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**DECONCEPTUALIZED AND RECALLED FREEDOM IN JEAN-LUC
NANCY: AN ESSAY ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THINKING FREEDOM**

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Deconceptualized and Recalled Freedom in Jean-Luc Nancy: An Essay on the Experience of Thinking Freedom

Jean-Luc Nancy’de Kavramsızlaşan ve Geri Çağrılan Özgürlük: Özgürlüğü Düşünmek Üzerine Bir Deneme

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BT</i>	Being and Time
<i>CD</i>	La communauté désouevrée
<i>CJ</i>	Critique of Judgment
<i>CPR</i>	Critique of Pure Reason
<i>CPraR</i>	Critique of Practical Reason
<i>EL</i>	L'expérience de la liberté
<i>ESP</i>	Être Singulier Pluriel

ABSTRACT

In the Third Antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) [*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*], Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) associates freedom with infinity. According to the definition given in this book, only an infinite being not subject to causality can be defined as free. However, the fact that a finite being, such as a human, is always subject to the laws of nature implies that they are perpetually bound by causality, which hinders their freedom. Freedom devoid of causality cannot be theoretically justified. Another reason for this is Kant's assertion in the Second Analogy of *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he states that everything in the phenomenal world is subject to causality. Accordingly, freedom can be conceived not in the phenomenal world but only in the noumenal world.

In the First Critique, freedom, defined as a cause without a cause, a cause without being the result of another cause, later be characterized as negative freedom in the third section of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) [*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*]. Such conceptualization of freedom cannot be determined by any other cause than itself. While there may be a theoretical foundation for accepting such a cause as uncaused, we have moral reasons to believe in it. This moral foundation in question guides us toward the notion of positive freedom. Here, unlike negative freedom, we are subject to moral laws, and as long as we comply with these, we can experience freedom as a finite being. This is because adhering to the laws we set for ourselves enables us to be morally the cause of our own actions. Thus, Kant renders freedom through positive freedom. Following this line of argument, negative freedom appears meaningful to us only within the framework of positive freedom.

Jean-Luc Nancy (1940-2021) finds a problematic Kantian account of freedom as an uncaused cause in his book *The Experience of Freedom* (1988) [*L'expérience de la liberté*]. Because, according to this perspective, humans are not only subject to the laws of nature but also to moral cause-and-effect relationships with others, they exist at the

limit of freedom. By this means, considering freedom as a duty imposed on the subject leads to ambiguous analyses such as negative/positive freedom in Kantian philosophy—In post-Kantian philosophy, the ambiguity persists until Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854)¹, who finds the solution by negating freedom. Therefore, according to Nancy, freedom should be considered not as a Kantian Idea but through its relationship with human finitude and experience. Thus, through the criticism directed at Kant in Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929) [*Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*], Nancy attempts to resolve the confusion created by the concept of freedom, which despite being associated with infinity in Kant, is made possible in the practical world through respect for the moral law. In this direction, Nancy finds the solution in the freedom that becomes conceptually elusive, transforming it into an act that goes beyond being a mere duty and which permeates all our experiences.

In this book, Nancy introduces the initial stages of “community” and “singularity” concepts, which he would later develop further. For this, he begins the book's introductory section by emphasizing Martin Heidegger's statement in §9 of *Being and Time* (1927) [*Sein und Zeit*], where “freedom” is mentioned as another name for existence. As a justification, he refers to the concept of *Da-sein* [being-there] and states that every being [*être*] is a being-in-common [*être-en-commun*], and freedom should be thought of through this. Namely, the problem of freedom is approached not as a political or ethical issue but as an ontological matter. Within the framework of being-in-common, this situation transforms into an ontological “generosity [*générosité ontologique*].”

¹ *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* [*Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*], Schelling, approaches freedom not through infinity but rather through finitude. While Heidegger and Nancy pursue different paths, they both adhere to the idea of finitude freedom in Schelling.

Despite primarily emphasizing Heidegger's thought in writing this text as his agrégation thesis, Jean-Luc Nancy desires to transcend it and maintain a certain distance. This transcendence and distancing include authors from the French Phenomenological tradition, such as Georges Bataille (1897-1962), Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003), and Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), and also incorporate the emphasis from Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) that death cannot be thought of independently of life. Referencing many philosophers from the continental philosophy tradition and developing a thematic reading through freedom, this book—like Nancy's other works—seeks ways to experience philosophy and thought freely in this own writing experience. So much so that this book, unlike Nancy's other works like *The Inoperative Community* (1986) [*La communauté désœuvrée*] ve *Being Singular Plural* (1996) [*Être Singulier Pluriel*], which is not widely discussed in secondary sources, is challenging to follow. Therefore, in examining this book as my Master's research thesis and addressing the idea of freedom in Nancy, I found it appropriate to adopt a close reading method. Certainly, this research should not be considered independent of works such as *The Discourse of Syncope* (1976) [*Le discours de la syncope*], *The Categorical Imperative* (1983) [*L'impératif catégorique*], as they serve as examples of while engaging in philosophy, how Nancy refers and relates to the works within the philosophical tradition.

Keywords: Freedom, Finitude, Jean-Luc Nancy, Problem of Evil, Heidegger's Silence

ÖZET

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), *Saf Aklın Eleştirisi*'nin (1781) [*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*] Üçüncü Antinomisinde *özgürlüğü* sonsuzlukla ilişkilendirir. Bu kitapta verilen tanıma göre ancak nedenselliğe tabi olmayan sonsuz bir varlık, özgür olarak tanımlanabilir. Ancak sonlu bir varlık olan insanın tabiat kanunları tarafından daima nedenselliğe tabi olması, insanın özgür olmasını engellemektedir. Nedensellikten yoksun *özgürlük*, teorik olarak temellendirilemez. Bunun bir başka nedeni de Kant'ın *Saf Aklın Eleştirisi*'nin İkinci Analoji'sinde fenomenal dünyada her şeyin nedenselliğe tabi olduğunu söylemesidir. Buna göre özgürlük, fenomenal dünyada değil, sadece numenal dünyada düşünülebilir.

Birinci Eleştiri'de nedensiz neden—yani başka bir nedenin sonucu olmayan neden olarak tanımlanan *özgürlük*, daha sonra *Ahlak Metafiziğinin Temellendirilmesi*'nin (1785) [*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*] üçüncü bölümünde negatif özgürlük olarak tanımlanacaktır. Bu tür bir özgürlük, kendisinden başka bir neden tarafından belirlenemez. Böyle bir nedeni sebepsiz olarak kabul etmenin teorik bir temeli olmasa da, buna inanmak için ahlaki gerekçelerimiz vardır. Söz konusu ahlaki zemin, bizi pozitif özgürlük fikrine götürür. Burada negatif özgürlükten farklı olarak ahlaki yasaya tabiyimdir ve bu yasalara uyduğum sürece özgürlüğü sonlu bir varlık olarak deneyimlemem mümkündür, çünkü kendi koyduğum yasalara uymam, ahlaki olarak kendi kendimin nedeni olmamı sağlar. Böylece Kant, pozitif özgürlük aracılığıyla *özgürlüğü* erişilebilir kılar. Bu denklemde negatif özgürlük, bize ancak pozitif özgürlük çerçevesinde anlamlı görünür.

Jean-Luc Nancy (1940-2021), *Özgürlük Deneyimi* (1988) [*L'expérience de la liberté*] adlı kitabında Kant'ın özgürlüğü nedensiz bir neden olarak sunmasını sorunlu bulur. Çünkü doğa kanunlarının yanı sıra ahlaki olarak başkalarıyla neden-sonuç ilişkilerine tabi olan insan, bu düşünceye göre özgürlüğün sınırında bir varlıktır ve özgürlüğün özneye sunulan bir ödev olarak ele alınması, negatif/pozitif özgürlük gibi muğlak

çözümlemelere götürür Kant felsefesini—Kant sonrası felsefede de Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling'e (1775-1854)² kadar bu muğlaklık sürdürülür, o da çözümü ancak özgürlüğü iptal etmekte bulur. Bu nedenle Nancy'e göre özgürlüğün Kant'çı anlamda bir idea olarak değil, insanın sonluluğuyla ve deneyimiyle olan ilişkisi üzerinden düşünülmesi gerekmektedir. Böylece Kant'ta sonsuzlukla ilişkilendirilmesine karşın ahlak yasasına saygı doğrultusunda olanaklı kılınan özgürlük fikrinin yarattığı açmazı, Kant'a Martin Heidegger'in (1889-1976) *Kant ve Metafizik Problemi*'nde (1929) [*Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*] yönelttiği eleştiri üzerinden çözmeye çalışır. Bu doğrultuda Nancy, çözümü kavramsızlaşan bir özgürlükte bulur ve onu, bir ödev olmaktan öte bütün deneyimlerimizde yer edinen bir edime dönüştürür.

Nancy, ayrıca bu kitabında daha sonra geliştireceği 'ortaklık' ve 'tekillik' kavramlarının ilk aşamasını ortaya atmaktadır. Bunun için kitabın giriş bölümüne Martin Heidegger'in *Varlık ve Zaman*'ının (1927) [*Sein und Zeit*] §9'unda 'özgürlüğün' varoluşun bir diğer adı olduğunu söylemesine vurgu yaparak başlar. Gerekçe olarak, *Da-sein* [orada-olmak] kavramına değinir ve her oluşun [*être*] bir ortak-oluş [*être-en-commun*] olduğunu, özgürlüğün de bunun üzerinden düşünülmesi gerektiğini söyler. Şöyle ki, özgürlük sorunu, siyasal veyahut etik bir sorun olarak değil, ontolojik bir mesele olarak ele alınır ve ortak-oluş çerçevesinde bunun bir ontolojik "cömertlik" [*« générosité » ontologique*] olduğu belirtilir.

Jean-Luc Nancy'nin yeterlilik tezi olarak kaleme aldığı bu eser, her ne kadar ağırlıklı olarak Heidegger düşüncesine vurgu yapsa da onu aşma ve ona mesafe koyma arzusu taşır. Bu aşma ve mesafelenme Georges Bataille (1897-1962), Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003), Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) gibi Fransız Fenomenoloji geleneğinden gelen yazarları barındırdığı gibi Hannah Arendt'teki (1906-1975)

² *İnsan Özgürlüğünün Özü Üzerine* [*Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*] kitabında Schelling, özgürlüğü sonsuzluk değil, sonluluk üzerinden ele alır. Heidegger ve Nancy, farklı bir yol izlese de Schelling'teki sonlu özgürlük düşüncesine tutunur.

ölümün yaşamdan bağımsız düşünülmeceği vurgusunu da içerir. Kıta Felsefesi geleneğinden pek çok filozofa referans veren ve özgürlük üzerinden tematik bir okuma geliştiren bu kitap—Nancy'nin diğer eserleri de bu niteliktedir—, felsefeyi, düşünceyi özgürce deneyimlemenin yollarını da kendi yazım tecrübesinde arar. Öyle ki, takibi güç, Nancy'nin *Ezersiz Ortaklık* (1986) [*La communauté désœuvrée*] ve *Tekil Çoğul Olmak* (1996) [*Être Singulier Pluriel*] kitaplarının aksine ikincil kaynaklara pek konu olmayan bir kitaptır. Bu nedenle Yüksek Lisans Araştırma Tezi olarak incelediğim bu kitabı ve Nancy'de özgürlük kavramını ele alırken, yakın okuma yöntemini benimsemeyi uygun gördüm. Elbette bu araştırma, *Senkop Söylemi* (1976) [*Le discours de la syncope*], *Kategorik Buyruk* (1983) [*L'impératif catégorique*] gibi kitaplarından bağımsız düşünülmemelidir, çünkü Nancy'nin felsefe yaparken felsefe geleneğinde yer alan eserlere nasıl atıfta bulunduğu ve onlarla nasıl ilişkilendiği konusunda örnek teşkil etmektedirler.

Anahatar Kelimeler: Özgürlük, Sonluluk, Jean-Luc Nancy, Kötülük Sorunu, Heidegger'in Sessizliği

INTRODUCTION

Selecting *Deconceptualized and Recalled Freedom in Jean-Luc Nancy: An Essay on the Experience of Thinking Freedom* as the thesis title brings certain risks from our perspective. These risks encompass at least three separate claims: the deconceptualization of “freedom” in Jean-Luc Nancy (1940-2021), its recalling—acknowledging its prior retreat—and its role as an essay on thinking freedom. Throughout the thesis, we will substantiate these claims and, when necessary, critically examine tangible aspects while maintaining a certain distance from the text. The initial segments focus on the implications and positioning of these claims in the history of philosophy. The later sections delve into a closer examination of Nancy's book, *L'expérience de la liberté* (1988). This strategy is the appropriate approach because, although Nancy's works engage in a conversation with each other, it is difficult to assert that they provide us with a cohesive thought. The research subject predominantly centers on Jean-Luc Nancy's evaluation of the concept of 'freedom' within this specific work. Nevertheless, we will not hesitate to reference his other works when necessary. The investigation closely scrutinizes the reasons behind his consideration of freedom as an ontological fact, not a concept, and examines the unfolding of this perspective within the text.

Indeed, close reading has some potential issues, the first of which is getting lost within the text. To solve this issue, in the Introduction section, we have contemplated how to position this work and Nancy's thoughts more broadly within the history of philosophy. We attempted to do this in the context of his influence and interaction with contemporary thinkers.

First of all, in the tradition of analytical philosophy and continental philosophy, there is a broad literature on the subject of “freedom.” However, given the methodological

choices and Nancy's emphasis on deconceptualizing freedom, we will refrain from deliberating on “freedom” within the analytic philosophical tradition, which still deals with the dichotomy between the infinite nature of the concept of freedom and its projection to the deterministic side of the practical realm. Instead, this thesis conducts its investigation from within the contemporary continental tradition of philosophy, where Nancy, extending from Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) to Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), has undertaken his references and readings.

Second, Nancy defined his prior philosophy as ontology by instrumentalizing the ontologization of Kant's philosophy in Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929). He argued his thoughts on “freedom” in this direction to resolve the previously explained dichotomy. Nancy’s approach to “freedom” as an ontological issue, in contrast to political philosophy tradition, has led him to assert early in his book that examining the topic solely within the realm of political philosophy, as observed in philosophers like Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), is also insufficient.

Arendt, as a philosopher who experienced the Holocaust, in her unfinished work titled *The Life of The Mind* (1977-1978), scrutinizes and elaborates upon the concepts she introduced in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). Nazi officer Otto Adolf Eichmann (1942-1962), who faced accusations of complicity in the Holocaust crime, identified himself as a Kantian in his trial defense. He contended that his actions adhered to legal principles, emphasizing that he merely executed his duties within the framework of established laws. In the aftermath of his defense, Arendt argued in her report that Eichmann did not harbor hatred towards Jews. Instead, she asserted that he succumbed to the banality of evil by neglecting the role of the senses in Kant’s categorical imperative.³

³ STEINBERGER, P. J. (1990). Hannah Arendt on Judgment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 34(3), 803–821. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111399>

Therefore, Arendt, in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt engages in the ambitious task of crafting a political theory grounded in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1724/1804). In her two-volume posthumously published work, Arendt undertakes the task of developing a political theory. Her approach involves elevating aesthetic judgments to the realm of knowledge, grounded in Kant's assertion that all forms of knowledge are made possible through the senses. Additionally, she accentuates the importance of imagination and its concepts in this intellectual pursuit. This effort finds its ground in the premise that, according to Kant, any kind of knowledge relies on the mediation of the senses. Arendt emphasizes the importance of imagination and its concepts, drawing attention to the crucial role played by the senses in forming our judgments.⁴

Nonetheless, Arendt fails to consider two pivotal aspects of Kantian theory. First and foremost, Kant invokes the concept of imagination in the "Transcendental Deduction" section of the *First Critique* (1781/1787), where he formulates his theory of knowledge. In Kant's view, the objects we conceptualize through sensory experiences are made possible by our productive imagination, allowing us to contemplate them even in their non-existent state. Moreover, Kant asserts in the "Analogies of Experience" that imagination is inherently judgmental, as the categories of relation govern it. However, this form of judgment does not allow us to make judgments between good and evil. So, it is different than the one articulated in the *Third Critique*. Therefore, the categorical imperative shapes our actions, and Kantian theory does not suggest the possibility of developing a practical theory based on the consequences of our actions. Instead, it indicates a moral theory based on the adherence to the law. Arendt attempts to reconcile the negative freedom from the *First Critique* with the positive freedom proposed in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) by analyzing the finite freedom present in our aesthetic judgments in the *Third Critique*. However, she overlooks that Kant is discussing not a theoretical nor a practical

⁴ *ibid.*

judgment but rather a judgment of taste. For our aesthetic judgments to confer the power of action, a prerequisite is the engagement of the imagination's concepts in the cognitive pursuit of an object. This stipulation transcends the hypothesis of Kant's philosophy in the *Third Critique*, which asserts an exploration of the concepts of imagination rather than the concepts of reason. Furthermore, despite being considered universal, aesthetic judgments mentioned in Kant's *Third Critique* remain inherently subjective as they are exempt from rules and objective standards. In essence, aesthetic judgments are deemed insufficient for delineating politically correct conduct and fail to resolve the plight of causality within the practical domain where the actualization of positive freedom takes place.

Therefore, even if Nancy persistently endeavors to incorporate the experience of the Holocaust into his philosophy, as Arendt did, and to explore its reflections upon Heidegger's thought, he follows Heidegger's ontologization subjected to Kantian philosophy. Instead of extracting political theory from the *Third Critique*, Nancy focuses on the "purposiveness" and "disinterestedness" of our aesthetic judgments as Heidegger did in *Kantbuch*.⁵ Nancy, following Heidegger's works such as *Being and Time* (1927), *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1975), *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (1928), and *The Essence of Human Freedom* (1982), delineate freedom not within the frameworks of causality, legal rights or rationality but designates it as a matter of community based on the idea of shared existence.⁶ Therefore, Nancy liberates freedom from being a constituent element of a subject philosophy formed by self-promotion since the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*.⁷ Through this process of liberation, he attempts to overcome the dichotomy created by social

⁵ INGVILD, T. (2016). Disinterest and Truth: On Heidegger's Interpretation of Kant's Aesthetics. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (1):15-32.

⁶ SORIAL, S. (2006). Heidegger and the Ontology of Freedom. *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 46 (2), 205-218.

<https://doi.org/10.5840/ipq20064627>

⁷ René Descartes (1596-1650), the founder of modern philosophy, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), proves the existence of a perfect, infinite Being, which is God, by our capacity to doubt. The Second Meditation suggests that to doubt, there must be an "I."

contract philosophers⁸ where freedom is initially defined in its negative form and then transformed into an attribute of the subject in a positive account. Thus, Nancy seeks to situate freedom not within the burden of empirical experiences under the obligation of objective determinism but within the realm of senses through which we experience our existence. In doing so, he attempts to resolve the conflict between personal desires and behaviors contributing to the Higher Good.

He says neither political scientists, legal scholars, nor political philosophers can resolve this dilemma. Only when we investigate freedom as an ontological issue can we avoid confining it, given our plural existence, within the dichotomy of personal desires and a Higher Good. This ontologization of the question of freedom facilitates our consideration of it not merely as a conceptual abstraction but as the fundamental essence of our existence.

Here lies the reason for using the participle “deconceptualized” in the thesis title within the factuality of our existence. Furthermore, according to Nancy, even if Heidegger has previously addressed this situation, it has been forgotten and covered up, starting from *The Essence of Truth* (1930), by his reconsideration of Platonic *epekeina tês ousias* to ensure a Being beyond beings, so that subjecting existence to the rule of a

⁸ QUINTARD, C. (2019). Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau. Trois penseurs du contrat social. *Sciences Humaines*, 319, 34-34.

<https://doi.org/10.3917/sh.319.0034>: Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), in his work *Leviathan* written in 1651, distinguishes the state of nature and the societal condition. According to this distinction, the state of nature represents a kind of "état de guerre de tous contre tous," a state of war of all against all. In contrast, the societal condition defines a situation where the ignorance of individuals is manipulated following the interests of the sovereign, often through religious fanaticism, as he articulates, "Dieu est roi de toute la Terre par sa puissance, mais c'est par convention qu'il l'est de son peuple élu [God is the king of all the Earth by His power, but it is by convention that He is the king of His chosen people]". Furthermore, in his work *Contrat Social* (1762), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) deviated from Thomas Hobbes by introducing the concept of *volonté générale* [general will] despite exploring a distinction between personal desires and societal benefit. By incorporating the notion of the general will into his philosophy, Rousseau asserts that the singular individual transforms into a plural entity within the framework of the political order. In contrast to Hobbes, where the cohesion of society relies on the concept of God and sovereignty, Rousseau adopts a republican stance, finding the solution in shared interests and the general will.

transcendental Truth⁹ deprived of temporality. This deprivation of time from Being, contrary to the path he draws in *Being and Time*, results in the retrieval of freedom in Heideggerian thought. Heidegger's deliberate exclusion of the question of freedom and his venture into a pursuit of a form of existence beyond existing entities render freedom an inconceivable concept within the framework of his philosophy. Prioritizing a Being beyond beings subsequently results in freedom's gradual fade into oblivion. Thus, for Nancy to reclaim this neglected notion of freedom in later Heideggerian thought, its deconstruction within the framework of the history of philosophy in a more general way becomes imperative.¹⁰

Nancy's critique of Heidegger appears warranted. In his rectorial address delivered three years following the publication of *The Essence of Truth*, Heidegger progressively distances himself from the transcendence inherent in Kantian philosophy. Instead, he gravitates toward embracing the model of the totalitarian state depicted in Plato's *Republic*, wherein the state and the individuals are reflective counterparts.¹¹ In this text, while Plato presents a sharp distinction between the world beyond the senses and the sensory world¹² as observed in Kantian philosophy, the influence of one upon the other is not mediated but direct. In these two works penned in the 1930s, Heidegger deviates from the notion that Being withdraws itself and subtly manifests (*Being and Time*, § 44). Instead, he interprets Being as a fixed, unconditioned cause lacking temporal qualities. In doing so, he falls into the trap discussed earlier with the social contract philosophers, pursuing an Absolute Good that is challenging to represent.

⁹ DAHLSTROM, D. (2005). Heidegger's Transcendentalism. *Research in Phenomenology*, 35. Koninklijke Brill NV.

¹⁰ This will constitute the focal point of the third section of our thesis.

¹¹ The text referred to below, despite attempting to extract democratic views from Plato's text, indicates that Plato sees the state and the individual as reflections of each other. It expresses interpersonal differences but assimilates this diversity within the idea of unity the state provides: Cf. MURLEY, C. (1941). Plato's *Republic* is totalitarian or Democratic? *The Classical Journal*, 36(7), 413–420. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3291428>

¹² In *Republic*, Books 4 and 5, Plato examines the relationship between things and ideas, in other words, it discusses the relationship between the sensory world and the transcendent world.

This perspective challenges Kant's assertion in the *Third Critique* (§84) that we can only know the Absolute Good by visiting and returning from the other world, a possibility deemed unattainable. For this reason, it suggests that we can approach the Good only by recognizing the existence of other subjects like us on Earth and acting within the framework of the moral law. In other words, Heidegger fails to consider that beings are necessarily within a community. In his inaugural address, Heidegger disregarded the conditions of realization of being in the sensory world (spatio-temporality of beings) and proposed an ideal university model. At the beginning of his speech, he stated that achieving this falls upon spiritual leaders.

Alternatively stated, Heidegger's proposition of spirituality directs us towards the notion of assigning a transcendent mission to the unified body of German people (*Volkskörper*) that came into prominence in Nazi Germany. The unified, collectively bound German national body, by rejecting the existence of different bodies and interpreting other bodies as invasive in line with its internal logic, has extended this notion to the point of seeking the annihilation of the Jewish body.¹³

In his inaugural address, Heidegger accorded precedence to spirituality, thereby neglecting the temporality inherent in being-in-the-world, as expounded in *Being and Time* (§69), and dismissing the temporality and transcendence of the world. His endeavor aimed at grounding truth ontically within the world of other beings, distinct from its reality. This fixation and the imputed unity by attributing a body to it lead to the practical exclusion of different communities. One could argue that Heidegger falls into this error by disregarding the ontic distinction in his philosophy and the ground offered by Kantian thought, which encompasses differences in theoretical, practical, and aesthetic discussions.

¹³ NEUMANN, B. (2009). The Phenomenology of the German People's Body (*Volkskörper*) and the Extermination of the Jewish Body. *New German Critique*, 106, 149–181. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27669259>

Kant argues that we cannot fully know the good, but we can choose the best possible conditions for realization according to the moral law (*Third Critique*, Introduction). Although realizing the Good is presented as a duty, Kantian thought does not consider it to exclude freedom. The German Idealist philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) also explores concepts such as finite freedom and the choice of evil in his text *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809). Contrary to general opinion, Schelling approaches the issue of freedom by departing from the idea in Kant's *Third Critique* that we arrive at Good judgment through the conditions of realization, aiming to analyze Kant's philosophy within its framework. In the Third Antinomy of the *First Critique*, Kant, despite providing a negative definition of freedom alongside its infinitude, by intertwining the freedom we possess in aesthetic judgments of taste with moral philosophy, imparts a finite, ethical significance.

Considering the political implications of Heidegger's conception of truth, we can assert a departure from the Kantian perspective. Heidegger seems to distance himself from Kant by disregarding Kant's emphasis on the subjective universality of the senses in his aesthetic philosophy. In light of this context, we can assert that Heidegger diverges from the Kantian perspective by narrowing his exploration of Kant's views on truth. Instead, he aligns himself with the pursuit of truth as articulated in Plato's *Republic*, particularly adopting the ideal state conceptualized in this philosophical dialogue. Despite his significant emphasis on freedom in his philosophy, the allegiance to transcendent idealism identified in Heidegger has led to the exclusion of freedom throughout his theoretical framework.

Due to this exclusion, Heidegger's ontological framework has given rise to a sense of tautology throughout his theoretical discourse. For example, Emmanuel Levinas, a philosopher of Lithuanian origin who experienced the loss of his entire family in the Holocaust, interprets his work *Totalité et infini* (1971) as an essay centered on the concept of exteriority. Within this philosophical endeavor, Levinas seeks to reintroduce

the notion of exteriority into Heidegger's thought, aiming to extricate it from the entanglement of tautology. He intends to liberate Heidegger's conception of Being from the impasse of immanence, providing an alternative perspective rooted in the inherent nature of transcendence.

In addition to his assertions from the 1930s, Heidegger critically examined metaphysical approaches to art, exemplified in *Hölderlin's Hymne "Der Ister"* (1942). In contrast to the Kantian emphasis on subjectivity in the theory of universal aesthetic judgment, Heidegger, within this work, establishes a unique link between Hölderlin's poetry and Greek tragedies. Beyond the subjectivity inherent in the concept of the beautiful, he ascribes to it the role of realizing truth. In this context, Heidegger deviates from Plato's *Republic* (605c-e), challenging the notion that literature is inherently vicious and imitative. He refers to Socrates' discourse on the soul in *Phaedrus* (246a-d). Plato and Heidegger exhibit parallel characteristics in their philosophical approaches. Rather than prioritizing freedom and democracy in the political domain, they focus on beauty's divine and spiritual significance. So, instead of contemplating the interactions among existing entities (or political subjects, for a more comprehensible interpretation within the context of Nancy's framework), their pursuit of truth subjects living entities to the dominion of a transcendent being. We quote:

It is not by chance that the thinker who begins that thinking that we call "metaphysics," namely Plato, reminds us of Ἐστία, and does do in his dialogue concerning the beautiful, the *Phaedrus*. Within the unfolding of Platonic thinking, this dialogue of Plato's is a kind of middle, from which Plato's proper doctrine concerning the being of beings emerges in his second speech concerning eros (246ff). Socrates speaks on the essence of the soul, whose wings receive from the divine their ability to fly and to soar upward. This pointer provides the occasion for describing the ὑπερουράιος τόπος, the

place of abode of the gods that lies beyond the heavenly sky; or to be more precise, it provides the occasion for thoughtfully determining its essence following truth.¹⁴

Furthermore, this Platonic turn in Heidegger's thought can be criticized in the following way: Despite the universality in the theory of aesthetic judgment, Kant, in his *Third Critique* (§83), distinguishes the ends pursued by human beings from those of other natural organisms. The orientation of human nature toward reaching its end is shaped not through isolated natural determinism from other beings but through the relation established with all other entities on Earth. So, the ethical agency of an individual is inherent in their existence. Human existence asserts that the realization of this agency can be achieved not through determinative reason but through a reflective faculty of judgment. We quote:

We have shown above that we have sufficient reason to regard the human being not merely as an end of nature like all other organized beings but rather also as the ultimate end of nature here on earth, concerning which all other things of nature compose a system of ends, according to principles of reason, though for the reflective, and not for the determining, faculty of judgment.¹⁵

As observed in Heidegger's inaugural address and *The Essence of Truth*, there is a failure to recognize the potential of Kantian aesthetic philosophy to transcend the determinism of things in themselves, which leads to a notion of community in the Kantian sense. This omission results in Heidegger's conception of a German university predetermined by fate in its historicity, contrary to the reflective relationality of the Kantian framework. We quote:

¹⁴ HEIDEGGER, M. (1996). *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"* (W. McNeill and J. Davis, Trans.). Indiana University Press: 113.

¹⁵ KANT, I. (2006). *Towards a Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History* (D. L. Conclasure, Trans.). Yale University Press; 37.

Surely, self-governance means setting ourselves our task and determining the way and manner in which it is to be realized so that thus we shall be what we ought to be.¹⁶

In this address, Heidegger, employing notions such as “self-assertion” and “self-administration,” appears to succumb to the fallacy of regarding existence in a manner reminiscent of Descartes as an intrinsic, self-affirming entity. This oversight neglects the critique he articulated in *Being and Time*, “§6. The Task of a Destructuring of the History of Ontology,” which aimed to redirect perspectives on being away from inherent views. At some point, Heidegger himself, akin to the self-affirmation in Descartes’ subject, has defined the German University in a self-affirming manner, neglecting an inquiry into universities that would manifest differences in their spatio-temporality and confining the institutions in Germany within an ambiguous spirituality. In this manner, Heidegger has regressed into the dilemma of the intrinsic nature of being, a problem he both observed and criticized within the history of Western philosophy. By subjecting entities to the dominion of a spiritual Transcendent Being, he has inadvertently succumbed to the very trap he sought to scrutinize. In this respect, Heidegger has annulled the inquiry into being. As mentioned earlier, his address led Heidegger to posit a meaning akin to the immanent nature of transcendence. Has Heidegger betrayed his thoughts in line with his political views? The ontic confusion in Heidegger’s philosophy has led to denying the possibility of freedom through the senses, thereby negating freedom presented in Kant’s philosophy.

However, Kant, again in *CJ* (§83), asserts that we will overcome the conflicting uses of freedom through the regulation of relationships among individuals by law, and this regulation is defined not through a *Volkskörper*, as witnessed in Heidegger’s thought and Nazi Germany, but through “civil society.”

¹⁶ HEIDEGGER, M. (1985). *The Self-Assertion of the German University and The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts*, *Review of Metaphysics*, 38:3 (1985: Mar.); p. 467.

Indeed, despite providing a Heideggerian ontologization of Kant's idea of freedom in the *EL* book, Nancy, as he claims, deviates from Heidegger's thought in two significant respects: Firstly, Heidegger utilizes the past participle *Gesetz* [*Position*], stemming from the same root as the term *Setzung* [*positionner*] found in Kant's *CJ* §76. This distinction entails the following interpretation: While *Setzung* could signify a positioning in time and space, acquiring existence, *Gesetz* may lead to understanding aesthetic judgments as a divine command deprived of verbal sense. Furthermore, through works such as *Le discours de la syncope* (1976) and *L'impératif catégorique* (1981), Nancy not only diverges from Heidegger's ontological perspective on Kant but also endeavors to provide a more nuanced exploration of this theme by drawing explicit references from Kantian texts.¹⁷ The second notable deviation from Heidegger's philosophical framework is his diminishing emphasis on the interconnectedness of existence and freedom. This departure becomes particularly apparent in works such as *The Essence of Truth* (1930), where the discourse revolves around the incapacity of freedom to establish its foundation.¹⁸ Nancy explores Kant's conceptualization of freedom in his philosophical discourse, focusing on *CJ*. So, despite the enduring dichotomy between negative and positive freedom within Kantian philosophy, Nancy asserts that Heidegger's perspective offers no viable space for the concept of freedom. In response, he seeks an alternative within Kant's *CJ*, thus engaging in a thoughtful and multifaceted analysis of the nature of freedom.

Nancy is not the only philosopher who addresses Heidegger's attempt to ontologize Kant's philosophy. Despite the contemporary French philosophical tradition leaning on this interpretive framework, it is fitting to reassess Kant's *Third Critique*

¹⁷ For a similar interpretation; cf. YÜCEFER, H. (*forthcoming*). "Büyük Kitap Büyük Bela" Jean-Luc Nancy, Kant ve Metin Olarak Felsefe.

¹⁸ HEIDEGGER, M. (2002). *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theatetus* (T. Sadler, Trans.). Continuum.

independently rather than adhere directly to Heidegger's perspectives. In light of Nancy's participation in collaborative works such as *La Faculté de juger* (1985)¹⁹ and the inclusion of eminent scholars like Gérard Granel,²⁰ Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard on the jury for his doctoral thesis (*EL*), it becomes evident that Nancy situates himself within a philosophical tradition that, taking into account these affiliations, remains both consistent and unsurprising.

EL was turned into a book in 1988, and a section of "Fragments," serving as responses to objections, was added at the end. Although freedom may have lost its visibility in Nancy's later works, it remains an essential notion as it can be read as the preceding step to the thought of "singularity" that he developed in works such as *La communauté désouvrée* (1986), *Être Singulier Pluriel* (1996). In *EL*, we observe traces of thought of "singularity," as the freedom of each singular entity lies in their being plural; otherwise, we would only be talking about fragments emanating from a universal whole, which will conclude in a totalitarian conception of being.

Although published chronologically later, *EL* is a book where Nancy radicalizes Heidegger's ontology and connects it to the fundamental issues mentioned in his other works. We can cite notions such as "community," *sens* [meaning/sense], and *eros* as examples of these issues. When Nancy states that being in common is not an obstacle to freedom, he notes that the relationship between singularities is not fusional. This

¹⁹ DERRIDA, J., DESCOMBES, V., KORTIAN, G., LACOUÉ-LABARTHE, P., LYOTARD, J.-F., NANCY, J.-L. (1985). *La faculté du juger*. Les éditions de Minuit; In Lyotard's exploration of Kant's concept of aesthetic judgment, which centers around the idea that judgment reaches its completion only in conjunction with maturity, this work emerges as a collaborative endeavor where various philosophers engage in thoughtful reflections on the subject. In this antecedent publication to *EL*, Nancy undertakes a nuanced examination of the concept of "freedom."

²⁰ Cf. GRANEL, G. (2007). Cours de Gérard Granel: Lecture du § 43 d'*Être et temps*. *Cahiers philosophiques*, 111, 117-125. <https://doi.org/10.3917/caph.111.0117>; In his essay, Gérard Granel elucidates that Martin Heidegger's examination of the Kantian *a priori* essentially serves as a continuation of the repudiation of entities external to the subject, reminiscent of René Descartes. This analysis suggests an inclination towards a Kantian interpretation within the realm of German Idealism, wherein the rejection of the things-in-themselves is discerned. Towards the conclusion of *EL*, it becomes apparent that Nancy aligns himself with an atheistic conception of God, reflecting an parallel evolution in his thought.

non-fusionality assumes an intersecting relationship between singularities, and this assumption ensures continuity between singularities through senses and *eros*. In this regard, it would be beneficial for us to take a closer look at the idea of community. This will help us understand more easily where freedom does not contradict the idea of community, contrary to traditional perception.

He wrote *EL* a year after the publication of *CD*, where he developed the notion of community. Beyond attributing a political and ethical meaning to freedom, Nancy treats it as a social ontological issue. The dichotomy between the liberal atomized individual's free will and the communitarians' identification of behaviors necessary for the benefit of society is resolved through the condition the experience of freedom starts from the very beginning of existence. Nancy emphasizes that by stating that every being is a sharing [*partage*], one cannot think of freedom independently of the idea of community in the continuation of existence. By this, he discusses again the need to approach freedom with a social ontological gesture. In this work, by prioritizing ontology, Nancy engages in the quest for answers to the fundamental questions of metaphysics, such as "Why is there something rather than nothing?". The concept of freedom has prompted an inquiry into the very condition of being, transcending the mere understanding of existence in pursuit of providing an answer to this question.

In this regard, Nancy sees a dilemma in contemporary political thought on freedom and attributes it to a deficiency in the perception of existence. Nancy attributes this situation to the absence of theories relying on a Supreme Being as their condition. He states that this brings a problem of groundlessness. He will later interpret this groundlessness as something positive because, in Nancy's thought, groundlessness becomes a factor that allows singularities to exist without self-positing to a substance or a foundation.

To shift from one understanding of freedom to the other, he begins his book by emphasizing the necessity of thinking of freedom as a situated existence instead of a property [*propriété*]. He asserts that existence, founding its essence, is another name

for freedom. He states that existentialism and essentialism annul the free existence. He announces that he will take an ontological approach, neither engaging in a discussion about human essence as in the metaphysical tradition nor following the path of existentialism observed in Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Therefore, before defining freedom, we must determine what existence is or how we should think about it. Subsequently, the terms freedom and existence become interchangeable with each other. This interchangeability makes it possible to speak of one in terms that evoke the other.

However, Nancy does not sketch an existence related to a substance for us. This is crucial because he emphasizes that thinking of existence in terms of substance makes freedom unthinkable by confining it within causality. In contrast, he describes that we would ruminate about existence in the opposite case.

According to Nancy, every existence forms a community; from this point of view, being in common is a fundamental problem for philosophy. It should be because community must be thought through the experience of being-in-the-world, that is, through existence. When we fail to do this (consider freedom intertwined with community and existence), freedom, as in Kant's philosophy, turns into a pure Idea or a duty. According to Nancy, freedom appears necessary in such a thought, hence an unthinkable reasonless reason. Contrary to taking freedom as a concept or an Idea, he argues it is a fact. Thus, he emphasizes its historicity and temporality.

He perceives a dilemma in philosophical inquiries into freedom and establishes the foundation of freedom on the ontological approach by stating that every existence is an experience of freedom. Additionally, he revisits the notion of community, previously addressed, more through the lens of being-in-common [*être-en-commun*] in *EL*, stating that it is part of an ontological inquiry. He says that every ontological inquiry is an ethical inquiry. Still, unlike Emmanuel Levinas, he does not prioritize ethics and does

not resort to concepts such as infinite responsibility or the infinite Other²¹. Instead, he claims that every ontology returns to an Aristotelian concept called *eleuthérologie*. In fact, Aristotele does not directly use the term *eleuthérologie*, but the term *eleutheria* appears in *Politics*²². Aristotle uses this concept to explain how ideas of equality and freedom take shape in different democracies. This concept is guaranteed by pursuing human ‘happiness [*eudaimonia*]’ mentioned in *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Aristotle's theory, *eudaimonia* is of significant importance as it not only grants the possibility and happiness through virtuous conduct but also enables us to access philosophy and thought. Being virtuous is achieved by leading a balanced and harmonious life. According to this thought, I can only pursue *eudaimonia* within the framework of ethical living. When Nancy talks about taking freedom as an ontology as a kind of *eleuthérologie*, it seems he overlooks this difference in Aristotle. For a balanced life, a person should not be a slave to their desires, bad habits, and external factors hindering their pursuit of the Good²³. In other words, being virtuous offers us an ethical domain that is more attributed to thought and independent of political freedom, and can be achieved by how much I sustain my life by considering others.

Before addressing the question of freedom in Nancy, one reason for the recent discussion of the notion of “community [*communauté*]” may be prioritizing the idea of living together in the political environment preceding and during his time. Indeed, Nancy’s thought questions how evil materializes, particularly during the period of the Holocaust and communist regimes. It evaluates this materialization as a negation of existence and, therefore, of freedom. Historically, the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the experiences lived during that time reveal the difficulty of addressing the concept of community regarding human freedom. Discussing

²¹ LEVINAS, E. (1971). Le même et l’autre. La transcendance comme idée de l’infini. *Totalité et infini : Essai sur l’extériorité*. Martinus Nijhof.

²² For this concept; cf. ARISTOTLE, Book V. Chapter 8. *Politics*.

²³ ARISTOTLE. Book II, III and V. *Nicomachean Ethics* discusses how a virtuous life can be sustained.

community without posing a threat to human freedom also becomes challenging in light of historical facts.

According to Nancy, no conflict exists between “community” and “freedom.” He states that no community should be abandoned. In his book *CD*, he provides an ontological analysis of the concept of community for this purpose. The connection between “freedom” and “singularity” arises from freedom being the first step in the thought of singularity. Every existence forms a community, and existence is impossible without freedom; to exist requires freedom. In the book *EL*, Nancy’s emphasis is not yet on “singularity.” He asserts that every “singular” is “plural,” but he mentions this sparingly, and except for a couple of sections, he does not extensively elaborate on the idea. However, by indicating that he will evaluate freedom ontologically, he informs us in advance that he will address being and Heidegger’s concept of *Mitsein* [being-with] that significantly influences him. This is because he cannot explain why he cannot reduce freedom to a mere quality without narrating all these.

Even though the publication of *EL* year is later than *CD*, in terms of writing, it precedes it. In *EL*, Nancy goes beyond questions like “community” and “singularity,” which he will address later. He focuses on freedom and how freedom as an experience can be defined metaphysically. In both works, Nancy emphasizes the need for an ontological assumption of the inadequacy of political theories on this matter. He avoids the common distinctions in political theories as positive freedom being the subject of the practical space and regulated laws instead, following Heidegger’s path, by analyzing freedom within the framework of Kantian philosophy, he specifies that freedom solely to the realm of *praxis*, without resorting to the distinction between negative and positive freedom. In this direction, there is no space of freedom where I do not encounter the other. The concept proposed here is that, rather than being an obstacle, the common being of every existence is put forth as an experiential domain for freedom. Due to his approach, the challenges faced in responding to freedom with a political dimension in the wake of the collapse of communist regimes and the rise of liberalism in his time

prompted him to grapple with the contradictions born out of ideas of freedom and communal living.

As mentioned earlier, after situating *EL* within Nancy's thought, we want to position it with other philosophers through its relationship with them. This will not only allow us to position it historically, which I have done to some extent in the previous section but will also assist us in detailing the references I have considered during the research for close reading.

When considering Nancy's relationship with other philosophers, the history of philosophy, and texts, two primary sources of inspiration become evident; the first of these is Jacques Derrida, particularly his approach to the problem of alterity through his relationship with other texts and the concept of *différance*²⁴. In Derrida, we find a similar idea to Nancy's: the emergence of the singular through its difference, the perpetual delay of existence standing behind, and the presence that arises in the movement of differentiation. This circumstance is reminiscent of Kant, wherein singular judgments exhibit a disjunctive quality in repetition (*CPR*, A70/95-B96).

Derrida is significant in Nancy's thoughts, and similarly, Nancy is an essential figure in Derrida's thoughts. There is a book dedicated to Nancy's philosophy by Derrida titled *Le toucher* (1998). Essentially, they are two thinkers engaged in a dialogue, conversing with each other through their writings. Also, we can see Derrida's influence on Nancy's strategy of philosophizing and wordplay. As we observe in Derrida's intertextuality, Nancy tries to sift through referenced texts, conversing with them through their concepts. In addition, Nancy wrote his works in France when this strategy was widely accepted. Furthermore, he dedicated himself entirely to writing after his illness, leading a life committed to thought in practical terms.

²⁴ DERRIDA, J. (1967), *Différance. L'écriture et la différence*, Les Editions du Seuil.

Returning to the concept of *différance*, Derrida criticizes Western metaphysics for favoring presence and self-presence since Plato. Thus, he argues that every self-presence can only occur due to *a priori* rupture from difference. According to this perspective, self-presence functions to assimilate differences. While not exhibiting a departure from Plato as radical, as seen in Derrida's thought, Nancy rejects the notion of self-presence. Through this point of departure, Nancy has further developed the concept of singularity.

The second significant philosopher in the background is Gilles Deleuze. Nancy has been notably influenced by Deleuze, particularly in his approach to the history of philosophy and the distinction between philosophy and simple thought. In fact, in the "Logos de la liberté" section of *EL*, when arguing that there is a logic of freedom, not the knowledge of it, Nancy openly refers to Deleuze's *Logique du sens* (1969). Indeed, Nancy's refusal to see the concepts of philosophers as interchangeable and his effort to take each of them within their contexts align with the trajectory presented by Gilles Deleuze in *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie* [What is Philosophy]? (1991, 21-37). Considering that each philosopher often derives different meanings rather than simply repeating the same concept, it would be appropriate to shed light on Nancy's insights and interpretations of the concepts and texts of Kant and Heidegger.

In *EL*, Nancy's central critique of Kant is centered around the conceptualization of freedom, which Kant posits as an unrepresentable Supreme Idea (*CPR*, Third Antinomy). Considering such a transcendent being (or universal subject) brings us to the fallacy of the symmetry of existences. Nancy posits that entities ought to be contemplated in light of the distinctions intrinsic to their singularities. In contrast to alternative interpretations, Nancy argues that he does not ascribe historical subjectivity to Kant, citing the latter's failure to account for these differences.²⁵

²⁵ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 18-19.

Nancy argues that within the framework of Kant's philosophy, freedom manifests itself as an imperative that transcends the boundaries of rational comprehension. Subsequently, he delves into the distinction between positive and negative freedom in Kant's philosophy. Negative freedom, related to the noumenal world, i.e., exempt from knowledge, excludes the practical domain established through principles like reasonless reason or first cause, independent of cause-and-effect relationships. While originating in negative freedom, positive freedom is asserted through dedication to the moral law within the practical realm. Therefore, Nancy argues that positive freedom emerges not from pure reason but from empirical reason.²⁶

Contrary to this definition of freedom, in *CJ*, §91, Kant mentions that freedom can be represented in history. Here, Kant introduces a different approach to the sensible and the intelligible relationship. Moreover, in *CPraR*, Kant underscores the significance of common sense in practical reasoning by invoking the concept of *Schwärmerei*, which refers to religious enthusiasm or excess devotion in everyday usage. This concept, translated as religious fanaticism in Kant,²⁷ indicates that when immersed in such excessive emotions, the subject may succumb to dogmatism and mysticism. However, for Kant, dogmatism and mysticism are states that surpass the limits of reason and hinder the compatibility of religion with reason and free will. Hence, Kant posits the freedom of causality in practical reasoning by introducing this concept's contrast, emphasizing the spontaneous nature of causality inherent to practicality.

Additionally, in "The Canon of Pure Reason,"²⁸ Kant argues that the practice of freedom is within experience. Further, in *CPraR*, as perceived by Nancy, Kant consistently emphasizes that freedom in practice is grounded in experience. Therefore,

²⁶ KANT, I. (1788) I. Chapter I. Book I. *Critique of Practical Reason*

²⁷ In the subsequent chapters, we will observe Nancy providing a Hegelian interpretation to this concept.

²⁸ KANT, I. (1998). II. Transcendental doctrine of method. Chapter II. The canon of pure reason. *Critique of Pure Reason* (P. Guyer and A. W. Wood, Trans.). Cambridge University Press

he sees practical reason as the law of freedom, a given of existence, not as a power of knowing. So, he sees reflections of an ontological inquiry in Kant.

However, Nancy identifies the inception of self-legitimization in the Kantian subject and the deteriorated state of this self-legitimization in existence.²⁹ In Kant, the question of freedom is undeniable, constantly surfacing; however, as it belongs to the realm of *praxis*, its inconceivability obstructs its scrutiny. Furthermore, it cannot be demonstrated or proven. It cannot be demonstrated because it is analyzed within the temporality of experience.³⁰

Finally, according to Nancy, even if Kantian theory allows us to consider freedom as a fact, Kantian logic does not attribute any factual status to freedom, regardless of what it may be. This is because unity between the intelligible and the sensible is impossible in this thought, contrary to the attribution of logic to freedom.

Indeed, Kant (as seen in Hegel and Schelling³¹), in contrast to Heidegger, devotes more extensive space to this issue. Hence, upon initial examination, this book, seemingly presenting a Heideggerian critique of Kant, contends that Heidegger's neglect of this topic, reflected in its limited treatment and subsequent omission, contributes to its being overlooked³².

In fact, in *EL*, the primary subject of discussion is not Kant but Heidegger. The majority of the interpretations of Kant in *EL* stem from the perspectives of renowned thinkers, including Derrida, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), and Simone Weil (1909-1943). Heidegger's conspicuous silence in response to Auschwitz is the predominant factor contributing to this perspective. For Nancy, who interprets freedom within the practical domain, Heidegger's historical decision in the face of Auschwitz should never

²⁹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 28-29.

³⁰ *ibid.* 29.

³¹ In the subsequent sections of the thesis, we will delve more extensively into the perspectives of these thinkers.

³² NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 51.

be overlooked. This criticism extends not only to the act of forgetting but also to Heidegger's narrowing of the freedom issue in his thought, progressively limiting it with the concept of will. In Nancy's philosophy, freedom encompasses more than being constrained by the will; it consistently implies a sense of community. If we are to interpret freedom as positioning in existence, this positioning can only occur within the framework of community. Our existence can be intellectualized independently of other existences but cannot be thought of independently from them³³. From this perspective, the concept in question is a radicalized form of Heidegger's notion of being-in-common [*Mitsein*]. And through this radicalization, Nancy is distancing himself from Heidegger's thought. Therefore, this work should never be considered independent of this distancing.

Indeed, his interest in Heidegger is always shaped by the underlying influence of Derrida. For example, *La partage des voix* (1982) is another book on Heideggerian thought. *Être Singulier Pluriel* (2000) is a work in which he reevaluates Heidegger's language to adapt to his philosophy.

Therefore, Nancy takes a distinct path from Heidegger, independent of the latter part of *Being and Time*, to approach freedom through everydayness. He argues that freedom is not given a place within *Dasein*'s obedience to existence when abstracted from everydayness³⁴. Similarly, according to the same reasoning, freedom in Heidegger, unlike Nancy, is unrelated to public action³⁵.

In the *Gesamtausgabe* (Vol. 14), Heidegger asserts that the essence of freedom is predictable only when we pursue freedom as the foundation of the possibility of being-

³³ We will delve into the distinction between the intellectual and the thinkable [*pensable*] in Nancy later in the thesis.

³⁴ HEIDEGGER, M. (1996). *Being and Time* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.). State University of New York Press; §5.

³⁵ Here, when referring to public action, it should not be understood in the sense of Hannah Arendt's thought. The detailed exploration of what the "public" entails in Nancy will be further examined in the third section of the study.

there. In this respect, freedom precedes time and space. Here, Heidegger opens up a realm of thought for freedom.

Heidegger summons Dasein to their freedom in *BT* (on the Call of Conscience). Heidegger rejects freedom as an Idea or a Concept. Nancy does not hold a divergent viewpoint; however, the metamorphosis of existence into a proletariat steers him toward a distinct inquiry within this philosophical framework. He emphasizes that freedom is overlooked for this rationale.

In conclusion, Nancy never considers Heidegger outside the context of his association with Nazism. Furthermore, in his statement dated March 29, 1994, published in *Le Monde*, Nancy underscores that Heidegger finds himself torn between the heroically portrayed authenticity within the *Volk* [people]³⁶, allowing for finitude and everydayness, and an aspiration for purity construed as authentic existence. In the “Fragments” section of *EL*, Nancy states that Heidegger never ceased to contemplate freedom and our freedoms. However, he criticizes Heidegger for always approaching the “free being” through domination and destiny of the truth.

Perhaps ontology is seen as a threat to ethics by many philosophers. Still, on the contrary, Nancy argues that when we see evil as it is, this threat disappears, and evil, in contrast to assuring freedom, leads to the negation of existence. The example of the Holocaust comes into play here again because it is an experience that enables us to recognize what evil is. In this regard, he approaches the radical evil of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854), particularly through Heidegger’s reference. The seminar *The Essence of Human Freedom: An Introduction to Philosophy* (2002), which Heidegger delivered in the last semester of 1930, is a study primarily focused on Schelling. Once again, Heidegger, in this work, finds Schelling’s effort insufficient and asserts that Schelling couldn’t surpass Kant. Contrary to Schelling’s effort,

³⁶ Heidegger emphasized a concept in his 1933 rectoral speech. “Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität [The Self-Assertion of the German University]”.

Heidegger interprets Schellingian freedom as a necessity and, once again, fails to analyze existence within its finitude. In the seminars from 1941-1943, Heidegger views Schelling's emphasis on freedom as a mere instant in the history of philosophy and reiterates this perspective in *Kant's Thesis About Being* (1961).

We understand that freedom has been a recurring philosophical topic since the Ancient Period. Nancy's initial approach involves an engagement with the ideas of Kant and Heidegger. However, he endeavors to articulate a distinct notion of freedom by revisiting and reiterating these philosophical perspectives. For this reason, he seeks to analyze freedom within the writing experience. Nancy's aporetic expression can similarly be delineated through this approach. Throughout the book, we observe Nancy navigating between thoughts and hopping from one concept to another. We witness Nancy both defending and negating specific ideas, approaching the thoughts not through the coherence of a philosopher's system but rather through the concepts encountered within his own thought experience. For instance, while the entire first section is dedicated to deconceptualizing Kant's notion of freedom, towards the end, we observe Nancy getting closer to Kantian philosophy or distancing himself from Heidegger through certain contradictions. Even when identifying errors in his thoughts, the resolution is often found by referring to Kant. This indicates that we cannot analyze the book without integrating it into Nancy's experience. In light of all this, how should we interpret what Nancy says about freedom?

Indeed, for us, the only viable option is to diligently follow and dissect this entire thought process, as there seems to be little alternative to comprehending the intricacies of the text. Indeed, Nancy neither unequivocally endorses nor refutes any particular philosopher. Indeed, the text does contain leaps and fractures; perhaps it is precisely from these that one must bring the weaknesses of the text to the surface or understand it lies within the details. Indeed, the endeavor to address the experience of freedom

beyond the scope of political philosophy, progressively through concepts such as art and imagination, indicates an effort to render it possible. A piece of writing or thought cannot affirm or negate freedom; instead, we witness and experience freedom in art and literature. Put differently, that writing that thought has come into existence precisely because there is freedom.

Examining *EL* in three thematic stages is appropriate while preserving the meanings I mentioned in the thesis title. In the first section, we will witness how freedom becomes conceptless; for this purpose, we will examine Kant's conception of freedom, traversing through the stages he invokes and shaking their foundations. Subsequently, in the next section, we will turn freedom into a matter of ontology; however, we will observe how this situation leads freedom into oblivion. This section will reveal how Nancy engages in a confrontation with Heidegger's thoughts. Finally, in the third section, our most challenging part, we will attempt to answer how Nancy endeavors to reframe freedom, rendered conceptless but forgotten and marginalized, as a matter of philosophy once again. Of course, our goal is never merely to reproduce a shallow rendition of Nancy's thought; instead, by following the path he has illuminated for us, the "Examining the Logic of Freedom or the Possibilities Offered by Writing to the Thought of Freedom" section in our study can serve as a guide in this regard, we aim to grasp the validation of this thought and, if necessary, engage in critique.

Before starting the research thesis, we would like to mention that unless otherwise specified, the English translations of the referenced French quotes belong to us.

FIRST CHAPTER: THE DECONCEPTUALIZATION OF FREEDOM

1.1. CRITIQUE DIRECTED TOWARDS KANT BY NANCY

Nancy argues that at the beginning of the *EL*, Kant's concept of freedom creates a problem of representation in the reception of freedom. This problem renders freedom both unthinkable (as negative) and positive. Instead of seeking a compromise between negative and positive freedom by attributing different status to the concept, to resolve this dilemma (as Kant did in *The Groundwork*), Nancy prefers to discuss the freedom in our aesthetic judgments mentioned in Kant's *CJ*, which leaves a space for free will within some teleological ends leading to a harmonious community on the aesthetic level. So, Nancy aligns his deconceptualization on the distinction between aesthetic and determinative concepts Kant mentions in the Introduction of the *Third Critique*.

From the start, by the deconceptualization act, Nancy approaches and critiques the dilemma created by negative and positive freedom within the Kantian framework and radicalizes it. According to Kant, the distinction between aesthetic and determinative concepts is in their direction to the specific objects (for example, aesthetic concepts that artistic genius aims to realize within certain teleological ends through some object are different from determinative concepts that an action of a subject instrumentalize to realize an action); however, as implied by its name, even if the specific objects differ (the concept of freedom and axe are different on ontic level), by considering both of them as concepts, we still reduce them to objectifiable subjectivities for a knowing subject. So, for such a conceptualization of freedom, free actions are possible only through some objectification process. That is why Nancy is not satisfied with the different statutes that Kant gives to aesthetic and determinative judgments, and he argues for complete annulment of attributing freedom concept statute.

As it will be understood, Nancy attempts to analyze the concept of freedom within the framework of Kantian philosophy by focusing on its different statutes. Indeed, interpreting aesthetic judgments as judgments that carry both universality and

subjectivity helps Kantian philosophy to hold the idea of a harmonious community and render freedom and community reconcilable. Still, for Nancy, this is not from the different statutes that the concept of freedom holds but from its factual nature. So freedom is not a concept; it is not objectifiable knowledge. Freedom exists in every experience in the world. We cannot deny it nor theoretically represent it. However, we can deconceptualize freedom within Western philosophy by integrating freedom into our everyday plural existence through the thought of singularity. So that we can ontologically understand what freedom is.

The first step in the conceptualization of freedom is to recognize the possibility of being free within the plurality of beings without associating it with a Supreme Idea, as in Kant's *First Critique*, and without confining all entities into a totality that absorbs them, thus allowing for freedom within the pluralistic context of existence. In the *First Critique*, the concept of infinite freedom can only be realized by a Supreme Idea that, due to its infinitude, can be achieved only by another infinite entity like itself. Therefore, according to Kant's *Second Critique*, the finite moral subject can attain freedom to the extent of its proximity to the infinitely free Supreme Being, as necessitated by the categorical imperative. This leads Kant, despite proposing a harmonious community within the framework of aesthetic judgments, to offer a reconciliation between positive and negative freedom in the *Second Critique* by presenting a coherence between infinity and finitude, which ultimately leads to a conception that overlooks inter-entital differences, reducing them to similarities under the auspices of an infinite being. In a sense, Nancy argues that, due to the determinism and exclusivity of the categorical imperative, which groups entities based on their similarities and excludes other integrities, Kantian philosophy, by the categorical imperative, impedes freedom. Therefore, Nancy suggests the necessity for freedom, where entities are evaluated based on their singularities and differences rather than being assimilated into a totality. It is imperative to assess freedom by this new ontological need.

Focusing on similarities and identities among entities reflexively creates a totality imposed by the substantial conception of existence offered by the Kantian model. As Nancy indicates, the problem posed by the conception of existence presented by the Kantian model, where everything emanates from a substance, is that it inadvertently isolates us from the phenomenal domain where differences manifest themselves and confine us to the noumenal realm, where entities appear as Pure Ideas such as God, Freedom, and Infinity. The detachment of these concepts, which gained a different status in Kant from the practical domain, has led them to acquire a negative connotation. Subsequently, according to Nancy, Kant, by presenting negative freedom as a motif of positive freedom, has been forced to enable negative freedom by conforming the subject's will in action to the law within the framework of positive freedom. The attempt to reconcile these two ontically different concepts has led Kant to resort to complex analyses, such as assigning non-deterministic functions to pure Ideas. By delineating positive freedom as negative freedom, Kant confines freedom in practical terms to the domain of the will, leading to a conflict among the wills of individuals. And Kant attempts to regulate this conflict within the framework of moral laws presented by the categorical imperative.

According to Nancy, the primary reason why freedom is initially presented in a negative sense in Kant is its irreducible nature. Therefore, Kant presents it as a Pure Idea and becomes part of the creation process rather than being a mere existence. If Kant reduces freedom to conform to the relationship between subjects and moral laws, then this stems from the notion that freedom is an idea that needs to be realized by individuals. According to this idea, the possibility of realizing freedom is only granted to the subject by approaching the concept of a 'universal subject.' However, this approach can only be presumed by denying the factual nature of existence, by abstracting existence from its being already ontologically free.

Nevertheless, we cannot say that Nancy's emphasis on ontology deviates entirely from the idea of Good discussed in Kant's *CJ* or that he opposes the community that will be

reached through aesthetic judgments. Nancy will emphasize the connection between our senses and thoughts, which will be discussed in our Third Section. However, before focusing on what this connection offers, he will criticize the basis of the harmonious community defined in Kant as being grounded in a totality conditioned by universality, arguing that the harmony of community lies not in unity but in deviance, in the freedom of deviations to exist without violating each other. In other words, Nancy sketches a more heterogeneous structure among singularities instead of a hierarchical order reminiscent of a Kantian harmonious community. In a way, although Nancy's assertion that our aesthetic judgments are singular does not contradict the Kantian theory, by proposing a plural thought without establishing an inter-singular relationship based on a universal idea, he moves away from the Kantian theory, saying that aesthetic judgments are also singular-plural.

Nancy criticizes the possibility of regulating the relationship between individuals through the motif of the categorical imperative in Kant. He assumes that such a legal domain is not necessary due to the factuality of freedom. The practicality of freedom arises from its factuality, which results in it not requiring theoretical recognition. Its irreducibility stems precisely from this fact. When we approach freedom as an ontological issue, as Kant does in the *Second Critique*, we are not obliged to subject it to a legalization process. We can talk about freedom because it exists and speculate about it as a concept. In this sense, freedom does not need to be conditioned by negative freedom to sustain its existence in the practical domain, as we can observe in positive freedom. According to Nancy, Kant felt the problem lay in the ontological assumption of his philosophy, which is why he introduced concepts that are difficult to reconcile, such as universal subjectivity, in the *CJ*. However, unlike Kant, when we remove freedom from being recognized and subsequently realized by the subject, it becomes an act rather than a pure concept. The spontaneity of freedom does not derive from its being a reasonless cause but from its inseparability from existence, its inability to be otherwise, making it a matter of ontology rather than recognition, moral practice, or

aesthetics. Therefore, as Nancy de-conceptualizes freedom, he will not only de-conceptualize freedom itself but also propose singular existences as a matrix in which freedom is experienced. The difference between singularities and the founding subject offered by Kantian schematism lies in the fact that singularities are already within a community, an experience, and cannot be isolated from externality. Thus, their relationship is not one of establishing or integrating with others but of participating in a common act.

If the subject maintains its founding quality, because differences will always appear to me as something other, strange, they will be isolated from my realm and turn into a competitive arena for me. This competitive arena can only be regulated by moral laws, and the domains of our actions and those of others will constantly conflict. According to Nancy, the strangeness in subjects' perpetual sameness and distinctiveness stems from their non-being as subjects. He proposes the concept of singularity to carry strange, unprecedented meanings, as it suggests an existence where these differentiations are not absorbed. Another difference between singularity and the subject is that for us to be singular, I must always differentiate myself from another; thus, according to singularity, existence cannot occur without differentiation, and this differentiation is the essence of existence itself. The intertwining of existence with community in Nancy's thought leads to presenting externality as a condition of existence. In Kantian thought, however, the founding subject, which disregards the externality of singularities, appears as a reconciliation between singular existence and the Supreme Being, and the solution lies in attributing divine attributes to the subject.

Nancy does not see the need to reconcile the Supreme Being and singular existence. The primary reason for the conflict between community and freedom is not due to a conflict between two entities, one infinite and the other finite. The real problem lies in approaching freedom as a matter of recognition and presenting it as a pure, infinite concept. In contrast, the ontology of singularity does not offer us a timeless infinite within our already free and communal existence; instead, it suggests that freedom

unfolds as a finite act within the spatiotemporal context of existence. According to this view, although a singular entity may not have an ontological judgment on its value, it acknowledges that practical violations of freedom exist, such as hunger and war, which can be considered infringements upon it. However, we will delve into freedom violations within the plurality of singularities in our Third Section when we examine the notions of good and evil. For now, let us suffice to say that the concept of singularity, independent of infringements upon freedom, assists Nancy in resolving the inter-subjective conflict where each freedom stands against another at an ontological level.

As previously mentioned, Kant proposes the resolution of this conflict through the concept of positive freedom, conditioned by negative freedom. However, this proposed solution renders freedom speakable and does not make it practically achievable; in other words, freedom's assurance is achieved through its definition rather than its affirmation in practice. Positive freedom, which lies beyond this definition, is presented as a moral duty imposed on existence within the framework of moral law. Although impossible to be recognized by the subject, it transforms into an inter-subjective impossibility that must be acquired. It is important to recall here that the concept of freedom appears inexplicable or solely bestowed upon by God when considered detached from life. However, when evaluated within the context of life, freedom emerges as a contingent term, and assurance is obtained. Thus, positive freedom can be achievable in experience without resorting to a negative definition.

When we do not consider freedom as a limited experience in our plural existence, as Kant does, we are compelled to reduce freedom to a symmetry among finite beings, as it is governed by inter-subjective causality dictated by the categorical imperative. Therefore, despite our earlier assertion in the Introduction section that Nancy approaches the Kantian theory through the lens of the *Third Critique*, Nancy will begin to address the problem of freedom in philosophy by pointing out the inadequacy of Kant's examination of the question of existence, which leads to a symmetry among

beings. Nancy criticizes Kant for establishing a relationality through symmetry/identity without questioning the subject. In this sense, by introducing singularity, Nancy distances himself from the notion of existence in the Kantian sense. Thus, rather than reaching a reconciliation between the determinative causality of inter-subjective relations and infinite freedom, Nancy will address existence not as static and devoid of differences but as being-in-itself, separated through communal engagement, rejecting a realm of freedom outside of the community. Nancy emphasizes the dynamic nature of existence, stating that each existence is becoming, and since it is always within a different becoming, it is free and singular. By offering us a new ontology, Nancy allows us to evaluate life and freedom intertwined, and according to the concept of singularity, freedom transforms into an act of being.³⁷

Singularity being plural within a community while drawing freedom into the ethical domain (since every act of existence also contains an *ethos*) also makes it a part of the practical realm because the plurality of singularity lies in the factual impossibility of existence being; otherwise, that is, in its practice. The main emphasis of *EL* is the unpredictability of existence and the fact that existence does not harbor a substance devoid of temporality and thus does not emanate from a universal; hence, it will always be free. According to Nancy, despite the ethical relationship between singularities, the unpredictability and temporality of existence are the main reasons for considering freedom as an ontological phenomenon before ethics. In this regard, freedom transforms into an existential movement that occurs, recurs, begins anew, ends again, continues a movement of sameness in difference, or extinguishes it. The finitude of freedom arises not from the finite, mortal nature of the subject acting—since the subject of action as an act sometimes realizes freedom and sometimes does not—but from the fact that within the framework of our being in the world, existence is always in a limited act with other singularities.³⁸ So, when we discover immortality one day, we won't

³⁷ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 18-19

³⁸ *ibid.*; 14-15.

suddenly start ruling over all mortals; we will continue to exist in a limited relationship with mortals or other immortals.

When we approach the condition of existence not through the framework of the community but rather, as in Kant's transcendental freedom, through an Idea that lies outside the realm of experience, speaking about existence and freedom within the realm of experience would only be possible through external intervention, Nancy opposes Kant's negative freedom by resisting the negation of a pure concept, which is the cause of itself, cannot be thought, and is rendered "negative." This opposition prevents freedom from becoming an external intervention to the subject. We quote:

*La liberté est tout, sauf une "Idée" (Kant lui-même, en un sens, le savait). Elle est un fait : nous ne cesserons pas, dans cet essai, de parler de cela.*³⁹

[Freedom is everything except an "Idea" (Kant himself, in a sense, knew this). It is a fact: we will not cease, in this essay, to speak of that.]

When we apprehend freedom as a pure Idea without opposing the Kantian gesture, when we treat it as a concept, we can present freedom as an obligation toward which the subject necessarily approaches to realize the Good. Instead of enabling freedom, such a conception of freedom will confine the subject to a determinative causality, allowing freedom only as the subject struggles for a predetermined Supreme Good, as dictated by the definition of infinite freedom. In other words, the subject will be granted the possibility of being free only to act by laws. This would confine freedom to a homogeneous community where sameness is sustained rather than experiencing it in the diversity of practical life. However, as seen in the Supreme Good, existence is unnecessary without temporal-spatial constraints. At this juncture, Nancy resorts to a

³⁹ *ibid.*

Heideggerian⁴⁰ discourse and asserts that Kant's notion of the "universal subject" devoid of temporal-spatial constraints stems from Kant's covering over the question of being. Neglecting that existence is already embedded in freedom and community leads us into an economy of necessity regarding how the subject should be and act without examining what existence is. The problem of what existence presently entails remains veiled.⁴¹

When existence is regarded as self-conditioning without needing any other reason infinitely, and freedom is similarly defined as a negative reason in the world of Ideas, it inevitably transforms into a reason that affirms and negates itself, conditions and unconditions itself, without the need for transformation. In his antinomies, Kant acknowledges the possibility of attaining access to self-conditioned existence and negative freedom within infinity and predetermination. However, in this context, the only entity capable of truly possessing and securing freedom is the idea of God proposed as an uncaused existence in the Antinomies of the *First Critique*. The self-affirming nature of this God Idea as a pure Idea enables it to possess infinite freedom. However, its realization beyond the realm of senses, in other words, its lack of temporality, casts a shadow over the nature of existence and freedom and their beingness in the phenomenal realm. Therefore, according to Nancy, the concept of existence and, consequently, freedom should not be seen as mere concepts but as realities. This approach leads to advocating singularity over subject philosophy and frees singularities from the necessity of being governed by an existence that transcends them on the ontic level.

⁴⁰ The main contours of Nancy's critique directed towards Kant rely, with differentiations, on Heidegger's *Kantbuch*.

⁴¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 15.

1.2. GOD CANNOT ENSURE FREEDOM

Nancy argues that God cannot ensure freedom, even if Kant claims the contrary to handle freedom on a practical level, and he even contends that this limitation and dilemma have been acknowledged by philosophy and theology before. This stance demonstrates that infinite freedom cannot be realized solely by a finite being but cannot be achieved by an infinite being like God. In this regard, Nancy cites Georges Bataille: “*La liberté n’est-elle pas le pouvoir qui manque à Dieu, ou qu’il n’a que verbalement, puisqu’il ne peut désobéir à l’ordre qu’il est, dont il est garant?*”⁴² [Freedom is not the power lacking in God, or which He possesses only verbally, since He cannot disobey the order that He is, of which He is the guarantor?].”

Nancy interprets this sentence as indicating that freedom is not established in God and is not Her/His prerogative. He implies that God is devoid of freedom or merely verbally acquires it. He points to a simple contradiction: God cannot go against the order (S)He guarantees, nor can He guarantee to go against it. In other words, he demonstrates that the freedom of the founding subject is based on the onto-theological limit caused by the *causa sui* God concept in theology. Through this onto-theological limit, God, as the uncaused cause, experiences the dilemma of grounding in existential terms.⁴³ According to this view, God does not confine beings solely within their determinations, but (S)He Her/Himself cannot transcend them. In this sense, creation is not a free act for God.

Is it possible to enter the ontology domain as an existence experienced freely, without attempting to reduce all existence to a god, a reasonless cause, and without evaluating freedom as a particular quality of the subject? Nancy's resistance to conceptualizing freedom as a special quality of the subject and his determination of God's freedom as an onto-theological limit indicate why we can only evaluate freedom as finite and

⁴² *ibid.*; 16.

⁴³ *ibid.*

positive in nature. Thus, Nancy will emphasize that freedom devoid of practicality cannot be discussed, and he will redefine freedom within the framework of existence, including its factual aspects. By doing so, Nancy will set aside all unifying concepts such as God, Human, Race, Culture, etc., which have been isolated in the philosophical tradition as constitutive elements of the subject. Instead, he will offer life as experienced within its factual nature, presenting singularity as a groundless foundation. This will provide us with an opportunity to confront our inevitable community without these unifying concepts.⁴⁴

1.3. POSITIVE FREEDOM

After negating God as the guarantee of freedom, Nancy sets aside negative freedom and turns to the concept of positive freedom examined by Kant in the *CPraR*. For Kant, positive freedom appears as a reality or a fact.⁴⁵ Therefore, as Nancy proposes, Kant is closer in the *CPraR* to considering freedom not as a matter of essence but as an experience. However, negative freedom enables the realization of positive freedom in practice. Additionally, Nancy, drawing from “The Transcendental Deduction” section of the *CPraR*, argues that for Kant, unlike negative freedom, positive freedom arises not from pure reason but from empirical reason.⁴⁶ For this reason, according to Nancy, like Heidegger, in Kant, freedom is approached only through the concept of positive freedom.

Furthermore, the reversal of the Deduction section in the *CPraR* compared to the *CPR* indicates the transition between the noumenal and practical realms. While freedom appears as an impossibility and a categorical necessity in the *CPR*, it is attributed to

⁴⁴ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 31.

⁴⁵ KANT, I. (2015). I. Chapter I, Book I. *Critique of Practical Reason* (M. Gregor, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁶ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 27.

practical reasons for positive freedom because the undeniable nature of freedom's experience proves that it occurs empirically. And the necessity of its occurrence arises from the rational experience of the mind.⁴⁷ Up to this point, following a Heideggerian line of thought, Nancy, by considering Kantian theory through the lens of positive freedom, distinguishes between Kant's conceptual treatment of it and its presentation within experience, as also noted in *CJ* §91.⁴⁸ He argues that the impasse encountered in the *CPR* stems not from the nature of freedom but rather from its conceptual treatment. He asserts that this has already been underscored in “Chapter II: The Canon of Pure Reason” in the *CPR*. In contrast to interpretations by Heidegger and similar scholars, Nancy finds this reasoning in *CJ* consistent and apt⁴⁹: “*La liberté pratique peut être démontrée par l’expérience*”, “*la raison (...) pratique contient des principes de la possibilité de l’expérience, à savoir d’actions qui (...) pourraient être trouvées dans l’histoire de l’homme.*”⁵⁰ [The practical freedom can be demonstrated through experience,” “reason (...) in practice contains principles of the possibility of experience, namely, actions that (...) could be found in the history of mankind.]”

In this vein, freedom, as presented in the *CPR* as a concept of pure reason, becomes, within Nancy's interpretation of Kant, not a faculty of cognition but rather a law of practical reason, a datum of existence.⁵¹ Consequently, it becomes impossible to evade the inexorability of the question of freedom; that is, the difficulty or impossibility in treating the issue conceptually arises from its nature as a matter of *praxis*, contingent upon experience.⁵²

⁴⁷ *ibid.*; 27-28.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*; 28.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ KANT, I. (1999). Canon I and II. *Critique of Pure Reason* (P. Guyer, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.

⁵¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 28-29.

⁵² *ibid.*; 29.

However, when we approach freedom through its positive aspect, are we not reducing it to a problem of free will in the Kantian sense?

1.4. FREEDOM AS FREE WILL

After demonstrating the impossibility of treating freedom as a philosophical problem by transcending the realm of cognition, Nancy asserts that freedom affirms itself as an affirmation, a self-affirming thought.⁵³ He states that he addresses freedom and existence in this manner in *CJ* §91. To support his argument, he cites:

Mais, ce qui est très remarquable, c'est que, parmi les faits, il se trouve même une Idée de la raison (qui en soi n'est susceptible d'aucune présentation dans l'intuition et donc aussi d'aucune preuve théorique de sa possibilité); c'est l'Idée de liberté dont la réalité, en tant qu'espèce particulière de causalité (dont le concept serait exagéré du point de vue théorique) peut être démontrée par des lois pratiques de la raison pure et, conformément à celles-ci, dans les actions réelles, par conséquent dans l'expérience. Parmi toutes les Idées de la raison pure et, conformément à celles-ci, dans les actions réelles, par conséquent dans l'expérience. Parmi toutes les Idées de la raison pure, c'est la seule dont l'objet soit un fait et qui doit être compté parmi les scibilia.

[But what is very remarkable is that, among the facts, there is even an Idea of reason (which in itself is not susceptible to any presentation in intuition and thus also to any theoretical proof of its possibility); it is the Idea of freedom, the reality of which, as a particular species of causality (whose concept would be exaggerated from a theoretical standpoint), can be demonstrated by practical laws of pure reason and, per them, in actual actions, therefore in experience.

⁵³ *ibid.*; 29-30.

Among all the Ideas of pure reason, it is the only one whose object is a fact and which must be counted among the *Scibilia*.]

However, Nancy identifies a contradiction within the framework of Kantian logic. This contradiction arises from the following: when freedom is accepted as an idea in itself, as a pure thought, in line with its self-affirmation, it becomes impossible to present it in the mind or to imagine it. Because I cannot present freedom in the mind, I can only experience it within empirical experience. Although Kant expresses that freedom is not empirical but a practical concept, when we exclude infinite freedom from the discussion, this practicality begins to take on an empirical value. According to Nancy, due to the practical becoming endowed with empirical value, freedom cannot be considered a phenomenon in the metaphysics of the subject. To consider freedom not as an empirical concept but as a phenomenon, a merging between the sensible and intelligible worlds is required. Kant enables this merging to escape the danger of empiricism through the concept of *Schwärmerei*, which means “to crush,” “to press,” and “to overenthusiasm,” thereby characterizing the merging as a sort of crushing of the two worlds into each other. However, in the *CPraR*, where he talks about positive freedom, this crushing is excluded, meaning that the connection between the sensible and the intelligible world is only made possible through the categorical imperative. Since the concept of *Schwärmerei* does not exist in *CPraR*, we have two separate definitions: positive freedom and negative freedom.⁵⁴

Although Kant claims to have resolved the problem of freedom with the concept of *Schwärmerei*, due to the inconsistency between *CPraR* and *CPR*, he encounters a deadlock. Therefore, according to Nancy's observations, as long as the subject philosophy is made, freedom will be reduced to a freely willed that is limited by causality.⁵⁵ Thus, Nancy finds a solution: rather than considering freedom as a thought,

⁵⁴ *ibid.*; 30-31.

⁵⁵ KANT, I. (1999). Third Antinomy. *Critique of Pure Reason*: “If I get up now from my seat, entirely freely...”.

a thought in itself, he suggests regarding it as something that appears like a thought within experience. In this way, he proposes an escape route from Kantian schematism.⁵⁶

So, how has this problem been resolved within the Kantian formula framework? How has positive freedom been legitimized in *CPraR* without the concept of *Schwärmerei*?

Kant finds a solution to the problem of positive freedom in a moral justification. The positive freedom he discusses in *CPraR* turns into a concept “I” resort to because I respect the law, my moral duty, and my responsibility. However, this again contradicts the concept of freedom. Every experience contains a kind of causality, and by calling this causality a specific type of causality, we attempt to legalize the concept of freedom. Nonetheless, Nancy tells us this: Perhaps this specific causality that enables freedom does not stem from free causality itself.⁵⁷ Following such a move away from Kant, Nancy turns to Heidegger's Kantian metaphysical interpretation.

1.5. IS GROUNDLESS EXISTENCE POSSIBLE?

According to Nancy's observation in *EL*, the dilemma caused by existence based on a common substance in philosophy is addressed first in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). According to Nancy, Spinoza endeavors to overcome the solipsism of the concept of God, which is taken as a foundation, by considering God not as the basis of existence but as a pure being. This de-foundation aims to assert that freedom manifests itself in existence. By stating that only God, as a pure being, is free and by not equating God with existence as in the Cartesian tradition, Spinoza de-founds and liberates God. With the dissolution of the assumed foundation of God in Western philosophical history, existence has been liberated from the necessity of relying on a

⁵⁶ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 31.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

foundation.⁵⁸ Thus, as an inquiry into the essence that claims to describe existence as it is, philosophy has ended, opening the way for ontology to make sense of the groundless and unending.⁵⁹

Nancy's significant move here is to assert that freedom arises precisely when existence is groundless and situates it at the limit of philosophy. The perpetual state of existence lies in its perpetual incompleteness. The incompleteness of existence impedes any attempt to account for it; it manifests as an intermittent trembling that intermittently reveals itself, partially concealing itself. While this might seem to confine us to a tautology of a being that is free because it exists and exists because it is free, it does not arise from a principle or an agent's multiplicity of effects—unlike the universal distribution of a whole observed in Kantian schematism. This is because it lacks the logic of being the essence of everything; it depreciates it. The free dispersion of existence is headless; it consists merely of singular manifestations, and since no singular manifestation can exist on its own, every existence is also plural. Approaching the question of existence or the meaning of being through its groundlessness and singularity allows for only one possible answer: “to recognize the freedom of existence in its singularity.”⁶⁰

In this context, philosophy is liberated from the responsibility to conquer and defend human freedom because it is not a nature we possess and govern. Philosophy can only truly understand and present humanity as it is when we approach freedom through such a groundless existence. Otherwise, freedom and humanity would be absorbed into a simple immanentism, referring to each other within a basic immanence. Nancy suggests the following to prevent existence from being absorbed in such immanentism: “[...] *il s’agit de présenter l’humanité de l’homme (son “essence”) à une liberté en tant*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*; 16.

⁵⁹ SPINOZA B. (1677). Part I. Concerning God. *Ethics*: “By substance, I mean that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself: in other words, that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception.”

⁶⁰ *ibid.*; 17.

*qu'êtré par laquelle l'existence transcende absolument et résolument, c'est-à-dire existe.*⁶¹ [It is a matter of presenting man's humanity (his "essence") to freedom as a being through which existence transcends absolutely and resolutely, that is to say, ex-ists.]”

Thus, existence does not consume itself by turning inward, discovering its essence, and realizing it under the guise of self-consumption, but rather by surpassing itself, transcending itself, and existing in finite transcendence. According to Nancy, the transcendental of existence is annulled in the infinite immanentism based on substance⁶²; when we approach existence through a substance, transcendence inadvertently leads to immanence. However, freedom as a singular finite movement of being finds itself not in the reflection of an inherent substance but in radical transcendence. Through the notion of groundless existence, Nancy endows existence with its temporality via the attributed finite being. The perception of an infinite, immutable, motionless being could only be contemplated within the logic of a being exempt from time and space. The necessary temporality bestowed upon existence through its groundlessness, its free self-construction as finite, liberates Western philosophy from onto-theological impasse and defines human finitude not as a hindrance to freedom but as the very possibility of transcending oneself, creating oneself, inherently making existence temporal by definition. Thus, finitude ceases to be a word used to denote being deprived of infinity or to explain situations devoid of infinity. It compels us to think about finitude in terms of finitude itself; hence, within Nancy's framework, we encounter contradictory definitions such as being infinitely finite, exposing ourselves to the alterity of our 'existence' as inherently contradictory.⁶³

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*; 18.

⁶³ The concept of finite infinity; DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 29-30.

SECOND CHAPTER: FREEDOM LEFT IN THE STATE OF BEING FORGOTTEN

2.1. EXPERIENCE IS ALWAYS AND ALREADY FREE

Nancy asserts that existence is neither produced nor derived from essence but is solely positioned [*posé*], emphasizing a stance exhibited in the abandonment of existence.⁶⁴ When existence is left to the world independently of the essence, thrown and detached from its conditioning factors, or indicated that its formation has always been as simple, contemplating freedom becomes inevitable. According to this perspective, existence, self-constituted by its essence, becomes another name for freedom. However, when we do not consider existence and freedom to refer to each other, we fall into the trap of intersubjective symmetry because subjects are derived from the same essence, and intersubjective sharing turns into a domain where freedom is annulled. Subsequently, freedom, sharing, and everyday existence's areas, when thrown out, also bring along specific ethical inquiries, emerging as a problem of freedom in the history of philosophy.⁶⁵ However, in Nancy's ontology, just as in Heidegger, every formation constitutes a common formation, and the emergence of freedom as a problem, an impasse in philosophy, arises not from freedom but from metaphysical history. In this matter, Nancy identifies a problem concerning certain philosophies' approach to freedom and existence.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Here, Nancy employs the word *posé*, derived from the past participle of the French verb *poser*, which means "positioned" in the sense of being placed. The term *position* used in contrast carries a connotation of a static stance or location.

⁶⁵ When discussing the conceptualization and phenomenology of freedom in Nancy, it should not be assumed that we are referring to free will. Freedom is not addressed as free will in the sense found in Kant when it is considered as an action. Through the discussion of "authenticity", Heidegger also gradually reveals the meaning of freedom in terms of conformity to truth, a notion that Nancy critiques. According to Nancy, the practical realm, unlike in Kant where it is governed by the categorical imperative or in Heidegger where it is regulated by truth, is not an area dictated by universal principles. This is because singularities are not reflections of a universal, and thus, it harbors not moral philosophy but ethical concern.

⁶⁶ HEIDEGGER, M. (1996). *Being and Time* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.). State University of New York Press; Referencing §9, Nancy demonstrates to us through a Heideggerian gesture why existence is

Nancy presents a second point of reference in establishing the inherent freedom of existence; when concepts such as existence and essence are used existentially and essentially, in their adjectival forms, they do not denote a predetermined existence. In other words, Nancy contends that the possibility of existence and essence is not annulled but suggests that freedom constitutes its essence and existence. Therefore, he again emphasizes the necessity of contemplating existence to discuss freedom or, as he will further articulate, the experience of freedom. Moreover, Nancy further argues that the existential nature of substance and existence⁶⁷ allows for an interchangeability between freedom and existence. This interchangeability will open up a space for freely experiencing freedom, which will also serve as a realm of existence.⁶⁸ Thus, Nancy attempts to respond to metaphysical inquiries regarding the succession of changes and positioning within singularity thought. According to his perspective, the continuity of beings emerges through their differences, not their similarities. When we consider beings solely through their similarities, they become interchangeable and inevitably negate each other. Therefore, our perception of existence not only threatens freedom but also any form of coexistence, making ethical inquiry an inevitable part of ontology.⁶⁹

2.2. HISTORICITY

At this stage of his argumentation, Nancy critiques the classical view of historicity. He elucidates how he understands historicity, emphasizing why we should not understand

grounded in the experience of freedom, and why they are not treated as separate entities as in Kant - "*Das "Wesen" des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz* [The "essence" of *Dasein* lies in its existence]", he indicates.

⁶⁷ Although Nancy rejects the concept of substance in singularity thought, he does not deny the occurrence and reference thereof.

⁶⁸ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 13.

⁶⁹ The ethical emphasis here may initially seem to allude to Levinasian philosophy. However, Nancy's move is distinct; he does not prioritize ethics. He emphasizes that ethics is not independent of ontological inquiry.

it in terms of the succession and predictability of the present moment. According to Nancy, historicity, while allowing the possibility of not being relegated outside temporality, paradoxically posits a present moment that reigns over all times to represent the unrepresentable. He critiques this notion of historicity, which has been grappled with since Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and carefully examined since Heidegger's *Being and Time*, due to its definition based on predictability and the historical period in which existence is situated. In such a conception of historicity developed through an understanding of the spirit specific to an era, existence, contrary to what is claimed, lacks temporality, and freedom, as its reflection, is once again relegated to the realm of the unthinkable and unrepresentable.

The necessity of history, determined by its predictability and defined according to the historical period in which existence is situated, renders a representation of existence, in its current state and with its differences, as a realm of shared freedom, which is impossible once again.⁷⁰

Furthermore, the attempt to regulate the unrepresentable within an overarching present moment leads us to arrange things. Here, it may be beneficial to delve into the etymology of the French word *histoire*, which also has a meaning of a narrative beyond the events occurring in time and originates from the Latin *storia*, as the English equivalent “history” denotes.⁷¹ Through this connotation, it is possible to grasp what it means to perceive existence within its history, apart from historicity. This perspective demonstrates that we cannot examine a real or supposed existence's being-in-the-world beyond its finite singularity; it is an experience in which you, I, we live. The subject of this experience is the “plural singular,”⁷² not the determinations of a higher self.

⁷⁰ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 18-19.

⁷¹ CHATEAU, D. (2019). Art. Encadré 2. Plastique, arts plastiques, "bildende Künste". *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies : Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* ; 114-115

⁷² Here, we are playing with a word game: we are making a reference to the second meaning evoked by the title of NANCY, J.-L. (1996). *Être singulier pluriel*. Éditions Galilée. The title of the book, categorically stating that the singular is necessarily plural and naming the situation where universality,

Therefore, insisting on being in one's finite story is a testament to existence in action and its existence.

When history is freed from its causality and comes to an end, it creates a space for the story of existence.⁷³ However, there is only one place where this story unfolds: the world. It is the sole space for the sharing of singularities. If we can still speak of a present moment, of a specific period, despite its blurred limits and vague determinations, and if we can posit certain representations within the context of historicity (freedom being one of these unrepresentable representations), it is due to the surprising⁷⁴ [*se surprendre*] temporality of existence, which both manifests and withdraws itself within the shared space. However, this perspective rejects the idea of reaching an ideal based on specific vague determinations outside of time.⁷⁵ Similarly, it emphasizes that, unlike the logic of representation, history is not a game of foresight but always an overcoming, a surprising event, and not deterministic. It lacks an external provider.⁷⁶

This endeavor to impart historicity to history is an essential step because, within these negations, two significant ontological reflections render the phenomenon of free existence conceivable within plural singularity: 1) Although the finitude of history, when contemplated within Kantian categories, may reduce it to causality, Nancy nullifies the uncaused cause that initially grounds it, namely God, thus leaving causality headless [*a-narchie*]; 2) The non-linearity of history demonstrates that events occurring

absolute existence is left out, also emphasizes that being singular always means being with other singularities.

⁷³ Here, there is a reference to GRANEL, G. (1972). *Traditionis traditio*. Gallimard; 175. indicating that the work is advancing in accordance with the opinion of the thesis advisor.

⁷⁴ Nancy uses the reflexive verb *se surprendre* here, implying a surprising outward expression, rejecting any remaining hidden aspect.

⁷⁵ The book does not mention Husserl; furthermore, despite numerous references to Heidegger, Nancy does not discuss phenomenology and instead focuses more on depicting or emphasizing his ontological stance by delving into Aristotle and Duns Scotus (-1308) citations. Finalizing transcendence, rejecting the beyond of time, necessarily annuls phenomenological idealism.

⁷⁶ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 20.

within time, despite happening within the same free space, are not historically deterministic. This is because they do not exist simultaneously, at the same state; it is not a departure or rupture from a hidden truth experienced in existence, but each event is a separate entity.

Considering that in Nancy's thought, ontology encompasses ethics, what does this headlessness tell us about the experience of plurality? Is existence, detached from an ideal context, capable of preventing evil and promoting good after distinguishing between good and evil? Otherwise, if one freely chooses evil, wouldn't they be attacking free existence?

2.3. SPATIO-TEMPORAL EXISTENCE: TRACES OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF "FREEDOM" AND "COMMUNITY"

The style of writing in which Nancy pushes the limits of word meanings might offer a clue to where and how freedom, acting with "passion," operates if it is not acting as an "action," a "movement." He uses the verb *éclore*,⁷⁷ which carries the meaning of something closed emerging, bursting forth (also used in the sense of blossoming, hatching from an egg, coming into being, appearing).

It is difficult to say what is coming into being because what comes into being is not existence itself; existence emerges as a singular action, and this happens as a spatial opening [*espacer*]. Each spatial opening and manifestation of existence occur within a moment, meaning existence does not develop independently of time.

⁷⁷ It could be argued that there is a reference to Derrida's concept of *déclousion* here. In this sense, we can say that, against Heidegger's philosophy, which instrumentalizes phenomenology, Nancy attempts to conduct an ontological study by elucidating the phenomenon and returning to it (through other phenomenologists). For this, see *Glas* (1974).

Unlike Heidegger's discussion in *Being and Time*, for Nancy, the Western philosophical habit of thinking about time through the moment is not problematic because existence, which presents itself as opening or concealing, always occurs within the moment. Hence, Kant's reference to the "Transcendental Schematism" section in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is significant. In that section, Kant states: "I produce time in the apprehension of intuition," and this apprehension is "a synthesis of the manifold."

Here, there is a phenomenological emphasis on defining time through the present moment. Kant focuses on how phenomena are formed and how I perceive them. Since Nancy does not maintain Kant's distinction between phenomenon and noumenon, no hidden, concealed thing occasionally reveals itself.

Existence freely opens up a temporal space within the moment within the framework of singularity. However, this singularity does not deprive the existence of plurality because each singularity occurs in a public space within the space-time framework, and existence always opens this shared space.

Nancy defines this space as "a free space of communication [*un libre espace de la communication*]" where interconnected bodies play a role.⁷⁸ Thus, freedom, an essential aspect of existence, is always an act [*agir*] at the shared limit.

According to Nancy, existence itself is the things themselves, but formulating this is not just a return to Kant but rather a derivation from Jacques Derrida's "*Le devenir espace du temps et le devenir temps de l'espace*" in *Marges de la philosophie* (1972), which he drew from Husserl's phenomenology.⁷⁹ Saying that existence is the things themselves does not render it a pure thought or intellect like in Kant's "God, Freedom,

⁷⁸ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 23-24.

⁷⁹ DERRIDA, J. (1972). *Marges de la philosophie*. Les Éditions de Minuit; 7-8.

and Immortality of the Soul”); instead, it indicates that existence occurs somewhere within the framework of space-time.

Successively existing and becoming aware of oneself are conditioned by freedom, meaning existence and understanding it through freedom, as in Derrida. However, for Nancy, this understanding is not a one-time event; it requires a limited continuity, and the given meaning does not remain fixed.⁸⁰ Thus, we should interpret Nancy's leap of things themselves not so much in Kantian terms but rather as an approach to freedom in a Heideggerian sense.

The quotation from Heidegger also leads us in a similar direction: “*L’essence de la liberté n’est proprement visée que lorsque nous recherchons la liberté en tant que fond de la possibilité de l’être-là, en tant que cela qui se trouve encore avant être et temps* [The essence of freedom is properly aimed at only when we seek freedom as the ground of the possibility of being-there, as that which lies even before being and time]”.

Therefore, freedom emerges as a kind of *primum movens* in the sense developed by Aristotle in Book 8 of *Physics*. The intertwining of freedom with existence and community makes it a matter not of politics or ethics philosophy but instead of ontology in an Aristotelian sense [*éleuthérologie*].

Nancy, drawing from Derrida and seen in Husserl, acknowledges the spatial-temporal nature of existence, considering it as an element of being, but still resists examining freedom from an idealistic framework: “[...] *la liberté en tant que chose même de la pensée ne se laisse pas approprier, mais seulement “pirater”*: sa “prise” sera toujours *illégitime*. [The freedom as the very thing of thought cannot be appropriated, but only “hacked”: its “seizure” will always be illegitimate.]”⁸¹ Here, freedom is proposed as an originless first cause to depart from the notion of essence. From this, we can infer

⁸⁰ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 24.

⁸¹ *ibid.* Fragments.

that while Nancy prioritizes freedom as a fundamental philosophical issue, he does not confine ontology to individual freedom.

Understanding this can be gleaned from his reference to *ethos* in ontology. Nancy suggests that including *ethos* in ontological inquiry does not correspond, as commonly thought, to the “development of moral consciousness.” And it must not be so because, according to Nancy, unless the concept of *ethos* encompasses both community and existence, it is impossible to contemplate what Goodness truly is.⁸²

When we consider common existence through its finitude and mortality, we observe that community indeed significantly influences the ontological structure of existence.⁸³

This situation should not be interpreted as a binary of singularity versus plurality, and it's important to emphasize that Nancy does not prioritize one over the other. When one is prioritized over the other, as Nancy pointed out in his *CD*, the problem of immanentism arises, leading to a metaphysics that self-produces and conditions itself rather than a philosophy or free thought.⁸⁴ Therefore, it would be more consistent for Nancy to prefer a formulation such as “What does it mean to already and always be in common?”⁸⁵ instead of posing a question that forces us to consider community as an essence and determine a starting point in community. Thus, the ontic foundations of the concept of community are not constructed from overarching determinations such as God, race, culture, etc., as in the preceding philosophy.⁸⁶

What does freedom entail within this framework of interrelatedness? Does the Kantian theory completely invalidate such a conception of freedom? Is it possible to find traces

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; IX.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*; XI.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*; 31.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

of this idea in Nancy's conception of freedom, developed concerning Heidegger's interpretation of Kant?

2.4. FREEDOM AS AN ONTOLOGICAL PROBLEM

Although Nancy directs a Heideggerian critique towards Kant, he does not entirely set aside Kant's philosophy with a gesture similar to Heidegger's. Therefore, Nancy's effort in the previous section is not so much about critiquing Kant's philosophy of the subject but rather about analyzing Kant's questions from within his metaphysics, revealing the ontology he believes is hidden within Kant's thought. At this point, Nancy quotes from Heidegger's lecture titled *The Essence of Human Freedom*, given in 1930⁸⁷:

*La causalité, au sens de la compréhension traditionnelle de l'être de l'étant, dans la compréhension vulgaire comme dans la métaphysique traditionnelle, est précisément la catégorie fondamentale de l'être en tant qu'être-sous-la-main. Si la causalité est un problème de la liberté, et non l'inverse, alors le problème de l'être, pris absolument, est en soi un problème de la liberté.*⁸⁸

[Causality, in the sense of the traditional understanding of the being of beings, in both common understanding and traditional metaphysics, is precisely the *fundamental category of being as present-at-hand*. If causality is a *problem of freedom* and not the other way around, then *the problem of being, taken absolutely*, is in itself a *problem of freedom*.]

⁸⁷ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 31-32

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*; 32.

According to Nancy, in this passage, Heidegger follows Kant's lead to reverse the relationship between freedom and causality, stating that the problem of freedom is an ontological issue. Through this reversal, Heidegger regards freedom as free will, as in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, where freedom as a will is considered a specific state of reality and assumes that practical reason is nothing other than that will.

However, for Nancy, the limitation of freedom to will corresponds not only to practical reason but to pure practical reason because the essence of willing implied by will is to be desired, and similarly, the essence of the one who wills is to fulfill the duty of its being-there, referring to Heidegger's "*das Sollen seines Da-seines*."⁸⁹ Existence desires only itself and manifests the will of its existence.

Therefore, constraining freedom to will by pure practical, as Kant did, reason leads us to define freedom as a phenomenon that refers to and affirms itself, excluding it from the realm of experience from its empirical actuality. Later, this absence will lead Heidegger to suspend the problem of freedom, but we will examine this later.⁹⁰ For now, let us suffice to say that, for Heidegger, freedom is limited to pure practical reason and that pure necessity is effectively desired [*das rein Gesollten*].⁹¹ So, it was not rejected at the beginning of his philosophy.

2.5. TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCE AS ECSTASY [EXTASE]

Nancy suggests that when we characterize freedom as a self-directed desire, as in the previous philosophy, we might fall into the illusion that freedom is an immanent experience. However, the will to exist is a transcendent experience that emerges by grasping and surpassing itself. Its transcendence arises from existence being an

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*; 34

⁹¹ *ibid.*; 35.

experience of limits. When delineating the field of experience, we refer not to a self-closing essence but to an expression at the limit. In this sense, Nancy's radical notion of transcendence proposes a view of being as always external to itself, avoiding inherent closure. Thus, transcendence is a passage between singularities.⁹² However, without positing an external object, this transcendent act of limit becomes a self-referential action, leading to the consideration of subjectivity as a relation with itself and ultimately nullifying subjectivity.

Claiming that freedom is an ontological issue implies that we cannot determine existence as a pure will without discussion, as in subject metaphysics. It is precisely because of the necessity of this external object that Nancy assumes the community of singularities. Since every existence is shared, we cannot speak of existence as the reflection of one entity onto others, as in subject metaphysics. Similarly, we cannot speak of plural existences that exclude each other.⁹³ Moreover, the community of singularities is based on the decision-making aspect of existence, showing the will to decide. Therefore, freedom as existence does not appear as a moral duty, as in Kant, because it is no longer about the individual's duty to practicality but as the decision to comply with the law of existence.

Nancy then discusses the concept of *Setzung* in Kantian metaphysics, addressing §76 in *CJ*. According to this paragraph, the limit crossing is not a "Position" but a kind of "positioning," a distinction that Nancy argues is overlooked by Heidegger.⁹⁴ What difference in meaning does it create for freedom as a transcendent limited experience, to be not a "Position" but a "positioning"? Initially, this shows us that freedom is not fixed. Existence itself is not simply placed [*Gesetzt*] into being but is in motion, constantly manifesting itself. Therefore, existence is an experience of positioning at the

⁹² *ibid.*; 36

⁹³ *ibid.*; 37

⁹⁴ *ibid.*; 37-38; HEIDEGGER, M., (1973). Kant's Thesis About Being (T. E. Klein, and W. E. Pohl, Trans.). *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 4(3), 7-33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43154946>

limit and settling into the world. This situation confuses “the factuality of freedom” and “the reality of existence.” The free positioning of existence shows us that it is not a *poiesis* in the Aristotelian sense but a *praxis*.⁹⁵ In *poiesis*, the agent is positioned outside existence, whereas *praxis* produces its agent. Building on this, Nancy engages in wordplay, stating that people are not born free but into freedom infinitely. Despite disagreeing with Heidegger's *Kant's Thesis about Being*, Nancy remains faithful to his interpretation of freedom as an ontological intertwining with life in an Aristotelian sense and quotes from *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*⁹⁶:

*La question : comment la liberté est-elle possible? Est absurde. Il ne s'ensuit pourtant pas que demeure ici dans une certaine mesure un problème de l'irrationnel, mais, parce que la liberté n'est pas un objet de la saisie théorique, et qu'elle est bien plus un objet du philosophe, cela ne peut rien signifier d'autre, que ceci que la liberté n'est et ne peut être que dans la libération. Le seul rapport adéquat à la liberté dans l'homme est le se-libérer de la liberté dans l'homme.*⁹⁷

[The question: How is freedom possible? is absurd. However, it does not follow from this that there remains a problem of the irrational here to some extent. Because freedom is not an object of theoretical grasp and is much more an object of philosophizing, it can only mean this: that freedom is and can only be in liberation. The only adequate relation to freedom in man is the self-liberation from freedom in man.]

⁹⁵ ARISTOTLE, Book I. *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁹⁶ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 39.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

2.6. NON-CATEGORICAL FREEDOM: FREEDOM AS AN ONTOLOGICAL TURNING OR AS THE FOUNDATION OF FOUNDATIONS

While Heidegger draws ontological thought from Kant, Nancy identifies a kind of hesitation in the stage of freedom philosophy developed by Heidegger. Although Heidegger, like other thinkers such as Spinoza, Kant, Schelling, Hegel⁹⁸, and Nietzsche⁹⁹ already acknowledges freedom, his difference lies in elevating freedom to the fundamental question of metaphysics: “*la question fondamentale de la philosophie, dans laquelle même la question de l’être a sa racine* [the fundamental question of philosophy, in which even the question of being has its root.]”¹⁰⁰ Thus, Heidegger opens up a distinct space for freedom.¹⁰¹ Unlike others, Heidegger does not conceive freedom as merely a thought or concept. Nevertheless, as we also touched on in the Introduction section, freedom gradually loses its significance in Heidegger’s thought, leading to oblivion. In this sense, Nancy quotes Adorno, stating that freedom has “aged,”¹⁰² and it is time to liberate it. Nancy understands this “aging” in two senses: 1) freedom is “aged” in Heideggerian thinking; 2) freedom is “aged” in our times. Therefore, like Heidegger’s reinterpretation of Kant, Nancy conducts a retrospective reading to thinking of freedom and seeks to make freedom thinkable in the perception of existence.

Nancy does not systematically examine Heidegger’s thought but instead seeks to identify the areas where thoughts on freedom emerge and to trace the source of this “aging.”¹⁰³ For this purpose, he will traverse the historical stages of freedom in Heidegger: Before designating the question of freedom as the fundamental issue in the

⁹⁸ HEGEL, G. W. F. (1939). *Phénoménologie de l’esprit*. Tome II. Paris. Aubier; 311.

⁹⁹ NIETZSCHE, F. (1996). *Human, All Too Human : A Book for Free Spirits* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.). Cambridge University Press; § 11.

¹⁰⁰ In the cited work: HEIDEGGER, M. *Gesamtausgabe*; 300; as well as in §§57-58 of *Sein und Zeit* there is a summons of doubt which provokes and calls forth Dasein towards freedom.

¹⁰¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 53

¹⁰² HORKHEIMER, M., & ADORNO, T. W. (2002). *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. (G. S. Noerr, Ed., E. Jephcott, Trans.) Stanford University Press.

¹⁰³ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 54

Gesamtausgabe, Heidegger began to develop thoughts on the freedom of *Dasein* in *BT* (1927) and the lecture series *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik* in 1928. In fact, in the same lecture, he stated that the transcendence of *Dasein* is identical to the transcendence of freedom. In his work *On the Essence of Truth*, published in 1930, he thematically evaluated freedom as “freedom for grounding” and subsequently as the “ground of grounds.” And precisely because it is this ground [*Grund*], freedom is what is distant from the foundation [*Abgrund*]¹⁰⁴ of human reality.¹⁰⁵

In his 1930 lectures, Heidegger, as he had already mentioned due to the ontological transformation, attempted to liberate freedom from the category of causality.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, he defined it as “*Archi-fondement* [Foundational-Arch],” seeing it as a foundational aspect that overflows and exceeds its limits.

Throughout all these endeavors, Heidegger seeks a transformation within the philosophical tradition. We can cite texts like *Kantbuch* (1929) and *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) as examples. In his latest work, he emphasizes that without freedom, knowledge cannot bring about the emergence of being. Thus it is an ontological problem:

L'être de l'homme, étant nécessité de l'appréhension et du recueillement (de l'être) est engagement nécessaire dans la liberté qui assume la technè, la mise en oeuvre de l'être par le savoir. C'est ainsi qu'il y a l'histoire.

¹⁰⁴ *Ab-* prefix in German signifies being away from something. Therefore, *Abgrund* carries both the meaning of being distant from the foundation and, in German, also conveys the meaning of an abyss or chasm.

¹⁰⁵ HEIDEGGER, M. (2003). *Questions I et II* (J. Beaufret, Trans.). Éditions Gallimard; 157.

¹⁰⁶ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 54-55.

[The being of man, the necessity of apprehension and gathering (of being), is a commitment to freedom that assumes *technè*, the implementation of being through knowledge. This is how history exists.]"¹⁰⁷

2.7. SCHELLING'S STRUGGLE: THE CHALLENGE OF UNSURPASSING KANT IN HEIDEGGER'S PERSPECTIVE

Heidegger began articulating his views on Schelling's philosophy in his lectures of 1936. While Schelling emerges as one of the philosophers of German Idealism who imbued freedom with a sense of finitude, Heidegger critiques Schelling's failure to transcend Kantian thought.

Before that, Heidegger revisits the concept of freedom within the tradition of German Idealism in his lectures on Schelling. In this reexamination, Heidegger identifies a possibility of the actuality of freedom in Schelling, characterized by its own actuality, as cited from Nancy: "*La nécessité grâce à laquelle - ou mieux, en tant que laquelle - l'être-libre se détermine est la nécessité de l'être propre* [The necessity by means of which - or better, as which - the free being determines itself is the necessity of its own being]." On the following page, he also defines freedom as self-apprehension and self-transcendence, attempting to present Schelling's thought as more original than it appears.

However, Heidegger finds Schelling's treatment of finite freedom unsatisfactory, as it fails to reflect upon the finitude of being. Consequently, Heidegger accuses Schelling of not surpassing Kantian metaphysics due to his conception of good, evil, and the necessity of freedom.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ HEIDEGGER, M. (1958). *Introduction à la métaphysique*. Paris. Gallimard, p. 175.

¹⁰⁸ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 55-56.

Nancy extrapolates two conclusions from Heidegger's lectures in 1930: 1) human essence and non-essence occur within history as freedom, and 2) Schelling does not penetrate the finitude of being.¹⁰⁹ Subsequently, in his lectures of 1941 and 1943, Heidegger positions Schelling's philosophy merely as a temporary stop within Kantian metaphysics, thereby losing its status as the most original thought on freedom. This stance reflects his endeavor to transform the ontology presented by Kantian metaphysics within the philosophical tradition. However, by 1943, the significance of freedom diminishes in Heidegger's discourse.

As early as his *rectoral address* of 1933, the distinction between freedom and the concept of freedom had started to blur, distancing from its actuality.¹¹⁰ Heidegger posits metaphysical freedom as a primary cause, presenting being as the cause of itself [*causa sui et mundi*]. However, this judgment concerning being merely touches upon it without delving into its essence.

The concern of metaphysical judgment with being is not about being itself but its mode of being, engaging with its subjectivity. Heidegger's emphasis on beings as a mode of Being gradually obstructs freedom from being the fundamental issue in ontology. Consequently, freedom begins to be neglected within Heidegger's ontology.

2.8. FORGETTING AND ABANDONMENT OF FREEDOM BY HEIDEGGER: THE UNVEILING OF DASEIN

As mentioned earlier, Nancy observes Heidegger's neglect of freedom in *The Essence of Truth*, published in 1943. A quest for more genuine freedom drives this neglect. It necessitates abandoning freedom to unveil the veil of being and to assert its

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*; 56-57.

¹¹⁰ LACOUE-LABARTHE, P. (1968). La transcendance finit dans le politique. *L'imitation des modernes*. Editions Galilée et GRANEL, G. (1985). Pourquoi nous avons publié cela. *De l'Université*. Editions Trans-Europ-Repress.

manifestation.¹¹¹ Furthermore, with the proposition of submitting to being, freedom will no longer bear the same name.¹¹² Nancy notes the absence of emphasis on the motif of freedom in Heidegger's works following this publication.¹¹³ He no longer dedicates a distinct space to it. Nancy interprets this act of forgetting, which removes freedom from the truth of being, as a withdrawal of meaning and existence.¹¹⁴

Nancy's stance of distancing himself from Heidegger is not limited to the issue of freedom; in an article published in 1994,¹¹⁵ he examines a similar issue. In his writing, he analyzes Heidegger's connection to Nazism and emphasizes the reflections of these connections, noting that they manifest themselves already in *Being and Time*. He highlights Heidegger's turn towards a heroic authenticity in the name of truth in that work, finding it in a pure state of existence. Consequently, this leads to the emergence of everydayness as an issue and, ultimately, to forgetting freedom. However, Nancy acknowledges that Heidegger still teaches us about everydayness and emphasizes the importance of his philosophy for the same reason. He defends the idea of "deciding on existence" in Heidegger's thought within his own framework.¹¹⁶ Nancy's criticism focuses on the critique of the emergence of being's existence by excluding everydayness.

Nancy asserts that Heidegger's entire purpose of being-towards-death is based on demonstrating that the self is not a subject. Furthermore, he points out that *Mitsein* never encompasses being-towards-death, suggesting that this needs to be rethought.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 60.

¹¹² *ibid.*; 59.

¹¹³ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 59; note de bas de page ; HEIDEGGER, M. (1980). *Essais et conférences* (A. Préau, Trans.). Éditions Gallimard; 44, 175, 312, 334 et HEIDEGGER, M. (1976). *Acheminement vers la parole* (J. Beaufret, W. Brokmeier, F. Fédier, Trans.). Éditions Gallimard; 202.

¹¹⁴ LINDBERG, S. E. (2022) Pourquoi Jean-Luc Nancy n'est-il pas un phénoménologue? *Lignes*, 68, 225-332. Handle. <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3422653>

¹¹⁵ NANCY, J.-L. (1994). Entretien. *Le Monde*, le mardi 29 mars.

¹¹⁶ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 80.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*; 80-81.

Therefore, by withdrawing meaning and existence, Nancy seeks freedom in the distance between finite existence and *Mitsein*.

2.9. TOWARDS THE THOUGHT OF SINGULARITY

Nancy suggests that when Heidegger states: “*la liberté est le retrait de l’être* [freedom is the withdrawal of being],” he also implies “*l’être est le retrait de la liberté* [being is the withdrawal of freedom].”¹¹⁸ Nancy interprets this as the withdrawal from the theoretical to the practical and argues that Heidegger’s forgetting of freedom is inevitable. He demonstrates that this indicates a distinction between freedom and truth despite Heidegger’s assertion in his definition of freedom. However, Nancy, without entirely abandoning Heidegger’s thought, poses an important question: whether we can instrumentalize the withdrawal of being and the emergence of freedom to defend the singularity of existence.¹¹⁹

In this regard, Nancy observes a leap in Heidegger’s *The Principle of Reason* (1956):

Le saut demeure une libre possibilité de la pensée; et cela d’une façon si nette que c’est seulement arrivé à l’endroit du saut qu’on voit s’ouvrir la région où réside l’essence de la liberté.

[The leap remains a free possibility of thought, and this in such a clear way that it is only when one arrives at the place of the leap that the region where the essence of freedom resides becomes visible.]

In this text, Heidegger attempts to transcend theoretical reason and engage in a theoretical inquiry as a *Grund* [foundation] for reason. Without explicitly stating it,

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*; 61-62.

Heidegger opens up a free space for freedom here.¹²⁰ This space had already been opened up in his work *Letter on Humanism* (1946): “*La dimension libre où la liberté ménage son essence*”; ((1966). *Questions III*. Paris. Gallimard; 122). From this statement onwards, he speaks of freedom not as a substance but as a quality of a foundation. Thus, he restricts the semantic meaning of freedom to the adjective “free.” Therefore, Nancy argues that the space opened up for freedom is not a sincere one.¹²¹ In this regard, he suggests that perhaps we must set aside the concept of being to call forth freedom. Consequently, Nancy’s concept of singularity diverges not from *Dasein* or existence in the Heideggerian sense, but in his view, singularity is a phenomenon based on existence and the present.

Nancy reiterates this position in *Homme et sujet* (1992). Moving away from thinking about existence signifies a departure from Heideggerian existence and a detachment from Kantian self-constituting existence. He asserts that the self-constituting subject in Kantian philosophy derives from the idea of things themselves. Similarly, in Heidegger’s thought, *Dasein*’s self-constituting existence originates from this source. Therefore, Nancy’s initial critique of these two philosophies is directed against the concept of things themselves and the idea of a self-constituting *Dasein*. For Nancy, the juxtaposition of freedom and the concept of existence becomes untenable because both philosophers’ views contain contradictions regarding their inquiries into existence.¹²²

Nevertheless, Nancy notes that in Heidegger, the worldly nature of the subject is more pronounced because the subject manifests itself not in its relationship with objects but in its being thrown into the world, thus defining itself as a groundless existence in contrast to Kantian philosophy. In groundless existence, the “self” remains subject to influences that do not belong to itself, and the act of differentiation delays its existence. Therefore, existence is already trapped within this movement of differentiation even

¹²⁰ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 62.

¹²¹ *ibid.*; 62-63.

¹²² DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 102.

before it becomes actualized.¹²³ After modifying the groundless existence in Heidegger, Nancy sees singularity as hidden within a movement of differentiation in both philosophies.

However, according to Nancy, existence has an utterly singular place, and its groundlessness, unlike in Heidegger, should not lead to being trapped in a movement of differentiation. The groundlessness of existence is itself an essenceless, finite, infinite differentiation. This singular existence constitutes countless moments where being emerges and appears. Nancy asserts that his existence is singular, going even further to claim that existence does not belong to him but occurs countless times in his singular actions.¹²⁴

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 63.

THIRD CHAPTER: RECALL OF FREEDOM

3.1. FREEDOM RECALLED BY WRITING

In this chapter, we will observe how Nancy elucidates that freedom is not a constituent of the political or practical domain but rather an ontological concern through the framework of metaphysics' two foundational questions. When we delineate freedom as an ontological issue, the following question arises: Does the exclusion of freedom from the political domain not lead to its displacement beyond the realm of experientiality, or if freedom's realm of experience is not political, where does it reside?

As previously noted, Kant accords freedom as a separate status to render it possible within the practical domain. The concept of freedom is initially acquired sensually, transforms into a pure concept as a residue of thought, and becomes legitimized within the practical domain through the categorical imperative. This concept is affirmed as a pure idea, and it can only be acquired through another pure concept, such as God. Considering Kant's notion that the phenomenal realm is conditioned by the noumenal realm and recognizing that the separate status granted to freedom at this point does not alter anything, concepts related to infinity, such as freedom, attain legality within the finite realm only through the categorical imperative, leading them to emerge as a necessity. Nancy identifies two fundamental issues: 1) Complex methods, such as granting freedom a distinct status from other concepts, do not adequately address the problem of freedom in philosophy. Because thinking of freedom as a concept, even in a different status, leads us to overlook its factual nature. The fundamental answer to the problem of freedom lies in its being a part of our existence without deciding how it will be represented. 2) When we define freedom first outside the empirical realm as in Kantian philosophy and then discuss its applicability in the political domain, we are compelled to assert, on metaphysical grounds, that it can only be possessed by a God who embodies the characteristic of a universal subject. This reduces freedom to a matter of will in practice, as the right to freedom is granted to the one who governs best

within the causality in which it exists, and the only possessor of such a right is the omnipotent God. The solution to this problem also lies in the lack of ontological resolution of freedom. So, how does this event, which we can call ontological resolution or analysis, occur? What characteristic distinguishes it from the practical domain in Kantian terms?

To claim that freedom is a matter of ontology rather than the practical domain implies, first and foremost, that it is not an object of knowledge, not a concept. Without being an object of knowledge, freedom cannot be defined legally or politically and cannot be made into an element of individual rights. In a sense, freedom is liberated from being part of a will economy. Since everyone is inherently free to exist, freedom cannot be given or taken away through legal regulation. Despite being something that cannot be taken or restricted, Nancy does not speak of freedom as an infinite freedom that only a God could possess. Because every existence is shared and cannot exist without another, freedom always occurs within a community framework and is ontologically already limited. Through this freedom, I constantly project myself and recreate myself, and I am free to reproduce this within the framework of community again and again. Therefore, by removing freedom from the political domain, Nancy asserts that freedom is not a matter of volition concerning how a subject should act upon an object but rather emphasizes that it emerges as an empirical experience of existence. So, how can this experience of existence be reiterated, affirming freedom in factual terms? If freedom is realized through the community between singularities, where is the domain in which community is acquired and freedom is realized?

While Nancy may have excluded freedom from the realm of knowledge when considering it as an ontological matter, he does not deny its thinkability. Thought derives from freedom, as I can think because I am free. What makes a thought a thought is the moment it is shared, spoken to someone, or communicated. Therefore, thought does not exist as a meditative process or a spiritual tool but becomes thought only when it enters into a shared space. In this sense, Nancy reserves a separate place for writing,

where the thought is inscribed. It is worth noting that this separate place remains somewhat ambiguous because, as evidenced by Nancy's shift towards fields such as art and aesthetics in his works following *EL*, he seems to prioritize writing as a creative space rather than just a means of inscription.

Moreover, as words take on different meanings with each reading, writing offers a space for free communication. Thus, each time we participate in existence, we become part of a shared existence. In this sense, writing is valuable as an experiential domain where freedom is reflected.

Yet Nancy does not regard writing or art as part of a divine creative process. His preferred definition emphasizes that they are more of an experience of existence than acts of creation. For Nancy to assert that writing is an experience of existence, he seeks first to answer what existence means. In this regard, he poses the two fundamental questions of metaphysics.

The first fundamental question is, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”; the other one is (assuming an all-powerful God exists), “Why is there evil?”¹²⁵ Nancy argues that the first question addresses the classical problem of identity in metaphysics, which subsequently evolves into the question “What is the Being of beings?” emphasizing that this issue concerns existence. On the other hand, he asserts that the second question arises from an ethical concern, as it identifies evil as a problem. While one question emerges from an ontological inquiry and the other from an ethical concern, both questions ultimately revolve around fundamental inquiries into existence and the essence of existence, which includes freedom. This is because for me to exist, I must affirm existence, and for me to be free, I must address the reasons for evil despite assuming the existence of a Supreme Good and regulate reasons behind evil.

¹²⁵ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 13-14.

Nancy opts for a different strategy rather than directly seeking answers to these two questions. Through these questions, he inquires why existence is affirmed and abandoned in a single gesture. If I need to be free to exist, he poses a different question: why do I need the judgment of a Supreme Good to be free? The contradiction in how these two questions are asked lies in metaphysics finding its answer in the search for substance when the question of existence is posed. This substance, determined as a transcendent entity beyond time, not deriving its source from the realm of experience, is cast out of thinkability as a residue of thought. Therefore, Nancy remarks that pursuing an explanation that transcends all time, instead of explaining existence, turns into a mumbling, a futile speculation.

Rejecting the notion of substance in being, Nancy, like Heidegger's *Dasein*, defines existence through a being-there. However, unlike in Heidegger, the truth of existence is not an emergence isolated from everydayness; instead, the realm of everydayness is existence itself. Therefore, Nancy does not approach existence solely as a mode or assign it a separate mode of being. The ontological trajectory Nancy outlines is thus different from Heidegger's thought.

By including Heidegger, Nancy asserts that contrary to what Western metaphysics assumes, existence cannot be conditioned by a timeless essence and cannot be defined through it. Thus, instead of asking what existence is, a question that can only lead to futile speculation, Nancy suggests experiencing freedom in the realm where ontology demonstrates the factuality of freedom through thought and writing. When freedom and existence are not considered facts, not experienced, or forgotten, they fall into the realm of the unthinkable due to their inability to be defined.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ The relationship between existence and writing is also addressed by the French thinker Maurice Blanchot. Blanchot's works *L'espace littéraire* (1955) and *L'Entretien infini* (1969) are fundamental texts that explore this topic. However, Nancy will not delve into themes such as the moment and death that Blanchot addresses regarding writing in his argument. For Nancy, the temporality of writing stems not from the author's closure of the moment but from its experientiality.

When discussing Western metaphysics, Nancy suggests that alongside Heidegger, we should also consider two other key figures: Descartes and Kant. These figures introduced the concept of the isolated subject, which is not approached through its relationship established within communal existence. They proposed that the subject could establish its theoretical relationship with the world only through the legitimacy affirmed by God. While the isolated subject may appear initially free and possessing will through its relationship with God, it is restricted by being unable to contravene God's laws, thus possessing a limited subjectivity. Therefore, any act of isolation, departure from everydayness, or approach to God does not make existence independent of causality; instead, it deprives existence of its being-in-the-world and its externality. Perhaps we need a theoretical framework for universal knowledge or a single truth. However, according to Nancy, existence and freedom do not require a theoretical framework; they are their ground, and likewise, writing and art are not acts of creating a divine ornamentation but are existential gestures contributions to existence. A piece of writing does not begin, does not end, and does not turn into a work, but it is lived and extinguished as an event, reanimating by differentiation. By attributing a different meaning to existence, not seeking its truth beyond time, Nancy makes freedom possible in its finitude without relegating it to the divine or the transcendent, thus attributing significance to writing that is not sacred but crucial.

Existence can only come into being through its temporality and positioning without being objectified by substance. While the temporality and positioning of the subject are not explicitly addressed in Descartes, they are present in Kant. As we recall, Kant argues in the *Third Critique* that aesthetic judgments are a form of positioning. Nancy suggests that Kant's aesthetic judgments harbor finite freedom, aiming to introduce variability and impermanence to freedom and, subsequently, to existence. However, Kant continues to be a thinker distant from Nancy's perspective because he sees the source of this finite freedom in a noumenal realm devoid of time. Although freedom manifests in our aesthetic judgments, moral causality still affirms it as a pure Idea. This

perpetually leads to dilemmas when considering freedom through Kantian thought, as discussed in the first section. However, freedom is this act of existence; existence is this experience of freedom. We can perceive freedom as a differentiation¹²⁷ act that occurs at the limit of existence. However, unlike in Kant, when we attribute freedom's thinkability condition to things devoid of time and spatiality, Nancy emphasizes the notion that the act of freedom cannot find meaning in theoretical terms, and we again turn the question of freedom into a free will question. According to Nancy, the fact that free will overtakes the discussion of freedom is inevitable in subject philosophy. Such dilemmas drive Heidegger to consider freedom as an ontological issue.

However, Heidegger not only subjected existence but also wrote about the tyranny of truth. According to Heidegger, lifting the veil of truth in poetic narrative entails an opening and closing. The unveiling of truth occurs as a result of abstraction. However, Nancy asserts that words contain truths about everyday life and develop within the logic of freedom. The truth we are referring to here is not a still, unquestionable reality; it is a phenomenon and, therefore, always and already plural. So, the pursuit of truths of freedom lies in the act of writing. And writing is an act in which we engage in everydayness. In everydayness, not in other modalities of existence, the experience of freedom occurs.

Writing is defined as the space where freedom is experienced, characterized by participation in a community. It is an act of self-giving and self-transcendence. In this sense, freedom in writing manifests as a kind of "generosity,"¹²⁸ a self-giving. The freedom that occurs in writing, which gives of itself, thus becomes not only ontological but also an ethical action.

¹²⁷ It's worth noting that in Nancy, the concept of singularity often carries a meaning closely aligned with Derrida's notion of *différance*.

¹²⁸ Actually, the theme of "generosity" was not initially introduced by the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy as we claimed in the abstract of this thesis; for instance, this theme, often associated with ethical engagements, emerges through the concept of *réciprocité* in Derrida's work *Donner le temps: 1. La fausse monnaie* (1991). In a sense, it serves as the adhesive for closeness and proximity.

Given all of this, we may pose the following question to Nancy: If freedom can manifest itself in writing as a phenomenon despite not being a problem of knowledge and does so without gaining legality in the practical realm, is writing an unrestricted, free domain of shared interactions? Without the legality of writing, how can any form of communication truly establish a sense of sharing?

3.2. EXAMINING THE LOGIC OF FREEDOM OR THE POSSIBILITIES OFFERED BY WRITING TO THE THOUGHT OF FREEDOM

Nancy asserts the view that there is no unified whole governing freedom and writing but instead posits that they entail a logic, emphasizing that the words “freedom” and “writing” lack an object and form. He adds that when contemplating a “nothingness” or not thinking of “anything,” we formulated the sentence in two ways to emphasize the formal and everyday meanings of the concept of *rien*. In this, he finds the reason behind the philosophical struggle in contemplating freedom. When we contemplate freedom, it does not emerge as a concept with an object or form; however, philosophy, in its approach to freedom, tends to conceive it as a concept by its habits, thus presenting it as a problem that needs to be philosophically analyzed. Although philosophy never ceases to contemplate freedom, it is not exclusively a philosophical concept; as previously noted, it is a fact of life.¹²⁹ Philosophy has abandoned the inquiry into freedom that s/he started by treating it as an object.¹³⁰

Although freedom consistently emerges as a problem, Western philosophy has nonetheless not ceased to contemplate it.¹³¹ Thus, it is not possible to speak of complete abandonment. However, Western philosophy has attempted to establish it by defining it rather than recognizing its factual nature. Yet, it is freedom itself that constructs

¹²⁹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 85.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*; 86.

¹³¹ *ibid.*

thought with its logic.¹³² Philosophy, as the realm of pure concepts, is generally the domain where foundations are laid. In this sense, it should not be surprising that freedom is also considered a pure concept. This is an artifact of the ability of thought to construct pure ideas. The constitutive nature of thought demonstrates its subjection to logic, and accordingly, individuals are free to contemplate non-spatiotemporal concepts, such as a founding subject or pure concepts, through philosophy.¹³³

The existence of logic to thought suggests that the freedom of thought lies not in rumination but in its intention to think freely. In a sense, freedom is the *primum movens* of thought, driven by its logic and philosophy. However, suppose freedom emerges beyond philosophy as a non-pure concept or as the foundation of the logic of thought. In that case, it is not independent of qualities such as outward interest, generous approach, and sharing. In this sense, writing is an entity in philosophy that can be associated with the concept of eros, and the foundationless foundational aspect of writing, where thought is inscribed and cannot occur without engagement with others.¹³⁴ This subjection to the other necessitates the presence of logic, ensuring its occurrence within a relational framework.

The perspective that intertwines philosophy with writing considering it as a matrix, was not solely introduced by Nancy but had been emphasized earlier by thinkers such as

¹³² *ibid.*; 96.

¹³³ *ibid.*; 86.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*; 87-88.

Nietzsche¹³⁵, Bergson¹³⁶, Heidegger¹³⁷, Deleuze¹³⁸ and Derrida.¹³⁹ In these philosophies, freedom manifests itself in the writing of philosophy. However, this manifestation has always been through the presumed analysis, signification, system, self-foundation, and self-interrogation of concepts.¹⁴⁰ Contrary to speech, writing is demonstrated in philosophy as a domain where the meaning signified is suspended and semantic understanding is prioritized. To give meaning, writing withdraws meaning from it, then restores meaning to it like a gift or an offering [*offrande*].¹⁴¹ These movements of withdrawal and donation enable writing to become an autonomous domain independent of its author. Carrying the dual logic of sharing [*partage*] (as freedom encompasses the notion of community-like existence), meaning manifests itself as an extension of both donation and withdrawal.¹⁴²

Concepts fundamental to philosophy, such as “truth,” “knowledge,” and “objectivity,” do not establish their foundations through pure conceptual formations thanks to logic and freedom. In this sense, these three concepts self-establish and betray the constitutive nature of philosophy.¹⁴³ However, philosophy represents a crucial twist in the exercise of thought; without philosophy, thought cannot access its essence, namely

¹³⁵ For instance, Friedrich Nietzsche, in his work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), examines the fluidity between literature and philosophy through his writing method.

¹³⁶ For example, Henri Bergson, in his work *Creative Evolution* (1907), advocated that philosophy can come to fruition through free and creative expression.

¹³⁷ Heidegger's ontological discovery at the end of *BT*, found through poetic language, particularly in his engagement with Hölderlin's work, stands as one of its most prominent examples.

¹³⁸ In their work *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), written in collaboration with Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze introduced the concept of a rhizomatic structure. This structure anticipates free circulation among concepts instead of adhering to a linear narrative, aiming to lead thought to difference through repetition without confining it to argumentative progression.

¹³⁹ Considering works such as *Of Grammatology* (1967) and *Writing and Difference* (1967), it can be argued that among the mentioned thinkers, Derrida places the greatest emphasis on writing. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida extends the significance of writing to its utmost by asserting that writing is the essence of speech and language. Furthermore, in his other works, he emphasizes the disruption of fixed meanings through the concept of *différance*, highlighting how meaning is both deferred and differentiated.

¹⁴⁰ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 193-194.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*; 195.

¹⁴² *ibid.*; 196.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*; 88.

the experience of freedom or the foundation of logic.¹⁴⁴ Thus, contemplating its essence, the revelation of logic, all of these elements are contributions that philosophy offers to thought. While freedom may not constitute a purely philosophical structure, philosophy enables access to the logic of freedom through its competencies. Indeed, without philosophy, it would not be possible to speak of “logic” at all.¹⁴⁵

[...] la philosophie est "stricte connaissance conceptuelle de l'être. [...] elle ne l'est que lorsque ce concevoir (Begreifen) est en soi le saisir (Engreifen) philosophique du Dasein en vérité¹⁴⁶.

[...] philosophy is the "strict conceptual knowledge of being [...] it is so only when this conceiving (*Begreifen*) is in sync with the philosophical grasping (*Eingreifen*) of *Dasein* in truth.]

However, when philosophy provides the possibility of contemplating the essence of freedom, it tends to attribute the reason for freedom solely to the practical axiom that initiates it. And philosophy is free to do that.¹⁴⁷ However, Nancy demonstrates that in logic, there is fundamentally no single given identity or definition for anything, hence stating that there is no need for an initiating axiom. Thus, accepting freedom as an act that exists in continuity when grounded in logic rather than originating from a pure concept does not entail a contradiction.¹⁴⁸ In this sense, even if philosophy historically abandoned the problem of freedom, philosophy can still think and write on experiential occurrences of freedom. In light of all this, Nancy proposes a new philosophical examination through the lens of freedom so we can discover rooted reasons behind the problem of freedom. Why did it emerge as a problem in the history of philosophy?

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*; 88-89.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*; 89.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*; 88-90.

¹⁴⁸ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 28-29.

3.3. A NEW PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION IN LIGHT OF LOGIC OF FREEDOM

Due to Rousseau's¹⁴⁹ simultaneous consideration of the issues of freedom and society before Kant and his departure from Thomas Hobbes in this regard, he holds a central role for Nancy in contemplating community and freedom. Moreover, akin to Kant, Rousseau evaluates society without recourse to Aquinas' God or Aristotle's unmoved mover¹⁵⁰ when pondering the structure of society. This has led him to define freedom as a starting point, portraying it as a reasonless reason. Nevertheless, according to Rousseau, the modern society, as observable in Nancy's work, comprises singularities in contingent contact with each other and lacks any overarching goal prioritizing experience.¹⁵¹ Therefore, it assesses causality through the lens of human sociability without resorting to the teleological thought founded in Kant's moral duty, emphasizing the primacy of experience.

In the first part of the *CD*, Rousseau emerges as a prominent thinker on modern society. However, it can be said that the precursor, Hobbes, also considers the issue of society to be one of the fundamental concerns, indicating that Rousseau was not the first thinker to address the problem of social life. Hobbes not only fails to differentiate between the perceptions of human life and the self-imposed nature of ancient polis and modern society¹⁵² but also illustrates the difference between the idea of ancient polis

¹⁴⁹ *Du contrat social* (1762) eseri bunun için en önemli örnekler arasındadır. Rousseau, Giriş kısmında da bahsettiğimiz sözleşme filozoflarından olmasına rağmen Hobbes'dan farklı olarak doğal durumu kötü değil, iyi olarak değerlendirdiği ve doğal durum iyi olduğunda insan, Tanrı düşüncesine başvurmadan özgür olabileceği için, Nancy, ona ayrı bir yer vermektedir.

¹⁵⁰ According to the general interpretation in the history of philosophy, these two prominent figures develop the concept of substance by attributing existence to a necessary first cause, despite the ongoing changes in the world: cf. AQUINAS, T. Prima Pars, *Summa Theologica*; ARISTOTLE, Book XII (Lambda) 6-9, *Metaphysics*.

¹⁵¹ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 33.

¹⁵² Hobbes does not explicitly use the term "ancient polis"; however, since he discusses a pre-social stage in the formation of society, it is generally interpreted as referring to such a concept when describing

as the natural state of humanity and the concept of personal excellence in modern society. Modern individuals strive for more radical freedom than those in ancient times. They seek to achieve this by liberating themselves by pursuing individual ambitions and interests rather than living a politically harmonious life following their natural state. Thus, freedom becomes a characteristic of modern individuals. When freedom is defined as the realization of individual interests, it ceases to be the harmonious political life of ancient times and becomes an experience where evil is acquired. With the attribution of such value to evil in Hobbes's thought, society transitions into a life far removed from the natural state, where freedom is suspended. According to this view, the fear of death drives individuals away from their natural state, compelling them to maintain social life at all costs to escape the free evils of the natural state. Therefore, the fear of death serves as the adhesive function of the community. Thus, from Hobbes onwards, death is the foundational basis of partnership. To escape this natural state, a sovereign must establish laws and a contract on behalf of society. Thus, we would be liberated from the problem of social violence, which is a reflection of our natural state. However, according to Hobbes, in modern society, the original society of the natural state has been replaced by a society based on an artificial contract, leading to the negation of social bonds. This negation of social bonds in modernity compels Hobbes to transform individuals into beings who can only live together under the domination of a sovereign entity he names Leviathan, mediated solely through a contract. Although the contract appears to confer sociality upon individuals, its primary function is to protect them from the harms of sociality.¹⁵³

As previously noted in Rousseau's framework, the state of nature corresponds to social life, wherein individuals are inherently free. Thus, social existence does not pose a threat to freedom. Rousseau achieves this by evaluating freedom not in terms of

the process of societal formation; cf. HOBBS, T. (1651) Book I: Of Man, Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery, *Leviathan*.

¹⁵³ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 70-71.

fulfilling individual interests but rather as pursuing a happy life for humanity. Consequently, individuals, bound together by their shortcomings and incapable of living otherwise, can sustain their freedom amidst social disparities.

Rousseau does not directly adopt the concept of the political animal [*zôon politikon*] as seen in Aristotle due to its perceived inadequacies.¹⁵⁴ Unlike in the ancient polis, modern humans are characterized by their opposition to socialization and have lost the attribute of being political animals. Nonetheless, like Hobbes, Rousseau does not subject the antisocial characteristics of modern humans to a contract enforced by a sovereign. Instead, he proposes that social sentiments [*sentiments de sociabilité*], such as sociability, could sustain a social contract. In this regard, Rousseau paves the way for concepts such as happiness and legality found in Kant.¹⁵⁵

Despite this inspiration, Kant does not define the natural state of humans as inherently antisocial. According to Kant, nothing is exempt from being within a community according to his categories, and he argues that no thought about community can be conducted from a position outside that community. Nancy takes this thought further and engages in wordplay, suggesting that Descartes' *ego sum* [I am] is *ego cum*¹⁵⁶ [I am with], implying that every being is in common and being cannot acquire meaning outside of the community. When one considers community, it is always through a sense of togetherness, and it is hardly possible to conceive of community in any other way. Similarly, any thought or expression occurring outside the context of community, according to the necessity of community, is not quite feasible.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Aristotle addresses this issue in his work *Politics*. Rousseau, on the other hand, opposes the view presented in *Politics* by rejecting the notion of the ancient polis as the natural state of humanity in his work *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1754).

¹⁵⁵ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 72.

¹⁵⁶ Nancy does not conduct an in-depth reading of Descartes in *EL*. In his book *Ego sum: corpus, anima, fabula* (1979), he provides a more detailed discussion of Descartes' philosophy. By radicalizing Descartes' thought, he reads it not as that of a philosopher of the subject, but as a thought that disrupts conventional subjectivity.

¹⁵⁷ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 73.

When considering the interconnectedness of existence with community, we can discern that the Kantian subject differs from the modern individual mentioned in Rousseau and Hobbes. Kant does not embark on a quest for a metaphysical proposition that would hold together and serve as the adhesive for community. He does not propose a separate mode of existence, such as the “state of being in common,” because he is already in the community. Hence, Kant, in line with the critique guided by Heidegger, does not evade the ontological question but rather provides an ontological response by not posing it. Just as it is impossible for us to access things-in-themselves [*Ding an sich*] through knowledge, according to Kant, as they remain outside the realm of representation, similarly, we cannot access the essence of existence. We are radically distant from our existence, and it is through the *a priori* categories of our understanding that we can know ourselves as much as the world appears to us.¹⁵⁸ This situation confines us within a social causality before ourselves despite our being the founding subject.

Heidegger, like Kant, presents a transcendent intersubjective domain that surpasses the finite individual. Instead of covering the question of existence with the unity of *a priori* forms, Heidegger argues that the evidence of existence relies on its facticity and cannot be presented beyond its facticity and, therefore, its finitude. Heidegger labels these facts as singular existential events. These events demonstrate that our existence is tethered to our mortality [*Sein zum Tode*] without recourse to an external object, enabling us to analyze our existence from our experience of being without being conscious of it. Every experience is always our own [*Jemeinigkeit*], and we have no choice but to be ourselves.¹⁵⁹ The impossibility of being outside our own experience, the clarity of our mortality within this experience, opens us to the world and others. Thus, we do not first exist and then gain community. It is not possible to be without being-with [*Mitsein*]¹⁶⁰. Heidegger’s advocacy of finite transcendence philosophy,

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*; 75.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*; 77.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*: “*Dasein* is always being with others, and being-alone is a deficient mode of being-with.”

unlike Kant's, stems from the finitude of transcendence due to the finitude of existence, and the transcendent character of *Dasein*, meaning being-there, governs our modes of being-with others. Thus, when we access our authentic communal existence in Heidegger, our existence is grounded, and we are free.¹⁶¹ However, what distinguishes the concept of authenticity in Heidegger from causality in Kant and our attainment of autonomy through it? In Heidegger's thought, does *Dasein* not turn into a separate external object, and does it not reduce freedom again to a question of will?

The inability to positively conceive of freedom outside of free will, its problem of incomprehensibility and unrepresentability, indicates that rather than abandoning this notion, we need to open up space for freedom. The incapacity to represent and understand freedom does not imply its non-existence. Freedom is experienced as a phenomenon, but because we cannot confine it theoretically to causality, it appears unthinkable to us.¹⁶² Nancy suggests that Rousseau's thought is foundational for assuming practical rationality. When we consider freedom as the consciousness of one's sovereignty concerning the sovereignty of other members, grounding legislative authority in the sovereign, as in Kant, in a morally competent subject becomes inevitable. Therefore, the ground provided by Rousseau distinguishes between physical causality and the causality of moral agents. It is this assumption of practical reason based on this causality that urges us to confine the question of freedom within the bounds of will.¹⁶³

When we consider freedom not in its positive sense but rather as a self-grounding first cause in its negative sense, it retains the power to be the reason for chains of phenomena. In this sense, freedom becomes a theoretical concept that is self-conditioning and confined to causality. The subject, as a willing agent acting within its

¹⁶¹ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 78.

¹⁶² NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 65.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*; 65-66.

causality, attains the position of legislative executor.¹⁶⁴ According to Nancy, the will formula follows: “the power to cause the reality of the same representations through its representations.” Thus, reality becomes a constructed, created, performative phenomenon. In this sense, freedom as free will, through its performative nature, possesses the constitutive quality of reality and existence. The idea of freedom as the plan of action of will requires its representation to be able to act, and thus, it seeks to explain freedom through a chain of causality.¹⁶⁵ This leads us to assume freedom is a reasonless cause and a necessity. This situation raises a problem regarding the representation of freedom in the philosophy of the founding subject.

The continuity of the practical domain, which positions itself differently from *praxis* emerging from the philosophy of the subject, being subject to a causality distinct from the physical, has reflections in Western philosophy. The self-sufficiency of the free founding subject in these thoughts has transformed into pure libertarian anarchy, compressing freedom into a realm of representation, subsequently leading to the abandonment of freedom being questioned in philosophy.

Lastly, Nancy, in departing from the paradigm of the founding subject philosophy, refers to Étienne Balibar's “Jus-Pactum-Lex.”¹⁶⁶ In this article, Balibar explains why freedom cannot be discussed in Baruch Spinoza's (1632-1677) *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670). Despite Spinoza's attribution of significant importance to freedom of expression in his thought, Balibar interprets Spinoza as negating freedom by viewing it as the recognition of necessity that underpins the deterministic structure of the universe.¹⁶⁷ Thus, Spinoza, a century before Rousseau, determined freedom as a necessity conditioned by causality and became the first philosopher to intertwine necessity and causality.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*; 66.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*; 66-67.

¹⁶⁶ BALIBAR, E. (1985). "Jus-Pactum-Lex". *Studia spinozana*. Vol. 1.

¹⁶⁷ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 67.

Nancy, advancing beyond the intertwining of necessity and causality in Spinoza, rather than asserting that freedom does not arise from Spinoza, as mentioned in Balibar's article, suggests that defining freedom as a necessity in a Spinozist sense implies that when we depart from causality, the notion of subjectivity cannot be maintained. For when the subject ventures beyond its universality, it is negated.¹⁶⁸ In this sense, while the deterministic structure in Spinoza is significant for excluding the concept of the founding subject, it still subjects freedom to the chain of causality, as is the case in practical reason.

According to Nancy, we consistently find ourselves within the same paradigm when discussing philosophies that address freedom because when something is conceived as an idea, it invariably presents itself as a necessity. He evaluates this issue concerning Hegel: "The idea, assured of itself and relying on itself alone, conquers its own freedom."¹⁶⁹ He suggests that when we fully develop an idea, it achieves liberation, breaking free from causality. He assigns to philosophy the task of achieving this liberation.

Heidegger's engagement at the Davos¹⁷⁰ conference similarly attempts to relegate freedom back to the practice of "philosophizing." Our engagement in philosophy arises from our need for inquiry. If philosophy overlooks the facticity of freedom in its practice, then philosophy, as a form of inquiry, must question freedom differently. It should step outside the paradigm offered by philosophy.¹⁷¹ Can we conceive of freedom without taking it as an idea? Can its facticity be grasped?

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*; 67-68.

¹⁶⁹ HEGEL, G. W. F. (1969) *Science de la logique* (B. Bourgeois, Trans.), Vol. 3, Vrin; 32.

¹⁷⁰ HEIDEGGER, M. (1998). *What is Metaphysics?* (William McNeil, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.

¹⁷¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 68.

3.4. IS IT POSSIBLE TO THINK FREEDOM?

In this context, we must understand the significance of being able to think, to articulate, and to preserve a thought without carrying it to its ultimate conclusion. As previously mentioned, Nancy asserts in the book's introductory section that the philosophical examination of freedom became impossible during the period in which this book was written due to ongoing political debates. He observes a rupture between the ethical-judicial-political and philosophical spheres of his time. As a result of this rupture, he laments the suspension of freedom and the reduction of life to a linear history devoid of freedom. Deprived of freedom, the capacity to attribute meaning to existence is hindered. Consequently, life is reduced to a mere endeavor of survival, a struggle for existence that has persisted throughout history.¹⁷²

Nancy argues that subjective ontology thus distances us from the meaning of life, and to avoid falling into the same error, he advocates for the development of an ethics of freedoms. He suggests that this ethics of freedoms, contrary to the idea of freedom, will liberate us from our reductive and isolating thought habits. He sees it as the most suitable method in line with the logic of freedom. The ethics of freedoms mentioned by Nancy involves evaluating freedom not as something about the essence of existence itself but rather as the becoming of existence to existence.

Nancy refers to Hegel's prior indication of the thinking problem arising from the ambiguous nature of freedom. He quotes from the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817), §486:

D'aucune autre idée que de celle de liberté, on ne sait aussi universellement qu'elle est indéterminée, ambiguë et susceptible des plus grands malentendus et, par là à même, soumise effectivement à ces

¹⁷² *ibid.*; 42-43.

*malentendus, et aucune idée n'est couramment admise avec si peu conscience.*¹⁷³

[No other idea of freedom is universally known to be so undetermined, ambiguous, and susceptible to the most significant misunderstandings, and thereby, effectively subject to these misunderstandings. Moreover, no idea is commonly accepted with so little awareness]

According to Nancy, the ambiguity of freedom arises when we refer to it solely in negative terms. This ambiguity leads us to the inability to address freedom as it is.¹⁷⁴ When we cannot address freedom as it is, when we cannot think of it philosophically, the conflict of freedoms in contemporary politics becomes inevitable. According to Nancy, this conflict emerges within the conditions based on the exploitation of resources of "Third World" countries and evaluates freedom solely in the context of formal law.¹⁷⁵

Official law, to function, transforms existence into a representation of will, and we can only be as free as will can be represented. Here, the subject becomes a power of determination, and freedom appears as a power of representation. According to Nancy, this leads to establishing existence through similarities, reinforcing the reality of already established representations rather than reflecting on existence itself. Even though Kant forces us to think of freedom negatively, when he defines freedom as free will in the *CRPra*, he reduces existence to these representations: "the power to exist with its representations causes the reality of the same representations."

¹⁷³ HEGEL, G. W. F. (1817). *Encyclopédie des sciences philosophiques* (B. Bourgeois, Trans.). Vrin; §486.

¹⁷⁴ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 43.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*; 43-44; see MARX, K. (2008). *On the Jewish Question* (A. Blunden, M. Grant, M. Carmody, Trans.). Marxists. marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/; and see ADORNO, T. W. (2004). *Negative Dialectics* (E. B. Ashton, Trans.). Routledge.

Despite all these obstacles against the idea of freedom, Nancy asserts that freedom exists both *in actu* and *in potentia*. *In actu* refers to what currently exists and what is happening, while *in potentia* refers to what potentially exists.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, despite all forgettings and abandonments, freedom has continued to be the subject of philosophy. Whether in Descartes' attainment of perfect form with freedom or free will,¹⁷⁷ or in Hegel's "effective and freely willing,"¹⁷⁸ freedom has found its place despite its ambiguity. Although they rely on the philosophy of the subject, reduce freedom to will, and engage in a philosophy of action, the situation remains such.¹⁷⁹ When freedom is reflected as a necessity of substance or essence, as in these philosophies, the subject can be as free as it approaches the absolute subject.

The problem of representation of the subject in all these philosophies leads to the inability to conceive of freedom, as the representation or reflection of infinite Being in finite existence does not seem possible. All these thoughts on freedom lead to a kind of interpenetration, and this interpenetration fundamentally occurs between the clarity of the principle of freedom and freedom itself.¹⁸⁰ However, to truly reach the thought of freedom and consider it an indispensable aspect of existence, one must free oneself from all these and emancipate oneself.¹⁸¹

If we do not conceive of freedom differently, we risk falling into the error of previous philosophies due to the representational limits outlined by subjective ontology. Rethinking freedom thus necessitates rethinking existence as well. When we reconsider existence and take into account that every existence cannot be devoid of ethical

¹⁷⁶ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 44-45.

¹⁷⁷ DESCARTES, R. (2008). Forth Meditation. *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies* (M. Moriarty, Trans.). Oxford University Press.

¹⁷⁸ HEGEL, G. W. F. (2010). *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline : Part 1 : Science of Logic* (K. Brinkmann, D.O. Dahlstorm, Trans.). Cambridge University Press; §478-481.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*; 45-46.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*; 46-47.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*; 47.

concern, it is then that the possibility of discussing an ethics of freedoms emerges. The philosophy of freedom seems to become possible through this ethical maneuver.

In this sense, Nancy, as we can also observe in Hegel, has been assigned the task of transcending the established representations and traditions of philosophy.¹⁸² From this perspective, the ethics of freedoms not only entails rethinking freedom philosophically but also serves the function of revealing the impasses of the established order. Philosophy is capable of doing this by the nature of thought. Unlike in the philosophy of action, the question of will is not raised when we speak of thought. This is because thought does not emerge in the subject; it possesses its freedom. Freedom of thought allows us to encounter surprises when we think of freedom; freedom astonishes us. In other words, we do not have the freedom to think or not to think; we already think freely and thought surprises us, revealing freedom in the experience of thought.¹⁸³

Therefore, the thought of freedom is always already there:

*Mais l'expérience de la liberté a déjà lieu, et il ne s'agit que de ça, et de notre redoutable insuffisance à le "savoir", à le "penser" ou à le "dire".*¹⁸⁴

[But the experience of freedom is already taking place, and that's all there is to it, along with our formidable inadequacy to "know" it, "think" it, or to "say" it.]

When we bring freedom into existence through thought, as no thought will find expression without another, discussing the ethics of freedoms becomes inevitable. Previous philosophies have not only failed to think of freedom but have also turned

¹⁸² *ibid*; 48. HEGEL, G. W. F. (1954). *Leçons sur l'histoire de la philosophie* (P. Garniron, Trans.). Vrin; 21.

¹⁸³ "[...], mais nous sommes libres à la pensée [but we are free to think/but we are free in thought]" NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 48. In French, the adjective form of "liberté" [freedom] means that we are free [*libre*] to do something. Nancy plays on this through a wordplay.

¹⁸⁴ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *Fragments. L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée.

freedom into a necessity, thereby transforming the Good into an obligation. Consequently, freedom has been inevitably reduced to a choice between good and evil, and evil has gained the value of freedom. Another thinker attempting to resolve the impasse of freedom in Western metaphysics, Heidegger, refers to the idea of evil in Schelling to resolve the conflict between finitude and infinity.¹⁸⁵ Although later criticizing Schelling for not breaking away from the Kantian paradigm, Heidegger presents evil as a possibility of accessing freedom because ethical concern is not pursued when dealing with freedom. In this sense, Nancy takes a different approach, attempting to remove evil from the realm of freedom by considering it an assault on existence. While Nancy rejects any transcendent being that lies beyond the realm of experience, he still recalls or does not abandon the notion of the Good due to ethical concerns.¹⁸⁶ The question of the Good remains indispensable to freedom.

3.5. THE DIFFICULTY OF DEFINITION OF GOOD AND EVIL: DOES IT IMPEDE THINKING ABOUT FREEDOM?

Before delving into the proposition that in Nancy, good and evil are not opposed but are interconnected possibilities, it is pertinent to elucidate the expression “*l’axiomatique de l’effectivité spatio-temporelle de l’existence* [the axiomatization of the spatiotemporal effectiveness of existence]” found at the outset of the paragraph. Through this, we will emphasize that existence is *hic et nunc* and that good and evil are simultaneously presented to us. The pivotal term in this expression is *effectivité*; in *EL*, Nancy, while rarely referencing Hegelian thought, elucidates the moment of experience of freedom, the realization of the good or the evil, drawing from Hegel’s *Elements of*

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*; 45.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*; 42.

the Philosophy of Right (1820). Thus, singularities acquire a liberated space beyond causality. We quote:

Ce qui est rationnel est effectif,

*Et ce qui est effectif est rationnel*¹⁸⁷

[What is rational is effective.

And what is effective is rational.]

Hegel's philosophical tradition attempts to establish a correlation between reality, objectivity, subjectivity, freedom, and ideality by pairing the effective with the rational, treating them as a form of creative power, a capacity for action. The active nature of the adjective form of *effectivité*, *effectif*, with its active nature. This indicates the factualness of the rationale. Thus, rationality does not arise directly from a universal truth. Human behavior, grounded in reason, does not become free by acquiring particular external adornments and essences.

Consequently, freedom is sought within the factualness of existence, in the movement of the subject turning inward to contemplate itself, subsequently defined as the effect of self-transformation and self-creation.¹⁸⁸ I find this step crucial in demonstrating the factuality of freedom, as the manifestation of good and evil resulting from human behavior emerges as a concrete expression of freedom. In this sense, we do not first

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*; 45.

¹⁸⁸ In his article "Un hégélianisme sans profondeur," Jean-François Kervégan emphasizes this word. Kervégan, without claiming to conduct a Hegelian reading, primarily touches upon the Hegelian inspirations in Nancy, particularly concerning the notions of contingent existence and *effectivité* found in Hegel. He suggests that Hegel could be interpreted as both the philosopher of absoluteness and contingency. However, independently of this, the singularity of thought in Nancy is read as existence in the form of *effectivité* (this term is used in Hegel to describe how phenomena manifest themselves temporally and spatially, without necessity); furthermore, he discusses how through this term, Nancy defines factual existence that lacks depth and necessity, rejecting anything behind and beyond being. Cf. KERVÉGAN, J.-F. (2004). Un hégélianisme sans profondeur. *Sens en tous sens. Autour des travaux de Jean-Luc Nancy* ; 25-37.

become free and then choose between good and evil.¹⁸⁹ They all occur on the same plane simultaneously.

However, the freedom inscribed within the existence that harbors both good and evil possibilities also engenders the possibility of freely rejecting freedom itself, which ultimately manifests as the destruction of freedom. And rather than as a mere thought, evil manifests itself in reality as the destruction of freedom. Therefore, Nancy does not blur the definition of good and evil; their coexistence does not lead us to overlook the evilness of evil.¹⁹⁰ That is to say, evil, which cannot be thought of separately from evilness and from the possibility of freely rejecting freedom, is not a hindrance to freedom or a view that negates it as a thought. Yes, evil, as it manifests itself as evil, consumes and destroys freedom. It bewilders it; however, the actuality of freedom inscribed within existence allows evil to be revealed as it is. Thus, evil eliminates the uncertainty of evil.

In “modern world history,” evil unfolds in a manner that would “exemplify” it. Nancy deliberately chose the word “exemplify”; he refers to a passage from Theodor Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*, which states: “*Dans les camps, ce n’était plus l’individu qui mourait, mais l’exemplaire* [In the camps, it was no longer the individual who was dying, but the exemplar of it],”¹⁹¹ where the term “exemplar” signifies a type, an idea, a representation of essence in Adorno’s context. Through the term “exemplar,” derived from the concept of essence, Adorno explains how the definitions of the overman and the underman are exemplified in Auschwitz. To present oneself as the exemplum of humanity, the Nazi individual experiences a kind of identification with the overman. Thus, through the definition of the overman, existence is subjected to domination, and those who fall outside the definition are exterminated. In such a scenario - Nancy

¹⁸⁹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 21

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁹¹ For a similar thought, cf. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Heidegger,” *Imitations des modernes*, 1968. “Sur la question du mal”, cf. *infra*; §12.

observes examples in Marx's experience in Manchester, the situation of third and “fourth” world countries, regimes based on racial discrimination, and all forms of fanaticism - freedom is relinquished, and existence is hindered. Because a pre-defined view of humanity leads to establishing an identity through exemplification, neither side can effectively realize their existence materially and intellectually as actors or recipients of evil. Nancy's goal is not to reject identity altogether, to cast it aside from existence; there is a need for identification for self-return and its externalization in existence, but identification should not be perceived as the substitution of essence into existence.¹⁹² Therefore, considering and facilitating free existence by thought requires great attention and openness.

3.6. THOUGHT PRESENTED NOT AS “DISCOURSE” BUT AS “PASSION”

What form of thought is freedom when it presents itself in thought as the self-presentation of good and evil? If freedom is violated where integrity is established, and if others fall under the dominion of a whole, the thought mentioned by Nancy is not a discourse that presents itself as a unified thought. When he says that freedom is thought, Nancy refers to the spontaneity of thoughts establishing a finite relationality rather than the interconnection of concepts within a causal network. And such thought can only manifest itself in passion.

In our present day, the experiences we have gained from modern history—experiences where freedom is consumed and attacked freely, for example, the hunger crisis, wars, massacres, etc.—and our failure to develop theoretical discourse against these experiences rather than plunging us into despair, indicate the necessity for us to strive to extricate the concept of “freedom”¹⁹³ from this impasse. This is possible through

¹⁹² NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 22.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*; 193: “Il n’y a pas “une pensée” de la liberté, il n’y a que des prolégomènes à une libération de la pensée [There is not “a thought” of freedom; there are only prolegomena to a liberation of thought].”

resilience [*endurance*]; resilience, combined with the feeling of hope that allows us to resist the interference of evil with our freedom and consequently our thought, renders freedom experiential.¹⁹⁴ Despite all evils and obstacles, we continue to think about free existence with resilience because of our hope. Nancy argues that every thought harbors this hope and that existence liberates itself. For without freedom, we could not even speak of thought. Therefore, thought is more than an “action”¹⁹⁵; it is a pre-action field. A similar notion exists in Heidegger: He suggests that thought can be conceived not as an “action” but as *agir* because the action will only emerge when thought is relinquished, and even contemplating thought as an action can lead to harm and relaxation [*pâtir*].¹⁹⁶ Thus, the direct reflection of thought into action is considered harmful; during action, instead of fully manifesting itself as in discourse, thought should be shaped by a passion suitable for action.

If a thought does not lead to action, then what is it? How does judgment between good and evil occur between thought and action? If every action entails some form of evil or violation, and if I can only approach the good when I am free in thought and act with passion,¹⁹⁷ how can the actuality and primacy of freedom be measured?

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*; 22

¹⁹⁵ Here, we aimed to emphasize the difference between *agir* and *action* because while the former, through its verb form, entails factuality and experientiality, the latter implies acting in accordance with preconceptions developed as a result of thinking of oneself as an agent.

¹⁹⁶ However, there is an important point where Nancy diverges from Heidegger concerning “freedom” and “thought.” According to Heidegger, these are not matters of public experience and therefore do not manifest themselves in action (*cf. BT*, §5). However, Nancy contends here that engaging in action according to discourse does not pertain to thought. Indeed (we will address this further in subsequent sections), he himself argues that freedom, existence, and thought are public (*cf. Espace publique. EL*).

¹⁹⁷ Here, Jean-Luc Nancy opts to ground the potential to resist against all negativities by using concepts imbued with emotions such as “hope” and “passion,” rather than outright rejecting the question of freedom. Of course, in Nancy’s case, *eros*, which is a familiar concept, should not be read independently from this preference.

3.7. FREEDOM AS LAW AND JUDGMENT: THE ACTUALITY OF FREEDOM

*La loi s'espace d'elle-même en tant que fait.*¹⁹⁸

[The law expands on itself as a fact.]

In this passage, Nancy approaches the notion of freedom as a passion, echoing Kant's perspective in the *Third Critique*, where freedom is conceived as emerging from the senses. As previously argued, this view is not independent of French thought. For instance, Maurice Blanchot, in his work *La communauté inavouable* (1983), asserts that a community is never fully established or completed but evolves within limits imposed by laws. Additionally, in the earlier mentioned work *Faculté de juger*, in which Lyotard, Derrida, and Nancy are co-authors, Kant's emphasis on the sensible is highlighted by Lyotard, with the assertion that the most accurate judgment can only occur through the maturity brought by age. In the same work, Derrida emphasizes that judgment, through indecision, is never final and underscores its spontaneity. Or Levinas, in his work *Totalité et infini* (1961), suggests that the factual nature of freedom operates as a law through the concept of ethical responsibility, thereby advocating for the opening of a weighty space for freedom.

However, Nancy does not directly adopt the views of these thinkers. He considers their emphasis on the function of the senses and adapts it to the concept of singularity. Among these thinkers, we can say that Derrida is the closest to Nancy, particularly in his approach to ontology, which resonates with Nancy's critique of Heideggerian ontology. Despite his resemblance with Derrida and the engagement with Kant's categorical imperative, Nancy enters into a close relationship with Levinasian thought at this stage of the argument. For instance, in Levinas, responsibility as law prioritizes

¹⁹⁸ NANCY, J.-L. (1983). *L'impératif catégorique*. Paris. Flammarion, p. 58.

freedom and existence, whereas for Nancy, existence and the question of the other are intertwined and inseparable due to their factualities. Nevertheless, the senses that bring clarity to responsibility transform ethics from practice into a positioning concerning the non-premeditated factual, as seen in Nancy's work. This is significant for Nancy because he renders freedom factual through Levinasian thought, somewhat instrumentalizing this notion. Instead of focusing on the inconceivability and incomprehensibility of freedom, Nancy emphasizes the impact of the senses on our judgments, suggesting the possibility of a meaning beyond representation.¹⁹⁹ This indicates that freedom, although transcending the realm of representation, is experienced through the senses, influencing my perceptions and directing my judgments. Stating that freedom manifests itself factually in the faculty of judgment, does it not imply a re-alignment with the categorical imperative? When we approach freedom as a law/necessity, we can accommodate it in the faculty of judgment. Instead of departing from the notion of duty in Kant, Levinasian ethics defines the face of the other as a similar necessity. However, despite Nancy's roots in the French philosophical tradition of interpreting Heidegger, he remains loyal to Heidegger's critique and continues his struggle with the manifestation of freedom as a necessity.

*La seule chose que nous comprenions, c'est son incompréhensibilité. Et l'incompréhensibilité de la liberté consiste en ceci qu'elle résiste à la compréhension dans la mesure où l'être-libre nous engage dans l'accomplissement de l'être et non pas dans la simple représentation de celui-ci.*²⁰⁰

[The only thing we understood is its incomprehensibility. And the incomprehensibility of freedom consists in this: it resists understanding to the

¹⁹⁹ NANCY, J.-L. (1983). *L'impératif catégorique*. Flammarion; 58-134.

²⁰⁰ HEIDEGGER, M. (1977). *Schelling : le traité de 1809 sur l'essence de la liberté humaine* (J.-F. Courtine, Trans.). Gallimard; 279.

extent that being-free engages us in the fulfillment of being and not merely in the representation of it]

According to Heidegger, while considered finite in Schelling, freedom is not thought of independently of the imperative, as in the Kantian view. Heidegger suggests that the essence of freedom is the completion of existence. This completion does not involve a representational relationship; instead, it is emphasized that it remains incomprehensible through representations. Its factuality also stems from the incomprehensible nature of this completion.²⁰¹

The limit in representation also leads to a limit in the view of metaphysics. This limit manifests itself in the notions of “understanding the incomprehensible” and “philosophizing.”²⁰² The incomprehensible does not imply a lack of understanding of anything. Incomprehensibility should not be regarded as a sheer obstacle to understanding. Within the nature of non-understanding lies the unreproducibility of the completion of existence. Thus, Heidegger opens the door to a form of understanding beyond representation. This understanding does not remain confined to representation. In this regard, Heidegger queries “knowledge” based on the impossibility of representing the phenomenon. Here, he points towards a different form of knowledge that exists outside of representation. What sets this form of knowledge apart from other forms is its lack of an object due to the non-objectivity of the completion of existence, rendering it devoid of an object. Therefore, it remains beyond comprehension. While understanding the incomprehensible initially suggests a limit in metaphysical thought, it transforms into an auxiliary element in explaining phenomena such as reason, theory, and thought, demonstrating that they can also be presented without an object.²⁰³ Without the incomprehensible factuality of freedom, it would hardly be possible to

²⁰¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 68-69

²⁰² *ibid.*; 69-70

²⁰³ *ibid.*; 70-71

discuss phenomena such as reason, theory, and thought that exist beyond empirical experience.

Kant's recourse to the categorical imperative in establishing the theory of transcendental knowledge stems from grounding knowledge outside the empirical domain. For it is through the categorical imperative that the possibility of humanity being a rational being, acting not on impulses and simple sensations but through reason, is made possible, and the manifestation of pure reason through practical use is also ensured, again through the categorical imperative. Therefore, even in a negative sense, Kant addresses the idea of freedom in the noumenal realm.²⁰⁴ Thus, while Nancy in *EL* expresses a view that seems to diverge from Kant, leaning towards a Heideggerian conception of freedom, in works such as *L'impératif catégorique*, he tends towards Kant. Kant's thought already presents the contradiction and limit between finite existence and infinite imperative. Thus, Heidegger was not the first to notice this contradiction. In Kant, practical ideas of pure thought always encounter a limit and are not realized in their pure form. According to this view, the law constructs and transcends existence because it determines my destination in the realm of noumena under the jurisdiction of finitude. In his work "Dies irae", included in the *Faculté de juger* compilation and later independently translated and published, Nancy also states that autonomy in the Kantian sense is based on such a plurality.²⁰⁵ According to Nancy, Kant's notion of *sensus communis*, as discussed in *CJ*, is confirmed in its directionality.²⁰⁶ Kant has intuited this beforehand. Thus, is freedom a pre-cognitive feeling, and does it prove to us the factuality of existence?

To evaluate freedom within the practical domain, existence must be understood as self-awareness. As discussed in the preceding section, Hegel also emphasizes this point in

²⁰⁴ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 73.

²⁰⁵ LYOTARD, J.-F. (1983). *Le différend*. Paris. Les éditions de minuit, p. 242.

²⁰⁶ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 73.

Elements of the Philosophy of Right.²⁰⁷ When we bring freedom into the practical realm, we integrate it as part of ethical life without subjecting it to a simplistic inter-subjective formula. Therefore, Hegel views self-awareness as a necessary step towards realizing freedom.²⁰⁸

Nonetheless, Nancy maintains that we should not confine ourselves to Hegel's conception of practice, as, according to this perspective, practice emerges as yet another philosophical construct. In the Hegelian sense, dialectics regard freedom or authentic self-awareness as a concept within its operability, not as embodying a comprehensible unity observable within philosophical discourse. However, there is a limit; Hegel designates the State as a point of arrival and presents a practical domain evolving within the framework of laws.²⁰⁹ For Nancy, freedom precedes laws in its essence of existence. Yet, what propels us towards the act of freedom is not our adherence to laws but rather its incomprehensibility and its nature as a limited action. According to the same view, theory also takes the factuality of the phenomenon as truth and similarly grasps the phenomenon by its incomprehensibility.

3.8. FREEDOM AS APPEARANCE, NOT AS NECESSITY

When freedom is not evaluated through necessity, what remains of it? In line with the trajectory presented by Nancy in previous sections, contrary to the philosophers we have discussed, we deemed it appropriate to begin this section by exploring how we can think freely about freedom without attributing necessity to it. In this regard, Nancy states: “*La liberté n'est-elle pas la seule à pouvoir «garder» son propre espace?* [Is freedom not the only one capable of “keeping” its own space]²¹⁰”. According to Nancy,

²⁰⁷ HEGEL, G. W. F. (2013). *Principes de la philosophie du droit* (J.-F. Kervégan, Trans.). Presses Universitaires de France; §142-§257.

²⁰⁸ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 71.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*; 72.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*; 73.

the incomprehensibility of freedom develops independently of the dialectic of incomprehensibility because freedom prioritizes thinking and understanding. Thus, the incomprehensibility of freedom does not indicate a problem within freedom itself but rather brings to light a problem concerning thought.²¹¹ Nancy elucidates the prioritization of thought by freedom and the notion that incomprehensibility is a problem concerning thought by recourse to Hegel, thereby emphasizing the factuality of thought:

*La philosophie est une pensée immanente, actuelle, présente, elle contient dans les sujets la présence de la liberté. Ce qui est pensée, reconnu, relève de la liberté humaine.*²¹²

[The philosophy is an immanent, current, and present thought; it contains within subjects the presence of freedom. What is thought, acknowledged, belongs to human freedom.]

This implies that freedom manifests itself in the immediacy of thought, in its present,²¹³ and detaches itself from the dialectic of incomprehensibility through its indisputable connection with the present moment. Nancy locates the origins of this thought once again in Hegel. However, there are evident departures from Hegel in Nancy's perspective; namely, freedom exists without existence and thought, but existence and thought are impossible without freedom. Nevertheless, in Hegel, existence is freely free, not necessarily by compulsion. However, Hegel suggests that phenomena that emerge freely do so not necessarily but in a manner about existence. According to this view, what is necessary is not existence itself but phenomena. However, this necessity is not static; according to Hegelian dialectics, to speak about something implies assuming its existence. Thus, the states of being and non-being rely on a logical totality

²¹¹ *ibid.*

²¹² HEGEL, G. W. F. (1954). Introduction. *Leçons sur l'histoire de la philosophie* (P. Garniron, Trans.). Vrin; 179.

²¹³ *ibid.*; 74-75.

that affirms each other and manifests in phenomena. In this sense, necessity presents itself as a possibility of an entity that can manifest itself differently each time. Existence as a possibility of necessity is a manifestation; thus, freedom as a phenomenon is always present, but it is not a true necessity due to the finitude of phenomena.²¹⁴

“Toute pensée est donc pensée de la liberté en même temps qu’elle pense par liberté, et qu’elle pense en liberté [Every thought is, therefore, a thought of freedom at the same time that it thinks through freedom and thinks in freedom].” If every thought is a thought of freedom and can think through freedom, then thought is not a realm at the limit between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible. Through its dialectical connection with the comprehensible, the incomprehensible is already a part of thought. The act of freedom also appears to be a limit phenomenon of this kind. However, it is not a transcendence like the one Heidegger uses to define *Dasein* in *BT*. Nancy observes a similar reflex in the thoughts of mystics concerning existence as Heidegger's. Thus, while Nancy extends freedom beyond knowledge, he does not attribute a mystical meaning to it. He perceives the attitude of mystics through the concept of *Schwärmerei* in Kant as close to religious fanaticism and emphasizes a symmetric understanding between them. For Nancy, the thought does not transcend understanding but rather describes a limited position in the dialectic of the comprehensible and the incomprehensible.²¹⁵ In Heideggerian terms, this limit is a kind of “abyss” and assumes thought as the realm of realization of freedom, distinct from foundational being and inherentness. Following a logic of limits, freedom stands at the edge of our capacity for understanding, devoid of origin, in the abyss.²¹⁶

When we say that existence is free, we are not implying a transition from an underlying foundation to freedom but rather stating that it is born in freedom. And at this limit, limitlessness demonstrates the generosity of freedom to us. Generosity arises from its

²¹⁴ *ibid.*; 75.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*; 75-77.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*; 77.

singularity and eventfulness.²¹⁷ Therefore, Nancy elucidates the orientation of freedom with the word “generosity,” which may initially be perceived as a personal attribute. However, “generosity” is a singular-plural concept because it always presupposes another, making it possible to be generous to another.²¹⁸ Similarly, within the logic of boundaries, freedom in existence is inherent before being transcendent: “*La liberté existante n’est pas ek-sistante, mais elle est l’insistance d’un éclat* [The existing freedom is not ek-sistent, but it is the insistence of a burst].”²¹⁹ While Heidegger speaks of a leap into freedom, for Nancy, freedom is the leap into existence. Thus, to free oneself from the inherentness presupposed by every transcendence, Nancy makes freedom the act of leaping instead of leaping into freedom. Therefore, when existence discovers itself as thought, freedom leaps.²²⁰ In the repetition of the leap, existence as the moment where difference is liberated reveals to us that thought is an experience. Within its scope, the experience of freedom is this experience as thought. Unlike Hegel and Heidegger, Nancy distinguishes this experience of thought from reasoning, understanding, immersion in thought, and philosophy.²²¹

3.9. ONTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION OF COMMUNITY

For Nancy, as we have seen, freedom is not achieved through compliance with laws as in Kantian philosophy. The fact that freedom does not denote autonomy, as discussed in the logic of freedom, stems from its lack of objecthood. Therefore, it does not manifest as self-control or the ability to act independently of the community. Although being in relation with others does not prioritize freedom, being-with [*être-avec*] occupies the same space as singular existence. Consequently, singularity, while

²¹⁷ DELEUZE, G. (1982). *Logique du sens*. Editions de Minuit; NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 77-78.

²¹⁸ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 80.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*; 81.

²²⁰ *ibid.*; 81-82.

²²¹ *ibid.*; 82-83.

excavating the time and space where being-with takes place, also implies a relationship.²²²

Nancy, in addressing the question of how singularity, constantly self-creating in motion, distinguishes itself from other singularities, turns to Heidegger's concept of *Jemeiningkeit*. Heidegger employs this concept to describe the ontology of embodiment and singularity, signifying *Dasein*'s self-manifestation as "mine" each time. Thus, in Heidegger, identity formation does not include the founding autonomous subject familiar to Kantian thought. However, as Nancy emphasizes, in the Kantian sense, "I think" finds an empty form of expression, thus leading us to the quest for identity formation through autonomy regarding substance in Kantian thought. Nancy opposes this notion through the concept found in Heidegger.

In the concept of the autonomous subject, we encounter the idea of continuity within the subject, uninterrupted; however, Nancy introduces the notion of a distinction [*intervalle*] through the concept of singularity. Unlike the autonomous subject, singularity always prompts us to think within a pre-existing relationship. For the same reason, the singular is always plural.²²³

Therefore, every being is a being-with, yet this communality does not refer to a relationality between two singularities. On the contrary, it emphasizes that singular existence itself is community.²²⁴ All of this directs us towards the idea that singularity is shared through emancipation. What is at stake in the sharing of singularity is freedom itself, and it is freedom itself that enables *intervalle* instead of *continuum*. Therefore, we are not speaking of an entity emerging from a continuity emanating from a substance; singularity, as it appears as a possibility rather than a necessity, excludes the

²²² *ibid.*; 91.

²²³ *ibid.*; 92-93; for a similar analysis cf. (1996). *La Communauté désœuvrée*. Christian Bourgois Editeur ve en termes heideggeriens une analyse d'Epicure et de Lucrèce: WOLFF, F. (1981). *Logique de l'élément-Clinamen*, Presses Universitaires de France; 256.

²²⁴ NANCY, J.-L. (1996). *La Communauté désœuvrée*. Christian Bourgois Editeur; 8.

notion of substance. Hence, freedom prioritizes singularity but does not establish it, for singularity, with its intervalle, cannot be established. The distinction that emerges in the withdrawal of existence brings it to the surface, and within the same logic, freedom is the withdrawal of existence itself. If freedom is the withdrawal of existence, then it is not something that exists; it liberates the beingness of existence, facilitating the relationship with other withdrawals, thus enabling liberation.²²⁵ However, our freedom is not calculated concerning others. Nancy considers the calculation of freedom concerning others as a kind of illusion. According to him, such a calculation may be possible when lines intersect, but the distance/gap [*espace*] between us and others is infinite and intimate. And it is within this infinite and intimate gap that freedom is experienced. This bond enables the withdrawal of existence from us and brings existence back to the world as singular. Without our connection to others, we would only be talking about the inherentness of existence. However, this is not the case because when we assert the inherentness of existence, it becomes impossible to speak of existence.²²⁶

Nancy asserts that existence is always distributed among the existing, using the concept of being-in-common [*être-en-commun*] in this sense. However, this distribution does not present itself as a substance distributed to entities. Existence itself is this distribution.²²⁷ Nancy uses ontological sharing and singularity of existence interchangeably, and the opening up of ontological sharing by singularities is only possible through freedom.²²⁸ As the logic of sharing, freedom exhibits equal distribution or immediate equality.²²⁹ It signifies that fraternity [*fraternité*], one of the slogans of the French Republic, denotes equality itself in the sharing of the immeasurable.²³⁰ Then, Nancy indicates that the singular “I” also exemplifies the

²²⁵ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 93.

²²⁶ *ibid.*; 93-95.

²²⁷ *ibid.*; 95.

²²⁸ *ibid.*; 96.

²²⁹ *ibid.*; 96-97.

²³⁰ *ibid.*; 97.

sharing of existence. He states that the use of “I” as a subject prioritizes “I,” not as a first person, but as a sharing or partition that makes recording “I” possible.²³¹ It should not be inferred that the singularity (“each time”) is reduced to the relationship between one person and another. Rather, we are speaking of a kind of bond. Singularities exist within the bond that is a consequence of humanity and constitutes humanity, i.e., this bond is established in the withdrawal of existence. Nancy suggests that freedom manifests itself in the form of *humanitas*, but he notes that it does so by drawing it from the essence of humanity.²³² The concept of singularity, through this emancipation in humanity, does not express a notion of inherentness to humanity, which *EL*’s “Fragments” offers us a definition of common belonging to the world:

*Le monde n’est d’aucune façon «pour moi» : il est la co-appartenance essentielle de l’ex-istence avec l’exister de toute chose. Sans quoi l’ex-istence serait seulement idéale, ou mystique... Mais l’existence a lieu à même les choses. Si on approfondi convenablement cette co-appartenance essentielle (du sans-essence), on trouvera qu’aucune chose ne peut être simplement «nécessaire». On ne pourra pas isoler, d’un côté la causalité des phénomènes, de l’autre la liberté nouménale (c’est bien ce sur quoi nous ne cessons depuis Hegel de disputer avec Kant).*²³³

[The world is in no way “for me”: it is the essential co-belonging of existence with the existing of all things. Otherwise, ex-istence would be merely ideal or mystical. But existence takes place within things. If we properly delve into this essential co-belonging (of the without-essence), we will find that no thing can be simply “necessary”. One cannot isolate, on one side, the causality

²³¹ *ibid.*; 97-98.

²³² *ibid.*; 98-99.

²³³ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 202.

of phenomena, and on the other, the noumenal freedom (this is indeed what we have been disputing with Kant since Hegel]

Nancy will also address this question (“How “we” does not turn into an exclusionary unity”) in his book *ESP*²³⁴; here, he simply mentions that this bond, which appears only as a *clinamen*, does not harbor an exclusionary nature touching upon a necessary essence. The ontological nature of freedom also manifests itself in the unfolding of this bond.

3.10. ONTOLOGICAL FREEDOM: WHAT DOES IT SAY ABOUT POLITICAL FREEDOM?

Freedom, before being collective or individual, is singular and common.²³⁵ This is because freedom resembles an external combination of direction and operation before being an internal tendency. Likewise, the concept of subjective freedom that requires autonomy does not seem possible in the space opened up by singular or common freedom. The ability to act autonomously does not necessarily lead to self-legislation, which is a prerequisite for autonomy.²³⁶ On the contrary, freedom provides us with a public space; it provides the public sphere. The political sphere, the first arena where freedom manifests its facticity, emerges through this open space. However, the political sphere does not have the duty or capacity to sustain freedom. The political, thanks to the capacity of opening up space, comes to light,²³⁷ emphasizing, contrary to the philosophical tradition, that freedom is not the subject of politics. This comes from the common immeasurability of beings, and Nancy rejects the idea of justice through the

²³⁴ DEVISCH, I. (2013). *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. Bloomsbury; 67.

²³⁵ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 99-100. For a similar thought cf. ARENDT, H. (1961). *Between Past and Future* (J. Kohn, Trans.). Penguin Classics. In fact, Nancy positions freedom prior to the political realm, thus presenting a critique of Arendt as well.

²³⁶ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 100.

²³⁷ *ibid.*; 100-101.

secondary meaning of reasonableness in French. The common immeasurability of beings excludes such reasonableness²³⁸ because being reasonable does not always guarantee equality and freedom. At this point, Nancy reminds us of Hegel's description of the “bad infinity”; thinkers like Badiou and Arendt approach freedom as a political issue rather than an ontological one, attempting to analyze it within thought, but they can only reach a reasonable idea of freedom. According to Nancy, this situation, like the “bad infinity,” creates a resolution infinitely distant from the representation of reality. Again, according to Nancy's deductions from Hegelian philosophy, freedom, which only presents itself reasonably, becomes a self-affirming illusion devoid of historical gains in thought.²³⁹ To illustrate the notion of reasonable freedom that we are never quite ready for, Nancy refers to a passage from Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), where Kant evaluates the problem of whether humans are ready to be free through the lens of religious freedom:

*J'avoue que je ne m'accomode pas bien de l'expression dont se servent pourtant des avisées : tel peuple (que l'on conçoit en train d'élaborer sa liberté légale) n'est pas mûr pour la liberté, les serfs d'un propriétaire terrien ne sont pas encore mûrs pour la liberté; et ainsi de même : les hommes en général ne sont pas encore mûrs pour la liberté de croire. Mais suivant une telle hypothèse la liberté ne surgira jamais. Car on ne peut pas mûrir pour la liberté si l'on n'a pas été préalablement mis en liberté (on doit être libre pour se servir utilement de ses forces dans la liberté).*²⁴⁰

[I confess that I do not easily accept the expression used, however, by the wise: such a people (conceived in the process of developing its legal freedom) is not mature for freedom, the serfs of the landowner are not yet

²³⁸ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 101; LACOUÉ-LABARTHE, P. (1968). *L'imitation des modernes*. Éditions Galilée; 188; LYOTARD, J.-F. (1984). *Le Différend*. Les éditions de Minuit; 204; BADIOU, A. (1985). *Peut-on penser la politique?*. Éditions du Seuil; 113.

²³⁹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 102-103.

²⁴⁰ KANT, I. (1986). *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*. Édition Pléiade; 226.

mature for freedom, and similarly: men, in general, are not yet mature for the freedom to believe. But according to such an assumption, freedom will never arise. One cannot mature for freedom if one has not been previously placed in freedom (one must be free to use one's powers effectively in freedom.)

This excerpt demonstrates that Kant also benefits from freedom as a regulative idea. It shows that freedom is reduced to an idea that needs to be infinitely realized rather than an empirical reality that stems from focusing not on the beginning but on the end of freedom. Nancy, this time, includes another quotation from Heidegger:

*Le commencement en tant que commencement de l'histoire ne se trouve que là où il y a liberté, c'est-à-dire où un groupe humain se comporte de façon décidée envers l'étant et sa vérité.*²⁴¹

[The beginning as the beginning of history is found only where there is freedom, that is, where a human group behaves decisively towards beings and their truth.]

3.11. DOES FREEDOM RESIST THE IDEA OF COMMUNITY?

*La forme la plus haute du néant pris pour lui-même serait la liberté, mais elle est la négativité en tant qu'elle s'approfondit en elle-même jusqu'à la plus haute intensité, et qu'elle est elle-même affirmation et, à la vérité, affirmation absolue*²⁴².

[The highest form of nothingness taken for itself would be freedom, but it is negativity insofar as it deepens into itself to the highest intensity, and it is itself affirmation, and indeed, absolute affirmation.]

²⁴¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 109.

²⁴² HEGEL, G. W. F. (1969) *Science de la logique* (B. Bourgeois, Trans.), Vol. 3, Vrin; §87.

According to Nancy, Hegel's aim here is to deepen the negativity of freedom in order for a self to be posited. Hegel defines freedom as the intensification of nothingness in the process of selfhood.²⁴³ The inception of freedom points to a kind of pre-dialectical stage.²⁴⁴ The deepening of nothingness does not imply the negation of its nothingness; rather, it densifies it and accumulates the tension of nothingness within itself. This deepening leads to the fusion of nothingness and culminates in the affirmation of nothingness. Freedom as the affirmation of nothingness is exempt from all determinism and necessity²⁴⁵: “*De cette façon, elle n’est ni dans l’indépendance, ni dans la nécessité, elle n’est ni spontanée, ni commandée* [In this way, it is neither in independence, nor in necessity; it is neither spontaneous nor commanded]²⁴⁶.” Hegel also includes freedom in a process of existence, but Nancy, unlike Hegel, does not evaluate freedom as a deepening or affirmation of selfhood. While including freedom in the process of existence, Nancy seeks to define it as a groundless foundation, as a domain of differentiation in existence. Nancy criticizes Hegel for not taking into account the commonality of existence in his deepening, and does not directly adopt his thoughts on freedom. Yes, in both philosophers, freedom conditions existence, but in Nancy's view, unlike Hegel's, this existence is defined as an expression in community rather than the development of a self. And Heidegger maintains the groundless foundation of freedom in his thought: “*L’être-essentiel d’un fondement ou raison* [The essential being of a foundation or reason].”²⁴⁷

The transcendence that realizes freedom is a finite transcendence because the essence of finitude ultimately lies in having no essence. Emerged from a universal essence transcending time, it would not be contingent and limited by time. Existence is this contingency itself. Therefore, we can also speak of finitude in freedom. Moreover, the

²⁴³ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 109.

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*; 109-110.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*; 110.

²⁴⁶ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 111.

²⁴⁷ HEIDEGGER, M. (2003). *Questions I et II* (J. Beaufret, Trans.). Éditions Gallimard; 156-157 ; NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 111.

concept of finite freedom does not only indicate a limit in contingency but is a limit where essence withdraws from existence. Nancy resorts to a complex definition: he states that freedom is experienced on the edge of the abyss as the foundation of the foundational ground; the abyss, which is the foundation of all foundations, arises from its abyssal quality as well as its thoroughness.²⁴⁸ Freedom is the experience of grounding, and the essence of the experience is the act of grounding itself.

Nancy names the act of grounding with the verb *expéirir*, which carries meanings of seduction based on limits and experience. There is no architectonic grounding involved because freedom unfolds as an opening within a field, requiring a topographical assessment for such grounding. Nancy assigns the name *chorâ*²⁴⁹ to designate the act of opening up the space we have described.²⁵⁰ Freedom, in this sense, is a founding activity that opens up a space, a communal activity that grounds community. This non-architectonic founding activity is also the grounding of existence. Thus, the grounding of existence does not precede existence itself. Therefore, while the grounding of existence is implied, it does not evoke a substance, and its lack of substantive expression, though resembling *poiesis* in its founding nature, leads it to be seen as an act bearing the characteristics of *praxis*.²⁵¹ Freedom, emerging as self-transcendence, presents itself as a liberating gesture through its act of limit. This limit activity begins with a moment of decision, but this decision, as observed in Kant, is not made by a founding subject, nor is it a decision that produces an object or engages in activity on an object.²⁵²

Human existence is defined by its being-thrown-into-the-world. Therefore, every existence is a moment of expulsion, of being thrown. Freedom is conceived not as a

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*

²⁴⁹ A settlement preceding the ancient Greek *polis*; a concept that could also be equated with the term “town.”

²⁵⁰ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 112-113.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*; 113.

²⁵² *ibid.*; 113-114.

self-development but as an act of self-giving. Thus, it emphasizes the singularity, uniqueness, and ever-changing nature of the experience of self-giving. In Descartes, the self-affirming subject *ego sum* is said to be a *unum quid*, asserting that in every thought, existence is liberated and changed. However, for Nancy, this singularity does not evoke an internal experience, as in Descartes' introspection. On the contrary, it is an affirmation of existence. So much so that we can only be what we are when our essence withdraws.

However, in Hegel, as long as I am the subject of my own representations, I can know myself and exist. Through this self-awareness, freedom becomes perceptible within experience.²⁵³ Hegel's article "Science de l'expérience de la conscience" also advocates a similar idea; it extends the concept of experience to the necessity of being its own subject. Nancy notes that Heidegger's thrownness of *Dasein* does not follow a different path due to Heidegger's assumption of an essence:

*Il mène cette nécessité pour l'expérience d'être son propre sujet jusqu'à la nécessité pour le sujet d'être en son (in)fondement abandonné à l'expérience, c'est-à-dire à la liberté d'exister.*²⁵⁴

[He leads this necessity for the experience of being its own subject to the necessity for the subject to be, in its (un)foundation, abandoned to experience, that is to say, to the freedom to exist.]

Also: "*l'apparaître en sa propre présence auprès de soi* [The appearing in its own presence beside itself]"²⁵⁵

For Nancy, thrownness into the world is not a moment of crisis but the experience of freedom itself. It is indicative of existence always being free. Being free is not a natural

²⁵³ *ibid.*; 114.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*; 116.

²⁵⁵ HEIDEGGER, M. (1962). Hegel et son concept de l'expérience. *Chemins qui mènent nulle part* (W. Brokmeier, Trans.). Gallimard; 154.

law, nor does *polis* life guarantee us the experience of freedom. However, when we consider every birth as an oscillation of existence, the journey of singularities transforms into a free experience.²⁵⁶ The abandonment of existence in the world is the foundational experience of freedom: “*L’ek-sistence, enracinée dans la vérité comme liberté, est l’exposition au caractère dévoilé de l’étant comme tel* [Ek-sistence, rooted in truth as freedom, is the exposure to the unveiled character of beings as such].”²⁵⁷

The idea of being the subject of one's own experience in order to be free has thus been undermined. Kant was among the first to realize that the subject-predicate relationship hinders freedom. Being the subject of one's own experience and thus experiencing freedom implies defining the relationship established by what is possible but not necessary as freedom. However, when freedom emerges as a surprise, as a marvel, the determination of phenomena [*la venue-en-présence*] will not be limited to the categories of reason and can acquire a status beyond causality. According to Nancy, the onto-theological tradition, by limiting the phenomenal domain with causality, posits the necessity of a creator in solving the problem of freedom.²⁵⁸ Quoting Kant: “*il n’y a pas de raison pour que ce ne soit pas le chaos, et pour que rien n’apparaisse* [There is no reason for it not to be chaos, and for nothing to appear]”. This implies that what makes a phenomenon a phenomenon is its regulation by laws, so phenomena can appear not freely but within a framework of necessity.²⁵⁹ Phenomena constitute a barrier to freedom; phenomena cannot appear without the command of a creator, hence Husserl focuses on phenomena when establishing transcendental idealism, aiming to reach ideals from them. However, when Heidegger speaks of the unveiling of being

²⁵⁶ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 119-120.

²⁵⁷ HEIDEGGER, M. (2003). De l’essence de la vérité. *Questions I et II* (J. Beaufret, Trans.). Éditions Gallimard; 177. As a counter-view, Michel Henry has stated that the idea of freedom does not arise in Hegel; HENRY, M. (2011). *L’essence de la manifestation*. Presses Universitaires de France. Ayrica, (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 121: in a footnote, Nancy presents this as a contrasting view.

²⁵⁸ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L’expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 122.

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*

(*aletheia*²⁶⁰ logic), it is not about attaining the word of God when the veil of being is lifted; rather, it shows itself in its withdrawal. It is not a realm suited to a certain ideality, thus it is not possible to conceive of freedom as an ideality. Being manifests itself differently each time, thus when the veil is lifted, another aspect is concealed.²⁶¹ The unveiling of being is not a fixed identity; the truth that emerges should not be perceived as a necessity or a command.²⁶² Similarly, existence carries the same logic, freely existing as a different expression each time in its communal realm:

*C'est l'être-en-commun qui me présente ce jamais: ma naissance, ma mort, ne me sont présentés et propres que par celles des autres, pour qui/à leur tour, elles ne sont ni présentes ni propres.*²⁶³

[It is being-in-common that presents to me this never: my birth, my death, are presented to me and are my own only through those of others, for whom/in turn, they are neither present nor their own]

3.12. THE TANGENCY OF BEINGS

According to Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), human beings are under the dominion of freedom and are compelled by it: “*Nous sommes condamnés à la liberté* [We are condemned to freedom].”²⁶⁴ However, in this Sartrean sense of freedom, necessity negates freedom. Sartre uses freedom as a power, defining it as a kind of duty within the determinism of life. In this sense, freedom, like in Nancy's conception, is not the foundation of existence but a basis within human beings. However, this basis becomes an incomprehensible necessity in humans who lack their own foundation. Nancy notes

²⁶⁰ Heidegger stated that *aletheia* is an unveiling of a veil; bkz. HEIDEGGER, M. (1996). Section 44. Division Two. *Being and Time* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.). State University of New York Press.

²⁶¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 122-123.

²⁶² *ibid.*; 123.

²⁶³ *ibid.*

²⁶⁴ SARTRE, J.-P. (1983). *Cahiers pour une morale*. Gallimard; 447-448.

that the freedom concept in Sartre thus leads to an absolute philosophy of subjectivity: “*le sujet doit maîtriser une liberté qui n’est pas la sienne* [The subject must master a freedom that is not their own].”²⁶⁵ Such mastery evokes the idea of an infinite Spirit in the Hegelian sense of freedom, and this is what Nancy describes as the 'bad infinity'.²⁶⁶ Thus, in Sartre's existentialism, the concept of freedom is caught again in the Kantian schema and appears as an external purpose or reason that lies outside of human beings.²⁶⁷ Remaining faithful to certain points in Heidegger's interpretation of Kant, Nancy argues that the notion of substance in Kant, which remains constant amidst the changes in phenomena, impedes the idea of change in existence, and asserts that in this condition, human beings can only be free as their own cause.²⁶⁸

According to Kantian philosophy, the thing-in-itself emerges as a reasonless cause, as the concept of essence emphasizes a cause that relies solely on itself. However, the thing of the phenomenon does not precisely constitute a cause; rather, it is the existence itself. Existence, in turn, signifies the withdrawal of being as a giving cause, as a permanent foundation of existence. The thing of existence, or *Setzung*, encompasses all successive changes in its essence, but the cause of these changes does not lie within the things themselves; it occurs in the phenomenal world. The concept of causality through freedom, namely, the cause that is free to appear, is nothing other than this *Setzung*. Without considering it in this way, freedom has no option but to be a reasonless cause.²⁶⁹ Although Kant's *Setzung* presents the phenomenal world as the realm of appearance, it is a freedom that tends to be forgotten due to the positioning of an identity, as it relies on the limits of possibilities inherent in essence.

²⁶⁵ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 126-128.

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*; 126-128; While Nancy's thought and this book are known for their proximity to Hegel, they harbor a sharp opposition to the concept of Spirit, as evidenced by Nancy's citation of Michel Henry in reference to Hegel; HENRY, M. (2011). *L'essence de la manifestation*. Presses Universitaires de France; a similar perspective can be found in Jean Kervégan's article; KERVÉGAN, J.-F. (2004). Un hégélianisme sans profondeur. *Sens en tous sens. Autour des travaux de Jean-Luc Nancy* ; 25-37.

²⁶⁷ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 128-129.

²⁶⁸ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 128-129.

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*; 130.

Therefore, rather than considering freedom as a reasonless cause, it would be more accurate to denote it as lacking causality. Due to this immediacy, freedom will manifest itself simultaneously as a phenomenon or an experience in all its aspects, indicating that it belongs neither to what can be felt nor comprehended. Due to this forgetting, Nancy embarks on a search for an examination beyond the examination found in Heidegger's *Kantbuch*. The initial destination is Michel Henry's *L'essence de la manifestation* (1963) (§58): In this paragraph, Henry finds the clarity of respect in its *factum rationis*, meaning that the reliance of freedom on experience does not make it belong to what can be felt; otherwise, a pathological condition regarding freedom would arise. Instead, the experience of freedom denotes that it is a pure passion of pure reason.²⁷⁰

Secondly, Nancy emphasizes the corporeality of existence. In this regard, he refers to Didier Franck's book *Heidegger et le problème de l'espace* (1986), where it is stated that the *praxis* of existence cannot be conceived independently of a transcendent materiality or an ontological materiality. When there is intercorporeal resistance, the inability of bodies to replace each other leads to freedom emerging as a gap, a power that enables them.²⁷¹ This materiality can be reduced to pure mentality; however, it is not possible to address this ontological materiality within the representational schema without falling into causality. This situation is not contrary to the ontological status of the power of freedom because the fundamental reason is the non-transitivity between the mental and the material. Nevertheless, the distance between them enables freedom.²⁷² Freedom is the intersection of these two bodies. The resistance created by the non-transitivity of bodies and thinking bodies forms the singularity of languages and thinkers, of thoughts.²⁷³ In this sense, the power of freedom manifests itself in absolute violence. By absolute violence, Nancy means the relationship between

²⁷⁰ *ibid.*; 130-131

²⁷¹ *ibid.*; 132-133.

²⁷² *ibid.*; 133-134.

²⁷³ *ibid.*; 134.

singularities in the play of differences. Freedom emerges within this absolute tension between singular bonds. This absolute tension becomes visible as soon as two gazes intersect. Even when gazes are not visible, they create a kind of tangible²⁷⁴ intersection. The one looking in the gaze is freedom itself and transfers us to existence, to being.²⁷⁵

3.13. THE ONTOLOGY OF FREEDOM

When we discuss freedom, if we were not speaking of the being that is free, that is, if it were not an ontological issue, our freedom would never be possible. We would find ourselves in the impasse of Kant's Third Antinomy, and freedom would turn into a transcendent illusion. Thus, instead of considering it as an ontological issue, we would talk about a general dialectic of freedom drawn in metaphysics. Kant, by addressing freedom within a general dialectical framework, proposed the idea of mental and ethical-political freedom conceived through two different kinds of causality. The two freedoms from different natures allowed Kant to both demonstrate the illusion of freedom and offer a transcendent solution. However, Nancy argues that there are no such two different natures because the transcendent realm also provides us with a kind of causality in any case. Therefore, when we think of freedom in the Kantian sense, we are left with a subjective necessity.²⁷⁶ It is necessary because it appears as a moral duty and I must fulfill it, but it is subjective because its feasibility along the ethical-political line makes it obligatory for it to be fulfilled by a subject. Thus, the subject is condemned to a freedom that it cannot think without falling into illusion. This concept of absolute freedom becomes the categorical imperative of freedom and can penetrate all thought.²⁷⁷ Therefore, Kant resorts to the concept of autonomy, and even the

²⁷⁴ DERRIDA, J. (2000). *Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*. Éditions Galilée; Derrida's work emphasizes the significance of the question of the sensible and the body in Nancy's philosophy. Similar to Aristotle, touch has a superiority over other senses.

²⁷⁵ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 135.

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*; 137-138.

²⁷⁷ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 138.

autonomy of freedom must operate within the framework of autonomy, thus finding itself within a predetermined totality of causality.²⁷⁸ Autonomy as the autonomy of freedom carries an absolute meaning. However, this does not mean that the Absolute is free; on the contrary, the idea of freedom being absolute arises from here, meaning that freedom is turned into an Absolute Being detached from everything else.²⁷⁹ However, freedom is not devoid of the practical, therefore, like in Heidegger, it is intertwined with technology. However, unlike Heidegger, in the issue of technology, Nancy's approach is critical, he claims that the idea of considering existence not as the free being, but as a technical being, leads the world to be liberated through technology.²⁸⁰

3.14. FREEDOM AS DESTINY

The necessity of freedom prevents us from making any relativization about freedom. Since freedom cannot be relativized, it remains independent of any historical determinations.²⁸¹ However, when we take into account what Heidegger and Derrida have said about time in the second section,²⁸² we see that the temporality of time reveals that it is not something temporary. For Kant, the situation is different; time is a synthetic *a priori* internal sense that conditions human experience, thus existence can continue in different successive time and space conditions.²⁸³ In the Kantian sense, the perception of time can only be thought through the succession of the present moment. Nancy refers to Heidegger's concept of *Ereignis* in *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (1989); the existence of each present moment is a birth to existence, so it cannot be reduced to

²⁷⁸ NANCY, J.-L. (1983). *L'impératif catégorique*. Flammarion; §5 ; NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 138-139.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*; 140.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*; 203.

²⁸¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 143.

²⁸² HEIDEGGER, M. (1966). Temps et être. *Questions III et IV* (J. Beaufret, Trans.). Éditions Gallimard; and cf. DERRIDA, J. (1972). Ousia et grammé. *Marges de la philosophie*. Les Éditions de Minuit.

²⁸³ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 144.

the transformation of a permanent essence. Thus, the present time will not be confined to the succession of an essence without sensing, and the act of existence giving itself to existence will begin to define time. Heidegger also says that the givenness of existence is the property of *Ereignen*²⁸⁴ and existence passes through *Ereignis*.²⁸⁵ Thus, time takes on meaning as the surrender of existence within the temporality of the event, rather than the succession of ordered existences.

The interconnectedness of existence and thus freedom with presence does not place it within presentism, which would be an empirical approach to experience, acquiring general knowledge based on experiences where similar conditions yield similar results. However, the presentness of existence does not mean this, because in its constant self-revelation, its self-giving, it emphasizes the temporality of existence, showing that existence is constantly changing. This would lead us to answer the type of question an empiricist would ask, “Will the Sun rise tomorrow?” with “Tomorrow the Sun will rise, but it will not be the same Sun.”²⁸⁶ In other words, we do not know which Sun will rise tomorrow, and when tomorrow comes, the Sun will surprise us under all circumstances.

Nancy refers to Lyotard's book *L'enthousiasme* (1986), a work on Kantian time, where he introduces the concepts of surprise and syncopation when defining time; we encounter a fainting, a swooning enabled by freedom, as a redefinition of time. Thus, while agreeing with Heidegger's temporality and finitude of existence, Nancy emphasizes that this temporality is something that suddenly emerges and reveals itself by withdrawing existence, indicating that the free act does not guarantee the present of the past and the future, yet it is not only confined to its own present.

²⁸⁴ When used in its verb form, derived from the same root as *Ereignis*, this word signifies “to appropriate.”

²⁸⁵ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 146.

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*; 147-148.

In this light, the free act emerging from existence giving itself is not an event [*Ereignis*] in the Heideggerian sense but rather signifies an inability to be present, closing oneself off to the present.²⁸⁷

*Car il n'est pas rare que ce soit dans les moments de répit-pour ainsi dire, dans le sommeil du héros-que s'accomplisse le décret de son temps; et de même, dans le destin tragique, la signification du temps rempli vient au jour dans le grands moments de passivité : dans la décision tragique, dans le moment retardateur, dans la catastrophe.*²⁸⁸

[For it is not rare that it is in moments of respite-so to speak, in the hero's sleep-that the decree of his time is fulfilled; and similarly, in tragic destiny, the significance of filled time comes to light in the grand moments of passivity; in the tragic decision, in the delaying moment, in the catastrophe.]

Nancy here alludes to Benjamin's tragic end, suggesting that through the inevitability of freedom, it is necessary and is our destiny.²⁸⁹ He develops this idea by stating that if we did not die in every act of freedom, the being of freedom would not be filled with freedom. He defends the connection between finitude, i.e., death, and freedom against the tradition, arguing that freedom is tied to death. If this game of death did not occur at every moment, if I did not tend towards death with every existence, it would not be possible for us to speak of freedom. If we did not play this game of finitude, we would be confined to a time where everything is predetermined by the necessity drawn by freedom itself.²⁹⁰

Therefore, when we develop this act as “being born free” and “dying free,” we are not just thinking about it in ethical and legal terms but rather using it in an ontological

²⁸⁷ *ibid.*; 150-151.

²⁸⁸ BENJAMIN, W. (2000). Trauerspiel et tragédie. *Origine du drame baroque allemand* (S. Muller, I. Hirt, Trans.). Flammarion.

²⁸⁹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 153.

²⁹⁰ *ibid.*

sense within the temporality of singular existence.²⁹¹ “Being born” and “dying” are not adjustments possible without a free act. They are fateful, but they do not denote a conscious action. Thus, Nancy names it a surprising generosity of being to avoid associating *Ereignis* with the free act in the Heideggerian sense.²⁹²

3.15. THE DECISION BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL: FREE WILL

Heidegger, though expressing his support for the Nazi government as “*La plus grande sottise de ma vie* [The greatest foolishness of my life]²⁹³” after Auschwitz, his silence in the face of the atrocity has always been emphasized by Nancy. Despite opening up the discussion of the free domain of *Ereignis* during the same period, his decision regarding the evil at Auschwitz and the subsequent silence—referred to in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *La fiction du politique* (1988) as Heidegger's concept of *Unheil*, which can be translated as “evil” or “calamity”—even though it is stated that the silence is not an absolute silence with the introduction of the concept, has been an indicator of the forgotten nature of freedom. Nancy puts forward the argument that thought is not merely an intellectual exercise; it is an experience of its own limits. Therefore, he accuses Heidegger of intellectualism regarding the concept of *Unheil* mentioned in *Being and Time* and emphasizes that the real limit of experience was encountered in Auschwitz. We quote:

²⁹¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 154.

²⁹² *ibid.*; 155.

²⁹³ *ibid.*

Auschwitz a signifié la mort de la naissance et de la mort, leur conversion en abstraction infinie, la négation de l'existence : et c'est peut-être avant tout cela que la « culture²⁹⁴ » avait rendu possible.²⁹⁵

[Auschwitz meant the death of birth and death, their conversion into infinite abstraction, the negation of existence: and perhaps above all, it was this that “culture” had made possible.]

The decision of evil was made at Auschwitz, but it should not be interpreted as the freedom to choose evil, as freedom is not *ad libitum* [freely as one wishes]. Indeed, assuming that freedom constructs existence, such a choice of evil ultimately results in negating freedom. While we may not intellectually determine what is good and what is evil, we experience it in our lives: "*Oui, nous savons à nouveau ce que sont bien et mal* [Yes, we know again what is right and wrong]²⁹⁶." But this is an unpublished knowledge [savoir], not recognized as an experience beyond the limit of thought [connaître]. Nancy summarizes the experience of this evil in three points: 1) It demonstrates the closure of all theodicy or logodicy, showing that evil cannot be justified; 2) All thought of evil ends as fault and deviation of any existing being, thus constituting the existence of evil as positive; 3) It is the effective embodiment of evil in the horror of the rootless mass grave, indicating that evil is neither sustainable nor forgivable.²⁹⁷ The lesson drawn from evil [*mal*] is summarized at these three points,

²⁹⁴ The use of the term "culture" here refers to Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*. Quoting Adorno: "*Qui plaide pour le maintien d'une culture radicalement coupable et minable se transforme en collaborateur, alors que celui qui se refuse à la culture contribue immédiatement à la barbarie que la culture se révéla être* [Those who advocate for the preservation of a culture that is radically guilty and despicable are transformed into collaborators, while those who reject culture immediately contribute to the barbarism that culture revealed itself to be]." Cf. ADORNO, T. W. (2003). *La dialectique négative* (G. Coffin, Trans.). Petite Bibliothèque Payot.

²⁹⁵ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 159.

²⁹⁶ The English version of the book is only available at Rutgers University, so I translated this quote provided by Nancy myself; MANN, T. (1939). The Problem of Freedom. In *The Problem of Freedom: An Address to the Undergraduates and Faculty of Rutgers University at Convocation on April the 28th, 1939* (pp. 3-16). Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36019/9781978811812-001>.

²⁹⁷ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 159.

constructing the modern knowledge of evil and thereby differentiating it from previous knowledge of evil.²⁹⁸ It is precisely at this point that it is stated that the "catastrophe" defined as Unheil is insufficient to meet evil in modern knowledge.

The fascination with evil in authors such as Marquis de Sade²⁹⁹, Charles Baudelaire³⁰⁰, Friedrich Nietzsche³⁰¹, Comte de Lautréamont³⁰², Léon Bloy³⁰³, Marcel Proust³⁰⁴,

²⁹⁸ *ibid.*; 160.

²⁹⁹ The works of Marquis de Sade, particularly *Justine ve Les cent vingt journées de Sodome* (1904), where eroticism intertwines with violence, could serve as prime examples of this phenomenon. While we may not describe it as being fascinated by evil in as assertive a manner as Nancy does, these works represent figures in which ethical values are undermined and disregarded in favor of deviating from any moral judgment. Here, the notion of goodness is eclipsed by the foregrounding of personal pleasures.

³⁰⁰ Cf. *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857)

³⁰¹ In Friedrich Nietzsche's *La Généalogie de la morale* (1887), the dichotomy between master and slave morality, where slave morality aligns with the weak, constructs general moral rules that hinder humanity from pursuing power and its own desires without feeling guilt. Therefore, sentiments such as modesty and compassion are criticized. However, there are commentators who do not read Nietzsche from such a dogmatic standpoint. See, for example, OYESHILE, A. O., *Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil: A Morality of Immoralism*, Kaygi, 2012/18; While Nietzsche questions conventional morality, his philosophy can also be interpreted as not entirely rejecting morality. Nancy, as evidenced by quotations in works like *ESP*, is a philosopher who does not completely abandon Nietzsche.

³⁰² The work *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868) provides fine examples of the blurring of boundaries between good and evil.

³⁰³ In the 19th century, we observe the beginning of criticism directed towards bourgeois morality. Here, we witness a shift in the concepts of good and evil. Goodness transcends sentiments like mercy to encompass the pursuit of what is good for oneself. In this context, while the term 'evil' may not be directly employed, there is praise for suffering as a means of approaching God through asceticism: see *Le désespéré* (1887); *La femme pauvre* (1897).

³⁰⁴ Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913) is another work that, while not directly examining the themes of good and evil, engages in a discussion of bourgeois morality. By emphasizing the complexity of human life and the difficulty in defining behaviors, it can be said to offer a critique of society.

Georges Bataille³⁰⁵, Georges Bernanos³⁰⁶, Franz Kafka³⁰⁷, Louis-Ferdinand Céline³⁰⁸ among others, defines modern knowledge of evil. In art, this modern knowledge of evil manifests itself through horror films and noir novels. This fascination indicates a contingency in evil, but this contingency does not enable a conversion into good because it always leans towards negativity. Nonetheless, "*dans sa négativité même et sans relève dialectique, forme une possibilité positive de l'existence* [In its negativity and without dialectical redemption forms a positive possibility of existence]"³⁰⁹. – in its negativity and without dialectical redemption, it forms a positive possibility of existence. This diabolical aspect of evil is described as "*un affreux soleil noir d'où rayonne la nuit* [A dreadful black sun from which radiates the night]."³¹⁰ Thus, the fascination with evil in the construction of modern evil does not have a similar status to that of Auschwitz. While fascination affirms evil, it carries a contingency of existence, as fascination does not transform evil into good. Evil remains evil. However, Nancy suggests that this situation changed after *Nacht und Nebel*,³¹¹ as the night no longer shines as it did in Bernanos' novel. It is no longer possible to speak of the

³⁰⁵ As seen in other writers, Georges Bataille's concern lies not just in praising evil but also in exploring the boundaries of the human experience through behaviors forbidden by norms. This is evident in works such as *Histoire l'oeil* (1928); *La Part maudite* (1949).

³⁰⁶ He is more of a writer who focuses on sinful behaviors, and it is worthwhile to see sin as behaviors forbidden by Catholicism. From this perspective, he differs from the other writers mentioned, as he emphasizes that straying from religion leads us to sinful lives: see *Sous le soleil de Satan* (1926), *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1936), etc.

³⁰⁷ Considering works like *La métamorphose* (1915), *Le château* (1926), Kafka may be the most challenging writer to adapt to the theme of fascination with evil. Kafka's concern is primarily with norms and institutions; additionally, he explores the absurd situations and the failure to conform to human conditions that these norms and institutions impose on us.

³⁰⁸ One of the most difficult authors to embrace criticism of due to his anti-Semitic views may be Céline; *Bagatelles pour un massacre* (1937), *L'école des cadavres* (1938) are among the most striking works dealing with anti-Semitism. However, when we consider his works such as *Le voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932), we can say that he addresses the disconnect between bourgeois morality, emotions like mercy, and the reality of life. For him the real life is cruel.

³⁰⁹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 160.

³¹⁰ HUGO, V., (1886) *La fin de Satan*.

³¹¹ The directive issued by Adolf Hitler on December 7, 1941, calling for the execution of political prisoners and those aiding resistance. In German, it means "night and fog."

contingency of evil as diabolical in modern fascination, as we have seen where the radical evil in humans can lead.

However, unlike the authors mentioned above, Kant, who can be interpreted as philosopher of morality, by contrast, defines evil as incomprehensible and uncertain.³¹² Nancy quotes Kant:

[...] *tout ce qu'on peut en figurer, c'est son incompréhensibilité, qui est l'incompréhensibilité d'un «désaccord» en notre libre arbitre" : celui-ci est "primitivement disposé au bien", et pourtant, s'il est possible que notre faiblesse pervertisse nos maximes, il a fallu qu'auparavant le mal lui-même ait pu être introduit en tant que motif d'une maxime en général.*³¹³

[...] all we can imagine about it is its incomprehensibility, which is the incomprehensibility of a “discord” in our free will”: it is “originally disposed toward the good,” and yet, if it is possible for our weakness to corrupt our maxims, it must have been that, before anything else, evil itself could be introduced as a motive for a maxim in general.]

In Kant, the incomprehensibility of evil lies fundamentally in the incomprehensibility of freedom. When Kant attempts to define freedom negatively outside of causality, evil becomes meaningless. Thus, he indicates that the mystery brought by incomprehensibility is not based on a spontaneously arising first cause, or this spontaneous cause leans on that incomprehensible evil.³¹⁴ Similarly, evil in Kant, being based on an aesthetic judgment, does not need to rely on a principle guiding actions [*maxime*]. Kant facilitates the transition from theoretical freedom to practical freedom

³¹² NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 161.

³¹³ *ibid.*

³¹⁴ *ibid.*; 161-162.

at this point.³¹⁵ Nancy, unlike Kant, suggests that the relationship between good and evil is “absolutely relative,”³¹⁶ stating that evil does not lack goodness but rather crushes it, and in situations where both good and evil exist, what is at stake is freedom itself. Freedom precedes and continues both goodness and evil. Thus, freedom is an experience that encompasses the possibility of both good and evil, unfolding spontaneously and surprising at the moment of decision. Even when an evil decision is made, freedom has been attacked.³¹⁷

L'essence du malfaisant ne consiste pas dans la pure malice de l'agit humain, elle repose dans la malignité de la fureur.

[...]

*Seul l'Être accorde à l'indemne son lever dans la grâce et à la fureur son élan vers la ruine.*³¹⁸

[The essence of the mischievous does not lie in the sheer malice of human action; it rests in the malignancy of fury

[...]

Only Being grants to the unharmed its rise in grace, and to fury its momentum toward ruin.]

Here, it is concluded that evil is actually a hatred towards existence itself. Fear in Heidegger has the power to annul existence, and Nancy interprets this as a hatred towards life. Although Heidegger appears to open up a space for freedom, by addressing the “free one” through fate and sovereignty, he causes an undeniable silence

³¹⁵ *ibid.*; 162-163.

³¹⁶ For a similar perception of bad, see WEIL, S. (1947). *Le Pesanteur et la grâce*. Librairie PLON.

³¹⁷ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 163-164.

³¹⁸ HEIDEGGER, M. (1966). Lettre sur l'humanisme. *Questions III et IV* (J. Beaufret, Trans.). Éditions Gallimard; 145 et 148 ; benzer bir düşünce Hegel'in *Système de la vie éthique*'inde de karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

in his thought. Thus, Heidegger's silence in the face of Auschwitz is not merely a silence against politics. Elements in Heidegger's thought that lead to this silence are identified. At this point, there is a confrontation with the decision to submit to sovereignty in Heidegger. Nancy aims to reconcile freedom as a "decision to be [*décision d'être*]" with the absence of sovereignty in Heidegger, allowing both good and evil to affirm each other, yet desiring to enable it with the knowledge of evil:

*La décision n'a pas seulement un statut formel parce que la pensée se prend effectivement dans la pensée de l'existence. Ce n'est pas par un choix moral antérieur au cours de la pensée, mais c'est dans l'acte de penser, en tant que posé sur la limite existante de la pensée.*³¹⁹

[The decision does not merely have a formal status because thought is effectively caught within the thought of existence. It is not through a moral choice preceding the course of thought, but it is within the act of thinking, as placed on the existing limit of thought.]

3.16. GOODNESS AS AUTHENTIC DECISION

Up to this final section, we discussed how Nancy, while acknowledging Heidegger's ontologization of Kant, argues that due to Heidegger's conception of beings, under the sovereignty of Being, as merely a mode, we cannot derive from his concept of freedom any possibility. Nancy attempts to analyze the problem of freedom in philosophy through his established social ontological system. In this ontology, since there is no hierarchy or symmetry established between singularities, Nancy, although not entirely relinquishing the notion of the Good, avoids defining it as a universal truth. Therefore, while Nancy describes freedom as a self-giving act and this self-giving as an authentic decision, he does not speak of authenticity in the Heideggerian sense. In Nancy's

³¹⁹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 175-176.

framework, deciding to exist is a variable condition, focused on the present moment and context-dependent, making it a difficult act to conceptualize independently of a particular context. Nevertheless, it remains a moment worth contemplating, generously accessible to us.

Nancy, unlike Heidegger, defines beings as genuine existence, freeing everydayness from its negative connotations and identifying it as the realm where freedom is lived. Everydayness is a concept that allows Nancy to focus on the present moment and assume plurality of singularities. In this sense, while everydayness is criticized in Heidegger for its lack of authenticity, Nancy affirms it as the space where the decision to exist is affirmed; in Heidegger, deciding to exist entails succumbing to sovereignty and wavering in the face of evil, whereas for Nancy, authentic decision is not about the essence of existence but is rather a part of the act of thinking itself. Therefore, what kind of explanations does Nancy provide us regarding this authentic decision, which is a part of the act of thinking?

At the outset of *EL*, Nancy, to criticize Heidegger, excludes the Platonic philosophy, but, by the end of the work, he revisits Platonic philosophy: he refers to the expression *epekeina tès ousias*,³²⁰ which carries a meaning beyond being or essence. This expression is used to explain the Platonic notion of the Good and elucidates the transcendent nature of forms. In Plato's thought, this implies that forms, such as the Form of the Good in our case, exist beyond the perceptible physical world and therefore verification of truth regarding these forms cannot be achieved in the material world we perceive. Indeed, it is a surprising aspect of Nancy's thought that draws inspiration from Plato's theory of forms, while also pointing to experience and the facticity of freedom. In a way Aristotle and Plato coexist in his work. Nevertheless, considering Nancy as a philosopher who emphasizes Kant's *CJ*, although he does not take freedom as an Idea, we can still say that he does not abandon the notion of the Good. Nancy suggests that

³²⁰ PLATON. Book IV. *Republic*; 509b8.

a decision is more genuine and good to the extent that it is less exclusively mine and to my benefit, thus, although we might perceive him as opposing Platonic philosophy in general terms, he tends towards a general notion of the Good.

For the next step, it refers to the “Space and Time” section of *BT*. According to this section, art plays a significant role in accessing truth, thus facilitating the disclosure of the world itself. For this reason, artworks provide a space [*Raum*] for the world to disclose itself, thereby enabling an encounter with the truth of existence. In fact, this final section serves as a compelling example of the indeterminacy in Nancy's philosophy. While unable to fully explain what constitutes a authentic decision, it sees it either in an external form or in a truth that is disclosed through art, yet still partially concealed.

In other words, Nancy refrains from providing a definitive answer and, although he claims not to develop an ethical philosophy,³²¹ he merely asserts that the authentic decision, which follows from the Good, will be one where we least consider ourselves and equally present ourselves to the other. Perhaps this is what prompts Nancy to use words with religious connotations like *générosité* and *offrande*, despite being a philosopher who maintains distance from the concept of God.³²²

³²¹ NANCY, J.-L. (1988). *Fragments. L'expérience de la liberté*. Éditions Galilée; 204: He also states that no authenticity can be conceived independently of any *ethos*.

³²² To explore the ambivalent relationship between Nancy and Christian thought in more detail, see Pierre-Philippe Jandin, "Dépeindre le christianisme", *Revue des sciences religieuses* [Online], 88/4 | 2014, Online since 15 March 2020, connection on 29 January 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rsr/8587>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rsr.8587>

CONCLUSION

In the initial segment, we observed that Kant's definition of freedom in the *CPR* emerges as a pure idea, which he later denominates as negative freedom in the *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*. We discerned that this occurrence leads to the inference that freedom can only become accessible through a Supreme Being. The rationale behind this lies in the existential dichotomy between finite humanity and a freedom delineated via infinity. In the subsequent section, we scrutinized the notion that God cannot guarantee freedom since such an assertion would entail a contradiction by opposing the order established by God Himself. In a sense, God is inherently free, yet when necessity intervenes, freedom can only be affirmed practically as a mandate. In the third part, attention was directed towards the positive freedom elucidated by Kant in the *CPraR*. Positive freedom, in Kant's framework, is not a product of pure reason but rather of practical reason, although it derives its source from pure reason. Thus, while it is conceived within the realm of practical reason, its apprehension is contingent upon being considered within the framework of moral law and the subject's conformity to it. Consequently, it becomes evident that freedom is constrained by the issue of volition. However, when Nancy contends that freedom is already an experienced phenomenon, it must not be deemed as something preferable. Moreover, considering Kant's belief that every finitude harbors causality, freedom as a concept becomes once again untenable. In this regard, Nancy shifts the focus towards the agent who realizes freedom and embarks on a quest for an existence outside the philosophy of the subject, an existence not derived from infinity or a substance. Here, he introduces the concept of radical alterity, attempting to resolve the impasse between finite humanity and infinite freedom from this standpoint.

In the second section, upon the initial deconceptualization of freedom, we perceived that when we incorporate it into the domain of *praxis*, the notion emerges that every experience is inherently free. Consequently, we recognized the possibility of transcending the dichotomy of positive and negative freedom. At this juncture, to

liberate experience from the causality to which free will is subjected, we emphasized the necessity of relinquishing a linear conception of time, or in other words, a classical notion of historicity. A non-linear perception of history would lack a regulating God, thereby affording individuals experiencing freedom the possibility of being separate personalities without conditioning each other. This leads us to a point where freedom becomes intertwined with community and renders it a matter of ontology. When freedom becomes a matter of ontology, it transforms into the uncaused cause of existence. As previously mentioned, if freedom is devoid of a conditioning cause, and existence becomes possible only when it freely manifests itself, then freedom becomes foundational. However, at this juncture, freedom remains precarious and loses significance.

Following this diminishment, Nancy endeavors to reintegrate freedom into the realm of experience through writing. For Nancy, writing constitutes a significant domain where thought is reflected, and when freedom, left hanging in conceptual limbo, is emancipated through the logic presented by writing, and consequently thought, it can once again be brought into the domain of experience. Attributing a new function to writing, Nancy embarks on a new reading of philosophy within this framework, engaging with philosophers predating Kant. Within the history of philosophy, Nancy identifies a persistent problem of thought. Freedom, in the wake of this problem of thought, encounters a form of unrepresentability. However, despite facing a problem of representation, we continue to think. Nevertheless, this problem of representation manifests itself in our definitions of good and evil. In the absence of a God who conditions goodness, I can be free, but when I attain the freedom to choose evil, I violate goodness, and consequently, freedom. In this regard, freedom encounters another impasse. Subsequently, Nancy shifts strategy and begins to search for this unrepresentability issue within the factuality of freedom. Freedom is surprising, emergent, and lies in a dialectical relationship beyond the formation of a good/evil dichotomy, where one does not negate the other but intertwines with it. At this juncture,

freedom manifests itself in a decision given in moments where good and evil intersect. In either case, cancellation does not occur. Yes, I cannot epistemologically represent good and evil, but when something bad happens, I recognize it. Evil is not in human behavior itself but in the fear it induces, in its trajectory towards destruction. The example of Auschwitz, which nullifies existence and leads it to complete negation, is one of the most striking examples in this regard. According to Nancy, ultimately, despite opening up a space for freedom, Heidegger nullifies freedom through his silence and submission of existential freedom to sovereignty, as the events of Auschwitz, as mentioned before, hinder freedom by nullifying existence. This situation leads Nancy back to the search for goodness and resorts initially to the Forms in Plato, whom he had criticized earlier. Nancy has never been a thinker of two worlds; as we stated in the first section, he offers a radical alterity to us. When he rejects the idea of God in Kant for the same reason, he also rejects the thought of things themselves. However, while advocating the idea of unconditional decision, he falters in his explanations, unable to prevent the forgetfulness that ensues when freedom becomes deconceptualized. This leads him back to the pursuit of goodness and endeavors to establish it through concepts associated with Christianity, such as generosity.

If freedom's experience, as Nancy suggests, is the withdrawal of being and its finite emergence, what does this notion tell us about what appears and what does not? In other words, are the hidden Forms, the things themselves conditioning their existence, not present? Additionally, despite the predominant discussion in Nancy resembling that of Heidegger, we also observe that, through his engagement with interpretations of Kant from Contemporary French Philosophy (Lyotard, Weil), he attempts to experience his thought through Kant. We evaluate this book as an inadequate study in the conflict between things themselves and phenomena in Kant, based on what appears and what does not. Although it seems to provide answers to the criticisms we raise within the framework of the definitions it offers, it falls short in explaining how an existence without substance is possible, even though it explains the consequences of

the idea of substance. Where does the act of differentiation, which constitutes singularities, originate? Therefore, in another study, I believe it is more important to focus on what does not appear, on what remains outside, beyond freedom, to understand the ontology it presents. To establish a deeper relationship with Kantian philosophy, it is necessary to examine the author's other works. In fact, considering Nancy's books such as *Le discours de la syncope* (1976) and *L'impératif catégorique* (1983), which are predominantly dedicated to Kantian philosophy and examine the idea of things themselves, we can see that Nancy also experiences similar concerns. It should be emphasized that the "Le katégorien de l'excès" section of the book *L'impératif catégorique* specifically addresses this issue.

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