have an equal claim to epistemic authority is making an implicit judgment about the equality of the claims, thus already putting the plurality of spaces into an evaluative relation. This however is not the greatest default of relativism. Rather, the default of relativism is that it is unsuccessful in securing what it is trying to secure, namely tolerance. For Weil's sources of relativism, Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Bayle (who both wrote during times of political and religious turmoil), the need to find wiggle room for those that thought differently was capital[103]. And their defense of relativism indeed seeks to justify the idea of tolerance. To understand how relativism comes up short, it is important to again look at the notion of incompatibility. We have noted that the incompatibilities in a discourse with shared discursive centers are relatively easy to overcome. There is a background acceptance of what counts as epistemic authority, and so, in this case seeing often *is* believing. That is, it is sufficient to show or demonstrate an incompatibility to one's interlocutor for epistemic authority to be established. This as I have said, is one of the pulls of foundationalist pictures of justification. So much of our lives are passed in overlapping discursive spaces, and so many of our intimate relationships are built by coming to understanding through a steady merger of discursive spaces (in fact, it may be the case that many intimate relationships end when we become aware of divergences in these spaces because we see this continued merger of projects and values as impossible). The incompatibilities that appear because of differences between central discursive commitments are harder to overcome than those of shared commitments, precisely because of what different discursive centers imply. Different discursive commitments imply different orientations and different lives. When such incompatibilities are uncovered, seeing no longer is believing, rather the long process of explanation and justification is needed. However, as long as certainty is held to, this alternative discursive center is seen to be a threat, and an existential one at that.

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[102] This will come back into play when I analyze the difference between vertical pluralism and horizontal pluralism.

[103] In his article "Democracy as a Space of Reasons" Michael P. Lynch argues that Montaigne's main motivation for his arguments for relativism where to defend Catholicism from the rising tide of the Reformation by showing that faith and not reason was the only way to secure social stability (2012). The line of argument that is followed later in this section is heavily indebted to Lynch's analysis.

In line with Weil's theory, nothing forces the individual to skirt out to the edge of their space of reasons, just as nothing forces them to lean out over this edge and stare into the chasm of another space of reasons. In other words, nothing can force the individual to see the possible relativity of their own discourse, even if there are social, political, and historical reasons that can compel them to do so. There is also nothing that can force the individual, once they have seen that possible relativity, to seek to overcome it or to accept another discourse as legitimate, even in its own sphere. One can seek rather to destroy that discourse. Weil notes:

> Nothing prevents me, once I've grasped myself with the help of discourse, from striving to demolish and spurn discourse, either in order to modify it, or in order to refuse all discourse *knowingly*; it remains nonetheless that I, who thus frees myself from discourse and, if it comes to that, from all language, only make this decision in the environment, the *medium* of language and of discourse (LP 67).

However, when an individual decides not to use violence and decides to admit the incompatibilities between different discourses, they are left with a plurality of different discourses. The question that must be asked is why does this plurality lead to philosophical relativism, to an infinity of monist discourses existing side by side. It is because incompatibility signals conflict in discourse and this conflict can explode into violence. Thus if the individual wants to avoid violence they have two options, they can fall silent or they can speak and try to resolve the problem of violence.

For Weil, the philosophical position refuses both violence and silence. Philosophy speaks and speaks reasonably. Following this analysis we can better see how relativism is a practical attempt *to solve* the problem of incompatible discursive spaces. It tries to insulate incompatible discourses in order to keep them from being seen as existential threats. The consequence of this however is that each space becomes incommensurable. In other words, relativism admits the existence of these different spaces, but at the cost of saying that they cannot be compared. By extracting them from the normative weight of better reasons, the relativist assumes that tolerance follows. In this way, relativism is supposed to entail a notion of tolerance[104] and tolerance is supposed to be seen as a solution to the problem of violence. However, this notion of tolerance based on relativism shows its limitations both structurally and practically. We have already defined the problem of relativism as the incommensurability of discursive spaces, but it is not clear how tolerance is supposed to

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[104] Weil describes this development of the attitude of tolerance in the different reprises of the category of *Intelligence* and its limits in the category of *Personality*.

follow from this notion, especially since relativism claims that there is no measure by which to judge these different discursive spaces. Imagining that relativism is metaphysically true or admitting that there exists a multitude of discursive spaces and they cannot be measured against one another because of a lack of criteria does not resolve the problem of violence. In this situation these discursive spaces can still be intolerant. Someone with a specific set of essential beliefs can recognize that their beliefs are incommensurable with another set of beliefs, and because of that want to eliminate this other set of essential beliefs, in order to protect the unicity of their own unique set. Thus we see that relativism on its own does not entail tolerance.

7.3.3 The Insufficiency of Relativism

If relativism doesn't entail tolerance, the question becomes, what does? Are relativism and non-violence together sufficient to entail tolerance? The answer is no. More strongly, the answer is that these two things together show more clearly how relativism is a practical position, and how properly understood, it actually leads to violence by limiting tolerance. Take the notion of freedom of religion in the United States. Here, religious tolerance and relativism taken together are often used as a defense of discriminatory action. Here we can refer to Indian Senate Bill no. 101 known as the *Religious Freedom Restoration Act*. It states: "a governmental entity may not substantially burden a person's exercise of religion, even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability" (2015). The New York Times notes "[t]he Indiana law opens the door for individuals or companies to refuse actions that impose a 'substantial burden' on their religious beliefs" (Barbaro & Eckholm, 2015). This includes most notably the hiring of or service to members of the LGBTQ+ communities. In this way, the law enables individuals or businesses to use their religious beliefs as a reason to discriminate. It also allows individuals to insulate such practices from critique by defending the aspects of said beliefs that would otherwise be open to critique in a public discourse. Relativism is thus used to demand tolerance for an absolutist position (here a specific species of Christianity) so that it can itself be able to freely discriminate[105]. Similar moves have been made as well when relativized religious freedom is used in the heated battles concerning women's access to contraception or the place of the theory of evolution in public schools. Both these questions turn around how policy infringes on

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[105] Weil analyses how individuals try to insulate their interest and their beliefs from scrutiny in the category *Personality*, most notably (LP 283-286). Claudine Tiercelin, also following Michael P. Lynch, made a similar point recently in her inaugural *Connaissance, Vérité, Démocratie* course at Collège de France (2017).

religious freedom and how religious freedom infringes on policy. It also shows how relativism does not entail tolerance.

When the plea for tolerance is used as a bulwark to protect debatable position the weakness of relativism as a practical position becomes all the more evident (which is only debatable for another discourse). In this case, the essential belief that structures permissible inferences is *no longer* subject to interaction with other discursive spaces. By insulating a discursive space, the incompatibilities of that space become all-important. Normally, incompatibilities are resolved in argumentation when the conflictual claim of a commitment is renounced. Relativism refuses to do so. Any incompatibility is seen as an imposition from another relative space and thus does not touch the space in question. By considering other positions to be incompatible *and* incommensurable, arguments no longer function, because the participants *knowingly* refuse to consider other reasons as live options. In this situation, before a deaf audience, the choice becomes once again one of falling silent or of the use of violence. Thanks to the previous development of the arguments, we now have the tools to see the why Weil rejects silence as an option for the philosopher and why he rejects relativism. When one is silent they commit to non-violence, but they also commit to the incommensurability of relativism. The pluralist on the other hand chooses argumentative practices because while they accept non-violence, like the relativist, unlike the relativist, they also at least formally commit to the commensurability of discursive spaces.

However this does not answer the question of what to do while better reasons are being figured out and investigated. Following the analysis of different discursive categories as different spaces of reasons, we can understand relativism as a potentially disastrous practical position and not a metaphysical reality. However the roadblocks that give rise to relativism have not gone away. My suggestion is that in order to tackle these roadblocks, the structural political space must be understood as pluralistic. Why must the political space be pluralistic? It has been shown that relativism does not entail tolerance, and how, relativism and non-violence can end up in silence. What I propose is that non-violence entails tolerance, and the normative weight of better reasons entails pluralism. This political space thus refuses to make a judgment about the substantive statuses of the claims that are being presented. Thus, although metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological commitments matter greatly for individuals, it is precisely these aspects of the commitments that are put on hold within the political space. Following this proposal, a question nonetheless remains. What kind of political space can both provide the non-violence that leads to pluralism? What I will argue in what follows is that it is specifically a democratic political space with a focus on education

and equality that can do so. This is because a democratic political space is governed by the refusal of the use of violence within the political community to settle disputes and by the application of the normative weight of better reasons to settle disputes in this same space. In this way, democratic culture is seen to engender a pluralistic tolerance. Still, as noted, real difficulties persist. For instance, the explicit structure of these spaces is born out of, among other things, implicit normative practices. In this way, the scope and understanding of discursive commitments is in constant evolution and thus it is not clear which essential beliefs should be counted as live options. More importantly, it is often not immediately evident what a person's center of discourse is and whether those essential beliefs go *against* the definition of a democratic political space, and should thus be seen as incompatible with democratic culture.

I have linked the relationship between the positions of relativism and pluralism and that of epistemic authority. What I argue now is that it is pluralism that defines a political space as democratic. However, since the use of violence, the notion of tolerance, and the emphasis on the normative weight of arguments can be different in different spaces, not every political space is democratic. In this case, the criticism of whether we fall back into the same problem of relativism exists. There are two responses to this charge. First, we claim that each discursive space is already governed interiorly by the epistemic norm of weighing better reasons. For Weil, the evaluative criterion used to distinguish better reasons is the universalizability of the discourse itself, but this universalizability is insufficient because we can still always find ourselves with mutually incompatible coherent discourses. Thus the universalization of commitments must always be linked to the willingness to establish the minimal agreement needed for dialogue to take hold. In this way, all that is being asked of individuals from different epistemic communities is that they apply to others the same discursive norm that they apply to themselves, because epistemic deliberation is itself already seen as a suspension of a certain type of practical commitments in order to weigh options by the criteria of universalizability and by the overall coherence of the argument. Second, it is only when political actors decide that their reasons are privileged that the threat of relativism as a *political* position comes back into play. Nonetheless, as philosophical positions, each space is governed by the fact that it exists in a larger structural space that makes the possibility of agreement, as well as disagreement, possible, precisely because particular discourses are elaborated on the floor-level discourse of the social space, which for us in our modern context, is that of *The Condition*. Therefore the incompatibilities that are judged as incommensurable are seen to lean on real criteria that make the judgment of

their incompatibility possible. However, and this is a real problem, nothing guarantees that we will be able to recognize better reasons, precisely because the debate about how to articulate the minimal agreement of dialogue can rage on. Different discursive spaces, as spaces of meaningfulness are understood as embodied and inhabited from the inside, thus when individuals enclose themselves in their single form of coherence they place major obstacles in front of themselves concerning the establishing of a minimal agreement with others. Even there where there is some overlapping consensus, different discursive spaces mean that different individuals can agree on things from different categories. This will not mean however that the reasons are good ones, but it does mean that the contradiction and conflict between their fundamental reasons have been subordinated to something that is seen as creating agreement. An example of mutual consensus based on bad reasons and different discursive commitments can be found for instance in the fact that secular individuals as well as people from different religions can all have an overlapping consensus about the immorality of homosexuality. Despite their consensus, someone who does not see homosexuality as immoral will neither see their reasons as good or grounded, but rather will see the consensus as a leftover from a more barbaric time. In order to define how people come to recognize better reasons it would be necessary to elaborate a theory of education, as well as go deeper into the political and philosophical considerations than is possible here. However, we can sketch the start of a response. In order to lay the groundwork for this response I shall mobilize Huw Price's notion of horizontal and vertical pluralism.

7.3.4 Horizontal and Vertical Pluralism

In the article "Metaphysical Pluralism" Huw Price abandons the notion of incommensurability and thus abandons the tag of relativism, instead he notes that the multiplicity and diversity of discourse can be understood using a spatial relation. What would normally be called relativism is what Price refers to as horizontal pluralism. Horizontal pluralists admit a multiplicity of different discourse but see these discourses as "*performing the same linguistic tasks*. There are many equally valid possible scientific worldviews, but all of them are scientific worldviews, and in that sense are on the same level of linguistic activity." (1992: 389). Price is quick to note that the example of a scientific world view is merely an example, but that horizontal pluralism can be found in partial discourses and in domain specific discourses, such as in the case of moral discourses or epistemological discourses. What matters here is that all the discourses are seen as

performing the same task at the same level of validity. This is different from what he calls vertical pluralism. According to vertical pluralism, there is "an irreducible plurality of *kinds* of discourse—the moral as well as the scientific for example" (*ibid.*: 390). Price then goes on to compare the key characteristics of his position with other positions. What he notes is that the idea of vertical pluralism or what he also calls discourse pluralism is that there are different discourses that are ontologically autonomous, that are legitimate, but that have no available unifying principle. What does this mean? First, when Price speaks of ontological autonomy, he is referring specifically to whether or not the discourse in question is to be considered "distinct from the background discourse" (*ibid.*: 391). Here, in his example, he contrasts moral discourses and scientific discourses in order to show that one cannot be reduced to the other. Thus the type of reality that these two discourses treat according to Price's discourse pluralism is different. Afterwards, he asks whether or not the discourse is legitimate, and here we can put our gloss on it and show that for Price, he is asking whether a given discourse, against a background discourse is to be thought of as being a source of epistemic authority. Here, in the terms of the two examples Price gives, we can conclude that for his position that scientific discourses and moral discourses are both to be thought of as authoritative in their domains. This links up to the placement problem that we exposed in earlier chapters as well as to the strategy proposed by Humean expressivists. According to Humean expressivists the only legitimate discourse is causally-structured, empirically-known, scientific discourse, thus moral talk is seen to be outside of its scope. Someone who does not grant ontological autonomy to moral discourse is reductionist in the sense that they reduce moral talk to psychological states. Emotivism is thus an example of the kind of reductionism that refuses ontological autonomy to moral talk and claims that all discourses must reduce down to a causally structured empirically known scientific discourse. Price's discourse pluralism grants epistemic authority to different discourses and thus moral talk and physical causal talk are seen to be equally legitimate in their spheres.

Afterwards, Price distinguishes between positions that propose a unifying principle and those that do not. According to this taxonomy, his defense of discourse pluralism refuses that there is a unifying principle that is available, this contrasts with a position that admits a unifying principle and which he calls additive monism. He states:

> additive monism agrees with discourse pluralism in rejecting reductionism and […] forms of irrealism, accepting that multiple discourse may each be autonomous and yet fully legitimate. The disagreement is only about how these separate spaces are

to be construed. The additive monist regards them as subdomains of a *single* universe of facts" (*ibid.*: 395).

Thus, according to this distinction, for both the discourse pluralist and the additive monist there are, for example, moral facts and scientific facts but the difference is that for the discourse pluralist, moral facts and scientific facts make up irreducible discourses and have no overarching discourse that binds them, no background discourse. For the additive monist, both moral and scientific facts exist and moral and scientific facts must combine according to some principal in order to be bound together in a single unified coherent discourse. Price's main claim about what separates additive monism from discourse pluralism is that additive monism finds itself in a corner where it must make strong metaphysical and ontological claims and then show how these claims sort through factual discourse and non-factual discourse in order to hold up the unity it claims exists. He says that this strong claim is required because "*diversity* is obvious, being guaranteed by difference of subject matter (once reductionism is rejected). It is the monist's *unity* that calls for substantial agreement" (*ibid.*: 398). This is because the monist must not only show how ontology and metaphysics fit together but must show how these things are *also* bound together at a linguistic and semantic level. This is a tall order. Price's position turns on whether one thinks that no unifying principle is available, or whether no unifying principle exists. This is an important distinction, because if pluralism claims that no principle is available and may in fact never be available, then it is normal to keep the distinctions that different domains of discourse make and in fact to allow a large diversity of practices to exist. However, if the pluralist is claiming that no unifying principle exists, it is difficult to see how their proposition does not fold back into relativism, or as Price prefers, horizontal pluralism. This is because, by claiming that no unifying principle exists, the pluralist is making the same kind of claim as the skeptic, that is, they are affirming the truth of the non-existence of a unifying principle and thus is making a positive claim about this principle. Price shows how this is problematic by showing that these positions all depend on a background discourse. The claim about the non-existence of a unifying principle thus would only make sense against a *background* discourse that grounds and confirms this claim. In this way he would be seen to be folding into exactly what he argued against. Price though clearly argues against this when he claims that the pluralist is merely "asking us to acknowledge" that truth, fact, assertion, belief are "mere products of language, categories thrown up by language itself, and not therefore presupposed by a proper explanatory theory of language" (*ibid.*: 399).

What I would like to hold onto from this presentation is the notion of vertical pluralism as a pluralism that accepts a plurality of discourses that have ontological autonomy, that are legitimate, and that while they have no unifying principal that is *available* they do not rule out the possibility that one *may* exist. Here is where Weil's presentation of the suite of discursive categories is useful. There are certain concepts that can support a coherent discourse, thus *The Conscience* supports a coherent discourse that is based on a central moral commitment, and *The Condition* supports a coherent discourse that is based on a certain positive view of nature. There are other discourses however that have their autonomous and legitimate frame but do not succeed in creating a single coherent discourse and thus depend of multiple reprises. This is the case with esthetic discourse and epistemic discourse for example. This may be because the esthetic experience and the justificatory necessity that is found in our lives outstrips a single discourse, this may also be because no one has yet succeeded in defining this essential aspect, (though the *Personality* may be close for the esthetic dimension and *The Absolute* is not far off for the justificatory dimension). I am arguing that Weil's theory should be read as a form of vertical pluralism, one that accepts the autonomy and legitimacy of different discursive centers, and that it refuses relativism. But, as I have mentioned, Weil's theory makes sense in terms of orientations and goals. Thus the orientation of pluralism is monist, and the goal is to overcome relativism and move people to pluralism. This is a pluralism that is based on non-violence that thus creates an atmosphere of tolerance. It may be more prudent to say here that pluralism moves towards a formal monism, which merely means that we mobilize all the resources of discourse, and all the categories, in order to look at problems from multiple angles in order to take into account what is said on a subject and understand what means are appropriate in any given situation. I think this is a position that Price would accept if he had Weil's distinction between language and discourse available to him. To show this we can look at two things he says concerning monism and language. First, Price states that "it is not enough for the monist that there be unified world out there; it is also crucial that within each of the disputed parts of language, statements stand in the same relation to the relevant part of the single world. Otherwise, monism is trivial: it is easy to find a unified world to which every use of language relates *in some sense*. The monist requires that it always be *the same sense*" (*ibid.*: 397). Second, he asks whether "the notions of truth, fact, assertion, belief, and so on [are] foundational categories, inevitably central to any theoretical use of language" (*ibid.*: 399). The answer he gives to that question is to say, as I have already mentioned, that all the pluralist asks is that we accept this as a possibility, and we must because as he notes,

"ordinary usage exhibits a unity between the discourses in in question. The issue is whether this superficial unity is more than skin deep" (*ibid.*: 399).

The Weilian answer to this question is that there is a difference to be made between language and discourse. As a reminder, language is seen as the creative and expressive production in human spontaneity at one level, and its instrumental use at another. At these two levels, language makes no claims of epistemic authority, this falls exclusively under the domain of discourse. It is also this difference and this tiered difference that allows for language to hold all the pragmatic and rhetorical effects that it does. Thus, while there is no concrete background *discourse*, Weil claims that all discourses happen against the concrete background of language (creative human spontaneity with semantic rules). At the inside of these discourses, thanks to the different justificatory structures and the criteria of universalizability and coherence, we can indeed judge and compare different discourses. We can judge discourses that make claims to coherence such as a moral or a scientific discourse just as we can judge discourses that do not make claims to govern all aspects of an individual's life. Thanks to reprises we are able to cut up these discourses in different ways and to have different pictures of the world that come out. However, because pluralism is a discursive commitment, just as relativism, skepticism, cynicism, and nihilism are, pluralism demands a decision. The decision that the pluralist makes, according to Weil, is to accept the local relativity of discourses but to work to bring them together into a unity through their reasonable action. This unity is not one that reduces and flattens the difference in the world, but rather one that accepts and celebrates this difference and asks how this diversity fits together. It recognizes that the goal is to bring together different people from different discursive centers in order to build a single *human* community, it thus accepts that this human community is made up of difference. It accepts the limits of epistemic authority, but also recognizes that epistemic authority is something that has been established, that differences have been overcome in the history of human thought and in the history of humanity in general. Because it recognizes this, pluralism works to convince people of the reasonableness of this goal. Pluralism is thus a task, it is a task that has many obstacles in its path which can dissuade the individual from advancing but it is a task that accepts the possibility of unity. Weil presents this position in a long citation in his *Philosophie politique*. He states:

> Men thus confirm through their life what analysis discovers: abstraction, which proceeds by reciprocal negations, separates that which can neither exist nor be understood separately. The opposition war-peace (violence-nonviolence) does not

constitute a subject of more or less intelligent moral debates, but constitutes a problem for action. It is not only a question of realizing a world in which historic morality can coexist with violence: the difficulty is ancient and morality has always *informed* violence inside of every society, every community, every State; from now on it's a question of realizing the world where morality can live with nonviolence, a world in which nonviolence is not a simple absence of meaning,—of this meaning that violence sought in history without knowing what it sought, that it created violently, and that it continues to seek through violent means. The task is to construct a world in which non-violence is real without being the suppression both of the nonsense of violence and of all positive meaning in the lives of men.

And he continues:

It is the question of a *task*, of an action to determine and to undertake at the level of politics and of history. The preceding reflections have changed nothing here; but, once again leaving philosophy, they allow formulating this task more clearly (and in the eyes of the philosopher, have thus transformed it), since it can now state itself under the following form: how can ethical lives [*morales vivantes*], these particular universals, be preserved, despite the formal and general universality of society and despite the formal morality that universally corresponds to this? How can the formal universal of social labor be conserved despite the resistance of particular moralities, despite these struggles that are born all the more easily between them since this universal forces them to establish the tightest of bonds? How, to say it differently still, can there be *a* meaning if in reality one only ever encounters *diverse* particular meanings? And how could these meanings be meaningful if none of them is *the* meaning and if formal universality has introduced the requirement, not only of a meaning, but of *the* meaning, of a meaning that would be universally and thus absolutely justified according to universal criteria? (PP 234).

These obstacles to pluralism are thus real, just as the triumph of relativism, skepticism or any other discursive position would be real. In fact, a careful study of history will show that all of these different discursive positions have become dominant at one time or another, and that the stability that humans seek is fragile. Nonetheless, a careful study of history does not only show the failures of coherent discourse, of the communities that crumbled because they let nihilism or pessimism take hold. History also show that humanity has done exceptional things, that higher levels of unity have been reached. Thus, while it may prove to be a material fact that an absolute unity will never be reached, either because new unities create

their own particular dissatisfactions and injustices, or because there will always be individuals who in their freedom refuse the possibility of unity and thus work to create a new coherent discourse, it is only time that can provide this proof. In the meantime, Weil's philosophical project presents a task to help individuals see their own freedom and to elaborate their own problems in a way that these problems and these dissatisfactions *speak*, and speak loudly, but also coherently. This project hopes to overcome relativism, by aiding individuals to elaborate their own discourse, and to present these discourses into our social reality, but as responsible, reasonable agents, who also bend before the normative weight of better reasons. In this case, the individual, who knows why they struggle, why they work, why they question, can recognize this work and struggle in others. What happens next?

7.4   The Choice of Reason

Skepticism and relativism put us face to face with the decision to be reasonable. All coherent discourse and all dialogue is built on accepting certain minimal grounding principles. Weil's theory shows us that. Once someone has made the choice of reason, the choice to be reasonable, they may continually refute discourse in its own terms in order to create the most coherent, the most rational, the most reasonable position. But the existence of this position does nothing to eliminate the moment of decision. It is every individual, who wants to understand their discourse and themself who must accept these grounding principles, and no coherent discourse can make them see the reasonability of this position if they refuse it. What Weil proposes is a discourse that takes this choice into account, by taking violence into account. This however does nothing to reduce the struggle to understand the social and natural reality in which individual find themselves and on which they act through their discourse. This does nothing to dissolve the fundamental duality between freedom and truth that Weil finds at the bottom of the philosophical endeavor, it also in no way suppresses the radical choice between violence and reason that is always in front of the individual. Rather it allows the individual to understand that they have made this choice in *good conscience*. That they have understood the truth of freedom.

Weil notes that philosophy is "the search for truth, and is only the search for truth" (LP 89) however what philosophy finds at the end is the freedom that grounds it. He thinks that it is only by understanding the radical nature of this freedom (which violence shows) that philosophy will recognize that it itself needs no justification. He notes that "as long as philosophy is not aware it is grounded on freedom, that it believes it needs a justification, it

344

inevitably consists of partial discourse, even there where it is supposed to be absolutely coherent discourse" (LP 64). We justify ourselves, but only against partial discourse, thus we do not need to justify the goal of understanding the world as a coherent whole, precisely because it is nothing more than something we freely choose to do. This does not eliminate the fact that the possibility of understanding is a historical possibility that has taken many shapes, but philosophy acts in the present, and thus it acts in a present that is already formed by discourse.

What Weil's formulation of the problem of grounding philosophy shows us is that even though philosophy is the search for truth, truth poses no problem for philosophy. The individual always speaks from truth, and when they are wrong they are always wrong in truth. As Weil notes, "[t]he *other* of truth is not error, but violence, the refusal of truth, of meaning, of coherence, the choice of the negating act, of incoherent language, of "technical" language that is used without asking what for, silence, the expression of personal sentiment that claims to be personal" (LP 65). Skepticism and relativism, such partial discourses remind of violence's radical nature. Both are discourses that claim to have a necessary hold on us because they are, for the skeptic or the relativist, what is *truly* at the bottom of all discourse. They assign a metaphysical and ontological reality to these particular discourses and commit to them because of this reality. They ask reasonable discourse to justify itself to them, and in doing so, they often drag the individual into their game. Discourse seems arbitrary, philosophy seems to have no foundations, we seem doomed to fail in our naivety, in our faith in the necessity of philosophy. However, what Weil tries to show is that both are a choice, that they are pragmatic *commitments* that individual's freely take on and that then guide or direct their action. We can only ever understand them as a choice, as a commitment, and not as a necessity imposed upon us by the *real* nature of discourse, if we face the fact that *all* discourse is a choice, even that of a reasonable, universal, coherent discourse that seeks to grasp the world comprehensively. For Weil, we can only recognize this radical choice of discourse (even in its most universal and coherent form) if we also recognize that any individual can make another choice, that of violence.

Skepticism and relativism are right, we are doomed to fail, but here, Weil's theory allows us to add, only if we choose them. Any discourse can be subject to radical doubt. Any part of any given experience that can at any given moment be relative and incommensurable. And as long as this is the case, it is possible that that relative aspect can move us, and can move under the cover of darkness so to speak, motivating us or defining the dissatisfaction that can lead us to act. However, and here is Weil's point, as long as that claim is said to be

subjective and relative, it is insufficient to establish any epistemic authority or unity, precisely because the objective and universal are claimed to be incoherent. The activity that this skepticism, that this relativity and incommensurability, bring about does not count, in Weil's sense, as action, because it does not know why it acts. The goal of pluralism then is to conceptualize those claims in a way that allows them to be grasped by coherent discourse, that allows them to hold place in our metaphysical systems, that allows them to be taken up by others and shared, to be the interlocking parts of discourse that leads individuals to see themselves as having full usage of their own reasonable freedom, because they indeed use these claims to enter into the game of giving and asking for reasons. Until this happens our dissatisfaction remains either a silent source of suffering or the arm of our violence.

The prize won at the end of the philosophical endeavor is nothing more than the *clear conscience* of the philosopher who has stopped "looking for the impossible justification of the understanding that predates understanding" (LP 64), because they have grasped the freedom of their choice to be reasonable. Being reasonable is not necessary, philosophy is not necessary, expect for the individual who chooses it. If the philosopher forgets this:

> philosophy renounces understanding itself as a possibility for man and exposes itself to the protest of the concrete individual, and wanting to impose itself on the individual through discourse, it finishes by finding itself obliged to impose itself through violence, calling the one who utters this protest (and even more the one who practices his refusal) a madman or a criminal, that's to say a dangerous animal that needs to be removed or eliminated (LP 65).

Thus, for Weil, philosophy must conceive of itself "as man speaking and who by speaking accounts for his realized possibilities in front of himself; it is the discourse of the man who, having chosen to establish his own coherence for himself, understands everything, by understanding all human understanding and himself" (LP 65). The clear conscience of the philosopher is nothing more than this. It is the person who, faced with the radical choice between reason and violence chooses reason in a world filled with violence and chooses to face this violence head on. It is the person who knows that the choice of reason is as a-rational and arbitrary as the choice of violence, but who in choosing it chooses to understand meaning. This is why necessity, justification, unity are all downstream from discourse and not "in the world" so to speak.

This seems a meager modification to all that the philosophical tradition has created, and Weil admits that. However, he also claims that this meager modification has radical consequences. He states:

If now we cast once more an eye behind us, it appears that the definition of man from which we took our start only underwent a single modification: instead of saying that man is a being gifted with reasonable discourse, we would say that he is a being that can, if he so chooses, be reasonable, that he is, in a word, liberty in view of reason (or for violence), that once he decided to speak in a coherent fashion, the universal is for him the beginning and end of his discourse and we would say that he will radically liberate himself from discourse *knowingly* only after having traveled through discourse in its totality (LP 68).

Because of this modification, if the individual wants to understand themselves with a clear conscience, if they want to grasp meaning and the world, they can no longer view philosophy as it has traditionally been viewed. They must see it as their own activity to give meaning to their life by grasping the meaning in their life coherently. As Weil states, "*[f]irst philosophy* is therefore not a theory of Being, but the development of *logos*, of discourse, for itself and by itself, in the reality of human existence, which understands itself in its realizations, in so far as it *wants* to understand itself. It's not ontology; it's logic, not of Being, but of concrete human discourse, of the discourses that form discourse in its unity" (LP 69). Again, this is a slight modification, but it seems to be the difference that matters because without it, the individual is left defenseless facing their own particularity and violence.

CONCLUSION

In the *Logic of Philosophy* Éric Weil seeks to lead philosophy to grasp itself philosophically. In order to do this, he thinks that understanding violence and its ever-present latent possibility is essential. The question that has to be asked is whether he succeeds. The answer to that question is ambiguous. He succeeds insofar as he develops a discourse that allows him to understand himself philosophically as a philosopher. That is, he articulates a discourse that makes a claim of comprehensive universality that at the same time explains his free choice to philosophize. Thus it accomplishes his goal. To do so, he in a certain sense reconstructs the Hegelian philosophical project, but from the point of view of his present situation. But he is also required to go further than Hegel did, to grasp a reality that Hegel had a hand in shaping. A reality where pure violence has showed its face. Raymond Aron notes that Éric Weil told him "that he was going to bring philosophy to a close", and also notes that he could only marvel at that claim at the same time that he ironically smiled about it (1983: 732). If we ask the question whether Weil succeeded or not in light of Aron's remarks, the answer opens back up, but we must also be suspicious of Aron's claim. Nowhere in Weil's text does he claim to write the *final* word on philosophy, rather he affirms over and over again that philosophy is constantly in the process of starting over. This is even part of his critique of Hegel. Philosophy does not and cannot exhaust the reality of human experience in the world. Weil has not closed the book on philosophy so to speak, precisely because history is not over and people will constantly work to grasp their own time in thought. This is because violence, the *other* of philosophy, moves deeply within us all.

There will always be rebellions against any concrete content that is deployed in philosophy (that is, that makes universal claims), just as there will always be new discourses that raise themselves up, pushed on by a shadowy dissatisfaction that individuals toil to bring to light. This even seems to be what Weil is trying to teach us, the practice of philosophy is unending. It can stop, it can go underground, but it also starts over any time the individual asks the question of meaning for themselves. There is however another question that underlies this one: is his elaboration of the philosophical categories is complete and correct? The response, one that I think Weil would accept, is that only time will tell. However, even if the order should change, or if the suite of categories should be enriched by new categories that Weil could not see, either because they were not present in the tradition that he was working from or because they had not yet been developed in history, Weil clearly thinks he provides us with the tools to tackle this problem. This is why his development of *Meaning* and *Wisdom*

are formal categories. They allow the grasp of all creation of meaning and of life lived meaningfully as a concrete unity. This is also why he claims that *Wisdom* fulfills the requirement of circularity that he gives to his project. The individual who works towards the category of *Wisdom* finds it by reinserting themself into the attitude of *Truth*, but transformed by the path travelled, armed with their mature certainty. But what does that mean concretely? It means that if we take Weil's project seriously, we have to respond to it, we have to give reasoned critique, and that we cannot just dismiss it out of hand. I take Weil's project seriously and yet I am not fully satisfied by it. My own dissatisfaction with Weil's discourse is born of the historical consequence of finding myself in a different context with different concerns and from a different point of view than Weil himself. Weil's discourse examines the western philosophical tradition. It was where he was working from. But the continued globalization of the world and the reasoned critiques that have been levied against the western philosophical tradition are both real and forceful. Does Indian philosophy really fit as neatly as it does into the first categories of a logic of philosophy like Weil seems to think, or did it give rise to different human attitudes that express something that Weil's categories miss? And Chinese philosophy? And what of the other traditions of thought and culture around the world? Does reducing these things to European philosophical forms take something away from them? Does it restrict their full expression? Perhaps. This is not a question that I am competent to answer at this point, but the presence of the problem seems real to me.

Weil modestly reminds us that the *Logic of Philosophy* is no more than "the end of the history that is its own" and that it is only possible "from the moment that violence has been seen in its purity and that, consequently, the will to coherence, as a violent decision (free and unjustifiable) of man against violence ('natural' up to that point), is understood as the center of the world in which this decision is made" (LP 84). In other words, Weil admits the fragility of his project, and recognizes that it will only be taken seriously by those that have already asked themselves how to grasp reality and themselves meaningfully, reasonably, and totally. He also recognizes that this desire to grasp oneself as such cannot be forced upon anyone or given to anyone fully-formed. It always starts from the free choice of a singular individual. Any attempt to show the necessity of Weil's project would invalidate it. Thus, the only way to show that Weil's project fails is to surpass it by providing another coherent and universal discourse that grasps our lives and the world in which we live our lives more comprehensively. However, because this project would surpass Weil's and would show what Weil missed, it would also show the truth of Weil's project, by

building off the partial coherence that Weil elaborated and that this hypothetical system succeeds in showing is partial. Thus to come back to the question of whether Weil succeeds or not, the answer is now, partially, no. This is clear from the legitimate critiques that can be raised against Weil's own presuppositions and his own blind spots.

However, this question only touches the surface of his discourse. The real question is whether his discourse provides the tools to overcome its own blind spots and problems. Here, at least for me, the answer is yes. By articulating the question about the comprehensiveness of discourse in the way he does, and by focusing on the requirement of the openness of discourse, Weil, provides critical tools to help individual's grasp themselves and their experience in the world more comprehensively, more reasonably, and less violently. This includes helping us to articulate what dissatisfies us with Weil's own discourse. I make this claim precisely because, in reading Weil, I have been able to give voice to my own effort to understand the world reasonably and comprehensively, and I understand that this was a choice, and a choice I freely made against the very real background of incoherence and violence of my concrete situation.

The presentation of Weil's philosophical project takes him seriously but also seeks to enrich this project by taking into account posterior developments. The major development that is mobilized here is that of inferentialism. This development enriches Weil's project in two ways. First and most simply, it provides a technical apparatus that allows certain moves that Weil makes in the *Logic of Philosophy* to be made more explicit. However, it only does so because some of the major commitments of both projects are the same. These shared commitments in large part come from the German philosophical tradition around Kant and Hegel. The inferentialist program, by placing the emphasis on the act of committing and of taking others as committed in discourse helps to articulate some of the major commitments of the German tradition (the primacy of the practical, and the emphasis on expression over representation) in our own philosophical language. Weil seems to take these things for granted, having been trained as a philosopher by Ernst Cassirer, one of the most important neo-Kantians, and someone who had absorbed these important lessons from the German tradition. In our modern philosophical discourse, Robert Brandom has admirably defended shifting the emphasis of the understanding meaning from words to sentences, because the sentence, according to him, the minimal meaningful unity we can take responsibility for in judgment. Here he explicitly looks to Kant (2001: 159). Cassirer shares that commitment but attributes its fullest articulation to Humboldt (1954: 105). Cassirer nonetheless reminds us that, for Humboldt, this claim is born of the double influence of Kant's notion of judgment

and Herder's notion of expression (*Ibid.*: 99-108). This influence is clearly present in Weil's work.

By presenting the technical apparatus that he does and by sharing the similar commitments born of the mobilization of (in part) the same tradition, Brandom helps to bring out the modern shape of these commitments. This is what motivates reading the *Logic of Philosophy* along pragmatist, expressivist and inferentialist lines. However, as I have tried to show, Weil's project also has something to add to inferentialism. Brandom notes that philosophy should be viewed as dialogical, open-ended, and pluralist (2002: 91-118) and in his method for tackling historical texts he notes the need to "navigate between different perspectives or contexts specified by different potential interlocutors" (*Ibid.*: 111). This, in my view, is exactly what Weil provides. Reading the different categories of the *Logic of Philosophy* as the inferential unfolding of different discursive positions develops an extremely important tool to help enrich this aspect of the inferentialist project. Both Weil and inferentialists see the need to understand the different types of inferences that lead to different substantive positions and to understand the interplay of these positions, but by starting from the possibility of violence, Weil also adds another piece to the inferentialist project that was missing. It provides a way of understanding how these different positions enter into conflict and what the *real* concrete shapes of these conflicts are.

This sketches the main results that I hope to be taken from this work. In other words, reading Weil along inferentialist lines adds something specific to our understanding of his project, just as inversely, reading inferentialism along Weilian lines does the same for the inferentialist project. This hypothesis motivates the moves made in this work. This reading seeks to bring out the *expressivist* motivations of Weil's distinction between language and discourse, which allows grasping the development of the discursive resources found in the *Logic of Philosophy* as inferential concepts. This modifies the traditional reading of these same resources by claiming that Weil starts by describing the most basic pragmatic attitudes that can be grasped by coherent discourse, namely those of *Truth* and *Nonsense*, in order to develop the concepts necessary for grasping semantically explicit coherent discourses. With these semantic concepts in place, Weil is able to give detailed description of the different semantic categories that, from *The Discussion* to *The Absolute*, develop different coherent grasps of meaning according to the permissible inferences of their different grounding concepts. This also leads us to read the categories *of* philosophy as pragmatic metavocabularies that characterize the individual's relationship to coherent discourse. By articulating the *Logic of Philosophy* this way, we are in a better position to understand why

argumentative practices are so important. Real agreement is only reached when individuals take on the meta-commitment to reasonable (nonviolent) practices. The focus on the argumentative aspect of the *Logic of Philosophy* seeks to understand what the mechanisms of stable and fecund agreement are.

To extend this project, it would be necessary, as already said, to enter into Weil's theory of education, which outstrips the scope of this work. It would also be necessary to engage another project which unfortunately also outstrips the scope of this work, namely an analysis of how Weil deploys the argumentative resources of the *Logic of Philosophy* in his *Philosophie Politique*, his *Philosophie Morale*, and his numerous essays. Therein, we find a philosopher extremely careful to show how to engage in reasonable argumentative practices, who takes the diversity of human discourse and experience non-reductively into account, and who shows how to dissolve the problems that can be dissolved while highlighting the real problems that remain. By showing how problems are in fact problems, he hopes to bring people to the awareness of their own positions concerning these problems and demonstrate how to tackle these problems reasonably. In other words, this leads to what Weil calls an *applied logic of philosophy*, which would consist in grasping the different reprises of coherent discourse in the lived attitudes of concrete individuals. This is necessary because, for Weil, it is the concrete deployment of different reprises that "form the language and the (non-coherent, even though claiming to be coherent) discourses of men" (LP 82).

By showing how concrete individuals live in different attitudes, and by trying to elaborate a comprehensive discourse that takes both these attitudes and their latent violence into account, we are in a better position to understand Weil's insistence on dialogical pluralism. The final result that this dissertation has tried to show is that different metaphysical positions, monism, relativism, skepticism, nihilism, cynicism, reasonable pluralism, are themselves born in discursive commitments. If this is true then the commitments we make matter, because they act upon the world and the discourse of the world. They act upon us human beings, those specifically discursive creatures, that will never be entirely discursive. Both Weil and inferentialism hope to provide the tools needed for the individual to understand themself rationally and reasonably. But, as Weil would add, these tools are only useful to those that demand them for themselves. For those individuals, who do indeed search such tools, this work hopes to insist on the value of using them. This is important for the person who seeks to be reasonable with others in reasonable discourse but also (and perhaps above all) for the person who seeks to be reasonable faced with someone who does not. For those who accept the project of reasonable discourse and who

already deploy it reasonably, this work hopes at least to clarify certain aspects of Weil's contribution to the overall development of reasonable discourse. If nothing else, this work sees itself as modest celebration of the diversity of human experience and a modest celebration of the monumental effort that has been expended to unify that experience reasonably while also recognizing the work that still needs to be done.

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INDEX OF NAMES