

One / Thinking

Two / Willing

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The Life
of the Mind

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erected not only new systems but a new "science"—the original title of the greatest of their works, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, was "Science of the Experience of Consciousness"²⁹—eagerly blurring Kant's distinction between reason's concern with the unknowable and the intellect's concern with cognition. Pursuing the Cartesian ideal of certainty as though Kant had never existed, they believed in all earnest that the results of their speculations possessed the same kind of validity as the results of cognitive processes.

*Does God ever judge us by
appearances? I suspect
that he does.*

W. H. AUDEN

Appearance

I

1 *The world's phenomenal nature*

The world men are born into contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they *appear* and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs. Nothing could appear, the word "appearance" would make no sense, if recipients of appearances did not exist—living creatures able to acknowledge, recognize, and react to—in flight or desire, approval or disapproval, blame or praise—what is not merely there but appears to them and is meant for their perception. In this world which we enter, appearing from a nowhere, and from which we disappear into a nowhere, *Being and Appearing coincide*. Dead matter, natural and artificial, changing and unchanging, depends in its being, that is, in its appearingness, on the presence of living creatures. Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*. In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular; everything that is is meant to be perceived by somebody. Not Man but men inhabit this planet. Plurality is the law of the earth.

Since sentient beings—men and animals, to whom things appear and who as recipients guarantee their reality—are themselves also appearances, meant and able both to see and be seen, hear and be heard, touch and be touched, they are never mere subjects and can never be understood as such; they are no less "objective" than stone and bridge. The worldliness of living things means that there is no subject that is not also an object and appears as such to somebody else, who guarantees its "objective" reality. What we usually call "consciousness," the fact that I am aware of myself and therefore in a sense can appear to myself, would never suffice to guaran-

tee reality. (Descartes' *Cogito me cogitare ergo sum* is a non sequitur for the simple reason that this *res cogitans* never appears at all unless its *cogitationes* are made manifest in sounding-out or written-down speech, which is already meant for and presupposes auditors and readers as its recipients.) Seen from the perspective of the world, every creature born into it arrives well equipped to deal with a world in which Being and Appearing coincide; they are fit for worldly existence. Living beings, men and animals, are not just in the world, they are *of the world*, and this precisely because they are subjects and objects—perceiving and being perceived—at the same time.

Nothing perhaps is more surprising in this world of ours than the almost infinite diversity of its appearances, the sheer entertainment value of its views, sounds, and smells, something that is hardly ever mentioned by the thinkers and philosophers. (Only Aristotle at least incidentally counted the life of passive enjoyment of the pleasures our bodily organs provide as among the three ways of life that can be elected by those who, not being subject to necessity, can devote themselves to the *kalon*, to what is beautiful in opposition to what is necessary and useful.¹) This diversity is matched by an equally astounding diverseness of sense organs among the animal species, so that what actually appears to living creatures assumes the greatest variety of form and shape: every animal species lives in a world of its own. Still, all sense-endowed creatures have appearance as such in common, first, an appearing world and second, and perhaps even more important, the fact that they themselves are appearing and disappearing creatures, that there always was a world before their arrival and there always will be a world after their departure.

To be alive means to live in a world that preceded one's own arrival and will survive one's own departure. On this level of sheer being alive, appearance and disappearance, as they follow upon each other, are the primordial events, which as such mark out time, the time span between birth and death. The finite life span allotted to each living creature determines not merely its life expectancy but also its time experience; it provides the secret prototype for all time measurements no

matter how far these then may transcend the allotted life span into past and future. Thus, the lived experience of the length of a year changes radically throughout our life. A year that to a five-year-old constitutes a full fifth of his existence must seem much longer than when it will constitute a mere twentieth or thirtieth of his time on earth. We all know how the years revolve quicker and quicker as we get older, until, with the approach of old age, they slow down again because we begin to measure them against the psychologically and somatically anticipated date of our departure. Against this clock, inherent in living beings who are born and die, stands "objective" time, according to which the length of a year never changes. This is the time of the world, and its underlying assumption—regardless of any religious or scientific beliefs—is that the world has neither beginning nor end, an assumption that seems only natural for beings who always come into a world that preceded them and will survive them.

In contrast to the inorganic thereness of lifeless matter, living beings are not mere appearances. To be alive means to be possessed by an urge toward self-display which answers the fact of one's own appearingness. Living things *make their appearance* like actors on a stage set for them. The stage is common to all who are alive, but it *seems* different to each species, different also to each individual specimen. Seeming—the *it-seems-to-me, dokei moi*—is the mode, perhaps the only possible one, in which an appearing world is acknowledged and perceived. To appear always means to seem to others, and this seeming varies according to the standpoint and the perspective of the spectators. In other words, every appearing thing acquires, by virtue of its appearingness, a kind of disguise that may indeed—but does not have to—hide or disfigure it. Seeming corresponds to the fact that every appearance, its identity notwithstanding, is perceived by a plurality of spectators.

The urge toward self-display—to respond by showing to the overwhelming effect of being shown—seems to be common to men and animals. And just as the actor depends upon stage, fellow-actors, and spectators, to make his entrance, every living thing depends upon a world that solidly appears as the loca-

tion for its own appearance, on fellow-creatures to play with, and on spectators to acknowledge and recognize its existence. Seen from the viewpoint of the spectators to whom it appears and from whose view it finally disappears, each individual life, its growth and decline, is a developmental process in which an entity unfolds itself in an upward movement until all its properties are fully exposed; this phase is followed by a period of standstill—its bloom or epiphany, as it were—which in turn is succeeded by the downward movement of disintegration that is terminated by complete disappearance. There are many perspectives in which this process can be seen, examined, and understood, but our criterion for what a living thing essentially is remains the same: in everyday life as well as in scientific study, it is determined by the relatively short time span of its full appearance, its epiphany. The choice, guided by the sole criteria of completeness and perfection in appearance, would be entirely arbitrary if reality were not first of all of a phenomenal nature.

The primacy of appearance for all living creatures to whom the world appears in the mode of an it-seems-to-me is of great relevance to the topic we are going to deal with—those mental activities by which we distinguish ourselves from other animal species. For although there are great differences among these activities, they all have in common a *withdrawal* from the world as it appears and a bending back toward the self. This would cause no great problem if we were mere spectators, godlike creatures thrown into the world to look after it or enjoy it and be entertained by it, but still in possession of some other region as our natural habitat. However, *we are of the world and not merely in it*; we, too, are appearances by virtue of arriving and departing, of appearing and disappearing; and while we come from a nowhere, we arrive well equipped to deal with whatever appears to us and to take part in the play of the world. These properties do not vanish when we happen to be engaged in mental activities and close the eyes of our body, to use the Platonic metaphor, in order to be able to open the eyes of the mind. The two-world theory belongs among the metaphysical fallacies but it would never have been able to survive for so many centuries if it had

not so plausibly corresponded to some basic experiences. As Merleau-Ponty once put it, "I can flee being only into being,"² and since Being and Appearing coincide for men, this means that I can flee appearance only into appearance. And that does not solve the problem, for the problem concerns the fitness of thought to appear at all, and the question is whether thinking and other invisible and soundless mental activities are meant to appear or whether in fact they can never find an adequate home in the world.

2 *(True) being and (mere) appearance: the two-world theory*

We may find a first consoling hint regarding this subject if we turn to the old metaphysical dichotomy of (true) Being and (mere) Appearance, because it, too, actually relies on the primacy, or at least on the priority, of appearance. In order to find out what truly *is*, the philosopher must *leave* the world of appearances among which he is naturally and originally at home—as Parmenides did when he was carried upward, beyond the gates of night and day, to the divine way that lay "far from the beaten path of men,"³ and as Plato did, too, in the Cave parable.⁴ The world of appearances is *prior* to whatever region the philosopher may *choose* as his "true" home but into which he was not born. It has always been the very appearingness of this world that suggested to the philosopher, that is, to the human mind, the notion that something must exist that is not appearance: "*Nehmen wir die Welt als Erscheinung so beweiset sie gerade zu das Dasein von Etwas das nicht Erscheinung ist*" ("If we look upon the world as appearance, it demonstrates the existence of something that is not appearance"), in the words of Kant.⁵ In other words, when the philosopher takes leave of the world given to our senses and does a turnabout (Plato's *periagōgē*) to the life of the mind, he takes his clue from the former, looking for something to be revealed to him that would explain its underlying truth. This

truth—*a-lētheia*, that which is disclosed (Heidegger)—can be conceived only as another “appearance,” another phenomenon originally hidden but of a supposedly higher order, thus signifying the lasting predominance of appearance. Our mental apparatus, though it can withdraw from *present* appearances, remains geared to Appearance. The mind, no less than the senses, in its search—Hegel’s *Anstrengung des Begriffs*—expects that something will appear to it.

Science
Kant

Something quite similar seems to be true for science, and especially for modern science, which—according to an early remark of Marx’s—relies on Being and Appearance having parted company, so that the philosopher’s special and individual effort is no longer needed to arrive at some “truth” behind the appearances. The scientist, too, depends on appearances, whether, in order to find out what lies beneath the surface, he cuts open the visible body to look at its interior or catches hidden objects by means of all sorts of sophisticated equipment that deprives them of the exterior properties through which they show themselves to our natural senses. The guiding notion of these philosophical and scientific efforts is always the same: Appearances, as Kant said, “must themselves have grounds which are not appearances.”⁶ This, in fact, is an obvious generalization of the way natural things grow and “appear” into the light of day out of a ground of darkness, except that it was now assumed that this ground possessed a higher rank of reality than what merely appeared and after a while disappeared again. And just as the philosophers’ “conceptual efforts” to find something beyond appearances have always ended with rather violent invectives against “mere appearances,” the eminently practical achievements of the scientists in laying bare what appearances themselves never show without being interfered with have been made at their expense.

The primacy of appearance is a fact of everyday life which neither the scientist nor the philosopher can ever escape, to which they must always return from their laboratories and studies, and which shows its strength by never being in the least changed or deflected by whatever they may have discovered when they withdrew from it. “Thus the ‘strange

defas de (no a panemoy)

notions of the new physics . . . [surprise] common sense . . . without changing anything of its categories.”⁷ Against this unshakable common-sense conviction stands the age-old theoretical supremacy of Being and Truth over mere appearance, that is, the supremacy of the *ground* that does not appear over the surface that does. This ground supposedly answers the oldest question of philosophy as well as of science: How does it happen that something or somebody, including myself, appears at all and what makes it appear in this form and shape rather than in any other? The question itself asks for a *cause* rather than a base or ground, but the point of the matter is that our tradition of philosophy has transformed the base from which something rises into the cause that produces it and has then assigned to this producing agent a higher rank of reality than is given to what merely meets the eye. The belief that a cause should be of higher rank than the effect (so that an effect can easily be disparaged by being retraced to its cause) may belong to the oldest and most stubborn metaphysical fallacies. Yet here again we are not dealing with a sheer arbitrary error; the truth is, not only do appearances never reveal what lies beneath them of their own accord but also, generally speaking, they never just reveal; they also conceal. “No thing, no side of a thing, shows itself except by actively hiding the others.”⁸ They expose, and they also protect from exposure, and, as far as what lies beneath is concerned, this protection may even be their most important function. At any rate, this is true for living things, whose surface hides and protects the inner organs that are their source of life. ★

The elementary logical fallacy of all theories that rely on the dichotomy of Being and Appearance is obvious and was early discovered and summed up by the sophist Gorgias in a fragment from his lost treatise *On Non-Being or On Nature*—supposedly a refutation of Eleatic philosophy: “Being is not manifest since it does not appear [to men: *dokein*]; appearing [to men] is weak since it does not succeed in being.”⁹

Modern science’s relentless search for the base underneath mere appearances has given new force to the old argument. It has indeed forced the ground of appearances into the open so that man, a creature fitted for and dependent on appearances,

can catch hold of it. But the results have been rather perplexing. No man, it has turned out, can live among "causes" or give full account in normal human language of a Being whose truth can be scientifically demonstrated in the laboratory and tested practically in the real world through technology. It does look as though Being, once made manifest, overruled appearances—except that nobody so far has succeeded in *living* in a world that does not manifest itself of its own accord.

3 The reversal of the metaphysical hierarchy: the value of the surface

The everyday common-sense world, which neither the scientist nor the philosopher ever eludes, knows error as well as illusion. Yet no elimination of errors or dispelling of illusions can arrive at a region beyond appearance. "For when an illusion dissipates, when an appearance suddenly breaks up, it is always for the profit of a new appearance which takes up again for its own account the ontological function of the first. . . . The dis-illusion is the loss of one evidence only because it is the acquisition of *another evidence* . . . there is no *Schein* without an *Erscheinung*, every *Schein* is the counterpart of an *Erscheinung*."¹⁰ That modern science, in its relentless search for *the* truth behind *mere* appearances, will ever be able to resolve this predicament is, to say the least, highly doubtful, if only because the scientist himself belongs to the world of appearances although his perspective on this world may differ from the common-sense perspective.

Historically speaking, it seems that an irremovable doubt has been inherent in the whole enterprise ever since its beginnings with the rise of science in the modern age. The first entirely new notion brought in by the new age—the seventeenth-century idea of an unlimited *progress*, which after a few centuries became the most cherished dogma of *all* men living in a scientifically oriented world—seems intended to take care of the predicament: though one expects to progress further and

further, no one seems ever to have believed in reaching a final absolute goal of truth.

It is obvious that consciousness of the predicament should be most acute in the sciences that deal directly with men, and the answer—reduced to its lowest common denominator—of the various branches of biology, sociology, and psychology is to interpret all appearances as functions of the life process. The great advantage of functionalism is that it presents us again with a unitary world view, and the old metaphysical dichotomy of (true) Being and (mere) Appearance, together with the old prejudice of Being's supremacy over appearance, is still kept intact, albeit in a different manner. The argument has shifted; appearances are no longer depreciated as "secondary qualities" but understood as necessary conditions for essential processes that go on inside the living organism.

This hierarchy has recently been challenged in a way that seems to me highly significant. Could it not be that appearances are not there for the sake of the life process but, on the contrary, that the life process is there for the sake of appearances? Since we live in an *appearing* world, is it not much more plausible that the relevant and the meaningful in this world of ours should be located precisely on the surface?

In a number of publications on the various shapes and forms in animal life, the Swiss zoologist and biologist Adolf Portmann has shown that the facts themselves speak a very different language from the simplistic functional hypothesis that holds that appearances in living beings serve merely the two-fold purpose of self-preservation and preservation of the species. From a different and, as it were, more innocent viewpoint, it rather looks as though, on the contrary, the inner, non-appearing organs exist only in order to bring forth and maintain the appearances. "Prior to all functions for the purpose of preservation of the individual and the species . . . we find the simple fact of appearing as self-display *that makes these functions meaningful*" (italics added).¹¹

Moreover, Portmann demonstrates with a great wealth of fascinating example, what should be obvious to the naked eye—that the enormous variety of animal and plant life, the very richness of display in its sheer functional *superfluity*,

cannot be accounted for by the common theories that understand life in terms of functionality. Thus, the plumage of birds, "which, at first, we consider to be of value as a warm, protective covering, is thus in addition so formed that its visible parts—and these only—build up a coloured garment, the intrinsic worth of which lies solely in its visible appearance."¹² Generally speaking, "the functional form pure and simple, so much extolled by some as befitting Nature [adequate to nature's purpose], is a rare and special case."¹³ Hence, it is wrong to take into account only the functional process that goes on inside the living organism and to regard everything that is outside and "offers itself to the senses as the more or less subordinate consequence of the much more essential, 'central,' and 'real' processes."¹⁴ According to that prevailing misinterpretation, "the external shape of the animal serves to conserve the essential, the inside apparatus, through movement and intake of food, avoidance of enemies, and finding sexual partners."¹⁵ Against this approach Portmann proposes his "morphology," a new science that would reverse the priorities: "*Not what something is, but how it 'appears' is the research problem*" (italics added).¹⁶

This means that the very shape of an animal "must be appraised as a special organ of reference in relationship to a beholding eye. . . . The eye and what is to be looked at form a functional unit which is fitted together according to rules as strict as those obtaining between food and digestive organs."¹⁷ And in accordance with this reversal, Portmann distinguishes between "authentic appearances," which come to light of their own accord, and "inauthentic" ones, such as the roots of a plant or the inner organs of an animal, which become visible only through interference with and violation of the "authentic" appearance.

Two facts of equal importance give this reversal its main plausibility. First, the impressive phenomenal difference between "authentic" and "inauthentic" appearances, between outside shapes and the inside apparatus. The outside shapes are infinitely varied and highly differentiated; among the higher animals we can usually tell one individual from another. Outside features of living things, moreover, are arranged

according to the law of symmetry so that they appear in a definite and pleasing order. Inside organs, on the contrary, are never pleasing to the eye; once forced into view, they look as though they had been thrown together piecemeal and, unless deformed by disease or some peculiar abnormality, they appear alike; not even the various animal species, let alone the individuals, are easy to tell from each other by the mere inspection of their intestines. When Portmann defines life as "the appearance of an inside in an outside,"¹⁸ he seems to fall victim to the very views he criticizes; for the point of his own findings is that what appears outside is so hopelessly *different* from the inside that one can hardly say that the inside ever appears at all. The inside, the functional apparatus of the life process, is covered up by an outside which, as far as the life process is concerned, has only one function, namely, to hide and protect it, to prevent its exposure to the light of an appearing world. If this inside were to appear, we would all look alike.

There is, second, the equally impressive evidence for the existence of an innate impulse—no less compelling than the merely functional instinct of preservation—which Portmann calls "the urge to self-display" (*Selbstdarstellung*). This instinct is entirely gratuitous in terms of life-preservation; it far transcends what may be deemed necessary for sexual attraction. These findings suggest that the predominance of outside appearance implies, in addition to the sheer receptivity of our senses, a spontaneous activity: *whatever can see wants to be seen, whatever can hear calls out to be heard, whatever can touch presents itself to be touched*. It is indeed as though everything that is alive—in addition to the fact that its surface is made for appearance, fit to be seen and meant to appear to others—has an *urge to appear*, to fit itself into the world of appearances by displaying and showing, not its "inner self" but itself as an individual. (The word "self-display," like the German *Selbstdarstellung*, is equivocal: it can mean that I actively make my presence felt, seen, and heard, or that I display my *self*, something inside me that otherwise would not appear at all—that is, in Portmann's terminology, an "inauthentic" appearance. In the following we shall use the word in

(the first meaning.) It is precisely this self-display, quite prominent already in the higher forms of animal life, that reaches its climax in the human species.

Portmann's morphological reversal of the usual priorities has far-reaching consequences, which he himself, however—perhaps for very good reasons—does not elaborate. They point to what he calls "the value of the surface," that is, to the fact that "the appearance shows a maximum power of expression compared with the internal, whose functions are of a more primitive order."¹⁹ The use of the word "expression" shows clearly the terminological difficulties an elaboration of these consequences is bound to encounter. For an "expression" cannot but express something, and to the inevitable question, What does the expression express? (that is, press out), the answer will always be: something inside—an idea, a thought, an emotion. The expressiveness of an appearance, however, is of a different order; it "expresses" nothing but itself, that is, it exhibits or displays. It follows from Portmann's findings that our habitual standards of judgment, so firmly rooted in metaphysical assumptions and prejudices—according to which the essential lies beneath the surface, and the surface is "superficial"—are wrong, that our common conviction that what is inside ourselves, our "inner life," is more relevant to what we "are" than what appears on the outside is an illusion; but when it comes to correcting these fallacies, it turns out that our language, or at least our terminological discourse, fails us.

4 Body and soul; soul and mind

Besides, the difficulties are far from being merely terminological. They are intimately related to the problematic beliefs we hold with regard to our psychic life and the relationship of soul and body. To be sure, we are inclined to agree that no bodily inside ever appears authentically, of its own accord, but if we speak of an inner life that is expressed in outward appearance, we mean the life of the soul; the inside-outside relation,

true for our bodies, is not true for our souls, even though we speak of our psychic *life* and its location "inside" ourselves in metaphors obviously drawn from bodily data and experiences. The same use of metaphors, moreover, is characteristic of our conceptual language, designed to make manifest the life of the mind; the words we use in strictly philosophical discourse are also invariably derived from expressions originally related to the world as given to our five bodily senses, from whose experience they then, as Locke pointed out, are "transferred"—*metapherein*, carried over—"to more abstruse significations, and made to stand for ideas that come not under the cognizance of our senses." Only by means of such transference could men "conceive those operations they experimented in themselves, which made no outward sensible appearances."²⁰ Locke relies here on the old tacit assumption of an identity of soul and mind, both being opposed to the body by virtue of their invisibility.

Upon closer examination, however, it turns out that what is true for the mind, namely, that metaphorical language is the only way it has to make an "outward sensible appearance"—even silent, non-appearing activity already consists in speech, the soundless dialogue of me with myself—is not at all true for the life of the soul. Conceptual metaphorical speech is indeed adequate to the activity of thinking, the operations of our mind, but the life of our soul in its very intensity is much more adequately expressed in a glance, a sound, a gesture, than in speech. What becomes manifest when we speak about psychic experiences is never the experience itself but whatever we *think* about it when we reflect upon it. Unlike thoughts and ideas, feelings, passions, and emotions can no more become part and parcel of the world of appearances than can our inner organs. What appears in the outside world in addition to physical signs is only what we make of them through the operation of thought. Every *show* of anger, as distinct from the anger I feel, already contains a reflection on it, and it is this reflection that gives the emotion the highly individualized form which is meaningful for all surface phenomena. To show one's anger is one form of self-presentation: I decide what is fit for appearance. In other words, the emotions