

**Certainty or Faith?  
Arendt's and Merleau-Pontys Critique of  
Cartesian Foundationalism**

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Tiivistelmä Referat – Abstract <p>Epistemological foundationalism has for centuries attempted to unify all scientific inquiry into the context of one grand science, the first philosophy. One of the most important tasks of this tradition has been to ground <i>all</i> knowledge on absolutely certain foundations.</p> <p>In this master's thesis I ask the following question: <i>To what extent and under what conditions is it possible to achieve absolute certainty in the sense of the attempts of Cartesian foundationalism?</i> By examining how the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) interpret the epistemological methodology of René Descartes, I claim that the Cartesian achievement of absolute certainty rests on the implicit presupposition of an epistemologically prior form of <i>faith</i> in the world and <i>trust (pistis)</i> in other conscious beings. I show that knowledge is possible only within the context of a common world that is inhabited by several conscious beings that share a common linguistic system. This threefold element is shown to be the bedrock condition for any kind of philosophical inquiry.</p> <p>The main literature sources for this thesis are <i>The Life of the Mind</i> by Hannah Arendt, <i>Le Visible et l'invisible</i> by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, <i>Meditationes de Prima Philosophiae</i> by René Descartes and <i>Erfahrung und Urteil</i> by Edmund Husserl.</p>			
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*“ Each time you write something and you send it out into the world and it becomes public, obviously everybody is free to do with it what he pleases, and this is as it should be. I do not have any quarrel with this. You should not try to hold your hand now on whatever may happen to what you have been thinking for yourself. You should rather try and learn from what other people do with it.”*

- Hannah Arendt

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Framing the research question

Epistemological foundationalism has for centuries attempted to unify all scientific inquiry into the context of one grand science, the first philosophy<sup>1</sup>. One of the most important tasks of this tradition has been to ground all knowledge on an absolutely certain basis. Whether the ideal has been to follow the model of Euclidian geometry and find a set of absolutely certain axioms from which all the rest of philosophy could be logically deduced, or whether the ideal has been to prove the existence of a supreme Being that grants the coherence of an all-explaining system, or to ground a set of indubitable beliefs, the key element of the projects has been the same: to guarantee absolutely certain foundations for all type of knowledge.

The rigor of the task has led to a sharp demarcation between philosophical, *a priori* knowledge on one hand and empirical, *a posteriori* knowledge on the other hand. It has also left unresolved the philosophical problem regarding the relationship between true, philosophical knowledge and mere belief. This is because epistemological foundationalism has generally normatively regarded the strive for certainty as the only right path to truth, claiming that mere, non-founded beliefs cannot guarantee the coherence and rigor that a rigorously scientific philosophical system needs in order to qualify as a science. Partly due to the influence of this tradition, concepts such as *trust* and *faith* are still regarded as opposites to rational knowledge and as concepts belonging to theology, religious studies, social psychology or Christian philosophy rather than to epistemology.

The struggle for epistemological certainty in the era of modern philosophy is deeply rooted in the philosophical project of René Descartes. Although Descartes is best

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<sup>1</sup> Foundationalism is generally defined as a doctrine according to which a set of few basic beliefs are foundational and non-inferential, whereas all other beliefs have to be inferred or justified by means of some prior forms of beliefs. This type of an epistemic structure originates from Aristotle's *Analytica Posteriora* (*Posterior Analytics*) and is developed further most dramatically in the work of René Descartes. Contemporary foundationalist philosophies are those of for example Bertrand Russel, Roderick M. Chisholm and C. I. Lewis. (Audi, ed. 1995/1999, 275-276, 321-323.) Aristotle calls philosophy "First philosophy", meaning that philosophical inquiry must be practiced prior to any other form of scientific inquiry. Aristotles' conception of philosophy is most notably emphasized in the philosophy of René Descartes and Immanuel Kant. Contemporary forms of first philosophy include logical positivism and Husserlian phenomenology.

known for his provocative attempt to refute skepticism, the most important heritage for contemporary philosophy is Descartes' rigorous epistemological methodology that he uses in the fields of metaphysics and natural science. It is the interpretation of Descartes' methodology as a whole, rather than any specific doctrine - such as the mind-body dualism, the equation of space with matter or the discovery of analytic geometry - that has heavily affected and influenced various trends within 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy. The most important and perhaps the last representative of contemporary Cartesian foundationalism is transcendental phenomenology, which interprets Descartes' project first and foremost as an epistemological inquiry into the conditions for the possibility of certain knowledge, focusing mainly on the structures of consciousness and less on Descartes' discoveries in mathematics and empirical sciences. What is significantly unique in Cartesian foundationalism with regard to other types of foundationalism, is the grounding of knowledge in subjectivity. Heavily influenced by German idealism, transcendental phenomenology adapts the Cartesian, first person-perspective as one of its most important methodological doctrines. Both René Descartes and Edmund Husserl, the founder of transcendental phenomenology, regard the immediate awareness of our own sensations, lived experience and thoughts as sufficient to ground and justify the certainty and self-evidence of basic, indubitable knowledge.

In this master's graduate thesis I ask the following question: *To what extent and under what conditions is it possible to achieve absolute certainty in the sense of the attempts of Cartesian foundationalism?* By examining how the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) interpret the epistemological methodology of René Descartes, I claim that the Cartesian achievement of absolute certainty rests on the implicit presupposition of an epistemologically prior form of *faith* in the world and *trust* in other conscious beings<sup>2</sup>. My main argument is that knowledge is possible only within

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<sup>2</sup> Due to a limited amount of space, the thesis is restricted to focus mainly on the three primary sources from the philosophy of Hannah Arendt. These are the essay "What is Existential Philosophy?" and the works *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind - book one: Thinking*.

The primary philosophical sources of Maurice Merleau-Ponty are *Phénoménologie de la Perception (Phenomenology of Perception)*, the two essays *Le Langage Indirect et les Voix du Silence (Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence)* and *Sur la Phénoménologie du Langage (On the Phenomenology of Language)*, *Le Visible et l'invisible (The Visible and the Invisible)* and the essay *L'Œil et l'esprit (The eye and the Mind)*.

The main sources of René Descartes are *Discourse de la Méthode (Discourse on Method)*, and *Meditationes de Prima Philosophiae (Meditations on First Philosophy)*.

the context of a common world that is inhabited by several conscious beings that share a common linguistic system. This threefold element is the bedrock condition for any kind of philosophical inquiry and cannot properly be doubted or bracketed - neither can it be proved beyond doubt. Rather, knowledge begins within the context of a special epistemological belief system that can more properly be called *faith* and *trust* (from the ancient Greek concept *pistis*), rather than knowledge (*doxa* and *episteme*).

The first part of the thesis focuses on Descartes' and Husserl's quest for certainty. The emphasis of the second part of the thesis is in the philosophy of Hannah Arendt. The philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty is approached only in connection to his interpretations of Cartesian, epistemological methodology. Whereas Husserl's attempt is to develop Descartes' methodological doubt beyond Descartes, Arendt and Merleau-Ponty bring up the implicit presuppositions that both Descartes and Husserl make in order to complete the steps of their methods. According to both Arendt and Merleau-Ponty, the Cartesian methodology does not take into account seriously enough the fact that when we begin to examine the certainty of the existence of the world, to doubt its existence, or to justify our beliefs about the world, we are already taking an *affective* position towards the subject matter of our investigation and assuming previous knowledge. We must already have some common criteria and standards for what it means that something is dubitable or that something is justifiable beyond doubt, for otherwise we could not even make the distinction between "dubitable" and "indubitable" knowledge. This type of criteria can only be constituted within a language-using, intersubjective community.

In this thesis I defend the claims of Hannah Arendt and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, that philosophical inquiry is always situated in a specific linguistic, historical, social, and bodily context. The human condition is constituted together with other conscious beings, within a framework of common language and through acting together

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The major sources of Edmund Husserl are *Philosophie der Arithmetik: Mit ergänzenden Texten (1890-1901)* (*Philosophy of Arithmetic*), *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie un phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie* (*Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*); *Formale und Transzendente Logik: Versuch einer Kritik der Logischen Vernunft: Mit ergänzenden Texten* (*Formal and Transcendental Logic*); *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie* (*The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*) and *Erfahrung und Urteil: Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik* (*Experience and Judgment*). In addition to these major sources, also unpublished manuscripts, other major works, essays, letters and interviews by the authors will be cited.

in a shared world. Thus, our basic beliefs are always dependent on a network of other beliefs and therefore it is impossible to locate an absolute ground for knowledge. Absolute certainty in the Cartesian sense can only be achieved within fields of exact sciences such as mathematics and formal logic. Following the existentialist-phenomenological tradition, Arendt and Merleau-Ponty claim that the model for philosophical knowledge in general can never be the model of exact sciences, since the human condition and the position of the philosopher is contingent and changing. The mistaken belief that we could have absolute certainty of the existence of the world or the existence of other conscious beings, or prove their existence, relies in the tendency of Western philosophy to apply the methods and models of mathematical, exact sciences to other fields of science and knowledge. To use the concept of certainty in the same way in all fields of knowledge is a conceptual confusion. The Cartesian thesis that all knowledge can be grounded in subjectivity is one result of this confusion. The way out of the confusion is to investigate what is meant by “certainty” and “truth” within various contexts. Arendt and Merleau-Ponty can thus be said to represent epistemological contextualism as an alternative to foundationalism.

An important element in both Arendt’s and Merleau-Ponty’s late works is, that despite being representatives of the phenomenological tradition, in order to establish their own philosophies Arendt and Merleau-Ponty present critical evaluations also of phenomenology itself, putting into question especially the grounds of its Cartesian form. It is in this light that the concepts of *faith* and *trust* as *philosophical concepts* become relevant. As a consequence, the late philosophies of Arendt and Merleau-Ponty represent the dawn of a new type of phenomenological philosophy that shares several important elements with late analytic, pragmatic philosophy.

## **1.2 Background: the earlier Arendt reception**

The philosophy of Hannah Arendt has experienced a renaissance during the shift of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a wide interest in her still unpublished philosophical papers and working notes, stored at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. During the past two decades, Arendt has mainly been approached as a political theorist or as a



philosopher of moral judgment<sup>3</sup>. The approach is relevant, since the corpus of Arendt's published work consists mainly of political essays and writings on the problematic relationship between action and moral judgment. Most of her main works, including *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *The Human Condition* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* focus on political and moral problems. Due to this, little attention has been paid to the more *theoretical, philosophical* ideas in Arendt's work. Most of the interpretations and commentaries on Hannah Arendt that do examine her philosophical thoughts, focus on the relationship between Arendt's *The Human Condition* and Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*<sup>4</sup>. Also this research is highly relevant, since Martin Heidegger was Arendt's teacher and had a major impact on her thinking. Heidegger introduced her to the phenomenological method and to ancient Greek philosophy, both of which are essential elements in Arendt's writings. However, there are many other important philosophical elements in Arendt's work that have been left in the shadow of the research on the influence of Heidegger. Arendt's philosophical role models included Karl Jaspers, Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Marx, among others and she was also deeply influenced by authors such as Franz Kafka and Nathalie Sarraute<sup>5</sup>.

With the exception of Heidegger, there is basically no research on Arendt's philosophical connection to other phenomenological philosophers, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl<sup>6</sup>. Also research that would focus on the relationship between late analytic, pragmatic philosophy and the thought of Arendt is more or less completely lacking. Even the connection of Arendt's early philosophical writings to

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Dana R. Villa (1996) and (1999), Seyla Benhabib (1990), Bonnie Honig, ed. (1995), Margareth Canovan (1992), Tuija Parvikko (1996). Bikhu Parekh holds that Arendt's method is first and foremost hermeneutical (Parekh 1988). Adriana Cavarero and Julia Kristeva among others, have focused on narration as constitutive of personal identity and subjectivity in Arendt's philosophy (Cavarero 1997/2000; Kristeva 1999/2001). Scholars such as Dana Villa and Jacques Taminiaux, who have primarily focused on the relationship between Heidegger and Arendt have based their methodological analysis mainly on what they call "deconstruction" (see for example Villa 1996; Taminiaux 1992/1997).

<sup>4</sup> See for example Dana Villa (1996) and Jacques Taminiaux (1992/1997).

<sup>5</sup> In a letter to her closest friend, Mary Mc Crathy (August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1972) Arendt writes that her thoughts on what would later become volume I of the *The Life of the Mind* are very similar to Nathalie Sarraute's, especially concerning the discursivity of thinking. Arendt also expresses her enthusiasm about reading more of Sarraute's works (Brightman, ed. 1995, 241-244).

Franz Kafka's conception of time has had a significant influence on Arendt's conception of time (LM I, 202-210; NN 158-162; Taminiaux 1992/1997, 208-210).

<sup>6</sup> Margareth Betz Hull recognizes the importance of Edmund Husserl's impact on Arendt's philosophical method and mentions the connection between Arendt's *The Human Condition* and Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la Perception (Phenomenology of Perception)*, in terms of the lived body, but does not examine the topics in extended detail. Also, she refers only to two of Edmund Husserl's works. Unfortunately Betz Hull's interpretation of Husserl's philosophy is highly simplified. (See Hull 2002, 82-86; 160-166).

those of her late writings, has been noticed by very few scholars<sup>7</sup>. Despite the posthumous translation of for example her doctoral thesis *Love and Saint Augustine* or the biography *Rahel Varnhagen*, these early works are still in a marginalized position.

I suggest that when Arendt's earlier works and *The Human Condition* are read parallel to her last work, *The Life of the Mind*, one finds a continuing thread of thought that develops from early sketches to a mature philosophy of the epistemological relationship between thought and the world<sup>8</sup>. This epistemological framework is something that Arendt discovered after her so called "return to philosophy" in *The Life of the Mind* and her discovery of the late Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy<sup>9</sup>. The highly theoretic framework is the answer that Arendt had searched for in her earlier works, from her doctoral thesis *Love and Saint Augustine*, to her mature work *The Human Condition*. What Arendt is trying to articulate and conceptualize in the earlier works is the problematic and multilayered epistemic, cognitive and social relation between human subjects and the world. In these works she is trying to understand what gives permanence, endurance, stability and most of all meaningfulness to the ever changing and fragile human habitat.

### 1.3 The structure and outline of the masters thesis

The core philosophical topic throughout this thesis is the problem concerning justification of knowledge concerning the external world, or the relationship between "thought and world", as Hannah Arendt herself would formulate her theme of inquiry.

The first part of the thesis investigates the theoretical background of Descartes' and Husserl's foundationalism.

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<sup>7</sup> An exception is Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott's and Juliet Chelius Clark's broad commentary on Arendt's doctoral thesis and Tuija Parvikko's research on the influence of Arendt's early book, *Rahel Varnhagen*, on her political thought in general.

<sup>8</sup> In a letter to Mary Mc Carthy, dated Feb 9<sup>th</sup> 1968, Arendt mentions her attempt to write a second part to *The Human Condition* (Brightman, ed. 1995, 213). This three-volume second part was later published posthumously as *The Life of the Mind*. Also Arendt's assistant Jerome Kohn and Richard Bernstein describes *The Life of the Mind* as a continuation to *The Human Condition* (Kohn, ed. 1996, 142, 156-157). Ronald Beiner illuminates the continuity between Arendt's first and last work by stating: "One might say that the entirety of Arendt's philosophical work merely elaborates the question she had posed directly to Augustine [his craving for a life hereafter]: 'Why should we make a desert out of *this* world'?" (Beiner 1996, 281). Italics added.

<sup>9</sup> See Arendt's letter to Heidegger, 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, 1972 (Ludz, ed. 1998/2004, 191). It is important to note that during this time Arendt also studied in depth the later Wittgenstein, mainly the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. It is evident that Wittgenstein's late philosophy has had an impact on Arendt's conception of philosophical certainty.

**Chapter two** focuses on René Descartes' search for a universal method to ground knowledge on absolutely certain foundations. I introduce at first the historical background of Descartes' quest for certainty (section 2.1). I then show how Descartes' interest in axiomatic-deductive sciences springs forth from a critique of Aristoteles' conception of the epistemology and ontology of mathematics (section 2.2). I argue against the common interpretations of Descartes, that Descartes' search for a universal method (*mathesis universalis*) does not lead him to adopt mathematical or logical deduction as the paradigm for all forms of knowledge. I support my argument by showing how Descartes' use of "deduction" and "inference" vary significantly from the current use of these terms.

Section 2.3 examines Descartes' discovery of the method of doubt. In this section I show how Descartes' quest for certainty leads him to an inquiry beyond physics, into the realm of metaphysics. I argue that within this shift, Descartes realizes that all knowledge cannot be properly grounded through the axiomatic-deductive method. Instead philosophy requires a meditational methodology. Finally, I examine Descartes' arguments for grounding knowledge in the subjective acts of consciousness. I show how God functions as the ultimate, absolute ground for knowledge.

**Chapter three** of this thesis investigates Edmund Husserl's radicalization of Descartes' method. In section 3.1 I introduce Husserl's conception of "philosophy as rigorous Science" (*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*). I show how Husserl's conception of the phenomenological bracketing is a radicalization of Descartes' methodological doubt. Section 3.2 focuses on Husserl's early writings in the philosophy of arithmetic. I show how the philosophical questions concerning the nature of number in this early work influence Husserl's later conception of linguistic objects and how it leads him to make a distinction between authentic, intuitive objects of thought and inauthentic, merely symbolic, linguistic objects. I examine Husserl's conception of linguistic meaning and show how his conception is derivative from his conception of the nature of number. In section 3.3 I follow Husserl's line of thought and show the consequences of his early, hierarchical distinction. I argue that Husserl's radicalization of Cartesian doubt leads him to a difficult position regarding the role of language in knowledge-formation.

**Chapter four** investigates the philosophical method of Hannah Arendt and its relation to the Cartesian, epistemological methodology presented in the two previous chapters. In section 4.1 I show how Arendt's method aims at locating and disclosing

problematic metaphysical conceptions that are due to a careless use of language and a neglect of the difference between various types of knowledge.

Section 4.2 examines Arendt's critique of empiricist foundationalism. I show how Arendt's critique of grounding knowledge in experience culminates in her conception of "the mathematization of nature", in which the whole of nature, including the human being, is understood as an object for applied mathematics. I claim that Arendt's critique is due to her specific conception of the nature of mathematical knowledge. In opposition to Cartesian and Husserlian Platonism or Aristotelian empiricism regarding the nature of mathematical knowledge, Arendt seems to represent structuralism.

Section 4.3 examines Arendt's critique of Cartesian foundationalism. I follow Arendt's argumentation and show how her critique of grounding knowledge in subjectivity is due to the problematic role of language in Cartesian philosophy. I claim that in opposition to an understanding of linguistic meanings as innate or as ideal, omnitemporal objects, Arendt regards that linguistic meaning rises in a complex, social network of language use, which include bodily gestures.

**Chapter five** introduces the philosophical terms of *faith* and *trust* as alternative ways of understanding knowledge concerning the world and other conscious beings. Section 5.1 investigates Maurice Merleau-Ponty's critical interpretation of the Husserlian, phenomenological reductions. I show how Merleau-Ponty claims that a complete phenomenological reduction is impossible due to the structure of perception.

In section 5.2 I will show how Hannah Arendt interprets Merleau-Ponty's notion of *perceptual faith* (*la foi perceptive*) as a specific form of *sense of realness*, which implies that the reality of the world can neither be proven, denied nor neutralized.

Section 5.3 investigates Arendt's and Merleau-Ponty's conception of knowledge concerning other conscious beings. I show how language has a crucial role in the formation of beliefs concerning other people. I further argue that a basic form of spontaneous *trust* in other people functions as the condition for the possibility of meaningful language.

## Part I Certainty in Cartesian and Husserlian foundationalism

### **2. Descartes' method: from *mathesis universalis* to methodological doubt**

The philosophy of René Descartes is a paradigm textbook example of epistemological rationalist foundationalism. Being famous for the *cogito*-argument, Descartes' method is usually regarded as representing a form of an axiomatic method, where non-basic beliefs are attempted to be logically deduced from basic, absolutely grounded beliefs. What is important with regard to the methodology of Descartes is to ask how exactly he justifies the connection between basic, fundamental beliefs and non-basic beliefs. In the following I will examine what type of a foundationalism Descartes represents. I argue that Descartes' method is much more complicated than the usual textbook version and that in fact there is a shift in the methodology of the early and later Descartes. Crucial to Cartesian foundationalism is not only the geometrical, axiomatic method, but also the justification of knowledge by relying on intellectual intuition. In this way the final and absolute, subjectivity-centered ground for knowledge is reached through a meditative methodological procedure.

#### **2.1 Historical background: motivations for the search of a new method**

In the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii* (*Rules for the direction of Mind*) and later in the *Discourse de la Méthode pour bien conduire sa raison* (*Discourse on Method*) Descartes explains his motivation for constructing a new scientific method<sup>10</sup>. He holds that the scientific theories of his time are methodologically so various that their principles contradict one another. Another problem that Descartes diagnoses is the tendency of common people to base their knowledge on mere opinions and beliefs (AT VI, 10-11/CSM I, 115-116). Even more serious according to Descartes, is the fact that even

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<sup>10</sup> The original version of the *Regulae* was written between 1625 and 1628 but was not published until 1701. The original name of the *Discours* is *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, & chercher la vérité dans les sciences. Plus la dioptrique; les météores et la géométrie*. It was first published in 1637 as a preface to the *Meteors, Optics and Geometry* of Descartes.

literate, educated people, including the authors of education materials, seem to adopt either a scholastic dogmatism or a complete ignorance in their attitudes towards the possibilities that rigorous scientific investigation could offer (AT VI 4-6, 15-16/CSM I, 112-113, 118-119). Descartes holds that it is his duty to change these defects (AT VI, 69/CSM I, 146). Thus he sets as his life's task to attain certain knowledge. This means nothing less than unifying all sciences into one coherent and clear corpus that rests on an absolutely certain basis. However, even unifying the sciences is not enough. Descartes must also be able to present the central ideas of his system with such clarity that any reasonable person can understand and repeat them.<sup>11</sup>

The leading philosophical and scientific paradigm in Descartes' intellectual environment was Aristotelian physics, metaphysics and scholasticism. However, during this historical era also another philosophical paradigm had begun to evolve. Applied mathematics had received a wholly new meaning and range with the hypotheses and discoveries of Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). Descartes was well aware of the new experimental natural-scientific method and manner of explanation. He devoted himself with enthusiasm to experiments in physics and optics (Hatfield 2003, 288-289; Hooper 1998, 149). In 1633 Descartes planned to publish a manuscript called *Le Monde (The World)*<sup>12</sup> in which he anticipated the Newtonian, mechanistic physics and claimed the universe to be a heliocentric system.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately for Descartes, the Catholic Church condemned Galileo's views during the same year and rumors of Descartes' own thoughts spread

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<sup>11</sup> Descartes' emphasis on the solitude and personal task of the philosopher is usually understood as an expression of an Augustinian attitude, inherited from his educational upbringing among Jesuits (see for example Hatfield 1985, 43-44). The parallel between Augustine's *Confessiones (Confessions)* and Descartes' narrative way of introducing his own works is important. However, it is equally important to pay attention to the overall atmosphere of 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The explorations, global markets and especially the reformation all contributed to the birth of an individualistic epistemology and methodology. A part of this individualistic tradition was that scientists, just like the explorers, would set out to discover the world by their own. This is also the role that Descartes took. However, an important demarcation for scientific knowledge was objectivity. Scientific theses had to be proven by the use of experiments that could be repeated by other scientists. Descartes' narrative writing style and the publication of his replies to the objections of the *Meditationes de Prima Philosophiae (Meditations on First Philosophy)* seem to serve this purpose. In addition to Descartes, even Hobbes, Galileo, Bacon, Boyle and Newton all saw themselves as the discoverers of a new revolutionary scientific method. (Machamer, 1999, 13-15; Sintonen & Kiikeri 2004, 207-210.)

<sup>12</sup> The original title of this work is *Le Monde de Mr Descartes; ou le traité de la lumière*. The work was published posthumously in 1664.

<sup>13</sup> Much later, in 1664, while working on his own theory, Isaac Newton studied critically Descartes' *Principia* (Hatfield 2003, 30).

among the learned (Kenny 1968, 7). Descartes' major book was not to be published during his lifetime.

These events seem to have changed the course of Descartes' writings. In the *Discours*, Descartes emphasizes that he does not advise everyone to imitate his method and that it should be applied only for philosophical and metaphysical meditations, not for practical and political means. (AT VI, 4, 13-15, 23-27/CSM I, 112, 117-118, 122-124.) Thus it seems that Descartes is defending himself in advance by constant reference to his obedience as a citizen and a religious person, who has no interests in offending the Catholic Church (AT VI, 23, 60-61/CSM I, 122, 141-142). This same tone is continued in the dedicatory letter of Descartes' later grand work, the *Meditationes*<sup>14</sup>. However, the sixth part of the *Discours* suddenly declares for the freedom of scientific research. After explaining shortly the central attempt of his *Le Monde* - which is to offer a new account of the material world and the celestial bodies - Descartes stresses the importance of establishing a free scientific community. He suddenly celebrates the search of scientific knowledge for *practical* means and claims that his next aim is:

“[...] to communicate faithfully to the public what little I had discovered, and to urge the best minds to try and make further progress by helping with the necessary observations, each according to his inclination and ability, and by communicating to the public everything they learn. Thus, by building upon the work of our predecessors and combining the lives and labours of many, we might make much greater progress working together than anyone could make on his own.” (AT VI, 63/CSM I, 143.)

Descartes even claims that he will not publish all his ideas during his lifetime, but bequeaths instead his writings to his followers. (AT VI, 66/CSM I, 145.) His wish is, that after his death, he will not be condemned according to rumors, but that his reputation will be judged solely on the basis of his actual writings. Taking into account these shifts of attitude in Descartes' motivations for discovering a new method are important for understanding what the new method actually consists in.

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<sup>14</sup> This work was first published in 1641 as *Meditationes de prima philosophiae* (*Meditations on First Philosophy*). In 1642 a second edition that included the objections and replies to this work was published.

## 2.2 The confrontation with Aristotelian mathematics

In an often quoted letter to his long time friend, Father Mersenne (28th of January 1641), Descartes describes his *Meditationes* in the following way:

“[...] and I may tell you, between ourselves, that these six Meditations contain all the foundations of my physics. But please do not tell people, for that might make it harder for supporters of Aristotle to approve them. I hope that readers will gradually get used to my principles, and recognize their truth, before they notice that they destroy the principles of Aristotle.” (AT III, 298/CSM III, 173.)

Descartes has thus obviously rejected the Aristotelian conception of reality. His approach already in *Le Monde* was radical enough to confront the Church. Indeed, on behalf of the letter to Mersenne quoted above, it may seem as if the *Meditationes* is simply a camouflage for Descartes' materialistic and mechanistic physics. The proofs of God and the immortality of the soul may seem imported to the general materialistic conception of the world and the human being presented in the *Meditationes* (Clarke, 1982; Caton 1973).

This view can be supported if Descartes' method is interpreted primarily as a method suitable for natural sciences. According to Anthony Kenny, Descartes' scientific method even in his later works consists in examining whether there are any propositions whose truth can be known with absolute certainty. If there are any such propositions, then these will qualify as the principles of scientific knowledge (*scientia*). The rest of the science is to be inferred from these first principles through the use of an axiomatic-deductive method (Kenny, 1968). If Descartes' method indeed consists of a logical deduction, then this supports the interpretations according to which Descartes' primary interest is to find a suitable *mathematical* method to ground his mechanistic naturalism.

It is true that there is an evident similarity between the basic axiomatic-deductive proof method of geometry and the rhetoric of Descartes' philosophy. In his early experiments with physics and in works such as the *Regulae* Descartes is explicitly attempting to ground physics in mathematics. Also the *Discours* contains several passages in support of this type of a reductionism. However, it is not evident that Descartes regarded mathematics as the universal paradigm for all scientific knowledge, or that he would have considered the axiomatic-deductive method as the one and only method that he was searching for. As Doren A. Recker notes, although Descartes uses a



vocabulary that resembles contemporary logic, it is important to pay careful attention to how Descartes uses concepts such as “mathematical demonstration” and “deduction” before reading any present-day logical reasoning into his texts. Recker shows through a detailed examination of Descartes’ early scientific practices, that Descartes’ way of using “deduction” does not correspond to the present-day meaning of deduction (Recker 1993, 223-244). What Descartes is actually doing when using the term “deduction”, is not inferring deductively valid conclusions from true premises. Instead, the term has several operational meanings for Descartes, varying from “explanation” to “demonstration”<sup>15</sup>.

There is indeed textual evidence that supports the interpretation according to which Descartes does not consider mathematical or logical deduction as the philosophical method *par excellence*. In the correspondence after 1630, Descartes expresses in several ways his dissatisfaction with abstract mathematics. For example on April 15, 1630, Descartes writes to Mersenne: “As far as the [mathematical] problems are concerned, I will send you a million of them to set for others if you wish; but I am so tired of mathematics and take so little account of them now that I would hardly take the trouble to solve the problems myself” (AT I, 139, translation modified). In 1637 Descartes writes in his *Discours*:

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<sup>15</sup> In contrast to most textbook interpretations of Descartes, Recker has also examined the historical meaning of several key concepts that Descartes uses. According to Recker, during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the French verb *déduire* was used interchangeably with “discussion” and “explanatory narration” (Recker 1993, 225-226). Also, when Descartes uses mathematics as an analogy, he refers to the Greek understanding of mathematics [*mathesis*] as a “general ‘process of learning’ or ‘universal method’, rather than as the [exact science] ‘mathematics’ ” as it is understood in Latin (ibid, 228). Thus even the concept *mathesis universalis* must not be translated as “universal mathematics”, but rather as “the universal method” (ibid, 228-229; AT X, 377/CSM I, 19). A similar view is presented by Frederick P. Van De Pitte, in his detailed study of Descartes’ conception of *Mathesis Universalis* (Van De Pitte 1979/1991, 61-79) and by Desmond Clarke in his detailed study of Descartes’ use of deduction and demonstration (Clarke 1977/1991, 237-247). Stephen Gaukroger points out that already in the early work *Géométrie*, Descartes does not see any epistemic value in demonstrating the truth of a solved problem with the help of mathematical deduction. It is enough for him to use simple mathematical equations for discovering the solutions to various problems. Gaukroger holds that it is precisely for this reason that Descartes does not see the opportunity to expand his algebraic method to logic, as for example Leibniz and Boole does. (Gaukroger 1992, 106.) Also Henk J.M. Bos, in his detailed work on the concept of geometric exactness in Descartes’ work, argues that Descartes theory of equations in the *Géométrie* contains no proofs (Bos 2001, 384, 386). There is a wide ongoing debate regarding the use of deduction and inference in Descartes’ philosophy. Due to the limited space of this masters’ thesis, I will not enter this debate in further detail. The task would require a work of its own. What is of interest in this thesis is the complex relationship between Descartes’ early and late methodology. For the support of the general argument of this thesis, it is enough to state that there is strong support for the interpretation according to which Descartes’ universal method is not a mathematical method in the modern sense. This becomes especially important when examining the method Descartes uses in the *Meditationes* (chapter 2.3 below).

“As to the analysis of the ancients and the algebra of the moderns, they cover only highly abstract matters, which seem to have no use. Moreover the former is so closely tied to the examination of figures that it cannot exercise the intellect without greatly tiring the imagination; and the latter is so confined to certain rules and symbols that the end result is a confused and obscure art which encumbers the mind, rather than a science which cultivates it. For this reason I thought I had to seek some other method comprising the advantages of these three subjects but free from their defects.” (AT VI, 17-18/CSM I, 119-120.)

Taking the axioms of Euclidean geometry as the first principles for his metaphysics would contribute greatly to the production of a mechanistic and materialistic system similar to the natural science of Galileo and the later Thomas Hobbes. But Descartes explicitly rejects this type of a philosophical foundation. The reason for this lies in his antagonism with Aristoteles’ metaphysics. In works such as *Regulae*, *Géométrie* and *Discours*, Descartes is not only opposing the Aristotelian geocentric system, but also the Aristotelian conception of number, space and matter (Gaukroger 1992).

In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle argues against Plato and the Pythagoreans that mathematical objects in themselves do not have a transcendent existence separate from the actual material world. Instead they have two ways of existing. Abstract mathematical objects of thought exist in the form of intelligible matter [*hylē noētē*] and sensible mathematical objects such as collections of things, lines and shapes exist in the form of sensible matter [*hylē aisthētē*]. (*Metaphysics* VII 1036a 5-10, 1045a 34; XIV 1090a 25-30, 1093b 25; Gaukroger 1992, 100-102; Heath 1949, 213-214.)<sup>16</sup> Aristotle holds that we come to understand mathematical objects by abstracting [*khōrismos*] from actual, sensible objects, such as shapes and collections of various things (*Metaphysics* XIII, 3). For example geometrical objects such as lines are understood by abstracting from perceptual, spatial shapes (XIII 1078a 2-31). A common example used by Aristotle to illustrate this type of abstraction is a bronze sphere. The definition of the shape of the sphere is given by subtracting the material of the sphere (bronze) from its shape. One is

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<sup>16</sup> In book XIII of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle examines the Platonist and Pythagorean views according to which mathematical objects are eternal and have a separate, independent existence. Aristotle holds that mathematics is a field of philosophy, defined as the theoretical science of quantitative being. Mathematics does not concern motion, which is the area of investigation in physics – or more clearly, the philosophy of nature. Contra Plato, Platonists and Pythagoreans, Aristotle does not hold that mathematical objects have an existence separate from sensible objects, since the only immovable and independently existing being is the immovable mover (God) (*Metaphysics* XI, 1064a 30 - 1064b 5). In the last section of the last book of *Metaphysics* Aristotle further clarifies: “The fact that our opponents have much trouble with the generation of numbers and can in no way make a system of them, seems to indicate that the objects of mathematics are not separable from sensible things, as some say, and that they are not the first principles” (XIV, 1093b 24-30).

thus left with an intelligible understanding of “circular” and “circle” in general, in contrast to an understanding of what the shape of a particular bronze sphere is (Heath 1945, 213-214). In the same way numbers are always first understood as numbers of something or units of something (*Metaphysics* V 1020a 9-13; XIV 1087b 34 - 1088a 5, 1090a 25-35)<sup>17</sup>. In addition or subtraction one is always adding or subtracting an amount of some objects with or from another amount of some other objects.

Descartes’ conception is quite different. According to him, mathematical objects do exist as eternal and transcendent (AT I, 145-146/CSMK III, 23). We learn the essence of such objects through acts of pure intellectual perception. Geometry forms an ideal system that the intellect can grasp and apply to various concrete physical phenomena through the faculty of imagination (Gaukroger 1992, 108-111). In addition, since Descartes is interested in negative and imaginary roots, he cannot accept the Aristotelian conception of number. On the basis of the Aristotelian conception of number, it would be very difficult to explain how one would be able to abstract from sensible, spatial shapes or collections a mathematical object such as “ $-\sqrt{5}$ ”. In Ancient Greek mathematics, receiving a negative number as the answer to a problem indicated an error in the process of calculation. The only possible numbers were the natural numbers<sup>18</sup> (Gaukroger 1992, 103).

For Descartes, solving geometrical problems does not require limiting the process to operations with line lengths, areas or volumes. Nor does he think that it even requires the drawing of figures, such as lines or circles. Instead, Descartes uses coordinates, designates line segments with single letters and uses simple algebraic equations to solve the problems. (AT VI, I 370-374/Descartes 1637/1954, 5-10; *Rule 16*, AT X, 454-459/CSM I, 66-70.) What is significant for him in this method is the level of abstractness. Descartes is not interested in the actual lengths, volumes, areas or numbers that he is operating with, but simply in the structure of the actual equations. (Gaukroger 1992, 105.) Mathematical objects received in this way, are strictly formal and abstract<sup>19</sup>. This type of algebra was not possible for Aristotle, since operations with several unknown variables or the use of more than three dimensions had not been discovered

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<sup>17</sup> This is also Euclid’s view in Book VII of the *Elements*.

<sup>18</sup> Negative numbers and irrational numbers were considered impossible numbers. They did not correspond to any object in the domain understood as numbers.

<sup>19</sup> In his early *Géométrie*, Descartes is able to make geometrical constructions with more than three dimensions. For example in the third part of the *Géométrie*, he gives solutions to equations of higher degree than the traditional second and third degree equations (AT VI, III/Descartes 1637/1954, book III).

during his time. Equations of algebraic type were solved by simple geometry (Heath 1949, 223-224).

Descartes does stress the importance of geometry but not on the same grounds that ancient Greek geometers did, as a practice of measuring or calculating line lengths or volumes (Bos 2000, 297-301). For Descartes, geometry is the necessary link that combines algebra to a highly abstract physics. In the early *Regulae* his aim is to construct a science of theoretical physics, but the application of the highly abstract algebra to the actual physical world seems to cause him great problems. On the other hand, he also seems to regard algebra as simply an abstract technique for solving equations. Hence the statement: “[...] which seems to have no use”<sup>20</sup> (quoted above: AT VI, 18/CSM I, 119-120.)

When Descartes writes to Mersenne that the principles of his physics, as they are expressed in the *Meditationes*, will refute the Aristotelian principles, he is not really saying anything that his earlier works would not already have implied. Nor does the refutation of the Aristotelian principles of physics imply the affirmation of Galilean physics. The principles of Descartes’ algebra, expressed in his early *Géométrie*, already refute the Aristotelian conception of physics because Descartes does not make a distinction between space and matter. For him, they are identical, that is, they are extensional substance (*res extensa*) (*Principia*, II, §4, §11, §13). For Descartes, geometry is not the science of areas, volumes or line lengths, but a *method* for the formalization of extension. Thus physics, as a science of matter and motion must be properly grounded in through the method of analytic geometry. However, since Descartes’ whole philosophical project is primarily epistemological, he is not satisfied with simply giving a mathematical account for the foundations of geometry such as he had done in the *Géométrie*. Instead, he attempts to give also a philosophical analysis for the condition of the possibility for

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<sup>20</sup> Henk J.M Bos shows an important discontinuity with Descartes’ conception of method and the development of his discoveries in geometry. According to Bos, in the 1620s Descartes faces great difficulties with the complexity of geometrical interpretation of algebraic operations and with the solutions of higher order equations. Bos suggests that due to this, Descartes gives up the early project of the *Regulae* to use mathematical exactness as the paradigm of all philosophical inquiry. Bos further argues that the analogy between mathematics and philosophy is much less rigorous in the *Discours* than in the *Regulae*. Thus, already from the 1620s onward, geometry seems to become a somewhat independent program for Descartes. (Bos 2001, 268-270, 402-407.) According to Gary Hatfield, Descartes makes a turn towards metaphysics during 1629-1630, when he claims to have discovered the foundations of physics while meditating on God and the soul (Hatfield, 2004, 289). Desmond M. Clarke refers to Descartes’ correspondence during the 1630s and emphasizes that Descartes lost interest in pure mathematics after he had started studying physics in more detail. (Clarke 1977/1991, 243).

geometrical understanding. In addition, when Descartes had read Mersenne's French translation of Galileo's *Due Nuovo Scienze*<sup>21</sup> (*Two new Sciences*), in 1638, he expressed his deep dissatisfaction with Galileo's work. Descartes did not consider Galileo to be a very extraordinary mathematician and did not even think that he had begun his physics rightly from the first principles (AT, 380/CSM III, 124). In 1638 Descartes wrote to Mersenne:

“Generally speaking, I find he [Galileo] philosophizes much more ably than is usual, in that, so far as he can, he abandons the errors of the Schools and tries to use mathematical methods in the investigation of physical questions. [...] But he continually digresses, and he does not take time to explain matters fully. This in my view is a mistake: it shows that he has not investigated matters in an orderly way, and has merely sought explanations for some particular effects, without going into the primary causes in nature; hence his building lacks a foundation. [...] When looking at his propositions, it simply struck me that you do not need to be a great geometrician to discover them; and he does not always take the shortest possible route, which leaves something to be desired. [...] Moreover, I see nothing in his books that gives me cause to be envious, and hardly anything I would wish to acknowledge as my own.”<sup>22</sup>

It seems thus obvious, that Descartes' aim in writing the *Meditationes* cannot have been simply the covering up of his heliocentric conception of the universe. If Descartes' purpose had simply been to convince the Catholic Church and the Aristotelians of his religiosity, the *Meditationes* would have been a weak defense. Proving the existence of God and the immortality of the soul in his system would not have changed the view held by the Church. The Church had condemned Galileo because he had held that the earth revolves around the sun. It would not have mattered whether Galileo would have placed God as the first cause and force of the universe and the mover of the earth, because according to the Catholic Church, the heliocentric view *per se* was in contradiction with the Holy Scriptures. Descartes' project should thus be understood as an attempt to develop a method that replaces both the shortcomings of the “unsystematic” physics of Galileo, as well as the “old” Aristotelian physics.

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<sup>21</sup> The whole original title of the book is: *Discorsi e Dimonstrazioni Matematiche intorno a Due Nuove Scienze Attinenti alla Mechanica i Movimenti Locali. Opere di Galileo.*

<sup>22</sup> Letter to Mersenne on the 11th of October 1638. AT II, 380-389/CSM II, 124-128

### 2.3 Discovering the method of doubt

Whereas in the earlier works Descartes relies heavily on empirical experiments and arguments in order to demonstrate his discoveries in physics, in the *Meditationes* he attempts instead to reach the philosophical inquiry beyond physics, into metaphysics. In this way, Descartes tries to examine the object of his investigations, such as the laws of physics, from a meta-perspective. The science of nature is according to him grounded in the abstract mathematics of the *res extensa* and now he needs to ground the certainty of mathematics. Thus, there seems to be a shift towards a rationalist metaphysics in the later works. Descartes now sets very high criteria for epistemic certainty. From the *Meditationes* on, this high degree of certainty is achieved only through the pure intellect.

According to Descartes, we have to have an understanding of what the essence of space, time and matter in general are, before we can start to measure them. We cannot simply take the physical nature at face value and start experimenting with it. Why is this? Because our understanding of nature is dependent on sense-perception. Contrary to for example Aristotle, Galileo and Bacon, Descartes holds that sense-perception is not a reliable source for rigorous knowledge, since perceptual errors and illusions are quite common (AT VII, 18-19/CSM II, 12-13). If some phenomena can be classified as optical or auditory illusions, then how do we know how many other types of perceptual phenomena there are that qualify to this same category?<sup>23</sup> In fact, on what basis do we even believe that the world is the way we perceive it? According to Descartes, in order for a science to rest on an absolutely certain basis, it cannot afford to ignore these types of questions. It has to take the challenge of skepticism seriously. But how is it possible to reach a meta-perspective of physical reality?

In the *Meditationes* Descartes attempts to answer the skeptical challenge in its own terms by following the argument as far as possible. Descartes' method is here both destructive and constructive. Gary Hatfield points out that there is a purpose for why Descartes writes the *Meditationes* from a first-person perspective and in the form of a narrative. The reader is supposed to take the meditator's place - the "I" - during the

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<sup>23</sup> In the *Dioptrique* for example, Descartes was puzzled by the optical illusion where the moon appears larger when setting or rising over a landscape in the horizon than when looked at directly overhead, even though both moons are exactly the same size. A current day example of an auditory illusion is hearing the sound of a siren coming from a vehicle moving with high speed. The pitch of the sound of the siren seems to be higher when the vehicle is ahead of us and then the pitch seems to fall with one note at a time until we do not hear the sound anymore. The siren however, produces the same sound all the time.

course of the meditations. According to Hatfield, the *Meditationes* are a series of cognitive exercises attempted to guide the reader's attention through the six meditations. (Hatfield 2004, 42.) The intention is thus not to convince or persuade the reader of the ideas of the author through the use of logically valid arguments. Rather, Descartes wants to enable the reader to follow him to the perspective of a rationalist metaphysics. According to Descartes, in order to reach a perspective pure from even the slightest possibility of perceptual error, one needs to reach beyond the sphere of sense-perception (AT VII, 157/CSM II, 111). In other words, the *Meditationes* are supposed to guide the reader to a point where the mind turns on itself and takes itself as the object of reflection (AT VII, 73/CSM II, 51). As it can be seen, the whole approach to science in the *Meditationes* is quite different from that of Descartes' earlier writings, including the *Discours*<sup>24</sup>. Descartes opens the *First Meditation* with the following passage that describes the destructive part of the method:

“Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently based on them. I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last.” (AT VII, 17/CSM II, 12.)

The purpose of the meditations is thus to suspend judgment of all beliefs that have the slightest possibility of error. Descartes further clarifies: “[T]o do this I will not need to run through them all individually, which would be an endless task. Once the foundations of a building are undermined, anything built on them collapses of its own accord; so I will go straight for the basic principles on which the former beliefs rested.” (AT VII, 18/CSM II, 12) Descartes thus makes the foundationalist assumption that all knowledge is built on a few epistemologically basic beliefs. What Descartes wants to discover is a set of indubitable beliefs that need no further justification.

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<sup>24</sup> Only a few years earlier, in the *Discours*, Descartes had explained how carefully he had proceeded. He compared himself to a man walking alone in the twilight, taking each step carefully and investigating one opinion at a time (AT VI, 17/CSM I, 119). He even says that he had not dared to use his new method on all sciences at once (AT VI, 21/CSM I, 121). The tone of the *Meditationes* is much more strict, since it encourages to rid oneself of all beliefs at once. Later, in the *Principia*, Descartes claims that “[t]he seeker of truth must, once in the course of his life, doubt everything, as far as possible” and continues that “[w]hat is doubtful should even be considered as false”. (*Principia I-II*/AT VIIIA, 5/CSM I, 193.)

In the *First Meditation*, Descartes guides the reader to see the possibility of doubting beliefs based on sense-perception. He claims that while asleep in bed, one usually dreams of being somewhere else than in bed. In a sense, one seems to be in two places at the same time. From this he concludes that actually “[...] there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep.” However, even in dreams things cannot be perceived unless they exist as objects in space and time. Descartes also holds that basic mathematical laws, such as laws of simple arithmetic are valid even in dreams. This leads him to think that complex thoughts and perceptions, such as states of affairs and physical objects are founded on an understanding of the most basic principles of knowledge (AT VII, 19-20/CSM II, 13-14.) In the *Second Meditation* Descartes sets out to test his hypothesis by expanding the scope of doubt to include even beliefs based on imagination. It is in this way that he reaches the conclusion that even if he doubts everything that he possibly can, he cannot doubt that he doubts. He concludes that since there is doubt, there must be someone who doubts (AT VII, 26/CSM II, 17). Even if an evil, demonic deceiver would convince him that he does not exist, the deceiver would have to convince someone that this someone does not exist (ibid.).

Janet Broughton compares Descartes’ methodological doubt to a kind of game in which the player suspends judgment in all beliefs that cannot be regarded as absolutely certain (Broughton 2002, 49-54.) The game-analogy is insightful since it pays attention to the fact that Descartes does not mean that we should, or even could actually doubt for example the existence of one’s own body or the external world (*Fifth set of Replies*/AT VII, 351/CSM, 243). The whole procedure of doubt is for him a kind of thought-experiment that will guide the meditating self (*ego*) to see the possibilities and limitations of its perceptual and cognitive capacities. Throughout the meditations Descartes invites the reader into the game of doubt by using sentences such as “now let us *assume* that”, “I *pretend* that”. Thus, Descartes’ intention is not to claim for example that the existence of one’s own body could ever be doubted for real (Wolterstorff 1993, 475-477, 492). Instead, Descartes uses doubt as a hypothetical and a methodological tool.

The proposition *cogito ergo sum* which Descartes already in the *Discours* claims to have achieved through the use of methodological doubt, is of such importance for him, since the understanding or intuitive “seeing” of the self-evidence of this



proposition opens up the sphere of pure thinking for the meditator (AT VII, 27-29/CSM II, 18-19, 160). Descartes holds that this sphere is the source of indubitable knowledge (AT VII, 38/CSM II, 27). In order to demonstrate the different aspects of thinking, such as imagination and understanding Descartes plays a thought-experiment using a piece of wax as his example. According to him, we can consider the wax as a solid piece, or imagine it in a liquid form and realize how the shape of the object changes. But no matter how we apprehend an object, such as in this case the piece of wax, it is always the “I” of my thinking that relates to the object through imagination, sensing, doubting or some other mental act. (AT VII, 28, 31-33/CSM II, 19, 21-22.) In the *Third Meditation* Descartes clarifies his conception of thinking by describing thinking as always intentional (AT VII, 37/CSM II 26). It is always the act of thinking that relates intentionally to the object of thought, whether the object is real or imaginary (Reuter 2004, 73; Alanen 2003, 112-118). Understanding Descartes’ use of the scholastic conception of intentionality is crucial for understanding his conception of certainty. It does not matter whether the object of thought is real or imaginary, since in both cases the presence of the object to the mind can be given with equal certainty. It is for this reason that Descartes claims that “[...] I know plainly that I can achieve an easier and more evident perception of my own mind than of anything else” (AT VII, 34/CSM II, 22-23). This also clarifies the common misunderstandings according to which Descartes is applying the mathematical, axiomatic-deductive model also to the sphere of thinking. The misunderstanding is due to a neglect of the important methodological distinction that Descartes makes between *synthesis* and *analysis*. The former consists indeed of geometric, axiomatic-deductive reasoning, whereas the latter presupposes no axioms but proceeds instead through stepwise meditations and a description of the indubitable principles apprehended through intuition (AT VII, 155-156/CSM II, 110-111). In the *Second Set of Replies* Descartes makes again this important distinction and writes:

“This is why I wrote ‘Meditations’ rather than ‘Disputations’, as the philosophers have done, or ‘Theorems and Problems’, as the geometers would have done. In so doing I wanted to make it clear that I would have nothing to do with anyone who was not willing to join me in meditating and giving the subject attentive consideration.” (AT VII, 157/CSM II, 112.)

Descartes' method in the *Meditationes* is thus different from the method he uses in his mathematics and physics. It is not deductive but analytic (Hatfield 2004, 40). He does not infer mathematical propositions and principles from propositions concerning knowledge of the mind<sup>25</sup>. Nor is his aim to infer the proposition "I exist" from the proposition "I think". As Descartes writes in the *Second Set of Replies*:

"Now awareness of first principles is not normally called "knowledge" by dialecticians. And when we become aware that we are thinking things, this is a primary notion, which is not derived by means of any syllogism. When someone says 'I am thinking, therefore I am, or exist', he does not deduce the existence from thoughts by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have had to have previous knowledge of the major premises 'Everything which thinks is, or exists'; yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing."<sup>26</sup>

It seems that for Descartes, the sentence "*cogito ergo sum*" is intuitively apprehended as a conjunction, "I think and I am", not as an inference. It is important to remember here the first-person perspective in Descartes' later philosophy. It is the very act of thinking that justifies to the meditator the certainty of his *own* existence. At times Descartes even uses the Latin word "*ego*" to highlight the importance of the first-person perspective. For example in the passage from the *Second set of Replies*, quoted above, Descartes uses the expression "*ego cogito ergo sum*"<sup>27</sup>. When the meditator is doubting, he cannot doubt that he is doubting. And in the mental act of doubting, it is self-evident for him, in other words, he is intuitively conscious of the fact that he himself exists as the one who is now doubting and thinking, he is a "thinking thing"<sup>28</sup>. It is this type of self-evident and self-

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<sup>25</sup> If this would be the case, then Descartes would leap into serious psychologism. The "*cogito* argument" should not be considered as a logical truth, since logical truths are not dependent on someone thinking about them. Although Descartes' holds that the "*cogito* argument" has a universal scope, it is meant to be valid only as long as the ego is meditating upon it. In this way it is a contingent truth. Since Descartes is more interested in certainty than in truth, it does not matter that the truth of the argument is contingent. For the meditating ego, the evidence of the cogitations are still absolutely certain.

<sup>26</sup> *Second set of Replies* (AT VII, 140/CSM II, 100).

<sup>27</sup> Also in the *Principia*, part I, §7 and §10 Descartes uses this way of expression (AT VIII A, 7-8/CSM I, 195-196).

<sup>28</sup> The concept of thinking is broad for Descartes. In the *Principia*, he defines "thought" as "[...] everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it" (AT VIII A/ *Principia* I, 9). These include doubting, understanding, willing, imagining, sensing and all other conscious mental operations. What is important here is that it is always the ego of the meditator that relates intentionally to various thought-objects. Some of these objects are apprehended with less certainty and others with absolute certainty.

justifying cognition that Descartes calls clear and distinct perception (*clare et distincte perceptio*) (AT VII, 70-71/CSM II, 48-49). Grasping the truth of a proposition through clear and distinct cognition is what Descartes calls intuition or natural light (*intuitus* and *lumen naturale*) (AT VII, 40, 49, 59, 192/CSM II, 28, 33, 41, 135). Since knowledge received through natural light is absolutely indubitable, it is the only type of knowledge that qualifies as principles for scientific knowledge (AT VII, 35/CSM II, 24). Thus, according to Descartes' foundationalist program, first philosophy must rest on this type of indubitable knowledge and all the other sciences are to be constructed on this absolutely certain ground (AT VII, 71/CSM II, 49)<sup>29</sup>.

Even if Descartes *cogito*-argument is not intended as an inference, neither in the classical nor in the modern sense, and should not be interpreted as such, his reasoning is still problematic. It seems that all that the *cogito*-argument can prove is the experience of thinking taking place at that particular moment. Descartes' argument does not establish the existence of a persisting self, since all past beliefs are put into doubt. The right phrase for the argument would thus be "*Cogitatio est, ergo aliquid est*" (thinking is, therefore something is). The only way to understand Descartes seems thus to be to trust his word. This seems indeed what Descartes' narrative voice aims at. It is the task of each one, by himself, to set out and discover the intuitively given existence of the *ego cogito*. However, this view is quite problematic as criteria for philosophical or scientific knowledge, since scientific knowledge in general should be able to be verified by a scientific community. Also, even if one succeeds in Descartes' task, all that the meditating self can have certainty of are his own various mental operations at a given time-period. What then can be said about the ontological status of the intentional objects of thought? How can one avoid a standpoint of solipsism? Descartes attempts to answer these questions in connection with the *Third* and the *Sixth Meditation* where he examines the conditions for the possibility to apprehend one's own body. He realizes that his body is capable of reacting to various stimuli, such as heat. Since the reactions that he feels are strong and involuntary, Descartes holds that he cannot have produced them freely through the use of imagination. He further claims that since effects and causes have an equally important existential status, there must exist some real objects, external to the

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<sup>29</sup> Descartes' late philosophical project has a striking similarity to Husserlian phenomenology, even more than Husserl himself admits. I will examine the relationship between Descartes and Husserl in more detail in the following chapters.

mind, which cause the reactions in his body (AT VII, 41/AT CSM II, 28). From this he concludes that there really exists an external world (*Principia* II §1/AT VIIIA, 40-41/CSM I, 223).

Again, Descartes' argument is not unproblematic. If the external world is known to exist due to a stimuli-response mechanism of the body, then how is this account any different from the common empiricist views that Descartes claims to oppose? Is it not precisely distrust in sense-perception that is supposed to function as the motivation for doubt? Descartes does not seem to be able to answer this question without relying on God. He claims that God guarantees the reliability of clear and distinct perception, as well as the validity of knowledge received through sense-perception, even though the latter is weaker and sometimes confused (AT VII, 62, 71/CSM II, 43, 49). However, despite God's justification of the reliability of knowledge received through the senses, Descartes does not relinquish his thesis that knowledge of the external world is always secondary to knowledge concerning the mind. Due to his standpoint of Platonic realism regarding the ontology of mathematics, the world in itself is regarded simply as an extensional and divisible substance whose real properties can be understood only through the pure intellect. However, Descartes never quite manages to explain neither the epistemological, nor the ontological interconnectedness of the two substances, the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*. This is because Descartes is blind to the problem of the complex relationship between language and the world. Using mathematics as the paradigm for a perfect conceptual language, Descartes holds that linguistic concepts (*idea*) are "innate", that is, the possibility for a correct understanding of the world by means of language is God-given, in a similar way as the valid understanding of mathematical concepts is given by God (*Principia* I, §13, §59; AT VIIIA, 10, 28/CSM 197, 212-213).

Like Galileo, Descartes separates secondary, sensory qualities from the physical reality and conceives physics as the science of the laws of this essentially abstract, geometric nature. Sense-perceptions such as "weight", "hardness" and "color" are secondary qualities of objects, not properties of the real world. (*Principia* II, §4, AT VIIIA, 42/CSM I, 224.) Perpendicular to the physical reality exists the inner, non-divisible world of the mind or the thinking substance. Descartes holds that human beings are finite creatures whose existence is an intersection of the mental and the material substance. Some of the attributes of the infinite Creator-God can be known through the

intellect, but at the same time the human intellect realizes its own finitude (AT I, 145, 152/CSMK, 23, 25; AT VII, 52/CSM II, 36). Descartes' meditative, methodological doubt thus leads him to a new sphere of knowledge, the sphere of the pure intellect. The method guides the meditator to a point where consciousness transcends itself and takes itself as the intentional object of reflection. The sphere of the *cogito* becomes for Descartes the foundation of absolutely indubitable and certain knowledge, including knowledge of God and the created world.

It is significant to notice that although Descartes attempts to accomplish the construction of an all-encompassing system of philosophy, he carefully advises his audience that his method is not suitable for practical means<sup>30</sup>. Another area that he carefully marks off from his inquiry is matters concerning faith. In the *Fourth set of Replies* Descartes explains that "[...] when I asserted that 'we should only assent to what we clearly know' this was always subject to the exception of 'matters which belong to faith and the conduct of life' " (CSM II, 172). In the preface to the French translation of the *Principia*, Descartes again makes a demarcation between his scientific inquiry and matters of faith (AT IXB, 5/CSM I, 181). In the *Second set of Replies*, Descartes defends the nature of his inquiry by insisting that he is inquiring into the nature of metaphysical truth and that the condition for such knowledge is knowledge of God's goodness and existence (CSM II, 106). However, faith in God is not enough to guarantee the certainty of the basis of Descartes' system. Instead, the existence of God has to be proven with the help of reason. This is what Descartes claims to have carried out in the *Meditationes*. He thus makes a sharp distinction between knowledge and faith. Because he never seriously inquires into the epistemic status of faith, or the semantic relationship between language and the world, he never approaches faith in any other way than as a religious attitude awoken in human beings by God (AT IXB 5/CSM I, 181). For Descartes, a concept such as "epistemic faith" would be a contradiction in terms.

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<sup>30</sup> Descartes sometimes distinguishes between two types of certainty. These are "absolute certainty" and "moral certainty". The former is required for rigorous, philosophical, scientific knowledge and the second is a type of certainty that is required for normal living. (AT VII, 22, 36/CSM II, 15, 25; AT VIII, IV 328-329/CSM I, IV 290.) According to Descartes, trust in the senses is necessary in ordinary, daily living whereas metaphysical doubt should not be exercised more than a few hours in a year.

## 2.4 Conclusion to the second chapter

Descartes' philosophical project from the early years to his mature works can be characterized as an attempt to discover a universal method (*mathesis universalis*) for establishing an absolutely certain foundation for knowledge. In his early works, such as the *Regulae*, *Dioptrique* and *Géométrie*, Descartes relies heavily on empirical experiments and mathematical demonstrations. However, he is also critical of his contemporaries such as Galileo Galilei. Throughout his methodology, Descartes uses concepts such as “demonstration” and “deduction” in several different ways, not always in connection to the general axiomatic-deductive method of geometry. In his later philosophy, mathematics still functions as a model for philosophy, but not any longer due to its methodology, but because of the self-evidence of its propositions. After the discovery of algebraic problem-solving, Descartes distances himself from mathematics and turns towards a meditational form of philosophizing. With this shift, there occurs also a turning from empiricist physics to rationalist metaphysics. Descartes now grounds absolute certainty in the *cogito* and its intentional acts. Knowledge of the existence of the external, objective world is justified through the rationalistic demonstration of God's existence and goodness. Certainty is regarded as a normative task of epistemology, whereas faith is defined as a matter of theology. What is new and unique in Descartes' philosophy with regard to philosophy preceding him, is the conviction that all knowledge can be founded on subjectivity, that is, on the immediate awareness of our own sensations, lived experience and thoughts. This uniqueness and radicality of Descartes' philosophy is something that German idealism and German transcendental phenomenology would develop to its extreme.

The following chapter examines Edmund Husserl's conception of Descartes' meditational method. Husserlian, transcendental phenomenology radicalizes the Cartesian methodology by investigating the transcendental conditions for the possibility of any knowledge whatsoever. As is the case with Descartes, also Husserl begins his philosophical career from an inquiry into the foundations of mathematics.

### 3. The Husserlian radicalization of the Cartesian method

According to Hannah Arendt, Descartes' project of first philosophy and his discovery of the subject as a basis for absolute certainty experience a renaissance within the birth of German Idealism. Arendt claims that Kant's critical remarks concerning the limits of reason are ignored by the speculative thought of German Idealism. Instead of taking Kant seriously, this type of a philosophy continues directly from the Cartesian basis and raises consciousness to the level of Absolute subjectivity - the one and only true theme for any serious scientific inquiry (LM I, 15-16). At the same time philosophy is no longer regarded as *philosophia*, the love of wisdom, but as a strictly scientific enterprise, concerning wisdom (*sophia*).

It is to this same subjectivity-centered, epistemological tradition that Arendt includes also German transcendental phenomenology. However, according to her, Cartesianism and its phenomenological variation are simply an expression of a specific theoretical attitude, the *Vita Contemplativa*, which has motivated Western philosophy throughout centuries. Inherent to this attitude is a valuing of theory over practice and a certain philosophical oblivion regarding language and the conditions for the possibility of knowledge of world and other human beings.

Hannah Arendt received her philosophical education as a student of Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl and Karl Jaspers, all of whom were deeply involved with various forms of phenomenological philosophy<sup>31</sup>. Arendt's interpretation of Cartesianism is heavily influenced by Husserl's conception of Descartes' project and Heidegger's critique of Husserl. Also Arendt's late investigations and affirmation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy can be properly understood only within its complex phenomenological context. The general theme of Arendt's critical remarks is the type of foundationalism that Cartesian philosophy promotes. However, before investigating in detail Arendt's conception of Cartesianism, it is necessary to briefly examine the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and its connection to Descartes' philosophy.

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<sup>31</sup> Arendt studied under Martin Heidegger at Marburg from 1924-1925. During the winter semester of 1925 Arendt studied under Edmund Husserl and from the spring of 1926 until 1929 under Karl Jaspers, to whom she completed her doctoral thesis, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*.

### 3.1 Philosophy as a rigorous science

Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) transcendental phenomenology can be conceived as a constant attempt of guiding the philosophical audience to embrace an idealistic and yet rigorously scientific conception of the totality of reality. From his early philosophy of arithmetic to his investigations in logic, eidetic phenomenology and finally transcendental-genetic phenomenology, Husserl is primarily concerned with how various levels of knowledge are constituted or founded by intentional acts of consciousness.

Inherent to Husserlian phenomenology is a constant struggle with competing philosophical paradigms such as naturalism, materialism and historicism. Already in his "Five lectures" from 1907 called *Die Idee der Phänomenologie: Fünf Vorlesungen* (*The Idea of Phenomenology – Five Lectures*) and in his later popularized article, *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (*Philosophy as Rigorous Science*) from 1911, Husserl claims that all various branches of special sciences conceal the epistemological origin of the possibility of any science to exist as a science. Modern science is according to Husserl, epistemologically unjustified and groundless (IP 13-14, 25; PRS 74-75, 85). He holds that the origin of the objective field of scientific knowledge, and of the objective reality in general, lies in the meaning-giving acts of transcendental subjectivity. All meaningfulness has its origin in subjectivity. (Hua III/1 79, 82/Id I 92, 96; HuaI 100, 183/CM 65, 156; EP II 128; HuaIV/CES §53.) In his late philosophy, the main challenges for phenomenological-scientific research is not only understanding and articulating how the external, natural world is an achievement of the infinite acts of transcendental subjectivity or the Absolute, but also how the personal self and the whole of human history are to be understood as achievements of various levels in the infinite process of absolute self-understanding (*Selbstverständigung*).

Throughout his career, Husserl presents several different paths into his phenomenology. He shares Descartes' conception that philosophy is first and foremost a question of establishing the right epistemological method. There is a parallel in the most basic core of Husserl's and Descartes' philosophy, since both philosophers are primarily concerned with articulating a universal method that any reasonable person could repeat in order to reach the absolutely certain foundations for any type of knowledge



whatsoever. In this way, Husserl represents a variation of Cartesian foundationalism<sup>32</sup>. From his early “Five Lectures” to his mature works such as *Erste Philosophie I, Kritische Ideengeschichte* (“First Philosophy I, critical history of Ideas”), *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge (Cartesian Meditations)* and *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie (The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: an Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy)*, Husserl credits Descartes for his attempts to ground all science on the absolutely indubitable first person-perspective and the intuitive insights of the *ego cogito* (EP I 63; HuaI/CM §8; HuaVI/CES §17). However, Husserl holds that even though Descartes realizes the essentially intentional nature of conscious acts, he misunderstands the manner of being (*res*) of the ego. Thus according to Husserl, Descartes holds naively that his essence is existence as a finite, “thinking thing” and rushes into inferring the reality of external objects from the immanent sphere of the ego, by means of mathematical deduction. Borrowing Kant’s terminology, Husserl argues that the ego that Descartes discovers is the personal self, which is but a level constituted by the synthesizing acts of the transcendental ego (HuaVI/CES §18). Husserl holds that all knowledge, including existential judgements, such as belief in the existence of an enduring external world, or in an identical and enduring self, are achievements of meaning-giving,thetic acts of transcendental consciousness. The transcendental ego is the condition for the possibility of any knowledge. It holds together the temporal flow of conscious acts and gives a unified character to the flux of perception, sensation and thought. (HuaVI 174-175/CES 171-172.)

For Husserl, as for Descartes, philosophy begins from the destruction of unjustified beliefs and expands to the construction of a philosophical enterprise of reason (EW 493, 495-496). This two-fold task is what Husserl calls philosophy as rigorous science (*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*) or transcendental phenomenology (*die transzendente Phänomenologie*). Husserl stresses that although he accepts the

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<sup>32</sup> Although John Drummond (1990) and James Mensch (2001) claim that Husserl’s philosophy does not represent a traditional type of foundationalism, Husserl nevertheless grounds all knowledge in the subjective first-person perspective of transcendental consciousness. It is important to notice that Husserl is critical of his Cartesian way into phenomenology and presents two alternative ways into transcendental phenomenology. However, the path through transcendental psychology or through the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) and history are but two various paths leading into the transcendental epoché, which aims at disclosing the realm of transcendental consciousness and finally of Absolute consciousness. This general Cartesian methodology is something that Husserl does not relinquish. (Smith 2003, 54-58.)

Cartesian *ego cogito* as the absolute basis for all knowledge and meaning, there is an important variance of nuance in his and Descartes' conception of how the destruction of former beliefs is to be carried out. Whereas Descartes speaks of methodological doubt, Husserl speaks of methodological bracketing (*Einklammerung*), neutralization (*Neutralisierung*) or (*epochē*). According to Husserl, his method consists neither in the doubt nor in the denial of existential beliefs (Hua III/1, 57/Id I 61). Instead he claims to bracket and neutralize all acts that posit an object as existing. In this way, Husserl claims to be able to examine and describe how all objectivity receives a meaning from consciousness. Thus objectivity must always be understood as the correlate of transcendental subjectivity (Zahavi 1996/2001, 10-11). All knowledge is necessarily knowledge for a conscious subject.

In order to understand what Husserl means by his method of bracketing and the phenomenological reductions, it is important at first to examine Husserl's earlier philosophy of mathematics and logic. It is from the motivation of these writings that the phenomenological radicalization of Cartesianism evolves. This path also raises the question of the position of language and the world in Cartesian methodology, which is a fundamental concern for Hannah Arendt and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

### **3.2 The conception of authentic intuition and merely symbolic representation in Husserl's early philosophy**

Husserl began his university career in 1876 as a student of mathematics and astronomy. Influenced by his teachers Karl Weierstrass and Leopold Kronecker, he wrote his doctoral thesis in 1887 on differential calculus. His first published work *Philosophie der Arithmetik, logische und psychologische Untersuchungen* (1891) (*Philosophy of Arithmetic, psychological and psychological investigations*), continued his interest in the foundations of mathematics, although this time with a methodological influence of his new teachers, the philosophical psychologists Franz Brentano (1837-1917) and Carl Stumpf (1848-1936). It is the somewhat extraordinary combination of research in both the foundations of mathematics and descriptive psychology that functions as the first and most important motivation for Husserl's phenomenological method and the quest for the genesis of meaning and objectivity (HuaXVII/FTL §27a; Willard 1994, XXXIV; Willard 2003, xiv, lxii; Tieszen 1994, 97-102).

In his *Philosophie der Arithmetik* Husserl attempts to give an account of mathematical analysis by fixing the concept (*Begriff*) of number. Husserl's thesis is that all higher order mathematics can be founded on cardinal numbers (*Anzahl*) and their relations. However, he claims that it is impossible to sufficiently define the concept of number. In contrast to his contemporary, Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), who in his *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik* defines number in terms of the extension of a concept<sup>33</sup> and regards the problem of the definition of number primarily as a logical and linguistic problem, Husserl's main concern is epistemological (HuaXII 118-119/PA 124-125). The guiding question throughout the work is: how is knowledge of ideal, mind-independent and atemporal objects such as numbers possible in the first place? (HuaXII 192/PA 203)<sup>34</sup> In order to answer this question, Husserl adapts Brentano's method of descriptive psychology and his central Cartesian thesis that consciousness is essentially intentional<sup>35</sup>. Whereas Frege relies on language in his analysis of number, Husserl claims that "[t]he difficulty lies in the phenomena, in their correct description, analysis and interpretation. It is only with reference to the phenomena that insight into the essence of the number concepts is to be won" (HuaXII 129/PA 136)<sup>36</sup>. Thus, while aiming to give an account of the concept of number, Husserl involves himself in a detailed description of several

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<sup>33</sup> Frege gives the following definition to number: "The number which belongs to the concept *F* is the extension of the concept *equal to the concept F* (Frege 1884/1999, 85).

<sup>34</sup> In his early writings, Husserl, just like Frege, is impressed and influenced by Bernard Bolzano's (1781-1848) and Hermann Lotze's (1817-1881) conceptions of numbers as ideal and mind-independent. The central epistemological problem for Husserl is thus to give an account of how objective, ideal entities arise from subjective, temporal acts of consciousness. J.N Mohanty diagnoses that a dominating interest throughout Husserl's work is "the search for a stable *via media* between Platonism and anti-Platonism" (Mohanty 1964 §1). Indeed, this problem puzzled Husserl throughout his career. In the introduction to the second volume of the *Logische Untersuchungen* Husserl asks: "How are we to understand the fact that the intrinsic being of objectivity becomes "presented", "apprehended" in knowledge, and so ends up by becoming subjective? [...] How can the ideality of the universal qua concept or law enter the flux of real mental states and become an epistemic possession of the thinking person?" (LI II, 169) Decades later, in his essay "Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie" ("The Origin of Geometry"), Husserl asks: "But how does the intrapsychically constituted structure arrive at an intersubjective being of its own as an ideal object which, as "geometrical", is anything but a real psychic object, even though it has arisen psychically?" (HuaVI, 370/CES, 359). In their critique against psychologism, both Husserl and Frege make a sharp distinction between the subjective and objective domain of being. Whereas Husserl regards universals as ideal and objective, Frege regards "thought" (*Gedanke*) as objective and non-actual, existing independently of subjective acts. Frege solves the problem of the interaction between merely subjective acts and objective thoughts by means of language. Human beings can have access to objective thoughts by means of a common language.

<sup>35</sup> In his *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* (*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*) Brentano determines thinking as always intentional, as always referring to an object of thought. Brentano's account of mental phenomena is very similar to the account that Descartes gives to thought in his *Principia*. (Brentano 1874/1973, 79). Compare to Descartes, AT VIII A/CSM *Principia* I, 9)

<sup>36</sup> "[...] die Schwierigkeit liegt in den Phänomenen, ihrer richtigen Beschreibung, Analyse und Deutung; nur im Hinblick auf sie ist Einsicht in das Wesen der Zahlbegriffe zu gewinnen."

phenomena, such as parts, wholes, moments and the various mental processes, whereby an understanding of these arises.

Husserl traces the concept of number back to more primary concepts such as “set”, “multiplicity” and “whole” and claims that knowledge of these objects is possible due to such mental acts as presenting, collecting, combining, separating and abstracting<sup>37</sup>. In a similar manner as Aristotle, Husserl holds that a number such as “7” is originally apprehended as an abstraction of a multiplicity of some seven arbitrary items. It is a collection received by counting “something” (*Etwas*) and “something” and “something” etc. (HuaXII 81-82/PA 85-86). The somethings are given through enumerating acts. In contrast to Descartes, for whom God’s creation of mathematical objects are apprehended through purely intellectual and immediate perception, Husserl holds that the intuition of the generality and ideality of numbers is achieved through a stepwise mental process of abstracting from the content of concrete phenomena (HuaXII 296-302/PA 312-318)<sup>38</sup>. In this way the ideal number “7” is not the extension of a concept, but a determinate multitude of any seven items (HuaXII, 181-182/PA 191-192). What is universal and ideal in a set of for example two dogs and five cats is the amount of seven. In a similar way, an ideal triangle is what is determinate for any triangle, no matter how it is presented. Husserl holds that in this way, ideal, objective concepts are achievements (*Leistungen*) of subjective, mental acts. The items in the multitude can be completely arbitrary since it is the mental acts that collect and synthesize the items into a determinate unity, into a number<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> This conception is central to the later, *Logische Untersuchungen*, in which Husserl will call these acts categorial acts, and the fulfillment of them categorial intuition (HuaXVIII/LI II, Investigation VI. 6).

<sup>38</sup> In his early work, Husserl sometimes calls this process “origination” or the finding of the origin of number (HuaXII 334-338/PA 351-355). This process is very similar to his later notion of “eidetic” or “imaginary variation”. In his later philosophy, Husserl holds that ideal objects are invariants and identities of the phenomena apprehended through lived experience (Hua III/1 /Id I §§67-72; EU/EJ §§87-93). Richard Tieszen holds that *Philosophie der Arithmetik* must be understood as Husserl’s first attempt to give a genetic account of number formation (Tieszen 1994, 98, 101). In his later philosophy, genetic phenomenology complements the earlier, structural analysis of object-formation, as Husserl pays more and more attention to the role of temporality in consciousness. Genetic phenomenology examines the necessary conditions for the possibility of understanding various objects. Thus, for Husserl, it is transcendental philosophy in the most rigorous sense. Husserl’s method of abstraction also resembles in remarkable ways Aristotle’s conception of abstraction (*χωρίσμος*). He even credits Aristotle for the discovery of temporality in number-formation (HuaXII 32/PA 33). Also Husserl’s way of understanding numbers as units of something echoes the Ancient Greek conception of numbers as always units (*ἀριθμός*) of something. As Aristotle, Husserl has great difficulties in giving an account of zero and one, which are no multitudes.

<sup>39</sup> Regarding the items of a set, Husserl does not restrict himself only to physical phenomena. The set of objects abstracted from can be completely arbitrary. Husserl gives the following example of such a set:

In his descriptions of the intuitive apprehension of numbers, Husserl makes an important distinction between “authentic” (*eigentlich*) and “inauthentic” or “merely symbolic” (*uneigentlich*) thinking (HuaXII 193/PA 205). He argues for example that it is not possible to authentically intuit a larger amount than one consisting of twelve items (HuaXII 192/PA 202). It is however, possible to intuit the basic relations between multitudes, such as “larger than”, “equal to”, “next” and “less than” (HuaXII 90-92/PA 95-97). Husserl holds that all numbers larger than twelve are inauthentic, symbolically combined representations of the originally intuited authentic numbers and their relations. He calls these inauthentic numbers abstract, categorial objects. (HuaXII 192, 222-224, 322/PA 202, 235-237.) Larger numbers can be intended, but they can never be fully given in intuition<sup>40</sup>. This distinction between authentic and inauthentic thinking leads Husserl to separate intuitive seeing from symbolic thinking (Miller 1982, 9-10).

What is significant here for Husserl’s later conception of objectivity as the achievement of transcendental subjectivity is that already at the beginning of his career he adapts a Cartesian conception of truth based on self-evident intuition. However, whereas Descartes bases his conception of truth solely on the absolute certainty of clear and distinct intellectual perception, Husserl holds that truth is that which is given to consciousness fully and clearly in intuitive self-evidence (*Evidenz*). Not only mathematical objects but also objects of sensible perception, volition and fantasy can be given with self-evidence<sup>41</sup>. For example the claim that “a square is round”, cannot be

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”[...] certain trees, the Sun, the Moon, the Earth and Mars; or a feeling, an angel, the Moon, and Italy, etc. In these examples we can always speak of a totality, a multiplicity, and of a determinate number” (HuaXII/PA, 17).

<sup>40</sup> This is because Husserl holds that the condition for the possibility to apprehend multitudes is the more basic perceptual acts (EW 386). We can for example perceive five apples in a bowl, but it is difficult, without counting or grouping, to tell the amount of more than six apples at one glance. We simply perceive the amount as a plurality or as several pluralities of apples. In order to know how many apples there are, one needs to be able to count the apples one by one. Thus we cannot intuit the items of a complex multitude such as 5412 in one mental act.

<sup>41</sup> Husserl claims that all concepts have a foundation in intuition (HuaXII 64/PA 67; HuaVI 281/CES 303). As early as in 1898 Husserl defines truth in the following way: “A representation is “valid”, “correct”, or “true” if there *is* an object to which it refers in the manner of representations [...] In other words, we turn back to the cases of Evidence, in which we grasp the truth itself, and thus do not merely represent or hold-to-be-true, but rather live through and behold (*erleben und erschauen*) truth” (EW, 381, 384). In the sixth investigation of the *Logische Untersuchungen* Husserl gives a similar characterization of truth (HuaXVIII/LI II, §39). Husserl’s notion of truth does not undergo radical changes in his later philosophy, but he later gives a sophisticated account between various degrees of evidence (HuaXVII/FTL §105; HuaI/CM §§5-6; HuaIII/1/ Id I § §67-71, §238). Adequate self-evidence means for Husserl an intuition in which there are no unfulfilled aspects. Adequate self-evidence gives the object in a complete way, all at once. This type of evidence seems to correspond to his earlier notion of authentic intuition. Apodictic certainty on the other hand means the impossibility to think the non-existence of an object. Husserl claims

true, since the idea of a round square can never be fulfilled with self-evidence in intuition. One can intend a square and imagine a square, in which case the intuition of the intended square is fulfilled in one act, or likewise one can intend a circle and draw a circle, in which case several intentional acts fulfill the intuition, but the intended round square remains forever an empty intuition. In other words, the acts of consciousness that intend the given object - in this case the round square - do not and cannot correlate with the object intended. The case with large numbers and numbers other than natural positive numbers is different, since one can intend and operate with such numbers, even if they could not be authentically intuited<sup>42</sup>. Thus Husserl holds that the condition for the possibility of arithmetic as a science of number is that the objects of arithmetic can be designated through symbolic thinking. The question is not any longer a question about number, but about the condition for the possibility of symbolic, inauthentic thinking.

The discovery of the problem with large numbers and non-natural numbers makes Husserl reject his earlier view that arithmetic can be founded on cardinal numbers. Instead he regards arithmetic as a field of formal logic. In a letter from 1891 to his teacher and professor, Carl Stumpf, Husserl writes that he has faced difficulties in the writing of a second volume to the *Philosophie der Arithmetik*.

”The opinion by which I was still guided in the elaboration of my *Habilitationsschrift*, to the effect that the concept of cardinal number forms the foundation of general arithmetic, soon proved to be false. By no clever devices, by no ”inauthentic representing” can one derive negative, rational, irrational, and the various sort of complex numbers from the concept of cardinal number. [...] Since I originally considered signs only in relation to designated concepts, in the case of numbers such as  $\sqrt{2}$ ,  $\sqrt{-1}$  and the like for example, I had to take them as representatives of ”impossible” concepts. [...] After all this I can state: The *arithmetica universalis* is no science, but rather is a segment of formal logic. Formal logic itself I would define as a symbolic technique [...].” (HuaXXI, 245-249/EW, 13-17.)<sup>43</sup>

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that the *ego cogito* is given with apodictic certainty, whereas physical objects are always given through a temporal horizon of different sides, and can thus be given neither apodictically nor adequately (Hua VIII, 397-398). Following Descartes, Husserl gives a broad definition to thinking (*cogito*). Feeling, remembering, judging, willing, desiring etc. are all forms of thinking (HuaXIII 150).

<sup>42</sup> In the *Formale und transzendente logik* Husserl seems to be in agreement with his earlier view. For example, he claims that no one has the ability to intuit reiterate infinity, since this would require the ability to perform an infinite series of conscious acts (Hua XVII/FTL §74).

<sup>43</sup> ”Die Meinung, von der ich noch bei der Ausarbeitung der Habilitationsschrift geleitet wurde, dass der Anzahlbegriff das Fundament der allgemeinen Arithmetik bilde, erwies sich bald als falsch. Durch keinerlei Kunststücke, durch kein ”uneigentliches Vorstellen” kann man die negativen, rationalen, irrationalen und die mangfachen komplexen Zahlen aus dem Anzahlbegriff herleiten. [...] Da ich ursprünglich die Zeichen nur in Beziehung auf bezeichnete Begriffe ansah, mussten mir im Falle der Anzahlen z.B  $\sqrt{2}$ ,  $\sqrt{-1}$  u. Dgl.

Husserl now argues in a manner resembling Descartes, that arithmetic and mathematic knowledge in general consists mainly in technical and mechanical manipulation of signs (Hua XII 238-239, 250-251, 257/PA 252-253, 265-266, 272; Mohanty 1991/1999 34-35). He is sympathetic with Hilbert's project of formalization and holds that it does not matter what the signs of an operation refer to. As long as one follows the rules of inference and deduction, the results will be correct (HuaXII/PA chapters XI-XII). However, Husserl is deeply puzzled by the nature and origin of formal and symbolic thinking, such as algebraic calculation, which he holds to be a science where one can produce higher order knowledge of numbers and their relations without authentically attending to numbers themselves. In contrast to Frege, who in his *Begriffsschrift* (1879) and *Grundlagen* (1884) attempts to give an account of the foundations of arithmetic solely by means of formal logic, Husserl wants to show the conditions for the possibility of such a task. He holds that formal logic itself has a more prior, epistemic foundation in the intuitive, subjective acts of consciousness. Thus, Husserl's original motivation for research in the philosophy of language and logic lies in nearly twenty years of experience in research on the epistemology of mathematics. The paradigm for his conception of linguistic meaning is that of mathematical intuition.

In his early writings preceding the publication of the *Logische Untersuchungen*, such as "Zur Logik der Zeichen (semiotik)" from 1890 ("On the logic of signs (semiotic)") and "Psychologische Studien zur elementaren Logik" from 1894 ("Psychological studies in the elements of logics") Husserl gives an account of signs in terms of inauthentic representations (*Repräsentationen*)<sup>44</sup>. He regards natural language as a form of an inauthentic, symbolical medium comparable to arithmetic in the sense that both language and arithmetic necessarily deal with objects that are not authentically and directly given to intuitive insight (HuaXII, 353/LS 32). This is because both arithmetic and language rely on the mediation of signs such as letters, numerals and words to

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Als Repräsentanten "unmöglicher" Begriffe gelten. [...]Die Frage, mit der ich vorhin abbrach, beantwortet sich so: Das Zeichensystem der *arithmetica universalis* gliedert sich eine gewisse Stufenfolge, vergleichbar derjenigen eines Systems konzentrischer Kreise."

<sup>44</sup> In his personal notes from 1906, Husserl refers to the "Psychological studies in the elements of logics" as the first draft of the third and fifth investigation of his later *Logische Untersuchungen*.

signify the authentic, ideal objects intended in intuition<sup>45</sup> (HuaXXII, 104, 107-108, 120/PSL 150, 153-154, 166). Whereas in the *Philosophie der Arithmetik* Husserl holds that large numbers can be only symbolically represented, in the later text “Logik der Zeichen” he holds that objects such as a past event, God and other minds are authentically non-presentable and thus necessary given through the mediation of symbols (HuaXII, 355-356/LS 34-35). Husserl does not give an account of how mental acts grasp the relation between a sign and the signified. In other words, he does not explain how signifying is possible but he still stresses that symbolic representation is the condition for the possibility of any scientific procedure. Symbolic thinking is necessary for transcending the limitations of the capacities of human intellect. (HuaXII, 350/LS 29.)

In the *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900-1901), Husserl further develops and clarifies the division between authentic and inauthentic thinking (HuaXIXI/LI I:1; HuaXIX2/LI II: 6 §§62-63). Whereas in his early writings he was not able to explain how symbolic thinking occurs, Husserl now turns his focus from the description of signs to the description of the mental acts that operate with signs (Moran 2005, 110). In the first investigation, Husserl defines linguistic signs in terms of their function, which is to signify either in the form of an expression (*Ausdruck*) or merely as an indication (*Anzeichen*) (HuaXIX1/LI I: 1 §15). However, he argues that signifying in general cannot happen without an interpretive consciousness (Bernet 1988, 7-8; Mohanty 1982, 56). Again he supports his arguments by Brentano’s conception of intentionality and claims that expressions function as a medium, through which the meaning of an authentic intuition is intended by meaning-giving, intentional acts of consciousness. With every meaning-giving intentional act there is also given an object of reference, the intended object as intended. In cases where the meaning is intuited, this is due to the presence of a further act of meaning-fulfillment (HuaXIX1/LI I:1 §9). However, the reference of an expression is not its meaning (*Bedeutung*). Instead, with a description resembling that of the account given of ideal objects in *Philosophy der Arithmetik*, Husserl explains that meanings are static, ideal and atemporal entities that are grasped or instantiated through meaning-fulfilling acts of consciousness, whereas the referent of an expression is an object or a state of affairs (*Gegenstand*), given through several intentional acts. (HuaXIX1/LI I: 1 §15, §35; HuaXIX2/LI II:6; Mohanty 1982, 43;

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<sup>45</sup> Husserl holds a similar position regarding language in his late essay “Ursprung der Geometrie” (HuaVI 372/OG 362).



Welton, 2000, 192-193.) Husserl does not give an exact definition of “meaning”, but describes it as an ideal entity that can be instantiated as a component of thought. Different persons can at various times intend the same referent, through various modes of presentation. This is because of the ideality of meanings (HuaXVIII/LI I prol. §§12-13). One can for example perceive a tree, imagine a tree, remember a tree or say “tree”. In all these cases the intentional referent remains the same, while the modes of presentation differ. Since Husserl assumes an isomorphism between thought and expression, he does not regard the relationship between thought and language especially problematic. He holds that in the private mental life one does not need to operate by means of expressions or any other signs, since one’s own thoughts are given in an immediate and transparent manner. Speech and writing are needed simply for the transmission and preservation of intended and fulfilled meanings, but this is secondary to the constitution of meaningfulness by subjective acts (Bernet 1988, 24; Bernet, Kern & Marbach 1989/1993, 168)<sup>46</sup>.

Husserl holds that rigorous scientific knowledge is by essence constituted by the adequate fulfillments of meaning-giving acts with their intended objects (HuaXIX1/LI I: 1 §2). Only in this way can concepts such as “existence” have any objectively valid meaning. This is what Husserl means by claiming that objectivity is an achievement of subjectivity (HuaXVIII/LI prol §62; HuaIII/2 §7; HuaXVII/FTL §56, §60). He holds that the condition for the possibility of formal logic is a theory of how the laws and concepts of logic receive a meaning from subjective acts<sup>47</sup>. In other words, all language is constituted by subjectivity. The phenomenological methodology of reductions, which Husserl articulates in his *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, I* (1913) (*Ideas Pertaining to a pure phenomenology*) relies further on the distinction between the authentic or eidetic intuition and the merely symbolic expression and indication, since the conception of truth is based on self-evidence in clear and distinct intuition (HuaIII/1 112-114/Id I 135-137). The justification for the transcendental-phenomenological science lies in the immediate givennes of the phenomena. Like Descartes’ meditator, a phenomenologist has to begin his enquiry from a presuppositionless ground. This is the “principle of all principles” for Husserl’s

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<sup>46</sup> Husserl continues to hold this view in his *Formale und transzendente Logik (Formal and Transcendental Logic)* (HuaXVII/FTL §§1-4).

<sup>47</sup> Husserl will continue to hold this view until his last works, such as *Formale und transzendente logik* and *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*.

philosophy (HuaIII/1, 44/Id I 44; HuaI/CM §5, §10; HuaXVII/FTL §95; HuaXIX1/LI I, intro §7). The distinction between authentic and merely symbolic thinking becomes especially problematic within Husserl's turn to transcendental idealism, since the phenomenological method has to bracket also language.

### 3.3 The bracketing of the symbolic realm

The task of the transcendental-phenomenological science is to give an account of the essential conditions for the possibility of any knowledge whatsoever. Since Husserl adapts a radicalized form of Descartes' methodological principle by refraining from all form of previous judgment, he can rely only on that which is given to consciousness, as it is given within the continuum of the floating present moment. This means for Husserl a necessary conviction to begin any phenomenological investigation and descriptive analysis from within the present and immediately given, intuitive field of conscious phenomena. As has been seen in the previous sections, Husserl claims that this task is not only possible but also necessary<sup>48</sup>. This is due to the fact that for Husserl, authentic intuition precedes any predicative judgment. Predication is simply a form of positing, objectivating and generalizing (HuaXVII/FTL § 91; EU/EJ 62-63).

Husserl claims that the standpoint of bracketed pure consciousness cannot be achieved from within the ordinary, unreflective and pre-philosophical life, which he calls the natural attitude (*die natürliche Einstellung*). This attitude is characterized by a general thesis (*Generalthesis*) of consciousness that posits the lived world (*Erfahrungswelt, Umwelt, Lebenswelt*) as a factually existing, objective and endurable totality (HuaIII/1 /Id I §30-31; HuaVIII §33; HuaVI/CES III.A). The thesis has a general character because it is the background that accompanies all forms of daily, intersubjective living (HuaIII/1 /Id I §30-31; HuaVI 326-327/CES 281). The natural, everyday life is characterized by a fundamental, belief (*Urdoxa* or *Protodoxa*) and naïve certainty in the independent existence of physical things, cultural artifacts, other people, animals, scientific entities and so forth, depending on what activity one is engaging

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<sup>48</sup> Throughout his life, Husserl gives also detailed descriptions of drive-instincts, passive forms of consciousness and emotions, such as empathy. However, all these investigations begin from the present, first-person perspective. Thus for example abnormality is always considered as a modality or an alteration of normality. Encountered people are considered as Others to the I, and death, sleep, unconsciousness and dreams as alterations of the wakeful, subjective life.

oneself in within the lived world (HuaIII/1 /IdI §104; EU/EJ §7, §10). The person living in this attitude cannot realize that all objectivity is a structural correlate to the intentional acts of transcendental subjectivity<sup>49</sup>. As has been shown in the earlier sections, for Husserl transcendental subjectivity is not only the condition for the possibility of knowledge, but also for meaningfulness in general. The world could have no intelligible structure and permanence, if it was not a world for an ego (Hua III/1, 60-70/Id I 66-81; Hua I/CM §8; HuaXVII/FTL §99). In order to realize this, one must perform the phenomenological reduction from the natural attitude to the transcendental-phenomenological attitude. This happens by a radicalization of the Cartesian stepwise procedure of methodological doubt. One brackets all actual and possible existential beliefs and judgements. This bracketing interrupts the general thesis and thus Husserl also refers to his methodological procedure as the suspension of the thesis (*Aufhebung der Thesis*). Husserl's assistant, Eugen Fink describes this process in the following way:

“As experiencing human beings we cannot escape believing in the Being of the world, but as thinking onlookers “we abstain” from this thematic believing in Being, we perform the epoché.” (Fink 1957/1981, 62.)

Within the transcendental epoché, the world's transcendent character is seen to be dependent on the belief in it as a spatio-temporal, enduring unity. This is because the epoché neutralizes and interrupts the general thesis and with it the fundamental belief in the external world. The epoché opens up the possibility for a radical shift in attitude<sup>50</sup>. What happens within the transcendental reduction is that the self of the philosophizing subject cannot any longer regard himself as a worldly, spatio-temporally existing,

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<sup>49</sup> Husserl at times prefers to use the term transcendental intersubjectivity instead of transcendental subjectivity. This is because he wants to avoid the position of transcendental solipsism. Objectivity is always objectivity for a subject, but objectivity cannot properly be understood as objectivity, if it is considered apart from other subjects, for whom this objectivity is also valid. In this way objectivity is always an accomplishment of every transcendental ego, which Husserl also calls the community of monads or transcendental intersubjectivity. However, even intersubjectivity and language can according to Husserl be reduced to a phenomena of constitutive investigation for absolute subjectivity (HuaI/CM §8, §44; HuaVI/CES §19, §54). Husserl's late philosophy has a strong resemblance to German Idealism, especially to the idealism of Fichte. Husserl's way of describing the infinitely active self-positing of the ego, the paradoxical relationship between the I and the Other, and the account of humanity, nationalism and Spirit (*Geist*) bear striking resemblance to Fichte's philosophy. Husserl gave three lectures on “Fichte's ideal of humanity” to German soldiers fighting in the First World War. These texts are published in HuaXXV.

<sup>50</sup> Dermot Moran pays attention to the significant role of the will in Husserl's philosophy. Like Descartes, Husserl regards all positing acts as voluntary acts (Moran 2005, 131). Also Marcus Brainard claims that the alteration of the natural attitude is for Husserl an act of the will (Brainard 2002, 62). The possibility of the reductions are thus grounded in the absolutely free will of the subject.

empirical person (HuaI/CM §8, §11). Instead, all belief in the factual and contingent existence even of one's own self is in brackets. The self is thus apprehended as an ego, a unity within the temporal flux of consciousness, who accompanies all intentional acts (Moran 2005, 202-203). This *transcendental* ego is the agent of the reductions and also the absolute condition for the possibility of knowledge. (HuaVIII 419-422.) Husserl holds that the *ego cogito cogitatum* is the absolutely indubitable ground for knowledge, whereas the objective being of the world is a contingent fact (HuaVIII § 33; HuaVI/CES §50). The world as we normally perceive and apprehend it, is just one modalization of a world. It is one possible world. What Husserl wants to examine, is the necessary, a priori structures and conditions for any possible world (EU/EJ §10).

The radicalization of Cartesianism consists in the fact that the transcendental reduction is followed by an eidetic reduction, or a reduction to essences. This reduction is performed by a method of free variation (*freie Variation*). Since all belief in spatio-temporal existence is neutralized, including belief in the own body existing as a spatio-temporal and physical body, Husserl claims that consciousness can now freely reflect on the manner in which the bracketed object is given through imagination, perception, volition, memory, or some other intentional act. Husserl holds that by freely modifying the given object through fantasy, one will apprehend the invariant or the essence of all the possible variations of the object. The free variation can also be performed on the acts themselves. In this way Husserl claims to be able to discover the essential and universal characteristics of all sorts of intentional acts and thus of consciousness in general (HuaIII/1 /Id I §§67-72; Hua XVII/FTL §98; HuaVI/CES § 47; EU/EJ §§87-93). The task of transcendental phenomenology is thus not merely an investigation of human cognition, but of the a priori laws and structures of any consciousness whatsoever.

Husserl is aware of the fact that the results of transcendental investigation must be communicated, in order for phenomenology to exist as a universally valid science. This is because phenomenology is for Husserl a descriptive and eidetic science, not an exact science (HuaIII/1 /Id I §§71-75). He holds that a phenomenological language must be capable of grasping and expressing univocally the essences apprehended in intuition. The concepts of this language must adequately correspond with the intuition, because the concepts and words will replace the intuition when it is no longer present (HuaIII/1 /Id I §66, §126; HuaXVII/FTL §2; HuaVI/CES, §55, §59; HuaI/CM §5; HuaVI 372/OG 362; EU/EJ §12; Fink 1939/1981, 31). As has been shown

in the previous chapter, Husserl holds that there is an isomorphism between thought and expression. Thus he is not concerned about how objects of intuitive, subjective seeing can be brought into a common language<sup>51</sup>.

In his late works such as *Formal und transzendente Logik*, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften* and *Erfahrung und Urteil*, Husserl broadens the scope of his investigations concerning meaning-formation by introducing a temporal aspect to the achievements of consciousness. He now holds that in the natural attitude meaningful acts usually function passively, without any reflection involved (HuaVI 372/OG 362). Intended objects can in this way be constructions of complex layers of past meaning-intentions and fulfillments. For example, when one perceives the house one lives in, it is not necessary to intend and fulfill all emotional or memorial aspects of that perception. Instead, past intentional acts bring a familiarity to the house. It is simply recognized as “my home”. “My home” is thus a complex phenomenon, a construction that is founded through the passive synthesis of previous and more primitive cognitive acts. Meaning-formation is thus now considered to be multi-layered and complex. However, these past meaning-intentions can be recalled and reactivated by the use of signs. Written texts, which function as the concrete, factual medium for ideal meanings, can be used to intend entire clusters of meanings (HuaVI 367-369, 370-371/OG, 356-358, 360-361)<sup>52</sup>. The symbolic realm is thus not simply a tool for expression but an essential, dynamic structure of the lived world of the natural attitude<sup>53</sup>. It cannot be

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<sup>51</sup> Husserl's assistant and perhaps most faithful student, Eugen Fink points out the problem of a transcendental language and holds that Husserl never establishes the conditions for the possibility of such a language. Thus, Husserl's key concepts such as "constitution", "epoché" and "transcendental logic" remain operative, ambiguous concepts (Fink 1957/1981, 67-70). Also Dan Zahavi recognizes the need for giving a detailed, phenomenological account of language (Zahavi 1996/2001, 205n27).

<sup>52</sup> Husserl holds that also a concept such as "Europe" has an ideal meaning waiting to be fulfilled. In the "Vienna Lecture", titled *Die Philosophie in der Krisis europäischen Menschheit* from 1935, Husserl suggests that Europe has its origin (*archē*) in the Greek ideal of a universal, theoretical science based on absolute insight. Husserl sees non-European cultures as expressions of pre-historical life-forms and mythical-religious attitudes. The ideal meaning of Europe is the absolute world-spirit (*Geist*) coming to self-consciousness in the form of a "new humanity" which is absolutely free. (HuaVI, abhandlung III/ CES, appendix I.)

<sup>53</sup> In his last work, the *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*, Husserl gives several examples of genetic constitution on the level of human history. One of these occurs in §§8-9 where he shows how modern natural sciences have their root in the meaning that Galileo and Descartes gave to the concept of *nature*. According to Husserl, Galileo and Descartes did not realize their presupposition underlying their scientific methods. Thus they both considered the world to be a physical, extensional and measurable unity (§9h). According to Husserl, modern science still takes this meaning of nature as given and practices a "mathematization of nature". The natural sciences do not realize that Euclidean, Greek geometry, the basis for all axiomatic-deductive methods, is a formal, limited science that cannot be adapted in giving a scientific account of all forms of being. Instead, geometrical understanding is an abstraction of the concrete,

explained through a static or schematic model. Thus, in order for the transcendental ego to bring into self-evident intuition the field of authentically intuited phenomena, it needs to work through the layer of former, sedimented meaning-formations. This is because Husserl holds that language is constituted in an “archeological” way. Judgments are complex, higher level mental acts that are founded on previous acts of experience and perception. Primitive cognitive acts constitute the objects that judgments are *judgments of* (EU/EJ §§4-5). In other words, Husserl holds that phenomenology cannot begin its inquiry from the level of language, because it must proceed beyond it. It must inquire into the primitive, pre-linguistic, subjective acts of consciousness, which give phenomena the shape or gestalt such as a thing, an object, a relation, a state of affairs, a universal or a plurality. Husserl holds that in order for a higher level conscious act, such as a judgment in the form of “S is p” to be possible, primitive acts of consciousness must already have established the components of the judgment and the predicative relation between them. In order to understand how the archeology of meaning is sedimented, one must take a first-person perspective on language.

“We therefore pursue the act of judgment as if it were an act always exclusively mine, with results only for me, and completely disregard the function of the act of judgment in communication and the fact that it always presupposes preceding communication precisely in the way in which objects are pregiven, already provided with a prescription of sense. It is only then that we arrive at the most primitive building stones of the logical activity out of which our world is constructed. The objects which function thus as substrates are objects which at first sight are not conceived as existing for everyone, or even for everyone living in a limited community, but as *objects only for me*; and the world from which they are to affect us must be considered as a *world only for me*. This methodological limitation to the domain of what is proper to the subject is necessary if we wish really to catch sight of logical activity in its ultimate originality, by which it is always precisely the activity of a *single* subject.” (EU, 58-59/EJ, 58.)<sup>54</sup>

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bodily perception of space. Husserl is here in agreement with his early view that mathematics is a formal science consisting mainly in a technique of operating with signs (§9f-g). *Nature* is thus a term sedimented in modern European culture. In order to bring into light its authentic meaning, one needs to understand that even factual history has a correlate in the a priori structures of transcendental subjectivity. This understanding is performed through a special historical self-reflection, a destruction (*Abbau*) of former beliefs, which finally leads to the transcendental reduction that purifies the term from its sedimented and inauthentic meaning (HuaVI/CES §15, see also HuaXVII/FTL §42e-f).

<sup>54</sup> “Wir verfolgen also das Urteilen, als ob es Urteilen jeweils nur für mich, mit Erweben nur für mich wäre, und sehen von der kommunikativen Funktion des Urteilens gänzlich ab und davon ab, daß es schon immer vorangegangene Kommunikation voraussetzt eben in der art und Weise, wie es seine Gegenstände, mit welcher Sinnesvorzeichnung, vorgegeben hat. Dann erst kommen wir zu den primitivsten Bausteinen logischer Leistung, aus denen unsere Welt aufgebaut ist. Die Gegenstände, die so als Substrate fungieren, sind Gegenstände, zunächst nicht gedacht als für Alle, auch nicht als für jedermann einer begrenzten

As Husserl in the *Philosophie der Arithmetik* holds, that the condition for the possibility to apprehend mathematical concepts is the more fundamental acts of perception, in his late philosophy he holds that also linguistic concepts are founded on a pre-predicative field of most primary forms of perceptual experience<sup>55</sup>. (HuaI/CM §5; EU/EJ §24; Bernet, Kern & Marbach 1989/1993, 192-194; Miller 1982, 65, 79-84.) Since the methodological requirement is that the general thesis of the natural attitude must be neutralized and with it also language, Husserl must be able to give an account of how language operates within the reduction (HuaVI/CES §59). This becomes according to both Arendt and Merleau-Ponty one of the major problems of transcendental phenomenology.

### 3.4 Conclusion to the third chapter

The radicalization of Cartesianism that the transcendental phenomenology carries out consists in the principle of presuppositionlessness and in the sophisticated methodology of reductions. Husserl's phenomenology, from its pre-transcendental to its fully mature transcendental-genetic investigations, is characterized by a sharp distinction between the immediately given authentic field of phenomena and the merely symbolic and indicative realm. The former justifies the absolutely certain foundations for phenomenological inquiry, whereas the latter is given a secondary role as the constituted medium for the communication of phenomenological-scientific results. Husserl's distinction is rooted in his early, unquestioned identification of mathematical and linguistic idealities. It is this type of an identification that is the core source of the main philosophical problems that

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Gemeinschaft seiend, sondern Gegenstände nur für mich; und die Welt, aus der her sie affizieren sollen, muß gedacht werden als Welt nur für mich. Diese methodische Beschränkung auf den Bereich des jeweils Eigenen ist nötig, um wirklich logische Leistung in ihrer letzten Ursprünglichkeit, in der sie eben Leistung jeweils eines Subjektes ist, zu Gesicht zu bekommen."

<sup>55</sup> In the *Philosophy der Arithmetik* Husserl gives an example of authentic intuition by saying that an actual perception of the outer appearance of a house is bodily present and thus authentically represented. On the contrary, if one merely describes the same house without ever actually having perceived it, it is a case of a symbolic representation. (HuaXII 193-194/PA 205-206). In *Erfahrung und Urteil (Experience and Judgement)* Husserl says that pre-predicative experience is direct and grounded in perception, in the *aisthesis* (EJ, 71), it is given "in the flesh" (ibid, 19). This type of pre-predicative experience forms the ground for all judgment. The pre-predicative experience can according to Husserl be predicated in a form such as "S is p". This type of a predication is a founding judgment whereas a judgment such as "Z is (S is p)" is a founded judgment, based on the previous judgment. One could also make a judgment such as "X is (Z is (S is p))". In this way, language is constructed through an endless sedimentation of meanings (Sokolowski 1964, 170-172). The task for genetic phenomenology is to bring into intuition the original acts of pre-predicative and predicative experience underlying complex meaning-formation.

both Descartes' and Husserl's foundationalist projects encounter. Although Husserl is critical of Descartes' mathematical model, his critique slightly misses its target. Descartes is not actually inferring the existence of the "I" from the experience of the "I think", by means of logical deduction. In fact, Although Husserl's technical terminology and the phenomenological investigation of the transcendental ego is much more sophisticated than Descartes' investigation of the thinking ego, Descartes' reasoning still bears a much higher similarity to Husserl than what Husserl himself admits. What both Husserl and Descartes have in common is that the certainty and self-evidence of the existence of the ego is given in the actual act of reflection and not by means of a logical deduction. This self-evidence functions as the indubitable, bedrock foundation for knowledge. All other forms of knowledge are justified with reference to the indubitable sphere of the thinking ego and its intentional structure.

The problem of Husserl's account is that if the transcendental and eidetic reductions are properly carried out and with them all existential commitments, then how can one interpret or give a universally valid description of the transcendental-phenomenological sphere and the correlation between transcendental subjectivity and the world, without relapsing back into the natural attitude? The distinctions, separations and analysis required for a universally valid interpretation and description of the intuited essences must be based on some criterion of validity and consistency. But such a criterion can only be one made in a language that is constituted by an already existing, language-using, intersubjective community, which share a common world as the context and reference-point of that language. Thus the constitution of meaning presupposes language, and not the other way around, as Husserl suggests. This implies that the phenomenological epoché cannot properly neutralize or interrupt belief in the existence of language, other subjects, or even the existence of the world. Ideal objectivity cannot be the accomplishment of the meaning-giving and meaning-fulfilling acts of transcendental subjectivity alone, since language itself functions as a transcendental condition for the very possibility of the constitution of such linguistic objects. The ideal objects, such as essences, cannot have an existence apart from language. They are objectivated in language, documented in written text, as Husserl himself says in "Ursprung der Geometrie" (HuaVI 369, 371-372/OG 358, 360-361). Thus objectivating acts are essentially language-using acts. Language further brings with it the problem of the semantic relationship between language and the world. Thus language is one of the



essential structures of transcendental consciousness, even within the reductions. This further brings up the question of the very possibility of performing the epoché and the phenomenological reductions in a rigorous, Husserlian manner.

It is these types of philosophical problems and open questions of Cartesian foundationalism that motivate the philosophy of both Hannah Arendt and Maurice-Merleau-Ponty. In the following chapters I will focus on how Arendt and Merleau-Ponty attempt to answer the questions by reformulating the hierarchical order of belief and true knowledge.

Part II *Doxa and pistis*. Arendt and Merleau-Ponty on the hierarchical order of certainty and faith

**4. Arendt's dismantling of Western metaphysics**

Arendt's philosophical methodology descends from the existential-phenomenological and hermeneutical-phenomenological tradition that has its origin in Martin Heidegger's critique of Husserl's phenomenology, implicitly presented in his first major work *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*). Heidegger's main critique against Husserl and Cartesianism in general is that transcendental consciousness with its intentional structures is always already situated, with the world, time and language as its horizons (Heidegger 1927/1962 §13; Heidegger 1975/1988, §13a; Taminioux 1992/1997, 63-66.) Thus, according to Heidegger the Husserlian methodology of reductions must be modified in order to reach an understanding of the primary question of the meaning of Being. Heidegger does not neglect the Husserlian methodology of reductions but denies that the transcendental epoché can ever be able to neutralize the being of the world. Heidegger's critical philosophy bears striking similarities to Nietzsche's and Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel's strive for absolute knowledge and especially Kierkegaard's critique of Descartes' strive for absolute certainty. The core of this type of a critical philosophical tradition - from which also Arendt's thought springs forth - is the philosophical examination of the position from which human beings as philosophical subjects begin their inquiry. In other words, the guiding question presented to Cartesian, subjectivist foundationalism is: from what position are we able to ask philosophical questions in the first place? The strategy to approach this question is to carefully examine the context of philosophical questions. In other words, the search for foundations is replaced by a hermeneutical examination of contexts, in order to be able to achieve a general understanding of reality. However, since one of the results of this technique is the discovery that the subject presenting the questions is always already situated within a

spatio-temporal, dynamic context, no absolute, final truth can ever be achieved or accomplished<sup>56</sup>.

On the other hand, in addition to the influence of Heidegger's early philosophy on Arendt's thought, Arendt was also heavily influenced by Aristoteles' and Marx's philosophies of praxis. Her second major work, *The Human Condition*, was originally meant as critical discussion of Marx' concept of praxis (Canovan 1998, xi).<sup>57</sup> In the following I will present Arendt's philosophical methodology and show how her argumentation at first moves within the framework of the hermeneutical, existential-phenomenology and then transforms itself to a linguistic-pragmatic critique of the conditions for the possibility of philosophical knowledge.

#### 4.1 Perspectivism and dismantling as theoretical tools

In the introduction to *The Human Condition*, Arendt mentions that her approach consists of a historical analysis of the conditions that constitute and shape human existence. Her main focus is on the role that action (*praxis*) plays in the constitution of a meaningful world (HC, 5-6). The style of the book is very typical to Arendt. She shifts between philosophical, political and historical analyses, changing from one topic to the other (Canovan 1998, viii). In this way the book displays carefully, layer by layer the different structures of human existence, including temporality, the necessary maintenance of life, the linguistic and pragmatic conditions for meaningful communication and finally the

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<sup>56</sup> This is why Merleau-Ponty in the introduction to the *Phénoménologie de la perception* (*Phenomenology of Perception*) writes that phenomenology must always begin anew, from its beginnings and that the reduction can never be complete (PP, 14/PPE, xv-xvi).

<sup>57</sup> Arendt was brought up in a liberal, leftist intellectual environment. Her mother, Martha Arendt was a leftist activist and an admirer of Rosa Luxemburg. During Arendt's youth years at Heidelberg and Marburg, she spent much of her time in socialist, intellectual circles in which she also met her first husband Günter Stern. When Arendt met her second husband, Heinrich Blücher, he was a lecturer and socialist activist who encouraged Arendt to read Marx, Trotsky and Weber. (Young-Bruehl 2004.) Although Arendt's first major work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, draws bold parallels between fascist and communist forms of totalitarianism, and although she presents critique against Marxism throughout her career, her stress on the importance of the feeling of belonging to some community, the importance of companionship, solidarity, communication and acting together for a common goal, originate from her early involvement in the socialist movements. *The Human Condition* and its chapters on "World-alienation" is among other things, an explicit, Weberian critique of capitalist individualism (HC, 251-256). Thus *The Human Condition* cannot be read simply as an implicit critique against Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. Having Arendt's background in mind, it is not surprising that after her emigration to the USA, she found the American, liberal pragmatism as an alternative to Marxist philosophy of praxis. In the opening of her early postwar essay "What is Existential philosophy" we find Arendt writing: "Pragmatism and phenomenology are the most recent and interesting of the epigonal philosophical schools of the last hundred years" (WEP, 164).

formation of a cultural and historical human habitat. The purpose of the analysis is to gain multiple perspectives over the same topic and to reach a hermeneutic understanding of it without diffusing the various aspects<sup>58</sup>. However, despite her explicit remarks on the importance of a historical analysis, Arendt does not explicitly tell what exactly her research method is. In other words, how is the understanding supposed to be achieved?

It seems that the first time that Arendt explicitly articulates the method that underlies both her philosophical and political investigations, is not until relatively late in her career, first in the introduction and then on the last pages of volume I of her last work, *The Life of the Mind*. Here Arendt opens her philosophical inquiry with a question concerning the relationship between the Western philosophical tradition and the present time. Arendt reflects on famous philosophical statements such as the claim that God is dead, that reason is in a crisis and finally the claim that Western philosophy and history has come to its final state in the self-understanding of Absolute Spirit<sup>59</sup>. Arendt remarks that actually the context of the discussion of “the end of philosophy” is Kant’s radical question concerning the possibility of future metaphysics<sup>60</sup> (LM I, 15-16). She points out that the philosophical shock that Kant gives to Western philosophy is due to the fact that he leaves open a possibility that the capabilities of reason may be limited.

Arendt claims that this challenge for philosophy divides the philosophical tradition following Kant. Whereas Hegel’s and the German idealists’ answer to Kant is to liberate the faculty of speculative reason - through a turn to transcendental idealism - in order to abolish the dichotomy between the subjective and objective fields of knowledge, philosophers such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Heidegger pause to think about the nature and meaning of Kant’s question for future philosophy. Arendt claims that it is here that the existentialist question originates<sup>61</sup> (WEP, 167-168). That is, from what

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<sup>58</sup> In the preface to the *Philosophische Untersuchungen (Philosophical Investigations)*, Ludwig Wittgenstein tells how his philosophical method consists in approaching the problem from various different aspects, depending on the nature of the problem. In this way, the philosopher, similar to the artist, makes several sketches of a chosen theme (Wittgenstein 1953/2004, Vorwort/Preface). This style has been previously used also by Friedrich Nietzsche. Arendt, who had studied both philosophers in depth, adapted a similar, perspectival method.

<sup>59</sup> According to Arendt, the claim that God is dead, was not first presented by Nietzsche but by Hegel, in a text from 1802 named “Glauben und Wissen” (published in *Werke*, vol II, Frankfurt 1970). (LM I, 9)

<sup>60</sup> Kant’s Copernican revolution aims at turning the focus of philosophy on asking for the conditions of the possibility of knowledge, instead of investigating on readily formed beliefs. This radical questioning thus puts into question all traditional beliefs and doctrines, including those of religion.

<sup>61</sup> It is important to notice that also Merleau-Ponty, in the preface to the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, describes how the existential-phenomenological tradition has been evolving already in Marx’s, Nietzsche’s and Kierkegaard’s philosophy. (PP, 8/PPe, viii)

position and within what context are we able to ask philosophical questions and make philosophical statements in the first place? In other words, what are the conditions for the possibility of philosophical knowledge?

Arendt reflects on her own philosophical thinking in relation to Kant's question and clarifies her position: "I have clearly joined the ranks of those who for some time now have been attempting to dismantle metaphysics, and philosophy with all its categories, as we have known them from Greek until today"<sup>62</sup> (LM I, 212). She claims that despite the eventual crisis of reason, man has not lost his ability to think philosophically. Arendt remarks that what has happened is that the way philosophical questions have been asked, and the context in which these questions have been framed has become implausible. (LM I, 10-12.) Arendt stresses the importance of interpretation and narration as constitutive of present philosophy. An original beginning (*arche*) cannot be located within history, since history consists of several different interpretations based on historical practices and events (HC, 273; BPF, 42-43)<sup>63</sup>. One of the implausible philosophical doctrines that Arendt locates in the history of metaphysics is the rational proof or demonstration of God's existence. In her essay "What is Existential philosophy?" Arendt writes:

"Kant's refutation of the ontological proof of God's existence destroyed any rational belief in God based on the proposition that anything accessible to reason had to exist [...]. This so-called disappearance of God from the world, the knowledge that we cannot rationally prove the existence of God, had as serious implications for concepts of ancient philosophy as it had for the Christian religion. In a godless world, man in his "abandonment" or his "individual autonomy" is accessible to interpretation. For every modern philosopher – and not just for Nietzsche – this interpretation becomes the touchstone for his philosophy. (WEP, 169)

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<sup>62</sup> The methodological ranks that Arendt has joined include Kant's critical philosophy, Nietzsche's genealogy and Heidegger's destruction.

<sup>63</sup> Arendt strongly opposes the Hegelian interpretation of history. In the last chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, called "Ideology and terror: a novel form of government", Arendt locates a continuity between deterministic conceptions of history and totalitarian forms of government. Arendt argues that when historical events are justified through an absolutely necessary *telos*, or through laws inherent in God, also totalitarian governments, holocausts and other events can be justified through the same means. (OT, 593-616.) As an alternative, Arendt develops a genuine conception of history, through an appeal to human natality and indeterminism. Arendt's conception of history cannot here be addressed in further detail, due to a restricted amount of space.

The refutation of the ontological proof has serious consequences for any philosophical attempt to construct a system of first philosophy. For example, as has been shown in the chapters 2.3, although Descartes emphasizes the finitude of the human intellect, the rational proof of God's existence is the cornerstone that guarantees the coherence of his metaphysical system. Even Kant himself finally needs God for grounding his moral philosophy. The echos of a neo-Platonic conception of God still appear as a historical *Geist*, or the Absolute in Fichte's and Hegel's systems and later in transcendental phenomenology<sup>64</sup>. What is common to these views is that they all have attempted to ground knowledge on absolute foundations. In order to avoid infinite regress in the structuring of hierarchical beliefs, the absolutely final ground has commonly been an omnipotent God (HC, 282).

According to Arendt, the philosophical rupture and crisis that Kant has caused in the history of Western metaphysics has not killed thinking and philosophy. Instead it has opened up a space for genuine self-critique and self-understanding (LM I, 11-12). She emphasizes that this space in the tradition of Western philosophy is something that every philosophical generation should cherish in order to keep critical thinking and philosophical dialogue alive (LM I, 212). Arendt regards Kant's achievement in the following passage:

“The [ancient] unity of thought and Being presupposed the pre-established coincidence of *essentia* and *existentia*; that is, everything thinkable also existed, and everything extant, because it was knowable, also had to be rational. Kant [...] shattered that unity. Kant robbed man of the ancient security in Being by revealing the antinomy inherent in the structure of reason; and by his analysis of synthetic propositions, he proved that by any proposition that makes a statement about reality, we reach beyond the concept (*the essentia*) of any given thing.” (WEP, 168.)

The result of this shattering of the unity of thought and Being has according to Arendt severe consequences for philosophy, since Kant focuses his philosophy especially on our understanding of the relation between language and the world. According to Arendt, the dichotomies between “mind” and “body” or the “real world” and “the apparent world” are not ontological distinctions, but conceptual distinctions. When we realize this, we can see the superficiality in many philosophical dichotomies. Arendt's dismantling of

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<sup>64</sup> Husserl recalls on several occasions that his transcendental phenomenology is finally meant as a non-confessional path to God (See for example Moran 2005, 17; Smith 2003, 210).

Western metaphysics thus consists in exposing philosophical thought-patterns and arguments that have become so common, that they have become a part of our everyday use of language. She sees efforts of this type of a dismantling already in Kierkegaard's, Nietzsche's and Marx's writings and thus states:

“In Marx, as in the case of great authors of the last century, a seemingly playful, challenging and paradoxical mood conceals the perplexity of having to deal with new phenomena in terms of an old tradition of thought outside of whose conceptual framework no thinking seems possible at all. It is as though Marx, not unlike Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, tried desperately to think against the tradition while using its conceptual tools.” (BPF, 25.)

In order to be able to localize and expose metaphysical fallacies, Arendt thus takes her clue from language. Quoting Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Arendt claims that:

“ 'The results of philosophy are the uncovering...of bumps that the intellect has got by running its head up against the limits of language.' These *bumps* are what we have here called 'metaphysical fallacies'; they are what 'makes us see the value of the discovery'. Or: 'Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday' (*wenn die Sprache feiert*). [...] Or: 'Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by language'. The trouble is of course that this battle can be refought only by language.” (LM I, 115.)

Arendt's aim is to show how our use of language and its concepts affect our philosophical thinking. In order to be able to show this, she uses both grammatical and etymological analysis of the use of concepts. However, the so called metaphysical fallacies must not be denied nor solved. Instead they must be located and revealed (LM II, 55). In this way Arendt's philosophical project consists in a form of a philosophical “deconstruction” (Kristeva 2001, 172; Taminiaux 1997, 125, 140). The deconstructionist method of dismantling focuses on the implicit presuppositions that philosophers inevitably make in their research processes. By following the philosophical argumentation of a chosen philosopher or a chosen philosophical doctrine to its limits, Arendt claims to be able to reveal strands of thought that are not visible to the author himself. This opens up a space for a critical dialogue between the author and the reader.

“None of the systems, none of the doctrines transmitted to us by the great thinkers may be convincing or even plausible to modern readers; but none of them, I shall try to argue here, is arbitrary and none can be dismissed as sheer nonsense. On the contrary, the metaphysical fallacies contain the only clues we have to what thinking means to those who engage in it – something of great importance today and about which, oddly enough, there exist few direct utterances.” (LM I, 12.)

#### **4.2 The problem of grounding knowledge in experience: empiricist foundationalism and the mathematization of nature**

One of the main metaphysical doctrines that Arendt aims at dismantling is the task of grounding knowledge on certain, bedrock foundations. In the last section of the *Human Condition* and in the first book of *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt presents a critical reading of both traditional rationalist- and empiricist foundationalism. According to Arendt, both types of foundationalism misinterpret the intentional structure that ties the subject and the world.

Arendt claims that something crucial happens within the birth of modern natural science. The ideal for the new science is the valuing and measuring of phenomena from an objective, independent and neutral viewpoint (HC, 258-259). Arendt claims that although empiricism claims to be able to ground knowledge in experience, it is still dependent on the mathematical, natural-scientific methods in order to be able to carry out and verify empirical experiments. Thus, one of the conditions for the possibility of empiricist foundationalism is according to Arendt the mathematization of nature (HC, 268). Without the abstract and experience-independent, symbolic language of algebra, Newtonian physics for example would not have been possible (HC, 265).

According to Arendt, Galileo's, Descartes' and Hobbes' fascination with pure mathematics distorted the distinction between the types of knowledge that pure mathematics and applied mathematics deal with. Because of this, formal, exact systems could be used for measuring all types of natural phenomena, including human behavior (BPF, 55-56; HC, 45, 266). Arendt claims that what was forgotten in the early modern process of the mathematization of nature was the fact that originally, knowledge of mathematical objects has arisen through practical measurement, counting and the bodily



apprehension of three-dimensional space<sup>65</sup>. In this way mathematical objects had originally been apprehended through abstraction from concrete, bodily perception (HC, 266-267).

Arendt's position regarding the ontology of mathematics is difficult to clarify, since both in *The Human Condition* and in *The Life of the Mind*, she presents a critique of the mathematization of nature but offers only scattered remarks of an alternative view. Also, when discussing the philosophy and ontology of mathematics, Arendt is at times careless with her use of language. Thus she occasionally gives the impression that she is promoting some form of a psychologism regarding the nature of mathematical knowledge<sup>66</sup>. However, if her critique of the mathematization of nature is read in line with her general, holistic view of language, it seems more plausible that Arendt is promoting some form of realist structuralism in the philosophy of mathematics. Thus mathematical objects, such as numbers, do not exist as such, but only as positions or places within a structure or a pattern. The way we come to know about mathematical objects, such as numbers, is through the apprehension of patterns and series (HC, 267). Mathematics is the language we use for describing simple and more complex structures<sup>67</sup>. The way we conceive the reality to be divided into structures, patterns and objects is thus highly dependent on our linguistic capacities, such as the capability to understand and use mathematical deduction and inference. Arendt thus avoids empiricism in the philosophy of mathematics but also the type of Aristotelian universalism in which universals are instantiated in some form of "noetic matter". On the other hand, she also avoids the type of Platonism promoted by Descartes' distinction of the *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, Husserl's distinction of "authentic" and "inauthentic" numbers or his later distinction between ideal, a-temporal objects and temporal, transcendental acts of consciousness.

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<sup>65</sup> Arendt's argumentation resembles Husserl's view of the history of modern science, presented in *The Crisis of European Sciences* (see especially K/CES §§8-9, §§10-13), with the restriction that the conclusions that Arendt and Husserl draw from the "mathematization of nature" differ in several ways. For example, Arendt does not see the teleological process of the history of philosophy as a preparation for the transcendental reduction, as Husserl does. The interpretational influence behind both Husserl's and Arendt's conception of the history of modern science is Alexandre Koyré's work on the subject. Koyré was Husserl's student and Arendt's good friend. In their work, both Husserl and Arendt thank Koyré for his insightful remarks on the rise of modern science (see HC, 249, 258, 260 and Hua1, 25/CM, 24). Arendt draws her interpretation of the history of modern science also from the works of Werner Heisenberg, A. N. Whitehead, both of whom she quotes frequently.

<sup>66</sup> See especially HC, 266-267 and LM I, 60.

<sup>67</sup> In contemporary philosophy of mathematics this type of mathematical structuralism has been developed Stewart Shapiro and Michael Resnik among others (See Shapiro 1997, 112-116; Resnik 1982).

The reason why Arendt regards Galileo and Descartes as revolutionary philosophers is due to their way of developing and changing the Greek conception of geometry. In this way, the original practice of measuring land and three-dimensional space becomes a highly abstract and technical enterprise (HC, 264-266, 287). In agreement with Descartes' own conception of the difficulties in the applicability of abstract branches of mathematics, Arendt remarks that the highly abstract and technical algebra does not directly reflect the perceptual world. Algebraic space is a technical construction, which is possible due to the rules of algebraic equations and the discovery of non-euclidean space. However, this type of pure mathematics deals with a different type of knowledge than knowledge gained through perception and sense-experience (HC, 265, 285). For example the perception of space and motion cannot be reduced to mathematical terms, without a significant change in meaning. "With the disappearance of the sensually given world, the transcendent world disappears as well, and with it the possibility of transcending the material world in concept and thought" (HC, 288).

This does of course not mean that Arendt would consider mathematical methods as completely insufficient for use in natural sciences. Arendt's point is rather, that within the modern physicalistic conception of reality, everyday perception and sensation are conceived as "mere appearance" in contrast to the way things "really" are. This is one example of a significant change in the meaning of "reality" and "real". Arendt takes as her example Galileo's conception of grounding knowledge in experience. Galileo's famous distinction between "primary" and "secondary qualities of sensation" can be seen as an attempt to answer the problem of skepticism that rises within empiricist foundationalism. The distinction makes it possible to regard the entire reality as an object for applied mathematics, and pure mathematics as the language through which the objective reality is constructed. Yet, the epistemic relationship between these two realms remains unresolved (HC, 283; BPF 56). According to Arendt, an important shift in the attitude towards the reality happens within the birth of Renaissance and the natural sciences. With the development of new instruments, such as the discovery of the telescope and various mechanical machines, philosophers and scientists loose trust in the accuracy of knowledge gained through "naked" sense perception (HC, 260, 274; Villa 1996, 190). Originally the so called "secondary sensory qualities" are experienced as just as real as the so called "primary sensory qualities". In fact, now we can see, according to Arendt, that the distinction itself is superficial, since it

presupposes an objective viewpoint from which human beings could evaluate how things really are in themselves<sup>68</sup>. Thus she states:

“[...] The scientists in their search for “true reality” lost confidence in the world of “mere” appearance, in the phenomena as they reveal themselves of their own accord to the human senses and reason [...] The trouble is only that the discovery of the “true reality” behind the mere appearances remains bound to a world of appearance; he [man] cannot “think” in terms of what he now conceives as reality, he cannot communicate in language about it, and his own life remains bound to a time concept that demonstrably does not belong to “true reality” but [...] mere appearance”. (AP, 7.)

When the whole nature is regarded as an object for applied mathematics, the difference between various types of knowledge becomes ambiguous. At the same time, the distinction between mere belief and true knowledge appears in a new form. This is because according to empiricist foundationalism, true knowledge is conceived as empirically verifiable, empirically grounded beliefs (LM I, 55). However, if these types of beliefs are to be scientifically verified, they must be factual truths (LM I, 61). Empiricist foundationalism thus needs to somehow explain the connection between empirical knowledge and non-empirical knowledge, such as the laws and truths of mathematics. If knowledge is divided into *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge, the question still remains, namely, what is the relationship between the types of knowledge and by what means are these types of knowledge gained? The positivist distinction between analytic and synthetic statements merely pushes the question further, as has been demonstrated by W.V. Quine in his article “Two dogmas of empiricism”. The question of verification still remains and thus, according to Arendt, modern, empirical science becomes a never-ending, self-correcting process that never reaches its ideal of truth<sup>69</sup> (LM I, 54-55). Yet, empirical foundationalism claims to be able to ground knowledge in empirical experience.

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<sup>68</sup> More recently, a similar argument has been presented also by Hilary Putnam, in his article, “Pragmatic realism” (Putnam 1987/1999, 591-606). Arendt and Putnam are in agreement on the pragmatist view that human subjects participate in the constitution of a meaningful world through action and the use of language. Also, both Arendt and Putnam are externalists regarding their conception of the status of linguistic meanings.

<sup>69</sup> This view is a fully accepted position among some strands of current philosophy of science. For example critical scientific realism holds truth to be an ideal goal that science can never accomplish, but towards which it aims. Critical scientific realism accepts the view according to which the objective reality can best be explained in terms of natural science. See for example Niiniluoto, 2002, 9-12, 64-78 and 185-191.

### 4.3 The problem of grounding knowledge in subjectivity: Cartesian foundationalism and the problem of language

According to Arendt, both Descartes' philosophy and transcendental phenomenology are attempts to answer epistemological problems faced by empirical sciences. One of the main philosophical problems is the problem of skepticism. Whereas empiricist foundationalism attempts to ground knowledge in experience, Cartesian foundationalism attempts to answer skepticism by means of establishing a philosophy based on absolutely indubitable foundations. However, Arendt claims that neither doctrine is able to see the conditions for the possibility of fulfilling their task.

Arendt's main argument against Cartesian foundationalism is that the world's existence cannot be properly doubted or bracketed because language, by means of which we think, functions as the unbreakable bridge between the contemplating ego and the world (LM I, 102, 110). Thus Arendt claims: "Descartes' *Cogito me cogitare ergo sum* is a non sequitur for the simple reason that this *res cogitans* never appears at all unless its cogitations are made manifest in sounding-out or written-down speech, which is already meant for and presupposes auditors and readers as its recipients." (LM I, 20) In other words, the withdrawal to the subjective realm of reflective consciousness presupposes the existence of an intersubjective community that shares a common world and a common linguistic system as a reference point of thought. Arendt claims that reflection takes its bearings from the visible world of perception and apprehends the structures of consciousness by means of conceptual thought. But thinking is always already intertwined with language. The intentional bond between the philosopher and the world can never be interrupted by means of a philosophical method because language binds thought and the world (LM I, 110).

According to Arendt, we cannot answer the question whether language presupposes thought or whether thought presupposes language (LM I, 98-99). The two are inseparable. Arendt quotes the preface of Merleau-Ponty's *Signes (Signs)*: "Thought without speech is inconceivable; 'thought and speech anticipate one another. They continually take one another's place'; they actually take each other for granted" (LM I, 32; S, 24/Se, 17). Whenever we want to describe a perception, an experience or a thought-pattern, we need to rely on some form of a language or system of signs. This can be sign language, speech or written text, but the criteria is that the language is

constructed through a set of common rules of use for that particular language. Arendt admits that we might feel that we cannot adequately express our most personal experiences or complex thoughts properly in any type of language, since the experience of thinking is very different from for example the experience of perceiving something or doing something practical. It may appear as if something essential to the experience or thought disappears the moment it is brought into language. Thus Arendt asks: “Was it not precisely the discrepancy between words, the medium in which we think, and the world of appearances, the medium in which we live, that lead to philosophy and metaphysics in the first place?” (LM I, 8). Further in the first book of *The Life of the Mind* she states: “[t]he words are part and parcel of our everyday speech, and still we can give no account of them; when we try to define them, they get slippery; when we talk about their meaning, nothing stays put anymore, everything begins to move.” (LM I, 170). However, here she differs significantly from Descartes and Husserl, namely, Arendt claims that this experience of a discrepancy does not imply that thinking or the subjective experiences are prior to, or more authentic than speech and symbolic language, as both Descartes and Husserl claim. This is because we cannot achieve a neutral point outside language from which we could evaluate which is prior to the other, thought to language or the other way around. Linguistic concepts are learned through the use of a flexible, historical language-system that we are born into. We learn to point to and speak about perceived objects by means of a linguistic system that has a set of common rules. Thus, according to Arendt, meanings cannot be understood as ideal, omnitemporal objects that have a similar existence as mathematical objects have according to Platonic realism. Instead, the meaning of a word arises through its use in a sentence, in a particular natural language<sup>70</sup> (LM I, 99, 171, 175). What is important to note, is that meanings do not exist prior to the use of some form of a system of signs, for example speech or complex body language.

This is also the reason why there cannot be an authentic, transparent correspondence between transcendental consciousness, the phenomenal world (*phainomena*) and language (*logos*). The relationship between thought and perception, between the mental and the physical realm, is always a relation of carrying over

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<sup>70</sup> Arendt often uses as her example the word “house”. The meaning of the word is constituted through our form of life, namely, a house is characteristic by someone living in it, dwelling in it and perhaps having it as a home (See for example LM I, 170-171).

information by means of “metaphorical” language (LM I, 102-103). This is because concepts of language are constituted by a historical community of subjects. Even though reflection necessary withdraws from the world of appearances in order to be able to focus on mental phenomena and the structures of consciousness, the concepts of thought are necessarily borrowed from a common language.

“Language, the only medium through which mental activities can be manifest not only to the outside world but to the mental ego itself, is by no means as evidently adequate for the thinking activity as vision is for its business of seeing. No language has a ready-made vocabulary for the needs of mental activity; they all borrow their vocabulary from words originally meant to correspond either to sense experience or to other experiences of ordinary life.” (LM I, 102)

In line with Merleau-Ponty, Arendt holds that speech of the public, common world does not make speech less authentic than philosophical conceptual speech. In fact, the speech of the public world, together with body language, is the most original form of language that we can ever know (HC, 175-181). According to Arendt, the human form of praxis, which she calls “action” and meaningful speech are the forms in which the person of a human being, “the who”, is disclosed. Thus Arendt can account that already a gesture is expressive. It is a form of praxis.

“[H]uman plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings. Speech and action [*praxis*] reveal this unique distinctness. Through them, men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects but qua *men*<sup>71</sup>. [...] With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. (HC, 178. Italics in the original text.)

Arendt respects the importance of philosophical, even meditative thinking, but she claims that the task and ideal of philosophical thinking cannot be the reaching of a final, absolute truth by means of intuition (LM I, 121-122). Truth, is according to Arendt something that can only be defined within a language, in relation to a context. In other words, the definition of “truth” is dependent on our linguistic conventions. It is far easier

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<sup>71</sup> Arendt commonly uses the word “man” to denote human beings in general. It is her translation of the German word *Mensch* and is not gender specific as in man (*Mann*) (Kohn 1996, 174 n2). The reason why Arendt has added italics to this passage is that she stresses the existence of man as always plural, as men.

to verify a sentence in the field of formal logic or mathematics, than to say what statement is true or false in for example the context of moral philosophy. (Nelson 1978, 278.) Our moral norms and codes are flexible, contingent, historically and culturally changing. The diversity of various perspectives and aspects is according to Arendt that which makes discursive thought and philosophy itself possible in the first place. Without the capability to discursive thought, there would be no such thing as philosophy. No matter what type of an etymological deconstruction, it will not be able to penetrate the layer of language and achieve an original, fixed and authentic meaning of words.

“Existence itself is, by its very nature, never isolated. It exists only in communication and in awareness of others’ existence. Our fellow men are not (as in Heidegger) an element of existence that is structurally necessary but at the same time an impediment to the Being of Self. Just the contrary: Existence can develop only in the shared life of human beings inhabiting a world common to them all. In the concept of communication lies a concept of humanity new in its approach, though not yet fully developed, that postulates communication as the premise for the existence of man. Within ‘all-encompassing’ Being in any case, human beings live and act with each other; and in doing so, they neither pursue the phantom of Self nor live in arrogant illusion that they constitute Being itself.” (WEP, 186.)

The task of thinking is according to Arendt the aiming of an understanding of things, to make the world meaningful (LM I, 15). It is not surprising that Arendt regards Socrates as her ideal thinker, since according to her, the aim of his dialectic method is precisely to reach a common understanding (*doxa*) of a chosen topic. Discursive thought that borrows its concepts from an intersubjective community cannot reach absolute truths. It can however, accomplish an agreement. According to Arendt, this is why most of Socrates’ reflections remain unresolved, they end in *aporia* (LM I, 169). This is because philosophical problems cannot be solved in a similar way as for example Euclidean geometrical problems, where the answer is always deducible from a finite set of axioms. The fact that the intersubjective, language-using community consists of a plurality of individual subjects, makes language flexible and changing. Arendt holds that we cannot accomplish an absolute truth of the whole reality, only particular, context-dependent truths. (PHPO, 2-6.)

“Being itself is not knowable; it can be experienced only as something ‘all-encompassing.’ This makes superfluous the ancient ontological search, which so to

speak, kept a lookout in beings hoping to find Being, as if Being were a magical, omnipresent substance that makes present everything that is and that is manifest in the little word 'is'. (WEP, 186)

#### 4.4 Conclusion to the fourth chapter

Arendt conceives empiricist and rationalist foundationalism as two sides of the same coin. As has been shown in the previous chapter, she holds that knowledge cannot be grounded on a set of indubitable or foundational beliefs. This does not mean that knowledge gained through empirical sciences is implausible or that we could not receive accurate information of our mental capacities by means of reflection. Rather, Arendt is critical of the general project of finding a set of basic, non-inferential beliefs that would ground other types of belief. According to Arendt our way of justifying beliefs is context dependent. Some forms of knowledge simply cannot be proven beyond doubt because these types of belief-systems function *as the condition* for the possibility of gaining knowledge in the first place. The focus of Arendt's critique against empiricist foundationalism is the conception of certainty modeled according to exact, mathematical sciences and the division of knowledge into "true knowledge" and "mere belief". Her critique against rationalist views and especially Cartesian foundationalism is the neglect of the role that language plays in knowledge formation. In order to be able to understand Arendt's critique against Cartesian foundationalism in more depth, it is necessary at first to investigate Maurice Merleau-Ponty's critical interpretation of Cartesianism, especially his interpretation of the phenomenological reduction. This is due to the fact that Arendt's mature view of the role of language in knowledge formation is developed in the first book of *The Life of the Mind*, which is heavily influenced by the conception of language and perception presented in Merleau-Ponty's preface to *Signes (Signs)* and in *Le Visible et l'invisible (The visible and the invisible)*.

In the following chapter, I will at first examine Merleau-Ponty's critical interpretation of the phenomenological reduction and then show how Arendt relies on Merleau-Ponty's notion of "perceptual faith" (*la foi perceptive*) in order to develop her notions of *faith*, *sense of realness* and *trust* in other people.



## 5. Faith, *sense of realness* and *trust* in other people

We sometimes err, so how can we know that we do not always err? Most traditional, epistemological problems arise from the uncertain nature of sense-perception. According to the typical skeptical argumentation, our knowledge-claims rely on a network of unjustified beliefs. In our natural, common sense attitude towards the world, we take for granted truths of various propositions, such as the fact that we are embodied beings who know various things about other people and the world around us. The skeptical argumentation, such as Descartes' methodological skepticism, proceeds by making hypothetic counter-claims to our most basic beliefs and demands that in order for there to be knowledge, these hypotheses must be proven to be false. If we cannot justify common sense beliefs, then how can we justify any knowledge at all? Knowledge after all, is built on true, justified beliefs.

These types of arguments may seem quite intuitive and convincing. But on the other hand, it is very difficult, if not impossible to answer skepticism in its *own terms* because the justifications that the skeptic demands seem impossible to satisfy. The most radical skeptic demands a justification, not only of epistemic propositions that concern knowledge in the strong sense, but also of doxastic judgments that concern our most fundamental beliefs, such as the belief that there will be a tomorrow or that external objects do not cease to exist when not perceived. (Stern 2004, 19; McGuinn 1989, 11-13.) The problem with epistemological foundationalism is that it attempts to answer skepticism in its own terms by proving that there are indeed fundamental, indubitable beliefs that skepticism cannot refuse to accept if it is to remain a serious, philosophical doctrine.

Another way of answering skepticism is to refuse to go along with the skeptic's criteria for justified, true knowledge. This second alternative is used by Maurice-Merleau-Ponty in his last work, *Le Visible et l'invisible (The Visible and the Invisible)*. In this unfinished, posthumously published manuscript, Merleau-Ponty develops the notion of *perceptual faith (la foi perceptive)* and states that inquiry and knowledge begins from a pre-epistemic, non-propositional conviction in the realness of the perceived world. The existence of the world can neither be proven, denied nor neutralized. It is the condition for the possibility of knowledge formation. Merleau-

Ponty's conception of perceptual faith descends from Husserl's conception of *Protodoxa* or *Urdoxa*, the most basic form of belief in the existence of an external, mind-independent world. However, for Merleau-Ponty, perceptual faith is not doxastic orthetic but instead an affective, bodily stance.

### 5.1 Merleau-Ponty's conception of *perceptual faith*

In the preface to the *Phénoménologie de la Perception (Phenomenology of Perception)* Merleau-Ponty makes his famous statement about the "impossibility of a complete [Husserlian] reduction" (PP, 14/PPe, xv)<sup>72</sup> Later, in *Le Visible et l'invisible (The Visible and Invisible)*, Merleau-Ponty writes: "The thematization of language overcomes another stage of naiveté [...] This is to be understood not as an imperfection [...] but as a philosophical *theme*: the incompleteness of the reduction ("biological reduction", "psychological reduction", "reduction to transcendental immanence" and finally "fundamental thought") is not an obstacle to the reduction, it is the reduction itself, the rediscovery of vertical being." (VI, 229-230/VIe, 178)<sup>73</sup> Phenomenology must according to Merleau-Ponty always begin its enquiry anew, from the beginning.

This statement has convinced some scholars, such as Aron Gurtwitsch, Gary Madison and Stephen Priest of the fact that Merleau-Ponty rejects the Husserlian methodology of reductions and turns towards a more Heideggerian conception of phenomenology as ontology (Gurtwitsch 1964; Madison 1981; Priest 1998). Others, such as Sara Heinämaa and Joel Smith argue that Merleau-Ponty does not reject the Husserlian reductions, but follows them to their ultimate point and takes Husserl's methodology a step further than Husserl himself did (Heinämaa 2002; Smith 2005). According to the latter interpretation, which will be defended and developed further in this chapter, Merleau-Ponty's conception of the Husserlian reduction is that if the series of reductions are carried out properly, a complete reduction shows itself to be impossible. In other words, the impossibility of a complete reduction is the phenomenological reduction carried out properly. The discussion between the different

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<sup>72</sup> « Le plus grand enseignement de la réduction est l'impossibilité d'une réduction complète. »

<sup>73</sup> « La thématization du langage dépasse encore une étape de naïveté [...] Cela à comprendre non comme une imperfection [...] mais comme theme philosophique: l'incomplétude de la réduction (« réduction biologique », « réduction psychologique », réduction à l'immanence transcendente » et finalement « pensée fondamentale ») n'est pas un obstacle à la réduction, elle est la réduction même, la redécouverte de l'être vertical. »

interpretations seems thus to concern the manner and nature of the reduction. What then does an “incomplete reduction” mean? A close examination of Merleau-Pontys’ last writings sheds light on this problem<sup>74</sup>.

The task of the Husserlian reductions is to bracket, suspend, neutralize or interrupt the thesis of the natural attitude. As has been shown in chapter 3.3, for Husserl, the conviction of the existence of an outer world is due to the thetic, doxastic positing acts of transcendental consciousness. This conviction is characterized by Husserl’s notion of *Urdoxa*<sup>75</sup>. For Husserl, the neutralization of this conviction is caused by an act of free will, the phenomenological and transcendental reductions are voluntary acts performed by transcendental consciousness. This is why Husserl can claim that the world is relative to the absolute consciousness. Like Descartes before him, Husserl argues that consciousness can suspend belief in the existence of an external world, but it cannot suspend belief in its own existence, because this conviction is given in the act of reflection itself.

Although Merleau-Ponty accepts the phenomenological, methodological first-person perspective as the starting point of inquiry, he argues that the positing of the world does not happen through a thetic, doxastic act of free will. Instead the relation between the subject and the world is an affective, bodily, perceptual network. As an alternative to the traditional, epistemological dichotomy between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge, promoted by both Cartesianism and empiricism, Merleau-Ponty offers a somewhat Spinozistic conception of the structure of reality, in which the mental and the material are two intertwining aspects of Being, or to use Merleau-Ponty’s terms, of “Flesh” (*chair*) (VI, 307-308, 297-298/VIe 259-260, 248-249).

Merleau-Ponty argues that human consciousness is always already situated and “incarnated” in a living, perceiving body. This “opening” towards the world is one of the transcendental structures of consciousness (S, 23/Se, 16). My body is a moving,

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<sup>74</sup> Joel Smith focuses mainly on the interpretation of the reduction that Merleau-Ponty gives in his *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, from 1945. This early work is an explicit level more Husserlian than Merleau-Ponty’s writings from the sixties. A close examination on Merleau-Ponty’s last writings, such as *Le Visible et l’invisible* and *L’Œil et l’esprit* (*Eye and Mind*) reveal an interesting twist in Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the Husserlian reduction.

<sup>75</sup> Although Husserl, in *Erfahrung und Urteil* conceives that predication is grounded on pre-predicative perception, he nevertheless regards even this primary form of perception as having a doxastic and thetic structure, in the sense that it *can be neutralized* by the acts of transcendental consciousness. It is “[...] already an activity, a cognitive performance at the lowest level [...] Thus even the purely perceptive contemplation of a pre-given substrate proves to be our achievement, an act, an not a mere suffering of impression” (EU/EJ §13).

touching, seeing, suffering and enjoying body through which I perceive and take various affective attitudes towards the world and other subjects, in the context of an always present background. This horizontal background is the world of perception, or to use Merleau-Ponty's terminology, "the visible" (*le visible*) ontological realm (VI, 47-48, 167-168/VIe, 28, 127-128). Since I am a "psycho-physical" being, I cannot separate myself from this lived body and neither can I withdraw completely from the context of the world, not even in reflection. This is because the experience of the world begins from my moving body, through the sensation of space (PP, 182/PPe, 169). According to Merleau-Ponty, the objects encountered through perception are originally given affectively, for example as repulsive, insignificant, compelling, beautiful or frightening. Colors, shapes, sounds and smells are given simultaneously with the experience of the perceived object. They are not synthesized on top of athetic, positing act by means of another act of transcendental consciousness (VI, 172-173/VIe, 132-133).

According to Merleau-Ponty, there is an inbuilt structure of "double-sensation" in both vision and tactile perception. When I touch things, my body is being touched by the things and when I look at a person in his eyes, I experience simultaneously that I am being looked at (VI, 162, 175/VIe, 123, 134). I am also able to experience this double-sensation by touching my own hand with the other hand<sup>76</sup>. In this way I am simultaneously the subject touching the hand and the object of that touch (PP, 122/PPe, 106-107). For Merleau-Ponty, the touching hands function as a paradigm analogy of reflection. In other words, my self-awareness is possible due to the existence of other perceiving subjects who, like me, perceive our common world as the context of our lives, and ourselves as perceiving subjects in this world (VI, 21-28/VIe, 7-12). In his late philosophy, Merleau-Ponty attempts to conceptualize the experience of the intentional double-sensation between the perceiving subject and the perceived world by the use of terms such as "tissue" (*tissue*), "intertwining" (*entrelacs*) and "chiasm" (*chiasme*).

Because embodiment is such an important element in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological descriptions, he argues that the presence of the world is originally experienced through a pre-epistemic, non-propositional, somatic and affective relation

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<sup>76</sup> Also Husserl describes this type of a double-sensation in §§36-38 of his *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch (Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, second book)*.

that he calls “trust” (*confiance*) and “faith” (*foi*) (PP, 350-351/PPe 346-347). Merleau-Ponty’s notion is strikingly similar to the ancient Greek notion of *pistis*, which means “trust”, “conviction”, “assurance”, “certitude” and “faith”<sup>77</sup>. The type of faith in question is not religious. “It is not faith in the sense of decision but in the sense of what is before any position [...]” (VI, 17/VIe, 3)<sup>78</sup>.

“We see the things themselves, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher – the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute “opinions” implicated in our lives. But what is strange about this faith is that if we seek to articulate it into theses or statements, if we ask ourselves what is this *we*, what *seeing* is, and what *thing* or *world* is, we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions”. (VI, 17/VIe, 3.)<sup>79</sup>

Merleau-Ponty highlights the affective, non-propositional nature of our primary way of relating to the world. Faith as *pistis* is precisely this type of an affective relation. It is not a way of positing something in the sense of a belief or a thesis - as is the case with Husserl’s notion of *Weltthesis* and *Urdoxa* - nor as in judgement or knowledge (*episteme*) (Brainard 2002, 58). In fact, it is questionable whether this type of faith is even intentional<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> The Ancient Greek conception of *pistis* can be found already in Thales, where he uses the concept to denote “trustworthiness”. Heraclitus describes *pistis* as a form of trustworthiness that is necessary in order for a human being to be able to give himself to a life of a philosopher and engage himself in the vision of the *kosmos*. *Pistis* in this context is not something supernatural, but nevertheless it is not something ordinary either. Heraclitus opposes reason and *pistis*. Empedocles uses *pistis* as a synonym to certitude and strong conviction or insight of truth. Plato opposes *pistis* to *doxa* (justified belief) and *episteme* (scientific knowledge). For Plato, *pistis* concerns knowledge of the sensible, perishable world. In ancient Greek language, *pistis* is not used to denote a religious type of faith, although in Parmenides and Empedocles’ philosophies the concept is at times used in connection with mysterious intuition. The religious connotations of *pistis* to faith originate in the birth of Christianity. (Gyllenberg 1922, 1-23.)

<sup>78</sup> « Ce n’est pas la foi dans le sens de décision mais dans le sens de ce qui est avant toute position [...] »

<sup>79</sup> « Nous voyons les choses memes, le monde est cela que nous voyons: des formules de ce genre experimentent une foi qui est commune à l’homme naturel et au philosophe dès qu’il ouvre les yeux, elles renvoient à une assise profonde d’”opinions” muettes impliquées dans notre vie. Mais cette foi a ceci d’étrange que, si l’on cherche à l’articuler en these ou énoncé, si l’on cherche à l’articuler en these ou énoncé, si l’on se demande ce que c’est que *nous*, ce que c’est que *voir* et que c’est que *chose* ou *monde*, on entre dans un labyrinthe de difficultés et de contradictions. »

<sup>80</sup> In contemporary epistemology, Robert Audi promotes a similar view regarding the relationship between perception and belief. Audi holds that knowledge begins from simple perception, which is non-objectual and non-propositional. “We have then a perceptual hierarchy: propositional perceiving depends on objectual perceiving, which in turn depends on simple perceiving. Simple perceiving is basic, and it commonly yields, even if it need not always yield, objectual perceiving, which, in turn, commonly yields, even if it need not always yield, propositional perceiving” (Audi 2004, 64).

“It is our experience, prior to every opinion, of inhabiting the world by our body, of inhabiting the truth by our whole selves, without there being need to choose nor even to distinguish between the assurance of seeing and the assurance of seeing the true, because in principle they are one and the same thing – faith, therefore, and not knowledge, since the world is here not separated from our hold on it, since rather than affirmed, it is taken for granted, rather than disclosed, it is non-dissimulated, non-refuted. (VI, 47/VIe, 28.)<sup>81</sup>

Since Merleau-Ponty experiences the relation between the knowing subject and his surrounding world as an affective structure, he also understands Husserl’s reduction in a somewhat different sense than Husserl himself. According to Merleau-Ponty, the epoché is a dramatic event that suddenly and by complete surprise happens to the philosopher within the stepwise practice of reductions. Thus the reduction is not completed through an act of free will<sup>82</sup>. The philosopher can actively bracket various layers of knowledge by focusing away from these themes, but at a certain point of the method, he is no longer in control of the procedure. The shift between the natural and the philosophical or reflective attitude happens in a similar, unexpected manner as Kierkegaard’s leap to faith<sup>83</sup>. It is a jump to the unknown. But then, what is it that is so dramatic within the reduction?

Merleau-Ponty’s last non-posthumously published essay, *In L’Œil et l’esprit* (*Eye and Mind*) functions as a clue to this puzzling question<sup>84</sup>. In this essay Merleau-Ponty once again describes the experience of perception, but this time through using as an analogy the experience of painters. Merleau-Ponty is especially interested in the documentations of some painters who experience that the landscape is looking at the painter while he is painting<sup>85</sup>. Merleau-Ponty quotes a somewhat cryptic passage from

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<sup>81</sup> « Notre expérience, plus vieille que toute opinion, d’habiter le monde par notre corps, la vérité par tout nous-même, sans qu’il y ait à choisir ni même à distinguer entre l’assurance de voir et celle de voir le vrai, parce qu’ils sont par principe une même chose, - le foi donc, et non pas savoir, puisque le monde n’est pas ici séparé de notre prise sur lui, qu’il est, plutôt qu’affirmé, pris comme allant de soi, plutôt que dévoilé, non dissimulé, non réfuté. »

<sup>82</sup> Sara Heinämaa traces Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the reduction to Husserl’s assistant Eugen Fink’s conception of the epoché (See Heinämaa 2002, 141-143; compare to Merleau-Ponty (PP, 14/PPe, xv).

<sup>83</sup> There is something similar in the experience of the reduction as there is in the feeling when one repeats a word or a sentence continuously until it loses its normal, everyday meaning and becomes unfamiliar. Sartre describes this type of an experience in *La Nausée* (*Nausea*), after having meditated upon a chestnut tree.

<sup>84</sup> Merleau-Ponty wrote *L’Œil et l’esprit* after finishing the preface to *Signes* (*Signs*) and the first three chapters *Le Visible and l’invisible* (Baldwin 2004, 290).

<sup>85</sup> A similar experience has been described also by Baruch Spinoza and Arthur Schopenhauer. For these two philosophers the experience happens while meditating on a landscape or in a forest. The stepwise, passive

the German cubist Paul Klee: ““In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me.”” (OE, 31/EM, 299)<sup>86</sup>. Merleau-Ponty continues by stating that this inspiration should be taken literally. “There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen [...]” (ibid)<sup>87</sup>. What is significant is the fact that Merleau-Ponty no longer explicitly uses the terminology of Husserlian phenomenology, but instead the language familiar from *Le visible and the l’invisible*. “Essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible – a painting mixes up all our categories in laying out its oneiric universe of carnal essences, of effective likeness, of mute meanings” (OE, 35/EM, 301)<sup>88</sup>. What these somewhat poetic expressions clearly aim to describe, is the experience of the “incomplete” reduction. The complete reflective turn of consciousness towards itself is doomed to a failure due to the fact that what such a reflective turn reveals is the network of affective, criss-crossing bonds between reflective consciousness and the world. This is the original experience of the *chiasm*.

Transcendental consciousness is never able to withdraw itself to a complete immanence or see the constitution of the world in a completely transparent manner because it is always already intertwined with the world and language, thus containing an element of alterity (PP, 410-411, 496/PPe, 410-411, 502; LIVS, 103-104/ILVS, 83). To put it in Kierkegaard’s or Karl Jaspers’ terminology, this experience of the reduction is an experience of a “ultimate situation” where transcendental consciousness realizes its own limits and its existential finitude (Jaspers 1932/1948, 472). According to Merleau-Ponty, if a philosopher is true to the methodology of phenomenological description, the reduction will reveal that the conviction in the reality of the external world and other subjects cannot be transcended or properly neutralized. This is because “[...] it is this unjustifiable certitude of a sensible world common to us that is the seat of truth within

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meditation confuses the experience of the subjective and objective and makes it feel as if the landscape was looking back at the meditator in a similar way as a mirror reflects ones own image.

<sup>86</sup> « Dans une forêt, j’ai senti à plusieurs reprises que ce n’était pas moi qui regardais la forêt. J’ai senti, certains jours, que c’étaient les arbres qui me regardaient, qui me parlaient... »

<sup>87</sup> « [I]l y a vraiment inspiration et expiration de l’Être, respiration dans l’Être, action et passion si peu discernables qu’on ne sait plus qui voit et qui est vu [...]»

<sup>88</sup> « Essence et existence, imaginaire et réel, visible et invisible, la peinture brouille toutes nos catégories en déployant son univers onirique d’essences charnelles, de ressemblances efficaces de significations muettes. »

us” (VI, 25/VIe, 11)<sup>89</sup>. The world and other subjects are truly real and external and yet, at the same time paradoxically experienced as partly constituted by the person practicing the reductions. For Merleau-Ponty, this experience is concretized in the chiasmatic experience of perception and in this experience lies also the impossibility of transcendental idealism and transcendental solipsism (S, 22-23/Se, 15-16; PL, 115-117/PLe, 93-94).

The perceptual faith is faith and not belief (*doxa*) or knowledge (*epistēme*) due to the fact that error and illusion is a part of our life form. Perception is always self-correcting, due to our spatio-temporal, mobile bodily existence (PP, 348/PPe 344; VI, 21/VIe, 7). Merleau-Ponty’s explanation to the paradoxical experience of the reduction is that the world becomes meaningful through the communication of several subjects inhabiting a common world (PP, 218/PPe, 208; VI, 21-28/VIe, 7-12; S, 23-24/Se, 16-17; LIVS, 103-104/ILVS, 83; Edie 1973, xxii-xxiii). In line with Arendt, Merleau-Ponty states: “A thought limited to existing for itself, independently of the constraints of speech and communication, would no sooner appear than it would sink into the unconsciousness, which means that it would not exist even for itself” (PP, 217/PPe, 206). Though each has his own unique bodily and temporal “opening” and perspective to the world, the perspectives overlap and intersect, without diffusing into an absolute mind, as is the case for example Hegel’s philosophy. The philosopher’s perspective can never be a pure first-person perspective.

“If I pretend to find, through reflection, in the universal mind, the premise that had always backed up my experience, I can do so only by forgetting this non-knowing of the beginning which is not nothing, and which is not the reflective truth either, and which must be accounted for. I was able to appeal from the world and the others to myself and take a route of reflection, only because first I was outside myself, in the world, among the others, and constantly this experience feeds my reflection. Such is the total situation that philosophy must account for.” (VI, 73/VIe, 49.)<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> « Or, cette certitude injustifiable d’un monde sensible qui nous soit commun, elle est en nous l’assise de la vérité ».

<sup>90</sup> « Si je feins, par la réflexion, de trouver dans l’esprit universel la prémisse qui depuis toujours soutenait mon expérience, c’en peut être qu’en oubliant ce non-savoir du début qui n’est pas rien, qui n’est pas non plus la vérité réflexive, et dont il faut rendre compte aussi. Je n’ai pu en appeler du monde et des autres à moi, et prendre le chemin de la réflexion, que parce que d’abord j’étais hors de moi, dans le monde, auprès des autres, et c’est à chaque moment que cette expérience vient nourrir ma réflexion. Telle est la situation totale dont une philosophie doit rendre compte. »



## 5.2 Arendt on the *sense of realness*

The uncompromising rigor of Merleau-Ponty's investigation concerning the structure of the relation between the embodied subject and the appearing, perceptual world is something that inspires Arendt to explore new areas in the history of philosophy. Arendt's first book of her last work, *The Life of the Mind*, is called simply and shortly: *Thinking*. This choice is a deliberate continuation of the central theme of *The Human Condition*. In that work, Arendt expresses her concern for the phenomenon she calls "world-alienation". She locates various forms of phenomena that she characterizes as falling under this category, for example the development of modern nuclear war-technology and the rise of the modern autonomic subject (HC *preface*; Bernauer 1987, 2). In this way *The Human Condition* presents a genealogy of the estrangement of human beings from each other and their common world, which Arendt calls "the space of appearance". There is an inherent Marxist-Weberian critique of capitalism present in the work, but at the same time, it is a phenomenological description of how the world as a human habitat is originally constituted through various forms of human practice, such as labor, work and - most important- action. According to Arendt, human beings do not merely respond passively to a world readily at hand, but participate actively in the constitution of a common human habitat.<sup>91</sup> She stresses the significance of the indeterminacy of natal and mortal human life and the human capacity to begin something unexpected and new through action (*praxis*)<sup>92</sup>. Because the role of human practice is so significant in the constitution of a common, meaningful world, the structure of the world is dynamic, changing and fragile. Arendt's most concrete example of the fragility of the human world is her analysis of totalitarian regimes and their impact

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<sup>91</sup> Arendt emphasizes the significance that for example routine factory work has on the human conception of time and the impact that city architecture has on our conception of spatial dimensions and social relations. This is a common Marxist theme. According to most Marxist philosophers, city planning directly affects the possibilities of group gatherings. If there are no markets, squares and other gathering places for people and if their daily routine is tied to working hours in a job environment that has no labour union, human beings become isolated from each other and their environment. Antonio Negri offers an excellent description of the human conception of time in relation to *praxis*, in his book *La costituzione del tempo* (published in English as *The constitution of time*, in the essay collection *A time for revolution*). The approach in this book resembles that of Arendt's.

<sup>92</sup> In *On Revolution*, Arendt uses political revolution as a paradigm example of the human capacity to begin something unexpected and new. According to Arendt, the French-, the American- and the Russian revolution, together with the French resistance of Nazi Germany during the Second World War and the Hungarian revolt of 1956 are all examples where men and women put faith in their courage to interrupt the routine life in order to create a public space for freedom and diversity.

on the conception of space<sup>93</sup>. After the publication of *The Human Condition*, Arendt remained occupied with political theory, political activism and the history of Western democracy for nearly fifteen years. However, the solutions of political theory did not seem to satisfy her concern for “world-alienation” and Arendt finally turned back to philosophy, the passion of her years at Marburg and Heidelberg<sup>94</sup>.

Also *Thinking* puts forward a genealogy of “world-alienation”, but this time the genealogy is presented through a description of the experience of metaphysical reflection. In Richard Bernstein’s words, “[...] Arendt’s project, especially in *The Life of the Mind*, might be characterized as developing a phenomenology of thinking” (Bernstein 2000/2002, 286). Arendt’s claim is that there is something inherently isolating and solitary in the experience of metaphysical reflection, which she calls simply “thinking” (LM I, 197-199). In Merleau-Pontyan terms, she claims that philosophical reflection must necessary take a step back and “withdraw” from the ordinary, everyday life and its activities, in order to be able to reflect on the chosen subject of investigation. In other words, one must have some distance of the subject of inquiry, in order to be able to see and evaluate its various details and aspects. Arendt thus adapts the basic phenomenological, descriptive method. However, as has been shown in chapter 4.3, philosophy is for Arendt also necessary a project tied to language. Her dismantling aims at setting frozen concepts and habits in motion (LM I, 175; Bernauer 1987, 5). By showing the context and common use of concepts such as for example “thinking”, “theory” and “freedom”, Arendt aims to disclose the underlying presuppositions of our everyday use of the terms. Grammatical and etymological analysis thus functions as landmarks and clues of how metaphysical thinking is experienced and has been experienced in the history of Western philosophy (LM II, 55).

What is interesting in Arendt’s writings is that she takes seriously the various descriptions of thinking that philosophers have given throughout centuries, instead of simply dismissing them as old and implausible. Arendt’s hypothesis is that if we are able to understand at least approximately what for example Plato and Aristotle meant with

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<sup>93</sup> See Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism* (OT, 565-592).

<sup>94</sup> During this same time period, Arendt begun to work on a translation of her doctoral thesis, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*, published posthumously as *Love and Saint Augustine* by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark. Already in this work, Arendt is concerned with “world-alienation” as something promoted by Christianity. Augustine’s two conceptions of love, *caritas* (charity) and *cupiditas* (cupidity) constitute a dichotomy between love for the world and humanity and love for the eternal. According to Augustine, the latter is proper love, since this world is simply a perishable place of sin, suffering and death.

wonder (*thaumazein*), what Dun Scotus and the medieval Christian philosophers meant with the infinite presence (*nunc stans*) or what Descartes meant with “metaphysical meditations”, then we can get a picture of some of the key elements in the human faculty of reflective thought. This may “open up [the past] to us with unexpected freshness and tell us things no one has yet has ears to hear” (BPF, 94). The clues that we have for this type of an investigation are the written texts and documentations that have remained for later generations, but also our own capability of reflection functions as an assistance in the inquiry (LM I, 212-213). It is in this way that the phenomenological method becomes useful. One could of course resist Arendt’s starting point by claiming that this type of an inquiry is doomed to a subjective, ivory tower perspective or that modern neurology and brain research is sufficient enough to give us an objective and scientific understanding of the mental capabilities of human animals. However, Arendt’s method does not exclude the addition of neurological research material to the inquiry. The history of philosophy and the phenomenological description are not incompatible with the natural-scientific research, provided that both paradigms realize their restrictions and context dependence<sup>95</sup>.

Arendt claims that although in perception the appearing, phenomenal world is always experienced as a spatio-temporal unity and background of our movement, metaphysical reflection somehow seems as if it is able to annihilate both time and space. Arendt gives several examples of this experience:

“The gap between past and future opens up only in reflection whose subject matter is what is absent – either what has already disappeared or what has not yet appeared. Reflection draws these absent “regions” into the mind’s presence; from that perspective the activity of thinking can be understood as a fight against time itself.” (LM I, 85.)

“It is as though I had withdrawn to a never-never land, the land of invisibles, of which I would know nothing, had I not this faculty of remembering and imagining. Thinking annihilates temporal and spatial distances...As far as space is concerned, I know of no philosophical or metaphysical concept that could plausibly relate to this experience; but I am rather certain that the *nunc stans*, the standing now, became the symbol for eternity – the “*nunc aeternitas*” (Dun Scotus) – for

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<sup>95</sup> Antonio Damasio is an excellent example of a neurologist who has found many useful clues to the problem of consciousness by reading texts in the history of philosophy (See especially Damasio 1994 and 2002).

medieval philosophy because it was a plausible description of experiences that took place in meditation as well as in contemplation, the two modes of thought known to Christianity.“ (LM I, 87-88.)

These experiences of withdrawal to silence and solitude makes according to Arendt possible such philosophical doctrines as Plato’s doctrine of ideas and the Cartesian mind-body dualism (LM I, 84-85; 197-213). This is because reflective consciousness is capable of focusing away from bodily awareness such as proprioception. This does of course not imply that the most basic structures of consciousness would stop functioning during meditation. The strangeness that Arendt locates is rather in the *experience* of not being aware of ones body (LM I, 162-163). Also, our imagination is to a large extent voluntary, whereas bodily sense-perception is not. The experience of momentarily freedom from bodily needs is dramatically characterized in Plato’s cave parable and also in the Greek conception of *thaumazein* – a type of wonder at the face of the world which is compulsive in the sense that wonder is not a matter of choice, but something that has to be endured. Arendt pays attention to the fact that in the context of this admirable wonder, the “world” which is admired is the harmonious *kosmos* or eternity (LM I, 142-143). Thus, if philosophy must begin from this wonder, in order to be philosophy in the proper sense, then disharmony, evil and ugliness can never be topics for philosophical reflection (LM I, 150). Suffering, wickedness and injustice become characteristics of the perishable, contingent and finite world of human beings. Since the eternal realm is regarded as hierarchically higher than the world of change, philosophers begin to evaluate the world of political action from the perspective of contemplative life of wisdom. Arendt continues that it is the experience of silent, peaceful and disembodied thinking that functions as a motivation for the Greek understanding of *theoria*, - to look and judge from a distance or from above (LM I, 93, 129). Also, the Roman translation of the Greek word *theoria* into the Latin *contemplatio* further promotes the distinction between the sensory and supracensory realms. In Augustine’s philosophy, the hierarchical order tapers in his work *De Civitate Dei* (*City of God*) and finally, in Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of history, political events and practical matters of the contingent world become moments of the Absolute Spirit unfolding in the process of World-History (LM I, 157, 216).

In line with Aristotle, Arendt holds that these experiences of timeless and non-spatial meditation are possible due to an imaginary abstraction from the way the

world is originally given to us in sensible perception (LM I, 199). Our perceptual experience is dependent on a conception of spatial dimensions and thus we refer even to temporal tenses by using expressions such as “the past is behind us” and “the future is ahead of you” (LM I, 205-206). The conceptual language we use for describing our mental experiences, such as various forms of thinking, is a derivative from the language we use for describing perception. Thus, the ancient distinction between *nous* and *phainomena* - or in modern terms, between the “mental” and the “physical” - is not an ontological distinction, but a conceptual distinction. Even in deep meditation, the thinking mind is still a corporeal, embodied mind connected to the appearing, phenomenal world by means of the body and language (LM II, 55). Arendt credits Husserl for his broad and illuminating use of the concept of intentionality for bridging the old dichotomy between the “internal” or “immanent” and the “external” or “transcendent” world. However, in line with Merleau-Ponty, Arendt claims that intentionality is not simply a relation between a mental act and its object. Instead, intentionality is in a sense always “double-intentionality” (LM I, 46; S, 23/Se, 16). The perceived objects carry with them an indication that they are indeed objects for several subjects. This element of “double-sensation” is a structure built in perception (LM I, 19-20; Bernauer 1987, 2).

“[O]ur ‘perceptual faith’ as Merleau-Ponty has called it, our certainty that what we perceive has an existence independent of the act of perceiving, depends entirely on the object’s also appearing as such to others and being acknowledged by them. Without this tacit acknowledgement by others we would not even be able to put faith in the way we appear to ourselves.” (LM I, 46)

Arendt claims that despite the experiences of metaphysical reflection or “thinking”, this type of reflection always presupposes what it aims to suspend or what it aims to withdraw from. In other words, it has to presuppose something *that* it withdraws *from* or *that* it brackets. Otherwise, withdrawing and bracketing would not even be necessary. An absolute consciousness to whom the world is given in a completely transparent way, does not need to withdraw from it. Withdrawal is necessary precisely because the world is opaque and dynamic. However, reflection is never capable of leaving the phenomenal world of appearances. Neither can it prove the realness of the world (LM I, 52-53). In complete agreement with Merleau-Ponty, Arendt writes:

“A radical doubt that rejects the testimony of witnesses and relies on reason alone is impossible for men; it is a mere rhetorical device for solipsism, constantly refuted by the doubter’s own existence. All men live together on the solid foundation of a *fides acquisita*, an acquired faith they have in common”. (LM II, 129. Parentheses in original text.)

Arendt’s use of the term *fides* is the Latin translation of the Greek *pistis*. In another passage, where Arendt quotes Democritus in order to demonstrate the antinomy between reason and sense experience, she inserts the word *pistis* to the text and associates it with perceptual trust.

“Sense perceptions are illusions, says the mind; they change according to the conditions of the body; sweet, bitter, color, and so exist only *nomos*, by convention among men, and not *physis*, according to the true nature behind the appearances. Whereupon the senses answer; ‘Wretched mind! Do you overthrow us while you take from us your evidence [*pisteis*, everything you can trust]? Our overthrow will be your downfall!’.” (LM I, 11.)

In other words, there could be no knowledge, nor self-awareness without bodily perception of an external world. Arendt thus develops Merleau-Ponty’s conception of *perceptual faith* in line with her own thought. She frequently refers to Merleau-Ponty’s works *The Visible and the Invisible* and *Signs*. Arendt describes this perceptual faith as the “sense of realness”. It is something non-propositional, affective and basic about the unity of all five senses that gives a sense of realness that is impossible to transcend, because the “reality” is the context against which everything is apprehended (LM I, 50-51). For both Arendt and Merleau-Ponty, this trust and faith is a form of certitude, but not in the traditional sense of absolutely certain knowledge. Yet, it seems to function as a kind of foundation for propositional and objectual beliefs. The key for understanding what exactly is in question here is to note that both Arendt and Merleau-Ponty emphasize the bodily, affective aspect of basic perceptual experience. In the following section, I will examine Arendt’s and Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the relation between non-propositional and propositional beliefs in more detail.

### 5.3 Trust in other people – the condition for the possibility of a meaningful language

One of the most discussed problems of Cartesian foundationalism is the methodological starting ground from the first-person perspective. This problem is something that both Arendt and Merleau-Ponty discuss broadly in their philosophies (HC 175-188; PP, 403-424/PPe, 403-425). Due to the starting point of inquiry, Descartes' meditational philosophy and transcendental phenomenology promotes a first-person authority view on knowledge. As has been shown in chapters two and three, this position claims rigorous knowledge to be something essentially rooted in the first-person perspective and conscious experience. The apparent plausibility of the view comes from the fact that we seem to have a special kind of certainty concerning beliefs regarding our own mind, compared to beliefs concerning for example physical objects. Our own thoughts and emotions seem intimate and immediately present to our consciousness, when compared to sensually perceived objects. It is for example common that we mistake a shadow for a person, but we do not confuse the experience of having a headache with the experience of being astonished. Our *inner* states are thus accessible to us in a completely different way than the *external* phenomena. (Guttenplan 1995, 291.)

It is also self-evident that we cannot experience other people's thoughts or feelings the way we experience our own mental states. We do not hear other people's thought-patterns or experience their head ache. In fact, through the use of various thought experiments, we seem to be able to doubt or bracket even the existence of other conscious beings. Thus there seems to be a deep asymmetry between the first-person and the third-person perspective. It is easy to draw the normative conclusion that if knowledge is to be founded on an indubitable basis, then it must be grounded in the first-person perspective. (McGuinn 1989, 4; Pihlström 2004, 12.) This step is common in the history of Western philosophy from Descartes on. Philosophical conceptions such as the "ego", the "subject" and "subjectivity", the "metaphysical self", the "transcendental ego", the "transcendental subject" and "transcendental subjectivity" all share the epistemological first-person view on various theoretical levels. According to Arendt and Merleau-Ponty, the problem here is not the conception of subjectivity as such, or the claim for a transcendental unity of the structures of consciousness. However, the function that some philosophers, such as Descartes and Husserl attribute to the subject or the categories and structures of

consciousness, in terms of beliefs and knowledge about the world and others, may lead to very difficult philosophical positions (VI, 250/VIe, 200; LM I, 46-47, 156-157). Examples of these kinds of positions are the ontological opposition between appearance and reality, the juxtaposition between immanence and transcendence, dualism regarding the relationship between mind and body, and finally solipsism. One of the most difficult problems of the first-person authority view on knowledge is to explain the role of language in knowledge-formation. This is because language seems to be something essentially intersubjective and something that resists any reduction to a pure first-person perspective.

As both Arendt and Merleau-Ponty argue, when knowledge is founded in experience (empiricism), or when meaning is grounded in the transcendental acts of subjectivity (idealism), both claims invite us to ask the following questions, all typical for skepticism: 1) how can I justify knowledge concerning the existence of other similar conscious beings as myself? 2) how can I justify the objective existence of anything at all outside my private realm of experiences? And 3) on what grounds can I justify even the certainty of my own mental states? If I can know directly only my existence and the contents of my own mental states, then my knowledge of the existence and content of other minds - or in phenomenological terms, "the Other" - must somehow be inferred or assumed on the basis of my own case.<sup>96</sup> But how am I to draw an analogy between my mental states and those of the Other? How can I compare myself to others, if the starting point of all beliefs and concepts is the immediate experience of my own mental and physical states? Either I have to conclude the existence of other conscious beings on behalf of their behaviour, or then I just have to assume that they are similar to me.<sup>97</sup> However, in case we are searching for certain knowledge, then the fact that someone or something behaves or moves in some familiar way shows no evidence of the existence of

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<sup>96</sup> This so called analogy-argument has been used by for example A. J. Ayer, Bertrand Russell and John Stuart Mill, among others (ter Hark 1994).

<sup>97</sup> It seems that Descartes was not especially concerned with the problem of other minds, since he regarded that knowledge of other minds can be proven in similar ways as the existence of the external world, that is, through an appeal to God's rationality and trustworthiness.

Husserl wrote about the problem of the Other in length, perhaps most intensively in his three-volume work *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität* ("Towards a Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity"). Husserl never relinquishes his position of the methodologically solipsistic first-person perspective and claims that the Other can be constituted from within my own sphere of consciousness (*Eigensphere*). The problem of intersubjectivity in Husserl's phenomenology is a much too broad topic to be addressed in detail here. However, what is significant in Husserl's approach is that in his investigations of the constitution of the Other, Husserl hardly pays any attention to the significance of language in our original understanding of the Other as a conscious subject (Dillon, 1988/1997, 113-129).



complex, conscious mental states such as thoughts and propositional beliefs. In order for me to know that a moving creature is self-conscious and has complex mental states like me, I would have to be able to interpret its' body language. But then again, such an interpretation already presupposes the capability to use a language because I need some criteria for what is regarded as an expression of for example anger or volition.

Although both Arendt and Merleau-Ponty promote a form of primacy of perception, they nevertheless admit that perception is not always accurate. Illusion and error is part and parcel of perception. To put it in Arendt's words: "[e]rror is the price we pay for truth" (LM I, 38). For example visual perception always apprehends a perceived object by means of various profiles (PP, 245/PPe, 235; LM I, 25, 38). I cannot see the back of a house while I am looking at the front of the house. In order to see all the sides of a house, I have to walk around it and look at one or two sides at a time. In a similar way, more complex knowledge-formation - such as the formation of objectual beliefs - is dependent on the capability to use a conceptual language. In many cases complex knowledge formation is also dependent on the testimony of others who perceive like me (S, 22-24/Se, 15-17). It is here that the significance of language enters Arendt's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. The indeterminacy of perception, the double-sensation and the chiasmic intertwining of the subjective and objective aspects of knowledge are reflected also in our common use of language since language is a part of the structure of the lived world (PL, 118/Ple, 94; Edie 1973, xxiii). Since meaningful discourse is dependent on our linguistic conventions and common rules of language-use, a meaningful language is possible due to a prior trust in the rationality and honesty of other persons (HC, 175; PL, 118-119/PLe, 94-95). This trust is something that we actually take for granted in our daily action and use of language<sup>98</sup>.

“Speaking is one form of action. That is one venture. The other is: we start something. We weave our strand into a network of relations. What comes out of it, we never know. [...] And now I would say that this venture is only possible when

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<sup>98</sup> Arendt's and Merleau-Ponty's conception of trust comes here close to the notion of “the principle of charity”, developed by Donald Davidson. According to Davidson, rational communication would not even be possible unless we always already attributed consciousness to other people (Davidson 2000, 21-22). Davidson argues further that our way of understanding other conscious beings is dependent on a holistic set of basic beliefs regarding the other person or creature. In communication we always already attribute properties to the other from our own perspective (Davidson 1989, 193, 198-199.) An understanding of the others intentions and thoughts is not possible without this type of a radical form of interpretation. In line with Arendt and Merleau-Ponty, Davidson claims that the possibility of thinking requires several subjects who share a common world as the context of their language.

there is trust in people. A trust – which is difficult to formulate but fundamental – in what is human in all people. Otherwise such a venture could not be made.” (EUN, 23)

We cannot know with absolute certainty that the other person is being true, we simply trust that the person is saying what she means and means what she says. Like the always present possibility of erroneous perception, so too is there an always present possibility that the other person is lying. In other words, error and illusion are constitutive of what it is to be a human being. According to both Arendt and Merleau-Ponty, due to our temporal structure of life, even our self-awareness is never transparent and complete. I have a past, which is not accessible to me in the same manner as my present mental states (PP, 404/PPe, 404; LM I, 203; LM II, 12-13). However, this does not imply that we could never form accurate knowledge concerning the world and other persons. This is because there is a special type of spontaneity inherent in the way we treat our fellow human beings as embodied, conscious beings. When we shake greet someone and smile, we do not relate to his body as a physical object that has certain sensations (Heinämaa 2003, 39-40). What both Arendt and Merleau-Ponty mean, is that our bodily being determines the way we understand other human beings as conscious subjects like us. The expression of a greeting cannot be isolated from the embodied subject, it is a part of his way of being, a “posture” in Merleau-Ponty’s terms. This is why Arendt and Merleau-Ponty claim that bodily expressions are meaningful expressions<sup>99</sup>. However, the meaning of bodily expressions is conventional, since the way we interpret various bodily expressions vary culturally, due to the fact that interpretation already presupposes a common context, in other words, some primitive form of a sign system (Edie 1973, xxiii-xxiv). Despite this, the fact that we spontaneously trust the other person seems to be a universal characteristic of the human condition. This trust is the condition for the possibility of communication and the formation of a meaningful language.

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<sup>99</sup> Arendt’s and Merleau-Ponty’s conception of language-use and bodily trust is strikingly similar to the conception of “belief” (*Glaube*) in the late Wittgenstein’s philosophy. In the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (*Philosophical Investigations*), *Über Gewissheit* (*On Certainty*) and *Zettel* (*Zettel*), Wittgenstein develops a notion of bodily trust, which is a basic condition for the possibility of language-games. (Wittgenstein 1953/2004 §420; Wittgenstein 1969/1974, §115, §94, §257; Wittgenstein 1967/1981, §§481-483).

The Cartesian ideal of gaining absolute certainty remains an unachievable utopia due to the fact that it is the indeterminacy inherent in human life that allows us to request for certainty in the first place.

#### **5.4 Conclusion to the fifth chapter**

Arendt and Merleau-Ponty both criticize Cartesian foundationalism and its Husserlian variation for an oblivion regarding the role of perception and language in self-awareness and in our formation of knowledge. Due to our embodied being, perception functions as the most basic form of connection to the “external world”. Despite the fact that human subjects actively participate in the formation of a meaningful world, this does not imply that the whole objective reality can be understood as an achievement of the acts of consciousness. According to Arendt and Merleau-Ponty, the position of methodological solipsism leads into a misinterpretation regarding the nature of the bond that binds the subject to the world. This bond is not an intellectual bond, as it is in rationalist foundationalism, but a structure built in bodily perception. We cannot radically alter this form of life voluntarily, nor can we neutralize the conviction of realness that perception guarantees us, since the other conscious beings and the external world influence our ways of perceiving things. We perceive objects *as* for example tools or works of art because we are members of a cultural, linguistic, intersubjective community. More importantly, we perceive other beings *as* conscious beings or animals, due the fact that we share a similar embodied form of being. When communicating with other people, a large part of the exchange of thoughts occurs by means of body language, facial expressions and gestures. In order to understand these expressions, we have to rely on interpretation, which is always to a certain extent arbitrary. This is even more important when dealing with animals, since body language and sounds are the only type of language we have for communicating with them. According to Arendt and Merleau-Ponty, the notion of *trust* in other people functions as the first type of a relation to the Other, whether it is a human being or an animal. This type of trust is also the condition for the possibility of the formation of meaningful language.

## 6. Conclusions

In this master's thesis I have followed the argumentation of four major thinkers of Western philosophy. Despite the differing time periods, geographical locations and writing styles of René Descartes, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hannah Arendt, the crucial insight of their philosophies springs forth from a common question, the philosophical problem of certainty. As I have shown, whereas Descartes and Husserl inquire into the nature of subjectivity in order to ground knowledge on absolutely certain foundations, Merleau-Ponty and Arendt investigate the formation of meaning as it arises in the intersection of language, the world and the subject. Arendt's and Merleau-Ponty's critical investigations of the Cartesian request for certainty share the view that certainty is by its very nature something that cannot be grounded by means of a philosophical proof, demonstration or deduction. Instead, certainty turns out to be a type of faith that we inevitably and spontaneously adopt in our everyday life. It is an affective stance towards our other fellow human beings and our common world, which becomes meaningful through the intersubjective communication by means of language. This unbreakable bond functions also as the context for any philosophical inquiry.

However, despite their conceptions regarding the grounding of knowledge, Merleau-Ponty's and Arendt's philosophical thinking is not a simple refutation of Cartesianism. Instead, both philosophers follow the argumentations of Descartes and Husserl to their limits. Philosophy thus becomes a questioning of its own possibility. For Merleau-Ponty, this task means a return to metaphysics, but not in any traditional sense. Merleau-Ponty's posthumously published sketches of a non-dualistic ontology of the flesh, nature and logos shows the way towards a new conception of embodiment and subjectivity.

Arendt, on the other hand takes her clue from the "metaphysical fallacies" in order to guide the philosophers' reflective gaze towards the contingent, perishable and fragile human habitat. It is as if Arendt had to dismantle the massive history of Western philosophy with all its categories and concepts, in order to show what was always already there, right in front of us, but too near to become a theme for philosophical reflection. For Arendt, trust and faith opens up a new possibility for an ethics and politics of diversity and finitude.

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Helsinki, 6. lokakuuta 2006

Humanistiselle tiedekunnalle

Esitämme lausuntona Julia Honkasalon englanninkielisestä pro gradu -tutkielmasta *Certainty or Faith? Arendt's and Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Cartesian Foundationalism* (80 +18 siv.) seuraavaa. Tutkielma kuuluu teoreettisen filosofian, eritoten filosofian historian, nykyajan filosofian ja tietoteorian alaan. Kysymys tiedon varmuudesta on klassisen filosofian keskeisimpiä kysymyksiä. Honkasalo käsittelee aihettaan Descartesin ja Husserlin pohjalta. Arendt ja Merleau-Ponty toimivat työssä eritoten Descartesin projektin kriitikoina. Nämä neljä filosofia saavat kukin vajaat 20 sivua osakseen.

Etenkin Descartesin esittely on oivaltavaa. Descartesin projektin ydin on siinä, että tietoa ja varmuutta yleensäkin tulisi perustella viittaamalla asiaan joka on varmempaa kuin mikään muu. Descartesin mukaan varmuus on löydettävissä mentaalisten tilojen, ajattelun, luonteesta. Tästä Descartes logiikan (ja Jumalan) avulla johtaa muita varmoja asioita. Descartesin tieto-opillinen panos, subjektiivisen painottaminen, jatkuu Husserlin ajattelussa, mikä taas toimii siltana Merleau-Pontyn ja Arendtin ajatteluun.

Honkasalon esitys etenee jäntevästi, ja hän selostaa vakuuttavasti miten Arendt ja Merleau-Ponty arvostelevat Descartesin tietoteoreettista projektia tavallaan ulkoa päin. Descartesin metodinen epäily toimii vain jo omaksutun kielen puitteissa. Täten Descartesille tyypillinen metodinen skeptisismi ja solipsismi ei oikeastaan pääse kunnolla käyntiin. Kieleen kuuluu olettamuksena intersubjektiivinen maailma. Merleau-Pontyn mukaan ihmisenä oleminen perustuu luottamukseen (*confiance*) ja uskoon (*foi*), so. esitiedolliseen ainekseen, joka näkyy kielessä.

Esiteltyjen filosofien ajattelua tarkastellaan vain sikäli kuin ne ovat relevantteja kirjoittajan aiheen kannalta. Tämä osaltaan selittää lukujen suppeuden. Tällainen valikoiva ja keskittynyt ote osoittaa hyvää filosofista tajua. Descartesin kohdalla ote kylläkin herpaantuu kerran kun kirjoittaja väittää että "Ajattelen, siis olen" oikeastaan tarkoittaa "Ajattelen ja olen". Näin ei ole. Kirjoittajan väite perustuu liian suppeaan käsitykseen loogisen totuuden toteamisesta. "Jos sataa, niin sataa" ymmärretään intuitiivisesti totuutena, aivan niin kuin Descartesin "Cogito". Päätelyketju ei aina ole tarpeen. Oivallus voi silti olla "looginen".

Pro gradu on erinomaista työtä siitä huolimatta että kirjoittajan tekemä yhteenveto on vain sivun mittainen (siv. 80). Täten avoimeksi jää miten relevantti Arendtin ja Merleau-Pontyn kritiikki on, ts. se että Descartes ei huomioi kielen asemaa tietoteoriassaan. Vaikka Honkasalon fokus on nimenomaan Arendtin ja Merleau-Pontyn näkemyksissä, mukana olisi voinut olla systemaattisempi foundationalismin (ja skeptisismien) käsittely. Tästä ja työn yhteenvedon suppeudesta johtuen lukijalle voi myös jäädä hieman avoimeksi, kuinka relevantti Arendtin ja Merleau-Pontyn näkökulma on juuri Descartesin projektin kannalta. On selvää, että näkökulma ei toteuta Descartesin vaatimusta, jonka mukaan tiedon oikeuttaminen tulisi tapahtua tietoteoreettisen keinoin (eikä esim. semanttisin tai ontologisin keinoin). Ehkä kirjoittaja säästää tämän kysymyksen myöhempisiin töihin.

Kokonaisuutena ottaen työ on hyvin kypsä, ja se osoittaa erinomaista filosofisen problematiikan hahmottamiskykyä. Ehdotamme, että Julia Honkasalon tutkielma hyväksyttäisiin arvosanalla *eximia cum laude approbatur*.

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