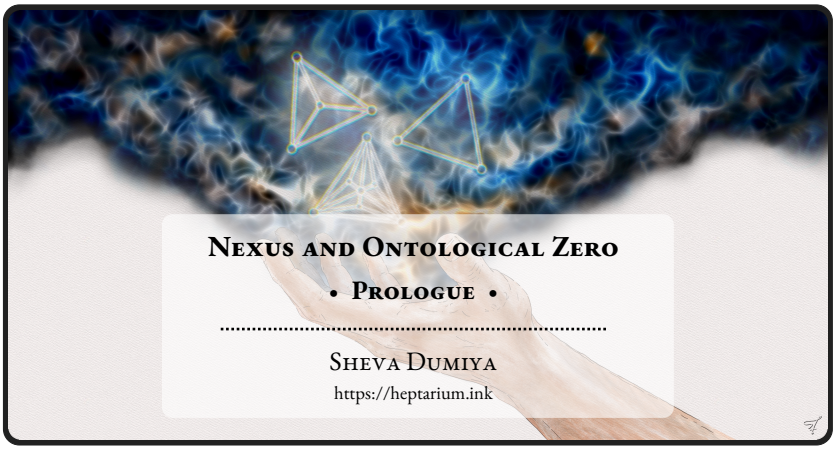


Nexus and Ontological Zero

• Prologue •

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Investigation of the conditions of intelligibility of experience through the triad sensing–feeling–thinking and the relations between determination, manifestation, and mediation.

"The essential thing is to know how to see,
To know how to see without thinking,
To know how to see when one sees,
And not even to think when one sees
Nor to see when one thinks."

Fernando Pessoa (Alberto Caeiro)
The Keeper of Sheep, Poem XXIV, c.~1914.

In seeking to understand more deeply the experiences one lives through, one inevitably confronts what one thinks oneself to be and may turn to some philosophy in search of meaning. With this, the reality of one's own thoughts soon imposes itself, along with the unsettling doubt: is it really possible to know the truth, or is it all no more than make-believe in which thoughts disguise more hidden needs? Is it all a play of metaphors and metonymies, as Nietzsche suggested? Or does something true reveal itself through perception, but hide behind words when one tries to make sense?

For most people, it is natural to suppose that ideas say something true about the world. In childhood, one tends to believe that everything is fixed and defined, as if things were governed by a definitive morality. A child who hears the same recommendation every day soon notices when the habit is broken and often corrects the

adult firmly. With time, the various motives for actions become evident, as does the fact that it is they — not habit alone — that determine behavior. That is when the endless *whys* arise.

Curiously, in adult life, it is not always possible to answer those same *whys*. Many actions find no justification — whether on formal or experiential grounds — and truth seems not to be unique and to remain open to speculation. It is enough to consider how many "truths" have been left behind since childhood and how many will still be abandoned by old age. There are beliefs sold as truths and truths that circulate as though they were only beliefs. In practice, one is often confused with the other: it is enough for an opinion to be invested with conviction, supported by some justification, or imposed by coercion — if not all three — for it to be treated as truth.

The central problematic of the determination of truths takes shape in the relation between the reality of the senses and that of thoughts, with perception constituting the bridge between them. It is the originary mode of the world's givenness, where things present themselves as something, under a given profile, in a horizon open to possible variations. The association between perceptual act and perceived content implies organization, differentiation, and synthesis according to a principle of intelligibility: the conversion of immediate experience — affective, intuitive, or practical — into conceptual, abstract, and discursive representation, through which it becomes an object of analysis and intellectual understanding.

Knowledge of these associations is not as simple to define as it usually seems in school learning, when one learns to accumulate and retrieve information from memory; it depends on the way one perceives and on the exercise of the freedom to think and express oneself. In the end, what matters is less what one knows than how one knows — for it is this how that determines whether knowing is invested with blind faith or oriented by truth.

Knowledge, beliefs, and truths inscribe themselves as historical forms of the manifestation of sense. It is difficult to reach unanimity on truths about the past, the present, or even the following week, as though one intended to reach an ultimate concept as a goal before which the production of sense would cease to raise new *whys* and detach itself from its creativity inherent in the opinions of others.

In the temple of Apollo at Delphi in Greek Antiquity, where the maxim "Know thyself" was inscribed, it is said that the oracles of the priestess Pythia were uttered in the name of the gods. The maxim is usually understood as a commandment addressed to man, but admits diverse readings: it could even be, for example, the recognition of the place attributed to him as a naming. In this sacred space, in which

the gods manifest themselves through the oracles, man finds himself confronted with knowledge of himself.

Behind the slant given to what has passed lie motives, wills, and needs, and knowledge often assumes an appearance that conceals these still unknown contents. Within it operates a creativity that interprets and consolidates itself historically in culture and personally in individuals, leaves its contents in books, doctrines, and forms of transmission, reaches the present, and projects itself into the possibilities already implicated in the current horizon.

In any case, the point of departure for one who wishes to know is always the immediate phenomenon offered to consciousness. One seeks to apprehend the content of this now, even when its object belongs to the distant past or to a moment that has just slipped away. The lived precedes the idea and, therefore, the act of knowing cannot begin in neutrality. One may try to unveil the unknown concealed content or start from a prior conception of what would be hidden and then formulate hypotheses to prove or reject its existence. The assessment of truth still depends on the initial belief in the assumption that the fact and the understanding of the fact remain implicated, exceeding the very idea that originated them.

Both painting over an already marked canvas and carving a piece of raw wood condition and limit the content offered to the formation of knowledge. By addition, new interpretive layers cover a base, reinforcing its marks. By subtraction, one removes layers imposed as evidence, so that what is already implicated emerges with greater clarity.

To speak of knowing is implicitly to take a point of reference from which impressions are received and consciously organized. This **I**, which is not to be confused here with personality, name, or life history, is the instance that experiences and the reference to which qualities of experience are imputed. Even if an empty or abstract form can be attributed to this reference, it occupies the immanent position from which this attribution can occur.

The denial of the *I* as a premise introduces an initial tension, for the very notion of falsification depends on the basis that sustains judgment. To keep this cyclicity from compromising the progression of the investigation, the typical strategy is to shift the basis to another domain of experience or to attempt to ignore it. The cyclicity, which at first seems to be a problem to be remedied, cannot be avoided and is already instituted by the subject implicated in what it intends to investigate. The problematic, therefore, lies precisely in the denial of the *I*, for the entire investigation is founded on the affirmation of its being.

With reference to the *I*, horizons of the phenomenon tend to be conceptually sep-

arated as if they were absolutely distinct domains: on one side, consciousness, feelings, thought, and the so-called processes of interiorization; on the other, the sensible and objective world, understood as exteriorization. Perception would assume the mediating function situated at the edge between these two domains, whose boundary depends on the determination of what is inside or outside the domains it separates. This second tension, also cyclical, can be attenuated when one recognizes that experience emerges in distinct ways within the same field of consciousness. Neither does experience present itself as a raw given, alien to sensory variations, nor does consciousness of this content present itself as uniformly distributed. There is neither an inside nor an outside except through a reference that defines them as such, one in relation to the other and in relation to itself.

Any content of perception, as well as thoughts, may be subjected to examination in terms of truth or belief. The examination is necessarily retroactive, for there is no validation before something has been lived as content to be known. One may, therefore, falsify knowledge as the effectuation of *what one knows*; one cannot, however, falsify knowing as a possibility without already occupying the position of one who knows what one intends to submit to falsification. Knowing, therefore, has as its basis the belief that one knows; since this basis cannot be definitively suppressed, it becomes assumed truth, and more often than not, given truth. Belief and truth do not occur within the same regime of legibility, for truth becomes the occurrence of belief, whose content may be submitted to a judgment of belief or truth of a derived order. Even when knowing is qualified as illusory, metaphorical, or allegorical, this judgment must implicitly claim for itself a non-illusory status; such an illusion occupies a position of truth, and its known content may then be judged illusory as the content of its occurrence.

This arbitration between occurrence and content, or between the occurrence and the order in which the occurrence participates, takes place through modulation in an already structured field, susceptible to determination by contingent inflections, and remains subject to the consequentiality imposed by the field's own necessities. The asymmetrical tension between the tendencies toward the variance of contingency and the invariance of necessity maintains a dynamic of polarities as a creative principle in determining the judgment as to the truth of the content.

From this arises a question pertinent to this text: how can a structure of intelligibility be derived from experience without already consolidated knowledge determining the horizon one intends to open? To annul what has already been lived is to make inquiry impossible, and the best one can do is reduce the conceptual load assumed as necessary without emptying it altogether. For that reason, one resorts to a triad traditionally described as *sensing–feeling–thinking*, which historically lends

clarity to the analysis of the phenomenon of perception, the status of the *I*, and its participation in the process of making sense. One cannot know whether it presents itself, as such, as an originary given prior to reflection, but one can draw from this reflective content, from this knowing that one knows, and try to lead it back to the conditions of its emergence as knowing with no content yet known.

For this, the term **sensible-intellectual** is used to designate a structure or dimension of experience in which there is no originary separation between the sensible and the intellectual, but constitutive participation among modes of determination, whether in the sphere of the senses, affections, reason, intuition, or creativity. Thus, the sensible "given" cannot be assumed to be raw material to be later subjected to an intellectual synthesis. It is a dynamically mediated and modulable unity: sensible apprehension is already legible and structurally compatible with intelligibility, and intellection is effectuated only as a modulation of the field of legible experience. Illegibility, non-sense, or the unintelligible are modes of subsequently judging content that, in different regimes of apprehension, has already passed through legible forms.

It is not required that *sensing*, *feeling*, and *thinking* be raised from the outset to the status of truth. When the conditions of the observations themselves are questioned, these modalities reappear as a minimal explanatory anchor, both in language and in the perception of the phenomenon. The philosopher, the scientist, the spiritualist, and the *bon vivant* move within phenomena made legible by explanations that, directly or indirectly, lead back to what is named as sensible, affective, and thinking — even though their fields seek to explain, reduce, suspend, or overcome them.

The limits of this triad vary culturally and are densely charged with traditions of inference. Simply using it as a basis for inquiry tends to suggest ontological universalities or forms of psychologization, as though one intended to define what they are or what they are for. Here, dislocation is required by suspending their conceptual saturation, so as to apprehend the minimal functions of sense one seeks to stabilize structurally in them.

This same saturation repels on the one hand and attracts on the other, since it gives them enough stability for a phenomenology to rest provisionally on them without needing a detailed introduction. The structure developed below starts from the recognition that every observation already involves some organized sense, which both gives it legibility and takes part in the formation of new relations. Knowledge emerges from effective experience, in which the semantic dimension results from a more fundamental structural compatibility between experience and its sayability. As in language or music, in which one recognizes an organization not yet conceptual

but structurally legible, intelligibility is not constituted primarily on the plane of the representation of sense, but at a level prior to that formality, which organizes the sensible-intellectual domain as a legible totality in a field of sense that being co-inhabits.

In order to investigate the conditions under which the sensible-intellectual emerges as thinkable content, an impersonal, quite recurrent description of the triad *sensing–feeling–thinking* is proposed, in which one can recognize oneself and what can be said about perception and its modes of apprehension. It is stressed that the intention is not to determine *what* these modalities are in their content, but to make explicit *how* the whole structures three minimal formal conditions of explicability.

Initially, there is consciousness of what one is doing and the possibility of reflection on what has happened. Deliberate thoughts also manifest themselves, alternating with suspended moments, called contemplative, in which one seeks to follow the flow of experience. At times attention turns to sensing; at times to the apprehension of this sensing as feeling; at times to reflection on the events that present themselves to consciousness. There is no linear, hierarchical, or previously determinable ordering, but there is a directionality that depends on how one attends. Sensing, feeling, and thinking show themselves as horizons that are not rigidly separated, and mental formulation, whether conceptual and linguistic or abstract and intuitive, focused on differences or similarities, the suspension of this tensioned activity, and the very sense of being conscious of all this present themselves as nuances of the same unity of sense.

Many other aspects could be distinguished according to the dedication of the subject who feels available to explore the exercise, but for this work it is enough to note five moments that allow a perceptual event to be described without resorting to particular determinations: *a whole as a horizon of the possible, sensing as delineation, feeling as sensation, feeling as affective reflexivity, and thinking as a reflective act*. They are:

(*a*) There is a field of **indeterminate possibilities**: not everything offers itself to perception; not everything perceived becomes known; not everything known acquires articulated sense. From the outset, there is an **effective delineation within** what could become known. This notion that possibilities exceed what has been actualized is not given, but is intellectually intuited.

(*b*) There is a delineation in *sensing*: a world called sensible that makes itself present to the senses and whose **orientation** may vary according to the direction of attention. There is sensing of the world, of oneself, of sensations,

of affections, and even of thoughts, insofar as these emerge as contents of experience.

(*c*) Sensing occurs as a multiplicity of *sensations*: not all sensations assume conscious contents. The multiplicity is primarily qualitative as **internal modulation** or sensible tonality.

(*d*) There are moments of *affective reflexivity*: contents made conscious are "evaluated" according to tonalities of affinity — through receptive **distension** or repulsive **tension** — which gives an order of reflexive sense. When compared with sensible tonalities, generally called "physical" sensations as already given modes of the phenomenon, those of affinity can also be attributed, implying levels of individuation according to the intentional or non-intentional origin of the non-conceptual qualification.

(*e*) These modes of apprehension through "liking" and "disliking" can still be requalified in different tonalities through *thought*: the modulations of qualities are rearticulated so as to acquire greater legibility, explicability, or intentionality concerning the phenomenon. On a first analysis, the horizons of sensing and thinking have greater differences, for one presents itself as a given and the other as an abstracted given; feeling, in turn, shows itself as an intermediary between them, in the role of a given quality, a determinant of qualities, and still subject to the determinations of the horizons, reducing the distance between them.

Although the conceptual roles of each term of the triad may vary, every attempt at fixation proceeds from a minimal categorization that distinguishes structural positions within the concept. Identifying recurrent functions of the fractions without losing reference to the others and to the whole aids legibility and constitutes structural conditions for the emergence of explicability that deposits certain characteristics onto one concept or others. For the whole to function in a harmonized way, making sense, these determinations need to co-implicate one another by limiting the ideas in relation to one another so as to keep the phenomenon within the delineation they articulate.

Some determinations introduce tensions unresolved in that concept, while others resolve them; some define conditions or possibilities, others effectuate them. The modulation of consciousness and perception is accompanied by the legibility that emerges as a phenomenon in lived experience, of which explicability becomes a form of representation that seeks to fix the internal tensions of sense according to the possibilities of the thinkable and the sayable.

If understanding emerges as experience becomes regulated and reaches a state of

greater clarity when this experience becomes linguistically explanatory, indicating provisional convergence toward something conclusive, the relations involved belong to a context whose organization can be directed by attention to reach moments of provisional and satisfactory stability. This directionality cannot be something abstract, but must be shared between the phenomenon already legible in some way and the intelligibility of this legibility. Discerning these three fundamental structural positions in perception aids this observation:

(*a*) There are possibilities that actualize themselves as **determined** events in the field of experience — a *what is* or a *who is* as content already mediated and situated through individuation;

(*b*) There is a form according to which these contents are **mediated** — a *how*, a *how much*, a *where*, a *when* — that designates the manner of their articulation, degree, inscription, and ordering;

(*c*) There is the **actualization** of these contents through requalification, that is, as content already mediated by the mode of its determination.

These three positions constitute functions that make possible the inquiry or teleological or explanatory questioning of *why* and *what for*. Such questioning presupposes the structural distinction between assumed content, the mode of its determination, and content actualized as known, positions taken as gaps to be filled by the regulation of content. This regulation follows three modes of determination: a prior state, a current one, and a subsequent one, all determinative of content, where directionality concerns the relation between these modes.

The case of *sensing–feeling–thinking* exemplifies precisely the dynamic relation between these three positions in inquiry, for its legibility depends on usually established conditions of sayability — spoken, written, gestured, or heard — an exemplary field of expression and directionality. This so-called *vectorial* field of sense is not restricted to linguistic categories, but runs through the phenomenon, the perceptual field, and intellectualization, manifesting itself as sensible-intellectual modulation.

Viewed linguistically, *sensing* relates to *what is* or *who is* as assumed presence; *feeling*, to the *how* of determination — intensity, modulation, location, tonality —; *thinking*, to the content of *sensing* already mediated by the mode of *feeling*.

Behind the new content that each term seems to add, there is conditioning according to limitations and directions imposed by making sense, which stacks interpretive layers. Making sense transforms and reinscribes the phenomenon in a construction whose structure of assertivity is a condition of legibility and whose vectoriza-

tion is a condition of explicability and, therefore, coincides with an assertive verbal structure.

The aim to reduce the entire field of possibilities to the actual requires determinations that restrict the variability of what can present itself as content, but suspending these determinations reopens the horizon to indetermination and makes definitive fixation impossible, compromising formalisms that seek to exhaust the phenomenon through explicability. In both cases, the minimal structure of *content*, *determination*, *manifestation*, and *actualization* remains; what varies is the regime according to which these positions of legibility are related through linguistic assertion.

Intelligibility is not added to experience as something the subject makes so that it then adheres to the world as the product of a process, but constitutes the very mode by which experience becomes determinable and apprehensible under conditions of shared legibility. Sense lies in the effective experience of being, in its articulation in the field of the lived, so that the intelligible process is the integrality in which **determination** and **manifestation** condition one another: that which manifests itself already does so under legible conditions of appearance, and that which is determined is so only insofar as it can manifest itself legibly. Reducing one to the other results in a lack of differentiation between these modes of apprehension that occur asymmetrically between the structure of legibility and its conditioning by inferred directionality.

Systems of explicability — from the ontological to the technical-functional — delimit, each in its own way, the possibilities for articulating the structure as if they aimed at explanatory closure, an invariance, a conceptual term, or a final theory. In practice, this can only be achieved through a model of delineation of the real, but never in phenomenological terms precisely because of the asymmetry between what is determined and what manifests itself according to the variability of the mediation of perception, the thinkable, and the sayable.

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