

On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects

Gilbert Simondon Translated by Ninian Mellamphy,
Dan Mellamphy and Nandita Biswas Mellamphy <

I. The Notion of Phase Applied to Becoming: Technicity as Phase

This study postulates that technicity is one of the two fundamental phases of the mode of existence of the ensemble constituted by man and the world. By phase, we do not mean one temporal moment replaced by another, but an aspect that results from a division of being and that is opposed to another aspect. This sense of the word phase is inspired by the notion of phase relation in physics; one cannot conceive of a phase except in relation to another or to several other phases; in a system of phases there is a relation of equilibrium and of reciprocal tensions; the present system of all the phases taken together is the complete reality, not each phase itself, since a phase is a phase only in relation to others, and it is distinguished from them in a manner that is totally independent of notions of genus and species. Finally, the existence of a plurality of phases defines the reality of a neutral centre of equilibrium in relation to which the phase-shift exists. This schema is very different from the dialectical schema, because it implies neither necessary succession nor the intervention of negativity as engine of progress; moreover, in the schema of phases, the opposition exists only in the particular case of a biphasic structure.

The adoption of such a schema founded on the notion of phase is destined to put in play a principle according to which the temporal development of a living reality proceeds by division from an initial active centre and then by regrouping after the advance of each separate reality

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resulting from the division. Each separate reality is a symbol of the other, just as one phase is a symbol of the other or of others; no phase, as phase, is in equilibrium in relation to itself, nor does it have complete truth or reality: every phase is partial, abstract, and unbalanced; only the system of phases is in equilibrium at its neutral point; its truth and its reality are this neutral point, the procession and conversion in relation to this neutral point.

We suppose that technicity results from a phase-shift of a central, original and unique mode of being in the world, the magical mode; the phase that balances technicity is the religious mode of being. Aesthetic thinking emerges at the neutral point between technics and religion, at the moment of the division of primitive magical unity: this is not a phase but, rather, a permanent reminder of the rupture of the unity of the magical mode of being and a search for a future unity.

Each phase in turn divides into a theoretical mode and a practical mode; there is thus a practical mode of technics and a practical mode of religion, as well as a theoretical mode of technics and a theoretical mode of religion.

Just as the distance between technics and religion generates aesthetic thinking, so the distance between the two theoretical modes (the technical and the religious) generates scientific knowledge as mediation between technics and religion. The distance between the practical technical mode and the practical religious mode generates ethical thinking. Aesthetic thinking is therefore a mediation between technics and religion that is more primitive than science and ethics, for the birth of science and ethics requires a prior division within technics and religion between the theoretical mode and the practical mode. From this results the fact that aesthetic thinking is truly situated at the neutral point, extending the existence of magic, whereas science on the one hand and ethics on the other are in conflict in relation to the neutral point, since there is the same distance between them as there is between the theoretical mode and the practical mode in technics and in religion. If science and ethics could have converged and united, they would have coincided in the neutral axis of this genetic system, thereby providing a second analogue of magical unity, over and above the incomplete aesthetic thinking that is its first analogue, incomplete because it allows the phase-shift between technics and religion to subsist. This second analogue would be complete; it would replace at once magic and aesthetics; but perhaps it is only a simple tendency playing a normative role, since nothing proves that the distance between the theoretical mode and the practical mode can be completely bridged.

In order to indicate the true nature of technical objects, it is therefore necessary to resort to a study of the entire genesis of the relations between man and the world; the technicity of objects would then seem to be one of the two phases of the relation of man to the world engendered by the division of primitive magical unity. Should technicity then be considered as a simple moment in a genesis? – Yes, in a certain sense: there is certainly something transitory in technicity, which itself becomes divided into theory and practice and participates in the subsequent genesis of theoretical thinking and of practical thinking. But, in another sense, there is something definitive in the opposition of technicity to religiosity, because man's primitive way of being in the world (magic) can be thought to provide inexhaustibly an indefinite number of successive contributions that can be divided into a technical phase and a religious phase; in this manner, although effectively there is succession in genesis, the successive stages of the different geneses are simultaneous within culture, and there are relations and interactions not only between simultaneous phases but also between successive stages; hence, technics can encounter not only religion and aesthetic thinking but also science and ethics. Now, if one adopts the genetic postulate, one notices that a science or an ethics can never encounter a religion or a technics on a truly common ground, since the modes of thinking that are different in degree (for example a science and a technique) and that exist at the same time do not constitute a single genetic lineage, do not issue from the same surge of the primitive magical universe. True and balanced relations only exist between phases of the same level (for example a technical ensemble and a religion) or between successive degrees of genesis that are part of the same lineage (for example between the stage of technics and of religions in the seventeenth century and the contemporary stage of science and of ethics). True relations exist only in a genetic ensemble balanced around a neutral point, envisaged in its totality.

This is precisely the goal to be reached: reflexive thinking has a mission to redress and refine the successive waves of genesis by which the primitive unity of the relation of man to the world becomes divided and comes to sustain science and ethics through technics and religion, between which aesthetic thinking develops. In these successive divisions, primitive unity would be lost if science and ethics were not able to come together at the end of the genesis; philosophical thinking is inserted between theoretical thinking and practical thinking, in the extension of aesthetic thinking and of the original magical unity.

Now, to make possible the unity of scientific knowledge and of ethics in philosophical thinking, the sources of science and of ethics have to be

of the same degree, contemporaneous one with the other, and must have arrived at the same point of genetic development. The genesis of technics and of religion conditions that of science and of ethics. Philosophy is its own condition, for as soon as reflexive thinking begins, it has the power to perfect whichever of the geneses that has not been entirely achieved, by becoming aware of the sense of the genetic process itself. So, to be able to pose the philosophical problem of the relations between knowledge and ethics in a profound manner, it would be necessary first of all to complete the genesis of technics and the genesis of religious thinking, or at the very least (for this task would be infinite) to know the real meaning of these two geneses.

II. The Phase-Shift of Primitive Magical Unity

In order to understand the true relation of technics to other functions of human thinking, one must start with the primitive magical unity of the relations of man and world; through this examination it is possible to understand why philosophical thinking should complete the integration of technical reality into culture, which is only possible by freeing the sense of the genesis of technics, by the founding of a technology; so, the disparity between technics and religion subsides, harmful as it is to the intended reflexive synthesis of knowledge and ethics. Philosophy must found technology, which is the ecumenism of technics, because if ethics and the sciences are to meet up in reflection, a unity of technics and a unity of religious thinking needs to precede the division of each of these forms of thinking into a theoretical mode and a practical mode.

The genesis of a particular phase can be described in itself; but it cannot be really known in its sense and, consequently, understood in its postulation of unity, unless it is repositioned in the totality of its genesis, as a phase in relation to other phases. This is why in trying to understand technicity it is not enough to start with constituted technical objects; objects emerge at a certain moment, but technicity precedes and surpasses them; technical objects result from an objectification of technicity; they are produced by it, yet technicity is not exhausted in these objects and is not entirely contained in them.

If we eliminate the idea of a dialectical relation between successive stages of the relation between man and the world, what could be the engine of successive divisions during which technicity emerges? It is possible to appeal to the theory of Forms, and to generalise the relation that it establishes between figure and ground. Gestalt theory draws its

basic principle from the hylemorphic schema of ancient philosophy, applied to modern considerations of physical morphogenesis: the structuring of a system would depend on spontaneous modifications tending towards a stable state of equilibrium. In reality, it seems that a distinction should be made between a stable equilibrium and a metastable equilibrium. The emergence of the distinction between figure and ground results from a state of tension, from the incompatibility of the system in relation to itself, from what one could call the oversaturation of the system. But the structuring is not the discovery of the lowest level of equilibrium: stable equilibrium, in which all potential would be actualised, would correspond to the death of any possibility of further transformation; so, living systems, precisely those that manifest the greatest organisational spontaneity, are systems of metastable equilibrium. The discovery of a structure is at least a provisional resolution of incompatibilities, but it is not the destruction of potentials; the system continues to live and to evolve; it is not degraded by the emergence of structure; it remains tense and capable of being modified.

If one agrees to accept this corrective and to replace the notion of stability with that of metastability, then it seems that the Theory of Forms may account for fundamental stages in the evolution of the relation between man and the world.

Primitive magical unity is the vital relational link between man and the world, defining a universe at once subjective and objective prior to any distinction between object and subject, and consequently also prior to any emergence of the separate object. The primitive mode of the relation of man to the world can be thought of as not only prior to the objectification of the world, but even to the segregation of objective unities in the field that will become the objective field. Man finds that he is bound to a universe that is experienced as a milieu. The emergence of the object can only happen through the isolation and fragmentation of the mediation between man and the world; and according to the principle proposed, this objectification of a mediation must have as correlative, in relation to the primitive neutral centre, the subjectification of mediation. The mediation between man and the world becomes objectified as a technical object, in the same way as it is subjectified as a religious mediator; but this objectification and this subjectification, contrary and complementary, are preceded by a primary stage of the relation to the world, the magical stage, in which the mediation is as yet neither subjective nor objective, neither fragmented nor universalised, and is the simplest and most fundamental structuring of the milieu of

a living being: the birth of a network of privileged points of exchange between the being and the milieu.

The magical universe is already structured, but according to a mode that is prior to the segregation of object and subject; this primitive mode of structuring is the one that distinguishes figure from ground by marking key-points in the universe. If the universe were deprived of every structure, the relation between the living being and its milieu could occur in a continuous time and a continuous space, without privileged moment or place. In fact, preceding the segregation of unities, a reticulation of space and time is established that highlights privileged places and moments, as if all of man's power to act and all the capacity of the world to influence man were concentrated in these places and in these moments. These places and these moments possess, concentrate, and express the forces contained in the ground reality that supports them. These sites and these moments are not separate realities; they draw their force from the ground that they dominate; but they localise and focalise the attitude of the living vis-à-vis its milieu.

According to this general genetic hypothesis, we suppose that the primitive mode of existence of man in the world corresponds to a primitive union, prior to any division, of subjectivity and objectivity. The primary structuring, corresponding to the emergence of a figure and a ground in this mode of existence, is what gives birth to the magical universe. The magical universe is structured according to the most primitive and most fecund of organisations: that of the reticulation of the world into privileged places and privileged moments. A privileged place, a place that has a power, is one which draws into itself all the force and efficacy of the domain it delimits; it summarises and contains the force of a compact mass of reality; it summarises and governs it, as a highland governs and dominates a lowland; the elevated peak is the lord of the mountain,¹ just as the most impenetrable part of the wood is where all its reality resides. The magical world is in this way made of a network of places and things that have a power and are bound to other things and other places that also have a power. Such a path, such an enclosure, such a *temenos* contains all the force of the land, and is the key-point of the reality and of the spontaneity of things, as well as of their accessibility.

In such a network of key-points, of high-places, there is a primitive indistinction regarding human reality and the reality of the objective world. These key-points are real and objective, but in them the human being is immediately united with the world, both to be influenced by it and to act upon it; they are places of contact and of mixed, mutual

reality, places of exchange and of communication because they form a knot between both realities.

Yet magical thought is the first, because it corresponds to the simplest, most concrete, most immense and most supple structuring: that of reticulation. In the totality constituted by man and the world there emerges as the primary structure a network of privileged sites that make possible the insertion of human effort, and through which exchanges between man and the world are carried out. Each singular site concentrates within itself the capacity to have control over a portion of the world that it specifically represents and whose reality it conveys in communication with man. These singular sites could be called *key-points* controlling the man-world relationship in a reversible way, for the world influences man just as man influences the world. The summits of mountains or certain narrow passes are in this way naturally magical, because they govern a region. The heart of the forest and the centre of a plain are not just geographical realities metaphorically or geometrically designated: they are realities that concentrate natural powers as they focalise human effort: they are figural structures in relation to the masse that supports them and that constitutes their ground.

In general, we look to superstition when we want to find an example of the schemas of magical thinking in the actual conditions of life. In fact, superstitions are faded vestiges of magical thinking and, in a search for its real essence, they can only be misleading. On the other hand, to understand the meaning of magical thinking, it is advisable to resort to high, noble and sacred forms of thought that require a clear and insightful effort. That, for example, is the affective, representative and voluntary substratum that supports an ascent or an exploration. Perhaps the desire for conquest and the sense of competition underlie the motivation that makes it possible to move from everyday existence to exceptional acts; but certainly when the desire for conquest is invoked, it is a matter of making an individual act legitimate for a community. In fact, in the individual being or in the group limited to those who perform the exceptional act, the thinking implemented is much more primitive and much more elaborate.

Ascent, exploration, and, more generally, every pioneering act consists in adhering to the key-points that nature presents. Climbing a slope in order to go towards the summit is to make one's way towards the privileged place that commands the entire mountainous massif, not in order to dominate or to take possession of it, but to enter into a friendly relationship with it. Man and nature are not strictly speaking enemies before such accession to the key-point, but strangers to one

other. Until it has been climbed, the summit is only a summit, a place higher than the others. The ascent gives it the character of a place that is more fully developed, elaborate and non-abstract, a place where this exchange between the world and man occurs. The summit is the place from which the whole massif is seen in an absolute way, while views from all other places are relative and incomplete, making one wish for the summit point of view. An expedition or a navigation that makes it possible to reach a continent by an established route does not conquer anything; nevertheless, in magical thinking they are valid in that they make possible contact with the continent in a privileged place that is a key-point. The magical universe is made up of the network of places providing access to every domain of reality: it consists of thresholds, summits, boundaries and crossing points that are connected to one another by their singularity and their exceptional nature.

This network of boundaries is not only spatial but also temporal; there are notable dates and privileged moments to begin one action or another. Besides, the very notion of beginning is magical, even if every particular value is denied on the date of the beginning; the beginning of an action that is to last and the first act of what should be a long series ought not to have in themselves a particular majesty and power of direction, if they were thought to be controlling the entire duration of the action and the whole sequence of efforts, propitious or otherwise; dates are privileged points of time that make possible an exchange between human intention and the spontaneous unfolding of events. These are the temporal structures by which man is inserted in natural becoming, just as the influence of natural time affects each human life, becoming destiny.

In civilised life today, a great many institutions concern magical thinking but are hidden by utilitarian concepts that indirectly justify them; in particular, time off, festivals and vacations compensate with their magical charge for the loss of magical power imposed by civilised urban life. Thus, vacation trips, that are thought to provide rest and diversion, are in fact a quest for key-points old or new; these points can be the big city for country people, or the countryside for city dwellers, but more generally they are not any particular site in the city or the countryside; it [–the key-point–] is the shore or the high mountain or even the border crossed on the way to a foreign land. Public holidays are related to privileged moments of time; occasionally, a conjunction of singular moments and singular sites is possible.

So, ordinary time and ordinary space serve as ground for these figures; dissociated from the ground, figures would lose their meaning; time off and celebrations are not a release from ordinary life by suspending

ordinary life, but a search for privileged places and dates in relation to the continuous ground.

This figural structure is inherent in the world, rather than detached; it is the reticulation of the universe in privileged key-points at which exchanges happen between the living being and its milieu. Now, it is precisely this reticular structure that goes out of phase when there is a shift from the original magical unity to technics and to religion: figure and ground separate by becoming detached from the universe to which they adhered. The key points become objective, retaining only their functional mediatory characteristics, becoming instrumental, mobile, capable of efficiency in any place and at any time; as figure, the key-points, detached from the ground for which they were the key, become technical objects, transportable and abstracted from the milieu. At the same time, the key-points lose their mutual reticulation and their power of distant influence on the reality that surrounded them; as technical objects they have only one action upon contact, site by site, instant by instant. This rupture of the network of key-points frees the characteristics of the ground, and these in turn become detached from their own ground, narrowly qualitative and concrete, in order to hover over the whole universe, throughout space and throughout time, in the form of detached powers and forces above the world. While the key-points become objective in the form of concretised tools and instruments, the ground powers become subjective by becoming personified in the form of the divine and the sacred (Gods, heroes, priests).

The primitive reticulation of the magical world is thus the source of an objectification and a subjectification that are in conflict; at the moment of the rupture of the initial structuring, the fact that the figure becomes detached from the ground is expressed by another detachment: figure and ground themselves are freed from their concrete adherence to the universe and take contrasting pathways; the figure becomes fragmented, whereas the ground qualities and forces become universalised: this break-up and this universalising are forms of becoming, the figure becoming an abstract figure, and grounds becoming a single abstract ground. This phase-shift of the mediation into figural characteristics and ground characteristics translates into the emergence of a distance between man and the world. The meditation itself, instead of being a simple structuring of the universe, takes on a certain density; it becomes objectified in technics and becomes subjectified in religion, making the first object appear in the technical object and the first subject appear in divinity, when previously there had been a single unity of the living and its milieu: objectivity and subjectivity emerge between the living and its

milieu, between man and the world, at a moment when the world does not yet have a complete status as object nor man a complete status as subject. Moreover, it can be affirmed that objectivity is never completely coextensive with the world, and that subjectivity is never completely coextensive with man. It is only when the world is envisaged from a technicist perspective and man is envisaged from a religious perspective that one can be called a complete object and the other a complete subject. Pure objectivity and pure subjectivity are modes of the mediation between man and the world, in their first form.

Religion and technics are the organisation of two symmetrical and contrasting mediations; but they form a couple, since each is but one phase of the primitive mediation. In this sense, they do not have a definitive autonomy. Furthermore, even when taken in the system that they form, they cannot be considered as enclosing all the real, since they are between man and the world, but do not contain the entire reality of man and of the world, and cannot apply to it in a complete way. Because of the gap between these two opposing aspects of mediation, science and ethics deepen the relation between man and the world. With regard to science and to ethics, the two primitive mediations play a normative role: science and ethics are born in the interval defined by the gap between technics and religion, by following the median direction; the precedence that religion and technics have to science and ethics is of the same order as the precedence that lines limiting an angle have to the bisector of that angle: the sides of the angle may be indicated by short segments, whereas the bisector can be extended indefinitely. Likewise, from the gap that exists between very primitive technics and a very primitive religion, a very elaborate science and very elaborate ethics can be progressively constructed without being limited by, but only directed by, the basic conditions of technics and religion.

The origin of the division that created technical thinking and religious thinking can be attributed to a primitive structure of reticulation that is truly functional. This division separated figure from ground, figure providing the content of technics, and ground providing that of religion. Whereas in the magical reticulation of the world, figure and ground are reciprocal realities, technics and religion emerge when figure and ground become detached from one another, in this way becoming mobile, divisible, displaceable, and directly open to manipulation because disconnected from the world. Technical thinking retains only the schematism of structures, of what makes up the efficiency of action on singular sites; these singular sites, detached from the world of which they were the figure, detached also from one another, losing their

immobilising reticular concatenation, become divisible and receptive as well as reproducible and constructible. The elevated place becomes an observation post, a watchtower constructed in the plain, or a tower placed at the entrance to a gorge. At the beginning, technics are often content to develop a privileged place, as when constructing a tower at the summit of a hill, or placing a lighthouse on a promontory at the most visible point. But technics can also successfully create the functionality of privileged sites. Of natural realities technics retain only the figural power, not the site and natural localisation on a determined ground given prior to any human intervention. Dividing the schematisms more and more, it makes something into a tool or an instrument, that is to say, a fragment detached from the world capable of working efficiently in any location and under any conditions, site by site, according to the intention that directs it and at the moment when man so wishes. The accessibility of the technical thing consists in its being freed from servitude to the ground of the world. Technics are analytic, operating progressively and by contact, leaving aside connection by influence. In magic the singular place permits action over a whole domain, just as talking to the king is enough to win over a whole people. In technics, on the other hand, all of reality must be examined, touched and treated by the technical object, detached from the world and available for use in any site at any moment. The technical object is distinguishable from the natural being in the sense that it is not part of the world. It intervenes as mediator between man and the world; it is, therefore, the first detached object, for the world is a unity, a milieu rather than an ensemble of objects; there are in fact three types of reality: the world, the subject and the object, which is an intermediary between the world and the subject, the primary form of which is the technical object.

III. The Divergence of Technical Thinking and of Religious Thinking

Technical thinking, which results from the rupture of the primitive reticular structure of the magical world, and which retains those figural elements that can be deposited in objects, tools, or instruments, gains from this detachment an accessibility that makes possible its application to every element of the world. However, this rupture also produces a deficit: the tool or the technical instrument has retained only its figural characteristics, and figural aspects that are detached from the ground with which they had once been directly connected since they came from a primary structuring that caused figure and ground to spring up as a

single and continuous reality. In the magical universe, the figure was the figure of a ground and the ground the ground of a figure; the real, the unity of the real, was at once figure and ground; the question of a possible lack of effectiveness of the figure on the ground or of the influence of the ground on the figure could not have arisen, since figure and ground constituted a single unity of being. On the other contrary, in the case of technics, after the rupture, what the technical object retained and established of figural characteristics finds any ground whatever anonymous and foreign. The technical object has become a bearer of form, a remnant of figural characteristics, and it tries to apply that form to a ground that is now detached from the figure, because it has lost its intimate inherent relationship and because it can be informed by any form encountered, but in a violent, more or less imperfect manner; figure and ground have become strangers and abstract in relation to one other.

The hylemorphic schema does not solely describe the genesis of living beings; it might not even describe it essentially. Perhaps also it does not derive from a well-thought-out and conceptualised experience of technics: before the knowledge of the living being and before reflection on technics, this implicit adequacy of figure and ground is broken by technics. If the hylemorphic schema seems disengaged from technical experience, this is because it is more a norm and an ideal than an experience of the real. Technical experience, making use of vestiges of figural elements and vestiges of ground characteristics, revives the primary intuition of a mutual adherence of matter and form, of a coupling preceding any division. In this sense, the hylemorphic schema is correct, not because of the logical use of it in ancient philosophy, but as an intuition of the structure of the universe for man before the birth of technics. This relation cannot be organised as a hierarchy: it cannot have in it increasingly successive and increasingly abstract stages of matter and of form, because the real model of the relation between matter and form is the primary structuring of the universe as figure and ground; now, this structuring is true only if it is not abstract, if it is at one stage only; the ground is really ground and the figure really figure, and it cannot become ground for a higher figure. The manner in which Aristotle describes the relations between form and matter, in particular the supposition that matter aspires to form (matter aspires to form as the female to the male) is already far from primitive magical thinking, for that aspiration can only exist if there had been an earlier detachment; so, it is a single being that is at once matter and form. Furthermore, perhaps one should not say that only the individual being is made up of matter and form; because the emergence of a figure-ground structure is prior to

any segregation of units. The mutual relation of correspondence between a given key-point and a given ground neither presupposes the isolation of the key-point from the network of other key-points nor the discontinuity of this ground from other grounds: it is a universe that is structured in this way, not an ensemble of individuals. The first detached beings to emerge after the rupture of the primitive reticulation are technical objects and religious subjects, and they are responsible for figural characteristics as they are for ground characteristics: therefore, they do not fully possess matter and form.

The dissociation of the primitive structuring from the magical universe entails a series of consequences for technics and religion, and through them it conditions the later development of science and of ethics. In fact, unity belongs to the magical world. The phase-shift that makes for an opposition between technics and religion, in an irreducible way leaves technical content with a status lesser than unity and leaves religious content with a status greater than unity. This causes all the other consequences. A proper understanding of the status of the technicity of objects depends on its being grasped in terms of the development that put the primitive unity out of phase. Religion, retaining its ground characteristics (homogeneity, qualitative nature, indistinction of elements within a system of mutual influences, long-range action across space and time resulting in ubiquity and eternity), represents the implementation of the functions of totality. A particular being, a precise object of attention or of effort, is always considered in religious thought to be smaller than real unity, inferior to the totality and included within it, exceeded by the totality of space, and preceded and followed by the immensity of time. Whether subject or object, the object, the being, the individual is always understood to be less than unity, to be dominated by a presaged totality that infinitely transcends it. The source of the transcendence lies in the function of totality that dominates the particular being; in the religious view of things this particular being is understood in relation to a totality in which it participates, because of which it exists, but which it can never completely express. Religion universalises the function of totality, which is dissociated and consequently freed from any figural attachment that limits it; the grounds connected to the world in magical thinking, and consequently limited by the very structuring of the magical universe, become in religious thinking a limitless background, spatial as well as temporal. They retain their positive ground qualities (forces, powers, influences, quality), but rid themselves of their limits and the adherence that attached them to a *hic et nunc*. They become absolute ground, totality

of ground. Advancement in the universe begins from liberated and, to some extent, abstract magical grounds.

Religious thinking, after the disjunction of ground and figure, retains the other part of the magical world: the ground, with its qualities, its tensions, its forces; but this ground, too, like the figural schemas of technics, becomes something detached from the world, abstracted from the primitive milieu. And just as the figural schemas of technics, freed from their adherence to the world, are affixed to tool or instrument in the course of becoming objectified, the qualities of ground that technicity makes available in the mobilisation of figures are affixed to subjects.

Technical objectification leading to the emergence of the technical object, the mediator between man and the world, has a counterpart in religious subjectification. Just as technical mediation is instituted by means of something that becomes a technical object, so religious mediation emerges as a result of the affixing of ground characteristics on subjects, real or imaginary, divinities or priests. Religious subjectification normally leads to mediation by the priest, while technical mediation leads to mediation by the technical object. Technicity retains the figural characteristics of the primitive complex of man and the world, while religiosity retains the ground characteristics.

Technicity and religiosity are neither degraded forms of magic nor relics of magic; they issue from the division of the primitive magical complex, the reticulation of the original human milieu into figure and ground. It is through their coupling that technics and religion are the heirs of magic, not through each on its own. Religion is not more magical than technics; it is the subjective phase of the result of division, whereas technics are the objective phase of the very same division. Technics and religion are contemporaries of each other, and, when each is taken separately, they are more impoverished than the magic from which they emerge.

Religion, therefore, has by nature the vocation to represent the exigency of the totality; when it divides into a theoretical mode and a practical mode, through theology it becomes the exigency of a systematic representation of the real as an absolute unity; through morality, it becomes for ethics the exigency of absolute norms of action that are justified in the name of the totality and superior to all hypothetical, that is to say particular, imperatives; to science as to ethics, religion brings a principle of reference to the totality, which is the aspiration to the unity of theoretical knowledge and to the absolute character of the moral imperative. Religious inspiration constitutes a permanent reminder of the relativity of one particular being with respect to an

unconditional totality exceeding every object and every subject of knowledge and of action.

Conversely, technics have a content that is always subordinate to the status of the unity, because the schemas of efficiency and the structures resulting from the fragmentation of the primitive network of key-points cannot be applied to the totality of the world. By nature, technical objects are multiple and divided; technical thinking, enclosed in this plurality, can progress, but only by multiplying technical objects, without being able to recapture the primitive unity. Even when multiplying technical objects endlessly, it is impossible to find an absolute adequacy to the world, since each of the objects attacks the world in one place only and in one moment only; it is localised, particularised; adding technical objects one to another can neither remake the world nor regain contact with the world in its unity, which was the aim of magical thinking.

In connection with a specific object or with a specific task, technical thinking is always inferior to unity: it can present several objects and several means, and select the best; but nonetheless, it always remains inadequate to the wholeness of the unity of the object or of the task. Each schema, each object, each technical operation, is controlled and guided by the whole from which it derives its ends and its orientation, and which provides it with a never attained principle of unity that is expressed by combining and multiplying its schemas.

Technical thinking has by nature the vocation to represent the point-of-view of the element; it adheres to the elementary function. Once technicity is admitted into a domain it breaks it up and starts a chain of successive and elementary mediations governed by the unity of the domain and subordinated to it. Technical thinking conceives the operation of an ensemble as a chain of elementary processes working point by point and step by step; it localises and multiplies the schemas of mediation, always remaining lesser than the unity. The element in technical thinking is more stable, better understood, and in a certain way more perfect than the ensemble; it is really an *object*, whereas the ensemble always remains to a certain extent inherent in the world. Religious thinking finds the opposite equilibrium: in it, the totality is more stable, more powerful, and more viable than the element.

In the theoretical domain as in the ethical domain, technics are concerned with the element. In the sciences the contribution of technics consisted in making possible a representation of phenomena one by one by breaking them down into simple elementary processes similar to the operations of technical objects; such is the role of the mechanistic

hypothesis that enabled Descartes to represent the rainbow as an overall result of the point by point trajectory taken by each luminous corpuscle in each drop of rain in a cloud; and it was also according to the same method that Descartes describes the functioning of the heart by breaking down a complete cycle into simple successive operations and showing that the functioning of the whole is the result of the play of elements necessitated by their particular disposition (for example, that of each valve). Descartes does not ask himself why the heart is made in this way, with valves and cavities, but how it works given how it is made. The application of schemas drawn from technics does not account for the existence of the totality, taken as a unity, but does account for the point by point and instant by instant functioning of that totality.

In the ethical domain, technical thinking not only introduces means of action that are fragmentary and tied to the capacities of each object that is becoming a utensil, but also a certain reduplication of the action by technicity; a specific human action, considered with respect to its results, could have been accomplished by a specific technical functioning going through various stages; elements and moments of action have their technical analogue; an effort of attention, of memory, could have been replaced by a technical operation; technicity provides a partial equivalence to the results of action; it accentuates awareness of the action by the being who brings it to completion in the form of results; it broadcasts and objectifies the results of the action through comparison with those of the technical operation, breaking down the action into partial results, into elementary completions. Just as in the sciences technicity introduces the search for the *how* by a breaking down of ensemble phenomena into elementary operations, so in ethics technicity introduces the search for a breaking down of the overall action into the elements of action; because the total action is envisaged as that which produces a result, the breakdown of the action generated by technics considers the elements of the action as gestures that achieve partial results. Technicity assumes that an action is limited to its results; it is not concerned with the subject of the action taken in its real totality, nor even with an action in its totality, to the extent that the totality of the action is founded on the unity of the subject. In ethics concern with results is the analogue of the search for the *how* in the sciences; result and process remain subordinate to the unity of the action or to the ensemble of the real.

The postulation of an absolute and unconditional justification which religion directs towards ethics translates into a search for the intention as opposed to a search for the result that is inspired by technics. In the

sciences, religious thinking introduces an appeal for absolute theoretical unity that requires a search for the sense of becoming and the existence of given phenomena (hence responding to the *why?*), whereas technical thinking offers an examination of the *how?* for each of the phenomena.

Because its content is inferior to unity, technical thinking is the paradigm for all inductive thinking, both in the theoretical order and in the practical. It contains this inductive process in itself, prior to any separation into practical and theoretical modes. Induction, in fact, is not merely a logical process in the strict sense of the term; any process can be considered to be a process of the inductive type if its content is inferior to the status of unity, if it strives to attain unity or, at least, if it tends towards unity from a plurality of elements, each of which is inferior to unity. What induction takes hold of, what it starts from, is an element that in itself is not sufficient and complete, and does not constitute a unity; so, it exceeds each particular element by combining it with other elements that are themselves particular, in order to find an analogue of unity: in induction there is a search for the ground of reality from figural elements that are fragments; to try to find a law beneath phenomena, as in the induction of Bacon and Stuart Mill, or to try to find only what is common to all individuals of a given species, as in Aristotle's induction, is to postulate that beyond the plurality of phenomena and of individuals there exists a stable and common ground for reality, that is the unity of the real.

It is no different in ethics that would directly derive from technics; to want the whole duration of life to be a series of moments, to extract from each situation what is pleasant in it, and to want to construct the happiness of life by accumulating its agreeable elements, as did ancient Eudaimonism or Utilitarianism, is to proceed in an inductive manner, by trying to replace the unity of the duration of life and the unity of human aspiration with a plurality of instants and with the homogeneity of all successive desires. The elaboration to which Epicureanism submits desires has one goal only, which is to incorporate them into the continuity of an existence that proceeds in an accumulative manner: for this, each of the desires must be dominated and surrounded by the subject, made lesser than unity, so that it can be treated and manipulated as a genuine element. This is why the passions are eliminated, since they cannot be treated as elements; they are larger than the unity of the subject; they dominate it, they come from farther away than it and tend to go farther on than it, obliging it to exceed its limits. Lucretius tries to destroy the passions from within, by showing that they are based on errors; in fact, he fails to account for the element of tendency in

passion, that is to say, for the force that is inserted into the subject and yet is more extensive than it, a force in relation to which it seems to be a very limited being; tendency cannot be considered to be contained within the subject as a unity. Wisdom, having restored the forces at the origin of action to a status of inferiority with respect to the unity of the moral subject, can organise them as elements and reconstruct a moral subject within the natural subject; however, this moral subject never completely attains the level of unity; between the reconstructed moral subject and the natural subject there remains a void impossible to fill; the inductive approach remains in plurality; it constructs a network of elements, but this network cannot amount to a real unity. All ethical technics leave the moral subject unsatisfied because they ignore its unity; the subject cannot be content with a life that would be a series, even an uninterrupted series, of happy moments; a life that is perfectly successful element by element is still not a moral life; it lacks what makes it the life of a subject: unity.

But conversely, religious thinking, the foundation of obligation, creates in ethical thought a search for unconditional justification which makes every act and every subject appear to be inferior to real unity; when related to a totality that expands endlessly, the moral act and subject derive their significance solely from their relation with this totality; the communication between the totality and the subject is precarious, because at every moment the subject is drawn back to the dimension of its own unity, which is not that of the totality; the ethical subject is de-centered by religious exigency.

Excerpted from a translation in progress of Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (1958); this particular excerpt being Chapter One, 'The Genesis of Technicity', of Part Three, 'The Essence of Technicity'.

Ninian Mellamphy (*Department of English, University of Western Ontario*)

Dan Mellamphy (*Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, University of Western Ontario*)

Nandita Biswas Mellamphy (*Department of Political Science, University of Western Ontario*)

Notes

1. Not metaphorically but really: the geological folding and the eruption that built the whole massif are oriented towards the peak. The promontory is the firmest part of the chain eroded by the sea.