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Being-in-Relation

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What is a relation? What are relations? The project of developing an understanding of being-in-relation starts with the supposition that the limit of the first question is established by the inevitability of the second—an inevitability to be encountered and then recovered. In other words, the second question opens up an importantly different proposition. The difference is clear. What the second question holds open is the possibility that the truth of relationality brings a form of plurality into play, and therefore what is true of relationality, correspondingly, could not be given by any one form of singularity in which that singularity would have been taken as primary. Were singularity to precede relationality, then the truth of relationality would have already been provided. Its truth would be found in the coming into relation of two founding singularities. While the positing of a founding form of singularity exerts a pervasive hold on philosophy, it contains a dimension—what will emerge as an ineliminable dimension—that remains unthought within it. What is yet to be thought is the possibility that plural relations are original and therefore that both singularity and relations between singularities are always secondary. In other words, the opening question has been attributed an automatic viability. However, there were two opening questions. The force of the second is that it brings another project into play. What was initially unthought—unthought despite being present—comes to be thought in the move from the first to the second question.

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Moving beyond the first question, therefore, or seeing that question merely as a step toward the second, is to allow the second question to open up the position that both informs and structures this entire project, namely, the proposition that the truth of relationality inheres in what is always at work within relations, namely, the effective presence of a founding and irreducible plurality. Within the structure of this general argument, singular relations, which can be more accurately described as pragmatic occurrences within relationality, can only ever be secondary (and this is the case despite the possibility of attributing a form of originality to them). Such occurrences always depend upon the presence of an original form of multiplicity or plurality (even if the presence of the latter is not affirmed). While an assertion of this nature may seem to be an imposition on the philosophical, the contention structuring this project is that this is not the case. Indeed, the overriding position advanced throughout the varying engagements with texts and figures from the history of philosophy that form the basis of this book is that relationality is always primary and that it continues to appear in this way. Moreover, what is fundamental to the argument developed in the course of this project is that relationality has always been there as a possibility. Relationality is not a lost possibility to be viewed nostalgically. It can be recovered. And yet the argument goes further. Not only can relationality be recovered from within the context of this overall argument, but relationality also is there as philosophy's other possibility.

The contention at work here is that relationality has an original presence. At times it has what might be described as an almost archaic presence. Nonetheless, the presence of relationality, no matter how the presence of a founding form of relationality is understood, is often excised or effaced in the name of a posited founding singularity (to which it should be added that it is a singularity that can only ever be posited as founding.) The feint of original singularity, or more accurately the latter's emergence as a feint, is part of this process. That such a singularity is posited and thus only ever there, and therefore only ever present as an after-effect, is a central aspect of the general argument. It should be added here that the presence of this conception of the after-effect when recognized as such, that is, when recognized as coming after rather than as actually original—needs to be taken as attesting to the primacy of relationality. It is important therefore to deploy the word "after-effect" as part of a rethinking of relationality.

The founding singularity, given that it emerges as a putative possibility, will only ever have occurred after the event. The event in question is what is called henceforth a constituting "plural event." As a result, the "plural event" then becomes one of the names for the quality of this founding form

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of relationality.[1] The plural event is that which allows for singularities. As is argued throughout the course of this book, the term "plural event" has a double ontological register. In the first instance, that register identifies the presence of a founding ontological irreducibility. Secondly and consequently, that register marks the place of a founding set-up that needs to be explicated in terms of a relational ontology precisely because it is the site of already present and irreducible relations.[2] Irreducibility is a term that is fundamental to this project. Irreducibility is an essential part of relationality (in the way that the term is deployed here). If a relation is original, then there cannot be any element of the relation that precedes it. Irreducibility is central therefore to any thinking of the plural when the latter occurs with a relational ontology. The reference here to ontology is also of fundamental importance. The plural event refers to modes of existence (and thus to what is). The claim made in connection to a relational ontology pertains therefore to "being"—the domain of the ontological—and consequently the plurality in question refers neither to the hermeneutic nor to the interpretative, except to the extent that they are both effects of the ontological. Taken more broadly, what the reciprocity between the plural event and an occurrence entails—where the occurrence is understood as that which is what it is only after the event—is that singularity is an after-effect. However, one consequence of its presence as an after-effect in which that presence is not recognized, but which takes the apparently singular as both original and

1. The concept of the "plural event" was first formulated in my *The Plural Event* (London: Routledge, 1993) and plays a pivotal role in all of my work. It identifies an ontological position comprising a founding irreducibility. What this means is that at the origin there is already more than one. However, the key point here is that this is not a claim concerning meaning. Pluralism in the context of this project is an inherently ontological term. It is therefore a claim made exclusively on the level of existence. Interpretive plurality, incorrectly understood as semantic relativism, is the result of an original ontological irreducibility.

2. The term "set-up" refers to different configurations that are ontological in nature. In other words, a set-up is a particular mode of existence. The importance of the term is that it underscores the possibility of a different conception of the ontological. Plato, for example, will argue for the separate existence of "ideas" or "forms" from that of particulars, and therefore the questions to which this set-up gives rise concern the identity of the "idea" or "forms" on the one hand and the nature of the relation between them and particulars on the other. While separateness will be examined in part throughout this chapter, and while it is possible to take a critical stance toward it, it should not be thought that Plato is making anything other than an ontological claim. Hence the relationship between ideas (or universals) and particulars in Plato is a "set-up." Equally, a similar argument can be made in relation to the "idea" within Kant.

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founding, is the excision of a founding event of plurality. Within such a context, namely, the context in which singularity is asserted as an end in itself, the plural event, while it remains the condition for singularity, can always be excised. To the extent that this excision takes place, the plural event remains unthought. To reiterate one of the positions with which this project began, it needs to be emphasized that the recognition of the failure to think both plurality and thus the primacy of relationality is equally, it can be argued, the recognition of that plurality as having a constituting and therefore founding presence. This position, the effacing of relationality, where effacing has a form of actuality, has continually and importantly different formulations in the texts to be considered in the course of this study. Fundamental to the position to be developed both here and in the chapters to come is that neither the means of excision nor the presence of relationality has a generalized and generalizable presence.

At this stage, what needs to be developed is the doubling within relationality insofar as the plural event as a site of original relationality is that which allows for the singular. A beginning can be made with the recognition of this doubling. While the position to be worked out will become increasingly more complex, and complexity here pertains to the detail of specific philosophical projects rather than the position itself, it is important to begin with this doubling. In the first place, there are forms of relationality that have an original quality. These forms are described henceforth as having "anoriginal" presence. The term "anoriginal" is used here to underscore a doubled presence at the origin and therefore a locus of irreducibility. Again, this doubling is an ontological claim rather than one determined by semantic concerns.[3] The origin can no longer be thought in terms of a *reductio ad unam*; the resultant shift in thinking occasions a terminological one. Hence the original becomes the anoriginal. This overcoming of a posited unity as constituting an original ontological position accounts for why there will

3. One of the most important and influential texts that deals with questions pertaining to reiteration and the impossibility of context to determine meaning is Derrida's "Signature, Event, Context," in his *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972). However, consistent with the overall force of Derrida's position, the argument is advanced such that what is at stake is the question of meaning. While the argument can be advanced on that level precisely because context does not determine meaning—the term used by Derrida is "saturate"—in an absolute sense, what is left out in Derrida's approach, or at least this is the contention here, is what makes this possible. That possibility is grounded in the ontological. Here the latter is configured as the plural event. The plural event is a set-up.

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always be an interpretive plurality. Again, the semantic is an effect of the ontological. With regard to the doubling under consideration, the implication of the secondary nature of the semantic has a twofold presence. In the first instance, the semantic has its conditions of possibility in this anoriginal relation. It is thus that this relation has a constitutive presence. The second is that within this doubling there is a movement in which a relation that had forms of original presence—that is, anoriginal relationality—may come to be excised. And it should be remembered that what is always at stake is the anoriginal presence of modes of relationality, relations in the plural, whose excision occurs in the name of the singular. There is an important additional point that needs to be made here, namely, that this removal has to involve the invention, after the event, of an original form of singularity. The latter is, of course, the already noted positioning or positing of the origin—or the original—which has as its precondition the effacing of the anoriginal. There is a form of necessity at work here.

The principal aim of this project is to outline the aspects of Descartes, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Heidegger that are integral to the development of the argument for the operative presence of both anoriginal relationality and the plural event. Prior to this, the terminology as well as the first stages of this argumentation stand in need of greater clarification. The detailed engagement with texts can wait at this stage. Nonetheless, an opening is essential. An opening in which it is possible to clarify what at the outset appears as no more than a set of general claims. It is this "generality" that holds the key. The presence of the general therefore provides a beginning. Indeed, a start can be made with the question of the essential and thus the possibility of the general. In other words, a point of departure need not inhere at this stage in the truth of the set of claims noted above concerning relationality—as though such claims existed as ends in themselves. Rather, a point of departure can be found in the assumption that the overall argument would seem to admit, if not necessitate, the equation of relationality with a form of generality in which each instance—each relation—would then be an example of the general. Accepting this position—that is, the positioning of apparent generality as providing an opening—gives rise to a specific point of departure. Following from its acceptance, again the initial acceptance of what will emerge as no more than semblance, is the need to move from a concern with the general (which can always be understood as the relationship between the universal and the particular) to a preliminary sketch of what is entailed by the terms "anoriginal plurality" and "plural event."

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While the problems posed by generality, or abstraction, are clear, beginning with them has an additional significance. The significance concerns the relationship between abstraction and generality on the one hand and the terms "anoriginal plurality" and "plural event" on the other. The effect of these terms—the effect of their operative presence—is that they need to be understood as distancing, if not interrupting, the hold exercised by the continuity of the oscillation between universal and particular where the elements—universal/particular—are defined in terms of each other. What this means is that while the terms "anoriginal plurality" and "plural event" admit a type of generality, their clarification brings to the fore the limits of any recourse to forms of generality as providing the only basis of the philosophical. Moreover, within universality as it is usually understood, there is an inherent *aporia* (which is identified at a slightly later stage as the impossible possibility of abstract universality). The consequence of this *aporia* is that it gives rise to the necessity to think the relational. In other words, what arises here in terms of the impossible possibility of abstract universality indicates that it (abstract universality) is also posited after the event of a founding relationality and, in addition, the presence of that limitation delimits the presence of a different mode of philosophical thinking. It is a mode of thought to which allusion has already been made in terms of philosophy's other possibility, namely, that mode of thought that holds to the primacy of relationality. It should be added here that, integral to the construction of this other possibility for philosophy, the primacy of relationality has a determining effect on the nature of the philosophical task. Philosophy, as a result, is linked to a form of recovery, where what is recovered are anoriginal forms of relationality. Any argument that is centered on overcoming the effacing of anoriginality, rather than the simply projective, defines futurity in terms of modes of recovery. However, it is a conception of futurity in which openings are connected to what will go on to be developed as the yet-to-be-determined.[4] (The latter—the yet-to-be-determined—forms an integral part of the process of coming into relation.)

The question of what constitutes either the universal or the general (and at this stage there is no automatic need to distinguish between them),

4. Recovery is a term that plays a fundamental role in this project. Recovery assumes the presence of relationality that is not a projected state of affairs, such that its possibility is only ever futural, and thus pointlessly utopian. It is there within the philosophical as a potential.

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when taken as preexistent and self-complete entities, yields a specific path of investigation. Taken more broadly, what this specific investigative direction opens up are different modalities of philosophical questioning. They are modalities that have an already well-defined role within the history of philosophy. Perhaps the most emphatic form that this questioning can take is the one in which the project of the philosophical is presented in terms of the development of either a definition or a description of the universal. This is a position that, in both its historical location as well as its actual possibilities, has positive as well as negative determinations. Even though the negative forms are not directly central in the context of this project, they can be understood as comprising two specific elements. The first involves the concession of the possibility, if not the necessity, of the universal while simultaneously arguing—and this is the second element—that the content of the universal is unknowable. A clear example of this position is the Kantian conception of the "idea" as that which cannot be an object of knowledge because it transcends "the possibility of experience."[5] On the other hand, the positive aspect is the determination of the philosophical, not just by the question of the universal but also by the related supposition that this question can be asked—perhaps should be asked—independently of a direct concern with particulars. Or—and this is the argument that is clear from Plato—the provision of an example or even repeated instances of particulars (as though they were instances of the universal) do not provide an answer to the question of the universal itself. This set up accounts for the insistent nature of the distinction identified by Socrates in the *Hippias Major* (287E), for example, in terms of a distinction between "what is beautiful" (τι εστι καλον) and "what the beautiful is" (ο τι εστι το καλον). Indeed, it is that very separation that both gives universality its Platonic construal and simultaneously yields the specific conception of particularity proper to it. There is an essential reci-

5. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 394 onward. References to Kant's works are given to the English translation, followed by the German original. The German edition consulted is the Academy edition of Kant's works: *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Königlich Preußischen (later Deutschen, and most recently Berlin-Brandenburgischen) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1900–). The *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*) is volume 3, and references to this *Critique* (as is customary) include page number of the English translation, followed by the pagination of the relevant German editions, first (A) or second (B).

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procity here. Moreover, within Platonism, the universal accounts for the identity of the particular. There is, in other words, an implicit conception of causality.[6] Posed in this way, the question of universality—universality in its Platonic form—raises the possibility of the counter-measure to such a conception. The latter, the "counter-measure," is the move in which what is countered is universality's apparently unassailable ubiquity. Though it should be noted that the possibility of a counter-measure will always be, indeed has to be, an argument defined in relation to specific forms of universality. This necessity will prove to be significant because it exposes the already present impossibility of universality or the universal *tout court*. The counter-measure is, in sum, an argument that counters Plato or Kant as examples of a philosophical understanding of universality that would be advanced as part of the process of recovery. In sum, the opening up of the philosophical occurs as a recovery; an occurrence that is, of course, dependent upon the primacy of potentiality insofar as recovery is not a simple repetition but the uncovering of a possibility—thus a potentiality—whose actualization awaits. Actualization here becomes a form of affirmation. An affirmation of anoriginal relationality is dependent upon its potential to be affirmed. The interplay of recovery and potentiality rids philosophy of the threat of "eternal return" insofar as, once they are taken together, recovery and potentiality comprise a form of transformation. Transformation is both an opening to thought and an opening for thought.

As the project of thinking the anoriginality of being-in-relation continues to be worked out, the possibility of a counter-measure—which is once again the move countering the assumed presence of the oscillation between universality and particularity, and where such a move is to be understood initially as an opening given within recovery—raises an interesting problem. The problem is simply that there is already a response to universality (in both its Kantian and Platonic formulations). However, the contention here is that it is no more than a response in name alone and as such does not have the quality of a counter-measure. (The difference between the two—response on the one hand and the counter-measure on the other—is of fundamental importance.) The two conceptions of universality that have already been identified define the universal, firstly, as either external to particulars but unknowable (Kant's distinction, for example, between the noumenal and phenomenal, in which the noumenon, despite

6. See in this regard the argument developed in my "A Missed Encounter: Plato's Socrates and Geach's Euthyphro," *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 29 (1987): 145–17.

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its necessity as the ground of appearance, "is not at all positive and does not signify a determinate cognition of any sort of thing"[7]) or, secondly, external insofar as externality defines the object to be known, and, as such, delimits the nature of the philosophical task (Plato). The response to both conceptions of universality in such a setting would become the response to universality itself—a response that, as shall be suggested, is not a counter-measure. As such, it would be incorrect to attribute critical force to it. In other words, the response would have to be an argument made against the possibility of relationality as a general claim and thus as having a form of universality in the first place. At work here is a more general argument against universality as a philosophical possibility, where universality has a necessary presence with regard to the identity of particulars (providing the conditions of possibility in the case of Kant or their identity in the case of Plato). The consequence of such an argument—one in which any form of universality is called into question—would have the following form. The argument would be that relationality would comprise no more than a description of varying instances and consequently in functioning as ends in themselves would not need to have any recourse to forms of universality. Instances on their own would be enough. Indeed, any move from instances to universals would be inadmissible. Accepting this position as a point of departure would mean that the identification of the universal with forms of idealism—an identification in which the relation between universal and particular is then played out—would, as a result, generate a response in which the presentation of particulars as ends in themselves would become no more than a type of empiricism.

The difficulty with the recourse to empiricism and thus the reason why it is a mere response rather than a counter-measure is that is does not obviate the need for forms of abstraction. Indeed, though contrary to empiricism's constituting impulse, it makes them even more necessary. This was of course the problem recognized by Hume at the end of the *Treatise* in which abstraction's impossible possibility emerges. Abstraction is impossible because there is no corresponding "impression" to any one abstraction. On the other hand, its possibility and its necessity is abstraction's presence as heuristic. (This is one aspect of the *aporia* within universality insofar as abstraction is both impossible and necessary.) The moment at which this occurs in Hume is in his description of "substance," and by extension

7. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 348–49; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 252.

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"abstractions," as constituting in each case no more than "a fiction." Within Hume's project, and by extension for Humean empiricism as such, there cannot be an argument against the presence of such fictions and therefore abstraction in general. This is an important concession, and it can be located in his having to write, "granting this fiction."[8] Within this move, these fictions are not simply posited. Their necessity can be located in their *having to be* posited. Fundamental to Hume's argument is the claim that the difference between "idea" and "impression" is merely qualitative, while for Kant and Plato the difference is quantitative. Hence they are two possibilities that are no more than the inversion of each other. Given this inversion, and that assuming an inversion of a position is not a counter-measure, then what is of central importance is the possibility of a different response and thus an actual counter. Difference in such a setting would not be defined by the continual specular oscillation between idealism and empiricism but by countering that oscillation itself.

As a result, therefore, another beginning becomes necessary. Consequently, it is important to start with the contention that the counter-measure to a search for the abstract or the essential, where both are taken to precede instances in their radical differentiation from the abstract or essential, is not found in the simple affirmation of instances. Leaving aside the problematic relationship between empiricism and abstraction, there is another reason why the counter-measure has to involve greater forms of philosophical dexterity. That reason is straightforward. The recovery of relationality is the recovery of a sustained possibility, a potentiality, that, while having an exacting reality, is not addressed in any direct way. For example, the evocation of terms pertaining to forms of commonality or to the shared (e.g., *koinônia*, *sensus communis*, *partagé*, *Mitsein*)—and there is within the history of philosophy an important confluence between the common and the shared—exists in a range of philosophical texts by, *inter alia*, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, and Heidegger. These terms, while identifying the centrality of commonality and relationality (after all, being-in-common is the identification of a relation; in sum, commonality is a possible name for relationality), still occur within a setting in which neither commonality nor relationality is addressed as an original position. There are two related consequences of this lack of address. Firstly, there is the necessity that being-in-common remains unrealized and does so despite what might

8. Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Section. VI. Oxford. 1978. Page 626.

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be described as its unexamined ubiquity. Secondly, there is the demand that its presence makes for the development of a relational ontology. And it has to be an ontological account because what is at stake in each instance is not just commonality, but also being-in-common. An ontological set-up of this form would have to be deployed to understand philosophically the exigency exerted by the continual reidentification of the presence of being-in-common, a reidentification and thus recovery that is itself only possible because of the founding link between recovery and potentiality.

Consequently, as part of the argument for engaging with the generality of relationality as a problem, it has to be argued in addition that the limit of the essential is not found in the denial of any form of abstraction or transcendence. (In sum, empiricism is not the counter to idealism.) Rather, the claim has to be that the recovering of relationality, the identification of an anoriginal possibility, demands a mode of philosophical thinking that cannot be equated with varying forms of essentialism, nor can it be equated with that conception of particularity that refuses any form of abstraction. Abstraction therefore has to be rethought. Remembering that abstraction thus far involves differing modes of separation, the relevance of the problem in this context is clear. Namely, that relationality, and with it the constraint of having to think relationality as an already present set-up, necessitates a mode of philosophical thought that breaks with an oscillation between the universal and the particular where that oscillation is defined either by idealism or empiricism. It is precisely this possibility—that is, relationality's already present existence—that allows it to be understood as philosophy's other possibility. What this means is that it is a set-up that is already there. In other words, what is already there with the anoriginal presence of relationality is not just another mode of thought. Rather, to allow for anoriginal relationality—that is, allowing for that which is already there, where the "there" is a mode of presence—is to allow for the incorporation of abstraction. This incorporation is premised on the very real possibility that the force of abstraction is not exhausted either by its identification with idealism on the one hand or by its conceded presence within empiricism on the other. While at this stage it remains a conception of abstraction whose status is still to be determined, once abstraction is understood as forming part of anoriginal relationality, then accounting for abstraction has to locate abstraction within the operative presence of a relational ontology and not as necessarily differentiated from particularity. In other words, incorporation would mean that abstraction, while present, would no longer be external to relations. Rather, it would already be there within relationality.

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What then of abstraction?[9] While this question is disarmingly straightforward, what it demands is now far from clear. Indeed, the enormity of this question must be noted from the start because at work within it is the appearance, once again, of a type of doubling: that is, the question of abstraction would already appear to be an abstract question. Rather than this being a mere commonplace, what it signals, as noted above, is that abstraction is doubled. Working with the assumption of that doubling makes it necessary to return to the opening question: What is abstraction? Asking the question again allows its limitations to emerge. The way through the problem—the problem posed by the possible doubling of abstraction—and thus the discovery of the limit announced within that doubling, involves the recognition that the question of abstraction is only ever asked in a specific context. The doubling, while a feint—in the exact sense that abstraction is only ever specific and therefore not abstract if abstraction were defined by a founding without-relation, as it is within Platonism—may nonetheless be thought, albeit incorrectly, to have philosophical force.[10] However, recognizing the feint as a feint amounts to the recognition of abstraction's impossibility if

9. This critique of abstraction—a critique that is in part already being carried out and that is aimed at a radical reworking of abstraction—accords with the critique of abstraction advanced by Walter Benjamin in relation to the work of R. M. Myer. While Myer's work was concerned with works of art, the methodological issues both in the formulation of his position and in Benjamin's critique accord with the argument advanced throughout this chapter. The position held by Myer was, in Benjamin's terms, one that has as its

> aim . . . to abstract by means of a comparison with outstanding representatives of each genre, rules and laws with which to judge the individual projected by means of a comparison of genres to discover general principles which apply to every work of art.
>
> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1985), 42.

The question that arises of course concerns how to "evoke" what may at first appear to be "abstract" without succumbing to differing modes of idealism. In the work of Walter Benjamin, this occurs through his continual reformulation of the project of criticism. I have discussed the question of criticism in detail in my *Philosophy's Literature* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000).

10. The term "without-relation" plays a fundamental role throughout this book. Instances of the way it functions have already been noted. The distinction between the universal and the particular in Plato, for example—a distinction that allows for a causal connection

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abstraction were thought to be the question of abstraction as without determination, that is, abstraction defined by complete externality (an externality that may be understood either epistemologically or as pertaining to existence) and thus as without-relation to particulars. And yet it must be noted that the limit of abstraction is not abstraction's impossibility. On the contrary, the limit that delimits abstraction is located in the now-present necessity of the identification of abstraction with specific abstractions. Abstraction is a plurality of particulars. The identification of this limit, which is another version of what has already been identified as the *aporia* within universality, also opens up abstraction. Given that abstraction is no longer purely without determination taken as occurring within a constituting without-relation, abstraction can take on the different quality already alluded to above. The transformation of abstraction is a fundamental element here.

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Abstraction itself is therefore not abstract. Abstraction as a question cannot be asked as though it were independent of the problem of the relation between particular determinations and the related particular abstraction. This is the effect of the doubling of abstraction. Here an example is essential. Abstraction is already present within the relation between "actual" subjects and their relation to law and a possible corresponding abstract presence. The latter in this instance would be the subject of right. While this example can be generalized, its generalization is not a form of abstraction if abstraction is thought within a constitutive without-relation. It follows from this sense of generality that abstraction is to that extent not abstract. Abstractions are always determined abstractions. The problem of abstraction therefore is the problem posed by the inevitability of its specificity. To let the force of this problem emerge, it is vital to note once again the difficulties that arise if abstraction is taken to hold independently of particulars.

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between them, from universal to particular—is such that the universal exists without-relation to the particular. This is the precondition for the question of the identity of the universal to be a question that is of necessity posed in its radical disassociation from the identity of particulars. Equally, however, it also means that the particular would not have its specific forms of identity—for example, the way in which a specific act of piety comes to be pious. I have discussed this question in relation to the *Euthyphro* in great detail in my "A Missed Encounter" (cited above).

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This point can be expanded by continuing with the example already given, that is, the example of abstraction posed at the center of a concern with subjects and the subject of right. The problem in the instance involves the relationship between actual subjects (named and located human beings) and the "abstract" subject of right. The problem here is encapsulated in the question of how to understand the link, in determined instances, between specific given individuals and the presence of those same individuals as subjects of right. Here the question—and it is the logic of this particular question that has to be followed—assumes the problem to be a projective one and assumes in addition—and this assumption is decisive—that there is an already present disassociation between particularity and abstraction (or universality). In sum, what is being staged within this setting is a specific determination of the problem of justice in which justice is delimited by questions of its application. Though equally it is the problem at the heart of morality, namely the presence of a subject who is assumed to exist prior to any form of relationality. Relations, understood as secondary, become the setting in which that agent comes to act morally (albeit positively or negatively). Indeed, it could be argued further that within such a setting, moral agency is constructed by actions as well as intentions to act. There is a related assumption, one with its own form of necessity, namely, that prior to the decision or even the holding of an intention to act, the subject or agent is in what might be called a pre-moral situation. There is therefore a constitutive gap. Thus construed, morality only comes into play at the point of action (or the intention to act). Given the identification of morals with the actions of subjects, one of the central problems (or questions) that such a setting sets in play concerns how to cause subjects to act morally. More generally, however, it involves the distinction between, on the one hand, subjects defined in terms of sensibility and therefore in terms of the particularity of a given subject (even though that particularity has a type of abstract quality) and, on the other, that which defines both law and morality in terms of either the latter's supersensible nature or at the very least as external to a subject that is itself already located within anoriginal relationality. (This latter component, which is integral to the formulation of the moral in Kant, is taken up in detail in Chapter 7). In both instances, what is at stake is the problem of how that which is both abstract and external pertains to a given particular in a determined and thus particular context. The particular returns.

The broader question under investigation, and therefore the one implicit in the preceding identification of the problems inherent in a concern with both justice and morals, if both are thought in terms of

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abstract non-relationality, pertains to the possibility of thinking a connection between abstraction and relationality. What would it mean, therefore, to argue that relationality occasions or can be thought in terms of abstraction? To argue that relationality is an abstraction does not mean that relationality is abstracted from differing forms of relationality. If it were, namely, if relationality were abstracted from particulars, then the problem of application would reappear. In addition, its philosophical force would be limited by the projective or the future. This would occur for the straightforward reason that the only question to have centrality within such a conception of relationality—that is, relationality as a separate abstraction—would concern the application of that established abstraction to an occurrence in the future. (This is a reiteration of the problem noted above concerning justice, the separation of the sensible from the supersensible.) Any attempt to resolve the question of abstraction in terms of it having been abstracted from a given set of particulars would encounter its own impossibility at the same time that it would encounter a mode of possibility. The impossibility here is located in the position that such a conception of abstraction would either be empty or amount to no more than a description of the particular form of relationality from which it was originally abstracted. It would simply be the non-determined form of that which was already determined. Hence it would be impossible. And yet its possibility resides in the fact that this conception of abstraction can always become, precisely because of its non-determined status, the concern of abstract universality that would then be able to be posed, or at least this would be the supposition implicit in the formulation of such a position, independently of any one particular. It would take on the form of the without-relation. However, once attention is paid to this instance of universality, the difficulties already noted above are encountered once again. Namely, in the move from abstraction to universality, the particularity of the abstraction in question will be effaced, and thus the question of the individual particular will have an abstract non-determined status in which abstraction will always emerge as a problem. In sum, what this means is that abstract universality encounters a founding problem in the moment in which its relation to particulars emerges as a question.

Understanding the complex of problems and questions posed by the possibility of a distinction between abstract universality and abstraction can only take place once there has been the construction of a genuine difference between them. The question of abstraction has to become more precise. If abstract universality is always a possibility, despite the necessity of its impossibility, then despite the form in which it is given, what has to be reposed is the original question, namely: What, then, of abstraction? The basis of

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constructing the latter question—that is, the possibility of its functioning as a question in its own right—is that while it cannot be identified with abstract universality, it must also be the case that relationality does not have an essential nature. (The relational does not have the form of an "idea" in either the Kantian or the Platonic sense, nor moreover is it an abstraction having the Humean quality of a "fiction.") To check the essential here is to check the possibility of abstraction having a non-relation to particulars. Were the non-relation to pertain, and were relations always to be established, then what would come into play, as a fundamental concern, would be the question of the next relation. Within that context, the "next relation" would be the one that would come to be established in the future on the basis of an already present abstraction. (At work here therefore would be causality of the abstract universal as the provider of identity.) Not only would the "next relation" have to be established already, but there also is an important reciprocity insofar as existing relations would need to be policed.

The argument would be therefore that overcoming the essential is the counter-measure in which the reconfiguring of relationality would entail that there are only different modalities of relationality. If relationality is to be thought, and thus for it to become another form of philosophical inquiry, it is vital to begin with the supposition that the relationship between universal and particular is not the way original relationality is to be understood. This gives rise to the position in which attempting to understand the presence of relationality would necessitate a rethinking of relationality. As a result, it would take on the quality of the already present (where "presence" would be defined as much in terms of potentiality as it would in terms of actuality). Again there is a return to the position that has already become clear, namely, that relationality pertains to modes of existence. Relationality describes a state of affairs that is ontological. It is not just that being is relational but that what exists fundamentally is a relation. Moreover, because fundamental existence becomes the point of origination, when that point is given within anoriginal relationality, then it cannot be reduced further. Original existence has to be thought as the point of anorigination.

Within this setting, abstraction is reconfigured; it is no longer the element of abstraction within a universal/particular relation in which the universal is *grosso modo* the abstraction. (Though, as emerges in the engagement with Hegel in Chapter 6, abstraction when it is present as a process of abstracting that eliminates particularity by refusing relationality—as occurs in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*—has a profound effect both on conceptions of subjectivity as well as on interconnected conceptions of the political.) Following the path opened above, the argument or the position that abstraction can only ever be present within relations has the effect of locating

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abstraction as part of a relational ontology—to which a word of caution should be added. The denial of anoriginal relationality occurs to the extent that abstraction's presence within such an ontology is refused. (This is also the formulation that can be recovered from the positions under discussion in the chapters to come.) In other words, the claim is that relationality describes existence in such a way that there are no singulars that come into relation as though there were singulars prior to relationality. There are in fact *only* relations. And yet there is an additional point that needs to be made here. While relationality is ubiquitous, there is no one determined form of relationality. On the contrary, singulars are always already in relation such that singularities are the after-effect of relationality. The further extension to this argument is that singularities, and thus particulars, do not have an abstract quality such that all singulars are defined in terms of an excluding and exclusive form of abstraction; such a conception of abstraction would be located within, while being defined by, the without-relation.

Fundamental to the development of the position being worked out here is the argument that the ontological does not identify a projected state of affairs. The absence of projection, while already noted, needs to be emphasized. Were the ontological defined in terms of the merely projective then it would be no more than a philosophical aspiration. As such, it would not have any basis in the history of philosophy. There are two important correlates to this position. The first is that, as a consequence, philosophy's history—given the centrality of the projective—would then not play a productive role in the project of philosophy's own transformation. The second is that relationality would not be an already present possibility. This latter point has further extension, namely that to the extent that it were to hold—and the clear supposition here is that it does not hold other than as a posited state of affairs—it would follow that relationality would not be a possibility other than as a state of affairs to come and then, as a consequence, there would be a radical disjunction between the ontological thought in terms of the relationship between potentiality and relationality on the one hand and what can be described as "the fabric of existence" on the other.[11] What is meant by this latter formulation—"the fabric of

11. While the expression "fabric of existence" presupposes an argument to be advanced elsewhere, it is intended to identify the locus of the ethical. Ethics, as it emerges here, is not defined in relation to a single subject who comes to act morally. The subject within ethics is always relational. Moreover, the locus of ethics is not a link between a subject and future actions. Rather, the locus of the ethical is already at hand within the place of human activity and thus within what is called the "fabric of existence."

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existence"—is that existence is a weave of relations in which singularities are after-effects. Integral to this project is that there is the already present interconnection between potentiality and relationality and that therefore this disjunction does not obtain. While it presupposes a number of arguments that are yet to be made in detail, it can still be claimed, contrary to these possibilities, that the actuality of relationality, as already suggested, not only allows for the assumption that relationality is there as a potential within the history of philosophy, but also opens up the possibility that relationality is already there within existence as a potentiality. Highlighting potentiality within the "fabric of existence" reinforces the identification of the philosophical with the process of recovery.

To reiterate what is at stake here, it can be argued that once relationality is no longer thought in terms of abstract universality, but is thought instead as a set-up that already exists within the history of philosophy, and that while there are different modalities of relationality—for example, those at work in the differing way in which being-in-common and the shared are themselves staged within the history of philosophy—it remains the case that precisely because relationality also exists in terms of potentiality, the incorporation of the relational within abstract universality would need to be understood as a denial of the status of relationality as defined as much by potentiality as it is by actuality. Were potentiality to have been repositioned within abstract universality, then it would have ceded its place to relations that are to be established on the premise of a non-relational singularity or singularities that come into relation. Moreover, the already present existence of anoriginal relationality would itself be effaced if relationality were only ever understood in terms of that which is to be established. Relationality, henceforth, is not positioned within the structure of abstract universality insofar as that structure is presupposed either to frame the philosophical project (Plato) or is such that while effective, its actual determinations fall outside the domain of knowledge (Kant). Nor is it taken to be futural in the sense that it is without precedent.

Relationality, therefore, can only be understood as an abstraction if there is a concomitant transformation of what abstraction is taken to mean. (This is the presence of transformation as an opening.) Within this setting, abstraction would need to be defined in terms of a potentiality to be recovered and thus actualized. Potentiality therefore is a key term within a conception of the philosophical that is itself bound up with recovery. Potentiality allows for recovery. (Recovery as opposed to any claim about either the originality of invention or the repetition of the Same). This is the point that has to be developed and occurs here in regard to a clarification

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of the terms "anoriginal" and the "plural event." While there are important points of interconnection between theses terms, they can also be approached separately. However, it is vital to add a further cautionary note here. Implicit in the argument developed thus far is that both terms have an operative presence within the structure and development of the philosophical (where the latter is defined within the setting created by the affirmation of being-in-relation). Hence, while it is possible to approach both the "anoriginal" and the "plural event" without stating or identifying contexts of operability, it should not be forgotten that, precisely because their presence involves operativity, what cannot be provided is a simple definition (where such a definition would be no more than a form of abstract universality).

Abstraction and universality—again, what should be underscored is the already admitted confluence between these terms—need to be rethought, as has been suggested, in terms of potentiality. And yet what is meant by this formulation still presents genuine difficulties. There are a number of elements that need to be identified at the outset. The first is that, consistent with the position that has been developed thus far, understanding the relationship between abstraction and particularity in terms of a separation—the without-relation—is no longer a viable option. Another approach is necessary. What would have been separated—a separation not admitting any form of threshold condition—is a relation that, in being reconfigured, has its constitutive elements transformed. What were taken to be separated and thus separate—that is, the abstraction and its particularization—are reworked such that what would have been the "separate" abstraction is now both "there"—"there" with particularity—whilst being what "is" in the continuity of its being worked out. And correspondingly, the particular is the working out of that which had hitherto appeared to be separable, namely, the abstraction. What this means is that a particular is given, and only given, within relations. In addition, its continuity is not the continuity of the already determined. Continuity becomes the transformation of any one particular—which is itself already constituted by relationality—by acts of determination that are themselves explicable in terms of the futurity of relationality. (Continuity is therefore always a type of discontinuity.) A future, it should be added, that cannot be determined and whose force—even its viability as futural—can only be thought in terms of a retrospective act. As a consequence, part of the definition of the original setting is the necessity of its opening to future forms of relationality. (Note here that this is a fundamentally different form of the future than one defined in terms of assumed singularities serving as the basis of relations to be established "originally.") Therefore, integral to the working out of any one particular is its being open to other modalities or

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forms of relation. Again, this attests to the effective presence of potentiality. Not only therefore is any one particular the working out of the abstraction to which it is related (and where that relation is in fact constitutive of the being of particularity—being is being-in-relation), and where neither one can be reduced to the other—thereby deferring the possibility of empiricism—it is equally the case that one cannot be separated radically from the other (thereby obviating the possibility of idealism).

To reiterate elements of the argument presented thus far, it should be noted that what is underscored by this approach is the need to account for that conception of relationality in which what are being worked out are irreducible relations. Relationality thus construed has a grounding anoriginality. What has been described as anoriginal relationality brings the plural event into play. What the plural event means in this instance is a founding ontological irreducibility; plurality is only ever ontological. Irreducibility that is both original and ontological will be defined as the anoriginal. Both these terms—anoriginal and plural event—have an operative presence. The operative has a twofold determination here. In the first instance it is the mark of potentiality. In the second it is the interrelated position that relationality is there in terms that allow relationality to be defined on the basis of the continuity of relations. This attests further to the indispensability of potentiality as part of any account of what is emerging as a fundamentally different account of the relationship between universal and particular. Precisely because of the repositioning and reworking of singularities as aftereffects, the possibility of coming into relation depends upon the capacity of the singular to be reworked—a capacity that can itself be reformulated in terms of potentiality. At work here are openings that can only be explained in terms of the interconnection of relationality and potentiality and therefore also where actuality has to be thought in terms of its possibility.

As all the components of the argument advanced thus need to be connected, it is vital to pause here and ask: What does the identification of the centrality of potentiality entail with regard to relationality and its connection to abstraction? There are two elements involved in answering this question, aspects of which are noted below. The first involves a return to the question of relation, a question that, when first posed, led to a discussion of both abstraction and universality. The second element pertains to the way in which a connection can be made to relationality as a question, and therefore to its operative presence within texts, figures, and arguments, which are to be worked out in the chapters to come.

Returning to the question of how relationality is now to be understood—where this "now" is the space that has already been opened—means

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