The Sense of Community Is the Community of Sense
On Discovering the "We" with Eugen Fink and Jean-Luc Nancy

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Abstract

The article discusses some striking correspondences between the respective accounts of sociality as developed by Eugen Fink in his Freiburg lecture on *Existenz und Coexistenz* (1952/53, repeated in 1968/69, first published in 1987) under the notion "community" (*Gemeinschaft*) and likewise by Jean-Luc Nancy in various books and articles since the 1980s, most notably in *La communauté désœuvrée* (1983) and *Être singulier pluriel* (1996). Their common ground is established by a chiasmatic

logic Fink considers essential for community as such: if it has a sense (rather than "meaning"), it is this very sense that is a communal one. Thus, the sense of community *is* community, or, in the words of Jean-Luc Nancy who elaborates an analogous idea from a special reading of Kant's first and third *Critiques* that is by no means alien to Fink's own: "We are the sense."

Keywords: community, chiasmatic logic, "we," sense, Jean-Luc Nancy.

Smisel skupnosti je skupnost smisla. O odkrivanju »mi«-ja z Eugenom Finkom in Jeanom-Lucom Nancyjem

Povzetek

Članek obravnava nekaj pozornost zbujajočih korespondenc med razgrnitvama družbenosti, kakor sta ju razvila Eugen Fink v freiburških predavanjih o *Eksistenci in koeksistenci* (1952/53, ponovljena 1968/69, prvikrat objavljena 1987) s pomočjo pojma »skupnosti« (*Gemeinschaft*) in tudi Jean-Luc Nancy v različnih knjigah in prispevkih od osemdesetih let 20. stoletja dalje, zlasti v delih *La communauté désœuvrée* (1983) and *Être singulier pluriel*. Njun skupni temelj tvori hiazmatična logika, ki je po Finku bistvena za skupnost kot tako: če ima slednja smisel (ne samo »pomen«), je natanko ta smisel sam skupnosten. Potemtakem je smisel skupnosti skupnost oziroma, z besedami Jeana-Luca Nancyja, ki analogno idejo, kakršni nikakor ni tuja Finkovi lastni misli, razdela na podlagi posebnega branja Kantove prve in tretje *Kritike*: »Mi smo smisel.«

Ključne besede: skupnost, hiazmatična logika, »mi«, smisel, Jean-Luc Nancy.

Sumus ergo cogito: An introduction

The main question underlying the issue at stake in my paper,[1] namely how to discover the "We," or to give a philosophically sound account of collective intentionality, as it were, is obviously the following:

What is more in need of being philosophically accounted for—the experience, or the notion, of the "We," i.e., of a plural existence (whether it be a joint, a shared, a dual, a dyadic, or other existence), or the experience, or the notion, of the "I," i.e., an individual existence (whether it be subjective, particular, solipsistic, egocentric, or other)? In this very respect, I am taking issue with the viewpoint (which has its origins in developmental psychology, but is not exclusive to it) claiming that it is primarily the former which remains to be explained, whereas we can basically take the latter for granted; and by contrast to this opinion, I would like to recall a perspective (psychoanalytic by contrast, or closely related to Freud's metapsychology, at least) that it is precisely the other way round. What is in dire need of being explained and accounted for, is how from an originary plurality of existence—the dyad between mother and child (which is not a case of merged experience at all, but rather the very experience of an original plurality of being, i.e., the experience of a limit between "us" that we make way before we become aware of "ourselves" as being "I"'s)—, how from such an originary, if unconscious, plurality arises, or only remains, for that matter, the conscious, if epiphenomenal position of an ego, or an individual subject, who experiences him- or herself as discontinuous, disconnected from the world and longs to regain its former state by and through association with others of more or less the same kind.

When Freud famously speaks of "his Majesty, the Baby," he does not refer to an alleged grandiosity of the infant's ego in the first place, but rather to an originary, ontologically grounded *majestatis pluralis* of an "us," which, far from

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1 Originally presented at the international conference *Discovering the "We": The Phenomenology of Sociality* (University College Dublin, Ireland, May 8–10, 2013), the text has been enlarged and revised for its publication in the present volume. A somewhat different thrift of the argument, exchanging, as it were, Eugen Fink for Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, has been pursued in: Boelderl 2016; cf. also my interview with Jean-Luc Nancy (Boelderl 2020).

being pathological at that stage, empirically as well as logically precedes the singular of the "I." Much as in the later Husserl for whom the transcendentality of the *ego cogito* increasingly disclosed its life-worldly, that is to say, collective nature, it is thus, from this viewpoint, less a matter of *cogitamus ergo sumus* than one of *sumus ergo cogito*, or even more precisely: *fuerimus ergo cogito me fuisse*. In other words: *Sein* precedes *Bewusstsein*, as Marx put it, which I take to mean: being (singular) plural will have preceded being conscious(ly) individual—and that is all "I" can possibly think.

In the present paper, I wish to discuss this as being exactly the issue that, according to my understanding, both Fink and Nancy are trying to come to terms with. And so am I—or so have I been ever since my first draft of a philosophical natology, or philosophy of birth, which amongst other things also aims at giving a philosophical account of sociality and community.

Not there (yet): Fink's take on community

In the autumn/winter of 1952/53 Eugen Fink (1905–1975), who had been Husserl's last (and eventually private) assistant in the 1930s and was then Professor of Philosophy and Pedagogy in Freiburg, holds a series of lectures on *Existenz und Coexistenz*, which he is to repeat some 15 years later, in 1968/69, and which appeared in print for the first time in 1987 with Königshausen & Neumann in Würzburg, twelve years after his death in 1975. I shall develop the main thoughts of this *Vorlesung* and subsequently try to approximate them, as it were, to Nancy's account of community as put forth in *The Inoperative Community* and *Being singular plural.*

In other words—and in order not to raise any false expectations as to the scope of this paper—: I am far from proposing a hypothesis or anything of the kind with respect to the question of what we are (to quote Simon Critchley), be it according to Fink or to Nancy, let alone to myself, nor do I wish to express a thesis along the lines of stating that Fink and Nancy basically say the same about community, for instance. I am only delivering a first report, as it were, about some striking correspondences between Fink's *Existenz und Coexistenz* on the one hand and what I think to have grasped from Nancy's conception of community on the other (without wanting to narrow the scope of such potential

correspondences down to this very issue); whether or not there is any further philosophical sustainability in this report—which does shine through, though, in passing here, for instance when it comes to certain common Kantian echoes both thinkers share—, remains to be evaluated.

Fink's argument begins exactly with stating that it is "us" who are in the focus of community:

> Human community is not something alien to us in the sense that we would be able to consider it in a cool, neutral, and unbiased manner; we live in the space of this community—it is the common and nonetheless contentious conduct of our living as being together. As soon as we exist, human community enfolds us, holds us, and carries us; even the most lonesome individual remains in its horizon. (Fink 1987, 8.)[2]

And yet, Fink is quick to add, "this human 'community' is not a factual natural finding we can only discover," but it is "essentially determined by a self-conception," that is to say, it "always entails an interpretation [*Auslegung*; lit.: exposition] of itself" (ibid.).

Fink, thus, holds that a community conceives of itself on the grounds of "the presence of a 'sense,' which enfolds all of its members" and "unfolds in the medium of linguistic understanding," which does not necessarily have "the form of a clear and elaborated conceptuality" (ibid.). But what is the "presence of a 'sense'" supposed to mean? Obviously, Fink refers to what he also calls "ways of self-conduct": human community is made up by objectivated forms of self-relation, as it were; it consists of individual modes of behavior turned reflective. "Paradoxically speaking," says Fink, "community constitutes itself primarily in its projection of a sense for what community is all about"; communities are not simply "there," they do not exist "in themselves," but also always "for themselves" (cf. ibid.).

So, while they are not just there, they are nevertheless (being) *given* (not constructed or made), Fink seems to suggest in a way that opposes and

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2 Unless stated otherwise, all translations from the German and the French respectively are mine.

challenges both the classical (Aristotelian) and most of the modern concepts of community, or the social, as developed since Hobbes: a community will always already have been given—it is neither the result of a process of communalization nor would one be justified in saying that it "was just there at first and gained an understanding, a representation of itself later on; 'consciousness' is not a later ingredient to a previously existing inventory" (ibid.).

Fink's account of community thus pursues a chiasmatic logic he considers essential for community as such: if a community has a sense, this sense is a communal one. "A human community is essentially characterized by what it wants and means *as* a community." (Ibid.) For Fink, the sense of community is community, or, to anticipate it in the words of Jean-Luc Nancy: "We are the sense." (Nancy 2001, 91–103, esp. 99; cf. Nancy 2004, 19–24.)

"ÜberdenMenschenhinausgehen": Transcending man toward community

Let us look at Fink's account in somewhat greater detail.

For him, as stated earlier, the problem of human sociality does not follow the general style of individual philosophical issues (cf. Fink 1987, 208). Only if one would pre-conceive of community as being "a particular behavior of a group of people," its philosophical treatment would rightly fall into the scope of philosophical anthropology. While such a preconception is not totally out of place or simply wrong, it nonetheless represents a "non-reflective opinion" and thus a "superficial truth" (cf. ibid.), likely to satisfy only "flat-heads" such as those who judge the fact, that what "prophets, poets, and thinkers" are saying differs from one another, to be the proof of their failure (cf. Fink 1987, 225). The flatness of the thought these heads practice issues from a basis that they deem incontrovertible and that Fink describes as follows:

> The superficial opinion of every-day life involves the view that all truths lie on one and the same level, so to speak, that everything unfailingly must boil down to "yes" or "no," that it be either "true" or "untrue," that there be no third. In so thinking, it is also the notion of being itself, which is used in a (down-)leveling way: everything that there is, is in one and the same manner; while there naturally are many different

sorts of things, and while everything that is, is manifold according to its respective being-itself (*Was-sein*: *quidditas*),—everything is the same according to its being, its "is"; here, too, there is—so they say—only the alternative: something is or is not; tertium non datur. The flatness of the notion of truth corresponds with a flatness of the notion of being. (Fink 1987, 208.)

A philosopher is he or she who is not satisfied with this flatness, but who considers the superficial truths of every-day life to be "fragwürdig," worthy of questioning (cf. ibid.). Then and only then, Fink continues, "the taken-for-granted prejudice stating that man is a thing amongst other things and community a certain way of behavior of man, begins to slip and slide" (Fink 1987, 209). For Fink, and likewise for Nancy, community is by no means a "finding" only waiting to be ascertained (by means of sociology, for instance) in order to get to know what community essentially "is." Neither do we already know what community is, just because we have always already been living together with others (such a view would exactly be a case of the superficial truth of a mere opinion scolded by Fink), nor can we hope to find out its essence by measuring and assessing its particular modes of appearance scientifically.

The crux of coming to terms with community philosophically is not due to its being different from everything else in the world, or—methodologically speaking—to the fact "that we cannot speak *about* community but from *within* a community," thus to us not having the necessary distance from it; rather, as we shall see, the problem with community is that in a strange way it is this very distance itself: for it is precisely "the presumably more rigid way of being true, the so-called 'objective' cognition claiming to be 'valid for everyone,' which stands within an inter-subjective horizon of sense and already refers to human community as to its sheer possibility" (ibid.).

And yet, community is not just inter-subjectivity, if the latter implies the notion of a posterior union or merging of "ready-made" subjects, subjects that have previously already been constituted as such. This, according to Fink, is exactly what subjects never are: they are not ready, complete, finished "individuals" in the sense of un-dividable (id)entities. "There is a much more essential aporia"—more essential than any real or just possible problem to do

with a *petitio principii* occurring at the attempt to think about community—, and this more essential aporia, says Fink, "is the intransparent or opaque character of being of man" as such. "The being which 'understands being' is at the same time the being which misunderstands itself. There is nothing more alien to man than he or she himself or herself …" (Fink 1987, 209.)

Precisely for this reason "ontology has its place in man" (ibid.): it is ontologically superficial and naive to posit the understanding of being, which this particular being (that is defined by its opacity towards itself) called man boasts of, as being "a primal phenomenon that cannot be deduced any further," to conceive of it as a gift of god or nature, as if human reason were a thing of the same order as the long neck of a giraffe and the poison fangs of a snake (cf. ibid.). In this sense, it is necessary to raise the question of an "ontology of ontology," which leads directly to social ontology, analogous to the question of a phenomenology of phenomenology, which Fink had raised some thirty years before with respect to his teacher's philosophy.

The main focus of social ontology, thus, consists in elucidating "whence man stands in understanding." Social ontology, according to Fink, problematizes man's mode of being by denying itself the opportunity to posit man methodologically as the ineluctable foundation of any ontology; it does not start from "a 'given' being, which could be described phenomenologically in its very givenness," i.e., from "us ourselves" (Fink 1987, 209), but on the contrary from something that is not (or not in this sense) given: community. "Community," thus, means for Fink—which brings him remarkably close to Nancy in my opinion—"the paradoxical situation that a being does not have its 'essence' within itself, but is self-ish (*selbsthaft*), i.e., *with itself by being without itself*" (ibid.).

And Fink is quick to underline the radical change as to understanding being and man alike that becomes evident in the face of this very insight:

> Whereas relation as a rule is something, in which a substance is correlated to another—whereas the *pros ti* represents a deduced categorical moment of *ousia*—, with man this "relation" gains a totally different priority. Paradoxically speaking:i is exactly relation that is man's substantial essence. (Fink 1987, 210.)

In other words, man's essence consists in that he does not "rest in him- or herself independently" (Fink 1987, 211), but is "eccentric" (as Hölderlin put it), he or she ek-sists (in Heideggerian terms); speaking with Nancy in Bataillean language one could also say: he or she is excessive. His or her relation to him- or herself is "primarily a 'relation' […] to the space-giving, time-permitting prevailing of the world (*Walten von Welt*)" (ibid.). Being "the most self-ish living being that is isolated/separated and does know about its being isolated/separated," man can only be determined by exceeding him- or herself (cf. ibid.), by transcending him- or herself. It is this "going beyond man" ("ÜberdenMenschenhinausgehen" [sic!]) (ibid.), which leads toward community, to the plurality of existence, toward co-existence as being-with:

> […] being-with is not an existential structure that belongs to being-there as being-there in general; man is by essence a *plural*, and not because there are two and a half billion of these strange "unfeathered bipeds" […] Human being is plural, because it is divided into the dual of man and woman, because it involves conception and parturition, battle, killing, and dying, because death and love are its elementary realities. (Fink 1987, 211 *sq.*)[3]

This is to say that the communal world of man cannot be reduced to one principle of unity in the sense of an *undividability* (cf. Fink 1987, 214). "As long as social philosophy is methodologically guided by the focus on *unity* and this unity is moreover being determined according to the model of the being-one (*Einsheit*) of a being, a thing" (ibid.), the Kantian "mere position" of beings, i.e., being as such, will not be recognized as being a dis-position—that very "dimension of tensions, opposites, contradictions" whose "play" (which

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3 Anticipating a line of argument, to which Derrida would later on devote a study of its own, Fink continues: "Being male or female is in each case not a factual character that the essentially neutral existence assumes on the basis of an accidental natural determination, which one could leave aside in a fundamentally ontological consideration. On the contrary: they [sc. male and female] are crucial *ontological essence traits* of human existence. Animals also mate, father, and give birth, fight and kill, form packs, swarms, herds. And yet, they are never 'communal' […]." (Fink 1987, 212.) Cf. Derrida 1988.

is a *leitmotif* of Fink's thought, cf. Fink 1960) constitutes the world (cf. ibid.). Against the background of this inconceivability of the being-with of being-there, an obvious identity or congruence of existence and co-existence in the sense developed so far, Fink sums up his considerations in such a way that community cannot be "described in a purely immanent manner," because it is "primarily a way of being in the world" (Fink 1987, 217), and he goes on to specify this way of man's communal-being-in-the-world quite in accordance with Nancy by stating: "It is such a way which must be understood as 'communication.'" (Ibid.) In my view, what Fink says in order to explain this notion at the same time considerably helps to clarify Nancy's use of the same term:

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> The essence of communication (*Mitteilung*) is dividing itself into (*Sich-teilen-in*) …; yet, such a division, which does not hack into pieces, dissect, or split that into which one divides oneself; quite on the contrary: dividing in(to) the world (*Teilen-in-Welt*), sharing is the basic mode of being with one another. Groups, communities, peoples each have their own "world," a compartment of sense, in which their members live, in which they understand one another. Without this momentum of a common area of sense human community cannot be determined at all, cannot be told from the animal swarm, pack, etc. But the sense, which thus traverses humankind as such, is by no means just an endemic or indigenous momentum, no anthropological structure; human life does not have "sense" by itself; it is within sense, because it is concerned by the time-space of being, because the world itself communicates him and her its sense. The area of sense of human being is grounded in the openness toward the world—and with it every inter-human association in the primal association of cosmos and man. (Fink 1987, 217.)

Is it not the same thought that finds itself expressed in a somewhat more prosaic, or at any rate: less pathetic and thus more contemporary way in Jean-Luc Nancy, when he briefly notes: "[…] 'sense' […] is the disclosed name of our being-with-one-another. We do not 'have' any sense, because we are the sense […]" (Nancy 2004, 19).

Of course, we must not overlook in all this that the sense, which we are, first and foremost presents itself as being intransparent, opaque, everything but clear. This is not just a strategically employed measure of precaution, aimed at fencing off a megalomaniac interpretation of such a concept of community as it is facilitated at a first, superficial glance by this seeming identification of "we" and "sense"; the argument does not result in a subject equipped with the right to exercise a *pluralis majestatis*. Quite on the contrary, the in-transparency or opacity of sense "is," ontologically speaking, its worldliness, or its corporeality, which, according to Fink, constitutes the "secret" of community (cf. Fink 1987, 218). Any attempt at grasping what human community is all about cannot miss to touch on this secret (cf. ibid.), which the "strangeness" of the world represents—or rather: which it does not represent (for it is beyond representation, without therefore being metaphysical):

> […] just as seeing […] does not exclusively see what is enlightened and transparent […], but arrives at that, which opaquely resists sight and is thus being seen exactly in its seclusion [Fink mentions the "earth," one could also think of the body as conceived by Nancy], so thought is capable of focusing the secret. […] thought achieves its utmost possibility in confrontation with the unthinkable. The world is *at once* open and closed, disclosed and veiled, torn by the sharp cut of differences and whole at the same time, one and unscathed; it is the field of isolation and of primal unity. […] it is the most monstrous counter-tension and counter-mobility. […] stronger than visible harmony, says Heraclitus, is invisible harmony (fr. 54). This does not concern the difference between a sensible and a spiritual harmony. Rather, the whole world of appearance (along with the harmony prevailing in it) is in an accord of tension with the absent "primal ground" that never appears. (Fink 1987, 218.)

According to Fink, this primal ground that never appears, that does not present itself as such and thus cannot be presented, is nothing else than the ontological category of community, that strangeness we are with respect to ourselves, sensible each and every time when I present myself to myself—a

strangeness at the heart of things called being-in-common, which constitutes a ground that is not a reason in the sense of "causa," an origin from which something came in the first place.

The unrepresentable community (a community beyond representation, i.e., a sense beyond meaning; cf. Nancy 1988), therefore, does not constitute a home, from which one could depart and to which one could return again later on like into a safe harbor; rather, it is this home, in and to which we find ourselves exposed, as Fink says, demonstrating an uncanny terminological proximity to Nancy once more, by translating Heidegger's "Geworfenheit" (being-thrown into) thus:

> […] what is homelike, does not have the alien outside itself, on the edge […]. Rather, the homelike always contains—even in its most intimate form—the alien in its core; yet, this "dowry" is usually neglected, so that one is alarmed when suddenly the uncanny erupts in the middle of the homelike […] (Fink 1987, 220.)

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This is a logic, if not exactly borrowed from Freud, then at least clearly directed in the same vein (cf. Freud 1999; Sturm 1995). "That which, speaking ontologically in general, must be understood as 'exposure' (*Aussetzung*), namely isolation, rates as the native place of being [to man] […]" (Fink 1987, 221).

Yet, what exposes the isolation, the becoming-an-individual of man, is nothing but his or her singularity or being-with: "Being itself is given to us as sense," writes Nancy, "because sense is *as* division (sharing) of being": "Being can only be as being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singular-plural co-existence"; thus, it is the task of man to expose this sharing and this circulation "by saying 'we'" (Nancy 2004, 20 *sq.*). This task—to put it in a Heideggerian manner: to be those who have to be their being—involves breaking open the immanence, in which we exist as individuals, to perform the act of resistance or distance toward ourselves, which renders the nothing "between us" (*entre nous*) perceivable, a nothing that evades appearance, while nonetheless being "there": "We need to re-appropriate that, which has already made us 'us'—today, now, here—, the 'we' of a world that

senses its not having any sense anymore while *being* that sense." (Nancy 2004, 22.)

For this very same reason, community is holy or transcendent—not in the traditional sense of constituting something *beyond* the world, but because it executes a certain function of resisting immanence, i.e., preventing being from shutting itself off from becoming, preventing being from achieving itself.

Nancy does not hesitate to put this function into the context of what he calls the creation of the world, with creation referring to the generation of that Nothing of distance between us, which keeps the world from closing in onto itself, from *clôture*: "The *nihil* of creation is the *truth* of sense, but sense is the original sharing of this truth." (Nancy 2004, 21.) As far as I am concerned, it is by no means a coincidence that this reference to creation, too, is in line with Fink's account of the ontological status of community, insofar as it opens up onto a cosmological dimension of social ontology, posing "the problem of community […] as increasingly turning into a cosmological question" (Fink 1987, 217).

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Last (ontological) exit: Community

While I cannot pursue this valuable trace of Fink's cosmology any further here, much remains to be said about why the sense of community is to be conceived of as a community of sense grounded in the ontological realm. Both Fink and Nancy develop their argument, as we have seen, in consequence of the facticity of plural existence. As Nancy writes: "One single being is contradictory." (Nancy 2004, 34.) "The plurality of being is at the ground of being" (ibid.), for "our being-with, as being-several, is by no means coincidental, it is not a secondary and aleatoric scattering of a primary being" (ibid.). One being alone would be nothing but a *contradictio in adjecto*, for one alone cannot be (one cannot just count to one; cf. Nancy 2004, 70),[4] not even (or particularly not) at the origin, because the origin is "irreducibly plural" (Nancy 2004, 35). "'Being' is not a condition, nor a property, but it is that action/passion according to

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4 Elsewhere we read: "'One' distinguishes the whole from the whole," and "this alone," i.e., the whole, "counts for one, one and one again, no linkage, no addition, no sum, but interruption of the continuum, truth of sense, its arrival, its event" (Nancy 1997, 19).

which happens ('is') what Kant termed 'the mere position of a thing.'" (Nancy 2004, 34; Nancy quotes Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 626, cf. Kant 1974a, 533.) For Nancy, by contrast, there is

> no *position*, which would not be *dis-position*, and in correspondence to that, as regards appearance, which is entailed in this position and happens with it, (there is) no appearance, which would not be comparence (*com-parution*). This is why the sense of being plays as existence, the *being-with-oneself-without-oneself*, which we represent, we, "human beings," which we represent however […] *for* the totality of being. (Nancy 2004, 35.)

What is this all about, and what has it to do with the question of community?

Nancy quotes Kant from the chapter on the "Impossibility of an Ontological Proof of God's Existence" in the "Transcendental Dialectic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which Kant strives to show that and why "the concept of an absolutely necessary being (= of God) is a concept of pure reason, i.e., a mere idea whose objective reality is far from being proved by the fact that reason demands it" (Kant 1974a, 529 / B 620), in other words, that in contrast to the long tradition of proving God's existence from ontological necessity (from Anselm to Descartes) the mere necessity of thinking the very idea of God does not at all posit its or His being, quite on the contrary: he or she who so claims commits a categorical mistake. Kant's argument famously culminates in the widely known determination that *being*—"apparently," as he adds—*is not a real predicate*, i.e., it is not a "concept of something which would add to the concept of a thing" (Kant 1974a, 533 / B 626). In order to understand what is at stake for Kant with this renunciation of the ontological proof of God's existence, it is important to take into account his depiction of what such an attempt to prove a highest being as being an absolutely necessary being essentially aims at: it does not aim at the positive business of an extension of understanding (*Verstand*) onto "new objects or issues," but quite on the contrary, at the maybe not exclusively negative, yet definitely restrictive—or, to employ Kant's favorite term: *critical*—business of a "limitation" of the former (cf. Kant 1974a, 529 / B 620).

Precisely this critical business of limiting understanding had been put forth by Kant in 1766 already, 15 years before the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in a pamphlet directed against the influential Swedish scientist, philosopher and "seer" Emanuel Swedenborg,[5] in which Kant first outlined metaphysics as the science of the limits of human reason, resulting in a relegation of the question of God from the scope of theoretical reason to practical reason; for Kant, the absolutely necessary being is a necessary idea of practical reason and not a possible issue of theoretical knowledge.

This is all well-known and has been the focus of much scholarly attention. Nancy, however, directs our attention onto that much less known, but according to him no less important determination, which Kant suggests subsequently to this negative determination of being—explaining what being is in a positive view, as it were: namely, "the mere position of a thing" (Kant 1974a, 533 / B 626).

Nancy, trained by his reading of Heidegger and the question of the meaning of being, recognizes in this statement Kant's version of the basic question of philosophy as raised by Leibniz, on the one hand: "Why is there anything at all and not rather nothing?"; on the other, Nancy sees in this statement at the same time the place of community in the thought of Kant. It does, indeed, seem by no means coincidental that Kant changes from the singular into the plural immediately after he has introduced being as the "mere position of a thing":

> If [in the case of speaking about an "absolutely necessary being"] the discourse were about an object of the senses, *I* would be unable to mix up the existence of a thing with the mere concept of the same. […] If *we*, however, wish to think the existence by the pure category alone, it is no miracle that we cannot name a token to differentiate it from pure possibility. (Kant 1974a, 534 *sq*. / B 628 *sq*.; my italics.)

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5 In which, by the way, the term "community" ("Gemeinschaft") is explicitly used the most frequently of all Kant's works.

This is to say, obviously, that *I* am very well able to name the congruency, even identity of a thing with its concept, in other words: to claim its existence, by attributing it (as to an object of the senses) certain properties as its predicate, while by contrast *we* are unable to state (*kategorein*) existence as such—without a predicate, as it were. What is more: it is this very impossibility that constitutes the reason for the necessity of assuming categories (i.e., forms of speaking), which enable *us* to speak meaningfully. A single being cannot just speak for him- or herself and from him- and herself (there is no private language, as Wittgenstein taught us); existence is grounded in the plurality of the "we" and the "between us" respectively.

What appears from behind Kant's discourse on category, thus, is nothing less than the community of existence, communality as the form of thought, which Nancy envisions; this interpretation might find its evidence in another sentence by Kant, in which he quite matter-of-factly betrays the unheard-of basic insight of his whole critical endeavor: "Our concept of an object may contain whatever and as much as it will, we nevertheless must exit from it (*aus ihm herausgehen*) in order to bestow it its existence." (Kant 1974a, 535 / B 629.) It is this "our" exit from the concept, which implies the repeatedly performed (and thus plural) exit of the "I" from itself in favor of a return to a communal "We," which is prior to it. In the case of empirical objects such an exit occurs as "coherence [of the concept] with any one of my perceptions whatsoever" (ibid.), i.e., it neutralizes itself during the process of cognition (by theoretical reason), so that the I of cognition fails to recognize or simply ignores its being-without-itself (its being-plural), whereas the same process of exiting (i.e., the communality of thought) is a "precondition for objects of pure thought," as Kant says, "which we cannot justify by any means" (ibid.), in other words: which remains groundless and without representation.

Conclusion: Sensing community

Thus, the "mere position of a thing" is, if read with Nancy, never merely the position of a thing—neither of a *thing* nor of *a* (of one) thing—, but rather that dis-position of things (in the plural), which comes about in and as *our* ex-position. Only in this perspective there is a warranty for what Kant had

expected from the renunciation of the theoretical proof of a highest being (or what he thought to have already achieved by it): namely, the limitation of understanding—by demonstrating the prior communality of thinking, in which its radical finitude is grounded (I cannot but only hint at the importance of the categorical imperative in that respect).

When Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* defines the "sensus communis" (*Gemeinsinn*) as "the idea of a communal sense, i.e., a faculty of judgment […] which in its reflection takes into account the manner of representation of every other person (a priori)" (Kant 1974b, 225 / B 157), he does not revise, let alone undo the framework of the limitation of human understanding as put forward in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. On the contrary: what he holds out in prospect here as a possibility under the title of *sensus communis* is just a reflection of the very same insurmountable finitude, or limit respectively, between the law (as prescribed by the categorical imperative) and its fulfilment or compliance. The sense oriented by this *sensus communis* does not communicate itself (community is not the sense), but merely indicates the direction (*sensus*) whence the sense comes (not where it goes to): from community. *The sense is com-munication / Mit-Teilung*. Thus, the communal sense does not refer to some transcendental inter-subjectivity ("from a cosmopolitan point of view"), which would guarantee the certainty of judgment and therefore of action of individuals; rather, it is the Nothing, which prevents the individual from absolutizing his or her judgment by appealing to humanity as a whole. Like the categorical imperative, the communal sense does not have an object whatsoever, but entrenches a formal obligation, as can be easily seen from Kant's remarks. The *sensus communis* considers everybody else's manner of representation (*Vorstellungsart*)

> in order to orientate its judgment by the reason of entire humanity, as it were, and thus escape the illusion of subjective private conditions that can easily be mistaken as objective and might have disadvantageous effects on the judgment. This is performed in such a manner that one orientates one's own judgment by the both real and merely possible judgments of others and places oneself in the position of every other person by abstracting from the limitations inherent to our own judgment

by accident, which in turn is effectuated thus that one leaves away as much as possible anything which is material, i.e., which is a sensation in the condition of representation, and pays attention only to the formal peculiarities of one's own representation. (Kant 1974b, 225 *sq.* / B 157.)

Both in the case of aesthetic judgment and the categorical imperative the repeatedly stressed formality of the respective determination is an indication of the transcendental character of the same, which cannot be by-passed without detriment (to put it with Nancy: without paying the price of a mythification of the communality that is respectively claimed), which happens wherever it is suggested that one could "uninterruptedly pass from the communicability [*Mitteilbarkeit*; of the judgment made by the communal sense] to communication and from there to a factual community," as Roberto Esposito comments (Esposito 2004, 125). To do so would mean to anthropologize—against Kant's intention—the transcendental (cf. ibid.), to declare the unrepresentable (communicability) representable (i.e., to make it a communication or, rather, to mistake it for a communication); it would mean to foist the "That" (*quod,* or the facticity of the community of being) onto the "What" (*quid*, or the actual community of existing individuals), or to mistake the latter for the former. Contrary to this view or this move, one must realize that "communicability [just as communality] is a concept of reason lacking an empirical correlate" (ibid.), which does not amount to stating the impossibility of communication, but on the contrary indicates the very condition of possibility of the same, just as, in Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*, it is the very inoperativity of community, which maintains its possibility (cf. Nancy 1988).

If community were not inoperative, but operative, i.e., functional, if it served a reason other than itself, than its own being, it would be senseless—the sense of community would be different from it (thus, not a sense, but only a meaning, an effect of representation). In order for community to "be," its sense must be in the community as such, or rather in the "with" that existence entails. There is no sense of community, unless there is a community of sense.

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