

# Ole Fogh Kirkeby

## Outlines of a Reason of the Generous Becoming

### **1. The conceptual history of reason**

The concept of "reason" is extremely ambiguous.

It is a Latin translation from the Greek terms *logos* and *nous*. Even though the root of *logos* means to speak and calculate, it has far deeper senses, especially through its reference to the essence of the universe, to deeper levels of a spiritual reality, and to the creating powers of God. It is no incident that St. John uses "logos" as the Greek term for the word, when he says:

#### **The Word Made Flesh**

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 The same was in the beginning with God.
- 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.
- 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.
- 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

*Nous* also originally had these metaphysical contents.

However, through the translation of Cicero and the Roman philosophers, the sense of *logos* and *nous* as the mechanisms of act of thinking became dominant. They were set on an equal footing with *nóesis*, and *episteme*, although they could also refer to *mens* and *animus*, to mind and soul. Even if Greek philosophers like Plotin still kept the strong spiritual and metaphysical sense of *nous* in the third century.

However, the roots of ratio, "ratus", pp. of *rerum* "to reckon, think," from PIE base \**re(i)-* "to reason, count" – the same root as "to read" - began to dominate from the Middle Ages.

Ratio offered itself to the power of man over man and hence merged with a related sense bound to the word "intellectus", a Latin translation of the Greek *dianoia*, a form of *nous*. Ratio versus intellectus would later form the powerful distinction between Vernunft und Verstand in German and Danish, in some contexts answering to the English distinction between reason and intellect.

A related, and important, distinction is the one between the *dianoetical* and *discursive capacities* on the one hand, the powers of the analytical intellect, and the *noetic* and *intuitive capacities*, the powers of the visionary and identifying mind's eye, on the other. In a modern sense this might be interpreted as a claim of the existence of a reason of mind and a reason of the body, or perhaps, a reason of knowledge which we can express in worlds, and one which we cannot.

Knowledge, by the way, has another root, the Latin "gnoscere", the basis of "cognition", answering to the Greek "gignoskein", from which "gnosis" stems, the deep spiritual acquaintance with the transcendent.

When Thomas Hobbes describes the process of thinking with the word "compute," he draws on the mental capacity of counting, and hence transferring one aspect of ratio. There is a performance of power, a will to dissect, to rule through knowledge of the inside of things – at whatever costs - in the analytical capacities of reason, thus understood. In this context reason uses the razor of the intellect. This urge towards dissection is of course, since Descartes, ideally completed with the focus on another Aristotelean term, the synthesis. However, the one who dissects, is also the one who performs the work of recreating the whole. Thus, reason usurps the right to judge both the unique and the essence of totality.

The increasing criticism of reason in our age originates in this right to judge, a right, which obviously is derived from the claim of its absolute validity for thinking and acting.

Plato, on the other hand, distinguishes between two types of thinking. A perfect, theoretical, and an imperfect one, the *dianoia*, which answers to the mathematical capacity, is an imperfect power of the mind due to its dependence on the senses. Aristotle adds another distinction, the one between the *theoretical reason*, pure knowledge of the mind cleansed of bodily prejudices, and the *practical reason*, the reason directed towards action, *dianoia praktiké* (it comprises the technical reason too). The practical reason can only succeed when it is allied with *phronesis*, the normative and experienced-based sensitivity to events and people.

Well, it would be quite wrong to see Aristotle as an exponent of instrumental reason, rather we might interpret him as a proponent of a reason which is virtual or dynamic of character, a reason of becoming, because reason is able to become. However, even if Aristotle conceives of mind as superior to the body, his concept of *phronesis* as both a normative and an experience-based knowledge, and his use of the concept *nous* for intuition, might make him the exponent of *physis*, nature, as incorporating a superior form of reason. He might be seen as the first protagonist of ecology.

The whole point here is that the Greeks did not exclude a reason which grows out of the reverence for nature, looking for the "eidos to enon," the form coming from within.

The Baroque Era detected this when they transformed reason from a barren instrument of thought to the principle of human divinity baptized the light of nature living in any man of sense. This transformed reason to the basis of the principles of human rights, and little by

little made both political and social rights a reality in the democratic society. This might be seen as the return of logos during the twentieth century in the principles of the welfare state. The ring is closed: logos triumphs as the possibility of man to find himself in any other creature and in nature too. It becomes the basic principle of a virtual spirituality comprising all.

This is what I understand by sustainability.

Still, our concept of reason mainly is formed, alas, by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who saw it as the capacity guiding the intellect, through which human beings create a meaningful world out of the chaos of sense-impressions. Thus reason belongs to man, not to nature. Since the intellect is the slave of reason, science can be the obedient instrument of the reason of power over nature, man, and society. If nature is allowed an autonomous reason, it is the brutal and blind one of evolution. Of, course our belief in the progress of civilizations, repeats the forward moving of evolution, but in spite of the market logic, which is just as brutal and blind as evolution might be conceived of, we imagine ourselves as considerate authors of our own history.

However, alternative pictures of the relation between reason and the intellect have come into existence during the twentieth century.

The twenty century, French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, doubts this picture, when he conceives of reason as a transcendent character of the world. We are not the only owners of reason, and our mind is not the only, and proper place, to reveal its secret. It is hidden in the world.

Other philosophers, like Martin Heidegger, imagined a new way of thinking, which returned to the pre-Socratic mode of thought, in which reason does not present the world in an image, and does not transform Being into an object. Instead thinking receives the world by identifying with it, because the world is the active part in the process of experience and cognition. This might, however, presuppose a universal non-human concept of reason, in which the being and thinking unites into one.

Also the French philosopher, Emmanuel Lévinas, conceives of a way of experiencing, in which Otherness keeps its autonomy, and reason does not usurp through projection and violent identification. This is based on the idea that reason becomes during conversation, especially teaching, and that dialogue thus produces reason without presupposing it.

These are all models of a receptive reason, a reason careful towards man and nature, and a reason, which does not exclude, which is neither logocentric nor ethnocentric. This also means that reason might be a manifold phenomenon, irreducible to one superior, hegemonic power.

This is this reason which is necessary for thinking sustainability.

It is also necessary for the task of imagining the one hundred years perspective, because the analytical powers of ratio are impotent, when there is nothing to analyze. Since this future is that far away, forecasts will not work. We have to use another mental capacity.

However, the more we agree on being the authors of our own future, the less importance forecasts will have, except for being guidelines to acknowledging realities and for doing the right things.

## **2. In one hundred years**

The first problem: Would we be able to perceive the mundus inversus, if it should exist? This is, of course in order to be able to answer this question, that we investigate the concept of a Reason of Becoming.

Following Aristotle, this concept must give reason free to identify with the future. It must travel to the future and inform us about it. Imagination and vision are necessary means here, but also what the Greek called *eikasía* or *stochasmós*, in Latin *coniectura*, *praesumptio* and *suspicio*; our capacity to assume. The German philosopher Leibniz made the following distinction between *coniectura* and *praesumptio* (referring to the juridical use of indices and refutations): To conjecture is to draw the right conclusion from insufficient premises, to choose the most probable from a lot of cases. To presume is to accept something as true, as long as the opposite has not been proven. The former is identical to the logical power combining deduction and induction called "abduction" by Charles Sanders Peirce.

This mental capacity of bold guessing is close to what the rhetoric tradition called *inventio* and philosophy sometimes *ingenium* (from Greek "euphysia"). Immanuel Kant called it "sagacity" in Paragraph 53 of his Anthropology.

The second problem: Now we must make it clear that one thing is the mental capacity through which we reach to a picture of a far future. Another is the mental capacity which shapes this future in accordance with our dreams, and hence, makes it possible. In this light the Reason of Becoming must be an alternative reason, a reason which lacks the desire for power and the inclination to violence, a reason deprived of any habitus of domination. The ethos of this reason must be generosity, and it must be formed by the virtues which Cicero named *reverentia*, *observantia*, and *honestas*; the capacities to think *with* and in *honor* of the object of thought.

If we do not develop a sense of the Reason of Becoming, a reverent, observant and honest reason, our assumption shall be too alienated to understand the future which this reason might produce. It would be nothing but wishful thinking. But this sense of reason must be formed by an ethical attitude which is incorporated in us as the way to experience. In other words, we should be able to *live* the Good. It must be the meaning of our mental-bodily complex, and the core of our thoughts and emotions. We could also speak of an ethos of the event in this connection, covering the centers of social intercourse. Its maxims would be

- To prove oneself worthy of the event
- To guard the secret of the event
- To make the world worthy of the event

Thus we have to be the agents of the Reason of Becoming.

Such a reason would think on behalf of the other person and on behalf of the non-human world. It will not objectify, not investigate Otherness in the capacity of material or means. To it everything would be an end. It would emphasize the other senses of the Greek word "lysis" in analysis, namely "to set free", "to relieve", "to save".

This ideal could be expressed in six modes of being in the event with others and otherness, which I have given Greek names as an attempt at etymology:

*Heterotelos (decency):*

The power to forget oneself.

The capacity to perceive Otherness on its premises

To acknowledge what one is able to act from a mutual perspective, and where one can do nothing.

To let oneself be shaped by the Good

Emotional attitudes:

The power to forget oneself.

The capacity to perceive Otherness on its premises

To acknowledge what one is able to act from a mutual perspective, and where one can do nothing.

To let oneself be shaped by the Good

*Synkatathesis (to accept in freedom)*

The capacity to accept the inevitable without losing critical autonomy and the sense that everything is possible.

Never to blame the others, but to realize the human being behind the person and focus the common cause

Emotional attitudes:

Sense of autonomy and unlimited responsibility, seriousness and objective hope.

Thus no

Desperation, fear, fatalism and horror. The "angst" is shared.

*Lepsis (careful co-creation)*

The capacity to receive Otherness without restriction, placing oneself in the centre as a synoptic target.

To be able to use and recognize the Others' force and experiences without envy, emulation, and expropriation.

Emotional attitudes:

Love balancing eros and agape, and solidarity.

Thus no

Will to power, no egoism, no ruthlessness, no self-complacency, and no self-righteousness

*Kataphygé (to be the Others hostage)*

Generosity: The capacity to warrant the truth of the life of Others.

To honor time, to read it gently and to

Identify with the time of Others

To rever Kairos

To be a pupil of the moment .

The desire for diversity and the belief in pleroma

Emotional attitudes:

The sense of gratitude, delight, relief, mirth, jocularly and enthusiasm.

Thus no

Indifference, pharicaism, and lack of courage to share the common conditions of being with Others

*Prosoché (the hexis of attention)*

The capacity to be attentive

To oneself

Present to Others

Attentive of one's attentiveness

To open towards all just forces

and to all genuine movements

And to every perfect gesture

Emotional attitudes:

Presence, sensitivity, co-vitality, creative empathy, encouragement, and inspiration, and intuition.

Thus no

Projective anticipations and the reactive recognition by prejudices; no unjustified reservations and grimaces of suspicion

*Ergon*

To focus one's strength in the service of the good and neither to give in nor to deceive oneself

To acknowledge that the "kydos", the nimbus of power, can only be borrowed for a while.

To honor the one I might become.

Emotional attitudes:

heart, the spirit of self-conquest and self-sacrifice, commitment, and loyalty.

Thus no

vanity, pride

and cowardice

A condition for the realization of this *logotopia*, this ideal of communication is, of course, that everybody is just as ready to receive as to manifest these attitudes.

3.

### **Logotopia:**

A new language beyond Babel which has

No excluding predicates and names

No reifying labels

No use of "I", only "we"

There exist

No violence, no crime, and no war

No affects, only passions

Only liberated memories

And

Self-forgetting

A new and rich practice of attention

There is

No police

No courts

No inflicted pain on any living creature

No private property, no market, no money, no competition

Almost no science, only philosophy and art

Beyond technology, i.e. the natural means of nature have for long absorbed the vital aspects of technology which are re-transformed to the natural form

No artificial media

No forecasts and predictions

No hopes and visions

Only love