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Resonances of Neo-Confucianism

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It is a common effort by which we strive to “develop ourselves without stopping” (*zi qiang bu xi* 自強不息) and to “abide in the supreme good” (*zhi yu zhi shan* 止於至善): these two parts of Xiamen University’s motto refer to the two aspects of “doing” (*wei* 為) and “not-doing” (*wuwei* 無為), respectively.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 PARTNERS OF RESONANCE

1.1.1 *Neo-Confucianism*

The present book wants to “resonate” some Chinese Neo-Confucian thinkers with some Western modern thinkers.

Resonance will be explained in more detail in later sections of this Introduction. But something can be gleaned from the common meanings of this metaphor itself, as when I say, “This resonated with me.” This means that I was “on the same wavelength” with it and then we started to “oscillate” together, with an increased “amplitude”. I want to do a similar thing with the thinkers involved: bring them to the same wavelength and make them oscillate together with greater amplitude, that is, connect them to a greater number of ideas than they initially had.

Neo-Confucianism is the most influential Chinese philosophical tradition of the last millennium. During the Song 宋 Dynasty (960–1279), after many centuries of Buddhist and Daoist prominence, several thinkers tried to revive ancient Confucianism, in a manner somewhat similar to how, a couple of centuries later, Renaissance thinkers in Europe returned to the ideas of Greco-Roman Antiquity. And just as Renaissance was a

syncretism of Christian and Antique influences, the Neo-Confucianism was a hybrid of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.¹

It should be noted that the term “Neo-Confucianism” is a Western notion that is not used in Chinese and was not the movement’s autonym. In China, the movement is usually called “the study of Dao” (*Daoxue* 道學), “the study of the veins”² (*lixue* 理學), “Song and Ming dynasty study of veins” (*Song-Ming lixue* 宋明理學) or by some other term (for the terms “Confucianism” and “Neo-Confucianism”, see Yang 2018, 2019). However, the school did intend to revive Confucius’ teaching, so the term Neo-Confucianism is not misleading (for further discussion, see Makeham 2010: x–xiv). In this text, I shall use the term Neo-Confucianism simply as a convention, without taking a strong stance on that issue.

There were different schools of Neo-Confucianism, the most important of which was the “school of veins” (*li* 理) or the “school of Chengs and Zhu”, founded by brothers Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), and developed by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). Another famous tradition is the so-called school of heart/mind (*xin* 心) or the “school of Lu and Wang”, founded by Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139–1192) and later developed by Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529). Other schools may be discerned, for example, the school of energy³ (*qi* 氣), initiated by Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) and developed by many other thinkers, the most famous of whom is Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692).

From these different lineages, I select three authors: Zhu Xi, Zhang Zai, and Wang Yangming, so that by their very differences and discrepancies a deeper understanding can be had of the Neo-Confucian constellations of concepts, just as from discrepancies between the images on our two retinas we acquire a perception of depth.

1.1.2 *Western Resonances*

I resonate these Neo-Confucian authors with certain Western thinkers:⁴ Deleuze, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and Husserl. Among them, the first

¹For those influences, see for example Yu 2020, Sellmann 2020, Makeham 2018, Lidén 2011, Angurarohita 1989, Fung 1942. General overviews of Neo-Confucianism also usually contain some treatment of Buddhist and Daoist influences.

²For this translation of the term, see below, Sect. 2.4.

³For this translation of the term, see below, Sect. 2.4.

⁴Comparisons with other than Western traditions are also very much needed, as Alexis McLeod has argued, comparing Chinese and Mayan traditions (McLeod 2018: 163–167).

resonance came between Deleuze and Zhu Xi. Deleuze creates good resonances not only with Zhu Xi, but also with the mainstream Chinese ontology in general that proceeds by differentiation.⁵ Plotinus is another great Western thinker of genesis by immanent differentiation, but his metaphors lean toward the “spirit” side, and he would probably resonate better with the Indian philosophy of koshas, that are different layers of interpenetration and that start from an interpenetrating consciousness.

Deleuze has a stronger material-ist emphasis; and by the hyphen I emphasize that he is not so much materialist (as he sometimes himself claims) who emphasizes the primacy of matter, but he is always rather thinking of materials: while matter is homogeneous (same quarks and electrons—or strings), materials manifest emergent heterogeneous behavior. The most familiar example is perhaps carbon that in different kinds of bonds can give graphite, diamond, or fullerene. In terms of basic matter (carbon atoms), they are all the same, but as materials, they have very different behavior, that is, different interactions with their environment.

Deleuze’s ontology, as presented in the “Difference and Repetition”, of virtuality that is actualized through intensive processes into qualified and quantifiable spatio-temporal beings, resonates well with the mainstream Chinese idea that an initial interpenetrating stage of being differentiates itself into increasingly juxtaposed stages, up until fully actualized spatio-temporal things that juxtapose each other, one next to another. There are important differences in details, but the overall scheme resonates well.

When contact had been established, and resonance initiated between Deleuze and specifically Zhu Xi, it started to resonate different parts of Deleuze’s philosophy itself. Zhu Xi has an ontology of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣, that I translate as “veins” and “energy”, and Deleuze, in his “Difference and Repetition” has a very elaborate treatment of the virtual (that I bring together with the veins), but the energetic side may be somewhat obscured. Resonating with Zhu Xi, it will come to the fore again: the *force* of actualization. Or even more broadly, one could speak of that Deleuze’s book as a book of veins, while his collaborative books with Guattari would be more books of energy.

⁵There is a growing trend of resonating Deleuze with the Chinese tradition: ontology (Garrison 2022, Ardoline, 2022), Daoism (Silantsyeva 2016), Chan Buddhism (Zhang and Tian 2018), aesthetics (Lee 2013, Wong 2013, Bogue et al. 2014, Shubao Dong 2018).

On the side of Zhu Xi, a resonance with Deleuze offers new interpretative possibilities, and through his intermediary, opens up a wide array of possible fields of relevance: Deleuze's ideas have been applied to the philosophy of science, to arts, even to religion, and so, they could be Zhu Xi's (see Ott 2021). Neo-Confucianism, during its thousand years of development, sometimes stifled into abstract reasoning about *li* and *qi*; and such contemporary links may give new life to it.

I then tried to resonate Deleuze with all Neo-Confucians, but it didn't always work out well. It seemed that the school of heart-mind would resonate much better with Husserlian **phenomenology**. If we take Wang Yangming, then some of his statements would seem to be decidedly idealistic, as if my mind would constitute the world. Yet it is clear that he cannot mean that; therefore, a different solution must be found, and one of the best Western resonance partners would be a phenomenological approach where the question is not about the constitution of the "real" world, but about the conditions of *appearing* of what appears, be it of the world or of myself. Wang Yangming's core notion of "primary knowledge" (*liangzhi* 良知) could be resonated with the phenomenological *epoché*, bracketing of the "real world" and instead investigating the modes of appearance.

After this initial resonance has been established, further points of resonance can be explored. For example, Wang Yangming claims that I form "one body" (or, more precisely, what I translate as "rhizomatic body", *ti* 體) with all beings. This may seem a relapse into naïve "belief" in the world and making a grand fictitious metaphysical claim on top of that. But if we maintain the phenomenological resonance, this idea can be taken in the sense of intersubjectivity, and in then it would cease to be grand or overstated, but would state the very basic fact that appearance can never be solipsistic. In the way that world appears to me, it is already implied that it appears also to others. Otherwise, the world would solve into bits of phantasy without any coherence. When I perceive this table as something objective, it means (and even demands) that others also perceive it. If all others would claim that there is no table where I see it, I would start to doubt my mental health.

And again, the school of *qi* seemed to demand yet another partner for resonance. While energy plays some role in nearly all philosophers (it is very prominent in the joint work of Deleuze and Guattari, as I mentioned), it is hard to find a pure thinker of "energy" in the West. Nietzsche would be one of the main candidates, but his idea of the eternal return, as

well as his intricate cultural critique, complicate things.⁶ Thus, I opted for **Schopenhauer** whose concept of will is clearly energetic. Although it is interesting that he chose a psychological metaphor—the will that I seem to exert in conscious decisions—he clearly conceives it in substantial terms and therefore resonates with the notion of *qi* or energy.

Again, further resonances can be created: between Zhang Zai’s “incipient activation” (*ji* 機) and Schopenhauer’s ideas as the primary objectifications of the will (or solidification of the energy), or between dualities in both authors, etc. Also, Schopenhauer’s ideas about art as self-cultivation resonate with the rich tradition of Chinese self-cultivation.

1.1.3 *Dissonances*

As hinted above, not all thinkers resonate well. And after we have established a resonance between two thinkers, also discordant notes become audible. In my analyses, I occasionally mention some of the discrepancies to avoid the impression that the resonances are neat and unproblematic. Certainly, they could be developed further, and many more points of disagreement and incongruities could be brought out. But this would rather fit under a different approach with a different aim in mind. Indeed, comparative philosophy is an especially fertile ground for precisely investigating those discrepancies and incongruities. There is in fact no solid common ground, or to put it differently (and we are going to discuss it in more detail in following sub-sections), the common ground always floats “in the air”. While in this book occasional discordant notes are heard, a sequel of this book could be conceived where those discordances would be a starting point. But one cannot move too quickly to those discordances either; discord appears together with a possible concord.

The resonance indeed takes place over an abyss; resonating partners are fundamentally disparate, and what joins them, is their very difference and incongruity. They are together *as* different. Determinate resonating partners do not precede the resonance, but they are constituted or determined by their resonance itself. And when they resonate, both concordant and

⁶ Also dualists could be considered, but they are either contradictory—reductive materialists who simply explain away the subjectivity, saying that it is “really” matter, while any representation of it is still *my* representation, part of my subjectivity, which I cannot cancel (Schopenhauer’s critique is still valid in this topic)—or matter and energy remain under the dominion of spirit, as in the case of early Modern scientists who developed a mechanistic understanding of bodily movements, but who remained theistic.

discordant notes are heard, translating their ontological belonging together through incongruity.

This is one of the reasons why I chose to resonate Neo-Confucians with Western thinkers: due to the deep differences in cultural context, incongruity is evident. When they are brought to resonance, and hence made congruous, the harmony they produce is that much richer. It will always contain discordant notes, and these can be used to better probe the ontological cut or discrepancy. In case of closer partners, we may be in greater doubt about how deep the discord is since some topics of deep disagreement in one tradition may seem trivial from the point of another tradition. To take an example from the context of religion: fierce battles were held in the West around *filioque* but try to explain that to a Chinese! And other, seemingly slight differences may express deep ontological rifts, if resonated with another tradition.

1.2 (UN)GROUND OF COMPARISON⁷

1.2.1 *What Is Comparison?*

When we bring together philosophers from different traditions, it is usually called “comparative philosophy”. There is already a lot of comparative philosophy, but there is still little philosophy of comparison, claims Ralph Weber (2014: 151). In his article “Comparative Philosophy and the *Tertium*: Comparing What with What, and in What Respect?”, Weber tries to show that every comparison requires a ground of comparison, a “third of comparison”, *tertium comparationis*.⁸ He is arguing against the claim that some things are incomparable (cf. MacIntyre 1991), and his own statement is that “anything can indeed be compared to anything” (Weber 2014: 151), that is, a comparative ground can be found for any two things or words, if not otherwise, then simply in relation to the fact that both exist in the universe or both are words (Weber 2014: 165, referring to G. E. Moore).

⁷This chapter has been published in the *Asian Studies* journal of the Ljubljana University, as Ott 2022. I thank the publisher for the kind permission to republish it.

⁸A more detailed presentation can be found in Weber and Chakrabarti (2016), where they distinguish five aspects, including a “pre-comparative *tertium*” (2016: 8). For our purposes here, it does not change much.

Toward the end of his article, Weber also meditates on the question that sometimes this ground for comparison is not clear. For instance, someone feels the need to compare Confucianism and Cicero, but initially they may not know exactly how or in what respect they should be compared (Weber 2014: 166). But even in that case, Weber argues, we can say that there is a ground, namely the interest of the researcher. Weber acknowledges the role of the person and their intentions and interests, in choosing what to bring together and how. The ground of comparison lies in the identity of the researcher. But it may be pointed out that researchers themselves are not sealed off from the object of their research, and the research changes them in turn, just as Gilbert Simondon said that the knowledge of individuation is the individuation of knowledge, that is, knowledge itself matures and individuates in the course of a process of research (Simondon 1989: 34). Indeed, Weber remarks that the researchers may not be themselves aware of their intentions when they initially bring things together, and their ideas may change in this process.

This topic of obscurity of the ground of comparison, that remains quite tangential for Weber's purposes, will be central here in what follows in this chapter. For the main part of his article, Weber argues for the identity and identification of the ground that he uses to ward off incomparability and hence the rejection of other philosophical traditions (and I completely share Weber's goal⁹). For my part, I would like to focus on the question of clarity or obscurity of the ground. If the ground for comparison would be always clear from the beginning, there would not be much creativity or philosophical interest involved in a comparison. And it seems that in those considerations where Weber acknowledges a difference, a differentiation, and an obscurity in the one who compares, he comes quite close to the ideas of unfolding and bringing to clarity of obscure articulations that I shall deal with later in this chapter.

⁹The obscure ground involves some incommensurability, but this does not preclude comparison; on the contrary, it warrants *multiple* comparisons: "The concept of incommensurability is not to be confused with, or reduced to logical incompatibility or incomparability. Incommensurable languages can be compared and rationally evaluated in *multiple* ways. Practically, such comparison and evaluation requires the cultivation of hermeneutical sensitivity and imagination." (Bernstein 1991: 92)

1.2.2 *Ground of Comparison*

Let us come to the basics of comparison. Weber argues that for any comparison there must be a ground for comparison, a *tertium comparationis*. That is, since one thing and another thing are in themselves incommensurate, incongruous, incomparable, they need a third one, which would give a common measure to them and through which they can start to communicate.

Money and monetary value are an excellent example. If I want to compare apples and oranges from the perspective of their market value, I note down how much one costs and how much the other, per kilo, and then I can compare the numbers. And as we see, it presupposes another common measure, the weight: in order to compare a certain number of apples with a certain number of oranges, I first have to weigh them, in order to say the price per mass unit. I can do it in two different ways, (1) either weighing apples and oranges in relation to each other on a balance scale: if the balance is big enough, so that a sufficiently large number of apples and oranges can be fitted on both sides, I can probably reach a pretty good equilibrium by adding or subtracting fruits on either side; and weight is their common denominator. (2) The other method is to weigh them separately by putting graded masses on the other plate, or by using a spring scale, and read the number on the display. In this second case, there is a further comparison or reduction: I view the weight from the viewpoint of number (summing up the masses on the other plate or reading the numbers on the spring scale); I reduce one ground of comparison, weight, to a more general ground of comparison, number.

All quantitative measures are good examples of *tertium comparationis*. We compare things *as to* the weight, price, speed, length, etc. They serve as the ground of comparison, as the 'third'. The comparison is always a two-step process: first, I introduce the kind of measurement that interests me: I reduce the phenomenon to that aspect, I take it from that angle. For instance, I take apples from the aspect of price or from the aspect of weight (and measurements may be nested; in order to compare the price of a certain number of apples to the price of a certain number of oranges, I also have to weigh them). This is the decisive step, a decision to question the phenomena from a certain viewpoint, with a certain intention (I want to know their price and/or their weight), the introduction of a ground (that makes possible comparisons with other things), a 'third' that gives the angle from which to view the two.

The second step is to compare two (or more) things. This is usually easier. I already have the common ground for the things, and now I only need to put the things together in this respect (on opposing sides of a balance scale) or compare the numbers read at separate instances of weighing. In the latter case, as discussed above, I compare weights to numbers, I introduce a numerical aspect to the weight, using some units (say, kilograms) which can be divided and added in a uniform way (e.g., in a decimal system, a kilogram can be divided into a thousand grams, and thousand kilograms can be added up and called a ton).

So, in a sense, the ‘third’ (the common ground) comes before the ‘second’ (a thing that differs from the ‘first’ thing). But then again, I could have no quantitative common ground, if there would not be different things. There must always be a ‘second’ in addition to a ‘first’ thing; indeed, we can call something a ‘first’ only if there is also a ‘second’. ‘First’ and ‘second’ cannot be separated absolutely—they may be relatively separate and distinguished, but their very limit or border requires something outside from them, which delimits them, and at the same time which unites them. And this border may be called the ‘third’.¹⁰ So, ‘first’, ‘second’ and ‘third’ form an inseparable complex. Number is the most general ground of comparison, because any actual thing or process can be quantified in one way or another. A number may represent price, weight, speed, brightness, length, happiness (say, in a happiness index), etc.

1.2.3 *Qualitative and Quantitative Comparison*

It is useful to make a distinction at this point between quantitative and qualitative comparison.¹¹ The former involves the repetition of units (as when we count how many units of grams or kilograms ‘fit’ into the weight

¹⁰ If we investigate it further, we will find that this border is not separate from the entity but is its own aspect (see Hegel 2010: 95–101). The whole of Hegel’s philosophy can be seen as renewed overcoming of fixed and closed identities and an ever more sophisticated incorporation of otherness. This is another way of comparing without a ground, or of overcoming initial, crude, and untrue grounds.

¹¹ Quantitative methods of science combine qualitative and quantitative aspects, since they take reality from the viewpoint of some qualities, and segment it quantitatively. Qualitative methods straddle qualitative and intensive aspects (the latter is a major topic in this chapter, discussed below); they depart from certain properties of reality, but they do not know beforehand how they fit together. Of course, the outcome of quantitative research may also well be that the initial quality is made problematic and obscure, and that a new distribution of qualities may be proposed.

of a thing). Qualitative comparison is based on similarity and its basis is a holistic or gestalt-like form. In this sense, the first step described above, for example, the treatment of a thing from the point of view of weight would be a qualitative comparison;¹² and the second step of comparing numerical values, would be quantitative comparison. Qualitative comparison is based, for example, on the weight as a quality of things. And by qualitative comparison, putting apples and oranges on two plates of a balance scale, we can make a qualitative judgment, for example, when we say that one is ‘heavier’ than the other or that they are ‘equally’ heavy. But when we want to know *how much* heavier, then we would need a repeating unit and we would become involved in a quantitative measurement and comparison.

Qualitative comparison is a basic fact for all living beings. It is the basis for the categories they form in their interactions with the surroundings. A bacterium has a category for food and another for poison. These categories are evidenced by its behavior, when it moves up the gradient of a substance or against it, toward the food or away from poison. And perhaps we can detect further differences in its behavior of feeding or fleeing, in function of the different types of food or poison, or of their abundance (and so there may already be an implicit incipient quantitative comparison). Each category subsumes a certain number of occurrences or instances; a bacterium may move towards a new gradient of sugar when the old one has been depleted (it can do it *again*, exhibiting a generalization over time); and it may perhaps exhibit the same behavior in case of both glucose and fructose—in that case these two would be the same for it, or at least sufficiently similar (again, showing that a generality is involved).

Qualitative comparison and categorization is behind practically every word of the language: white things include instances of sugar, salt, snow, etc.; ‘houses’ include bigger and smaller houses; ‘running’ includes several different instances and the ways of running of different people and animals; ‘ouch!’ expresses a certain kind of reaction in different people; even

¹²When weight is mentioned, we may be tempted to think that it is something quantitative, since we often encounter weights in an already quantified form. Yet, in itself, weight is a quality, a property of an object, just as velocity and color are. It is quantifiable, but in itself, it can be distinguished from quantity. In quantity, distinctions are made inside the quality; a certain unit is extracted and imposed on other phenomena. I take a standard for weight, for example, a thing of one kilogram, and observe, how many of those standard units can I fit on the other side of a weighing scale, before the scale equalizes.

‘but’ or ‘or’ involve some kind of scheme for relating things, behaviors, propositions (“this apple is red, but this orange is orange”, “do you want apples or oranges”). The so-called prototype-based categories, investigated by George Lakoff (1987), also have a certain qualitative image or scheme as their basis. For example, a robin may be at the center of our bird-category, on the basis of which we compare putative birds and either include or exclude them, and include more centrally (sparrow) or more at the margin (ostrich, penguin). The birds at the margin, by qualitative comparison, depart more from the central image than the more ‘prototypical’ birds. This can again be made to correlate to some quantitative data—for example, that ostriches and penguins weigh way more than a ‘prototypical’ bird—but it requires first some qualitative basis (e.g., that we recognize them all as birds).

In sum, the ground for qualitative comparison—as well as for quantitative comparison—is some actualized feature of the world.

1.2.4 *Intensity*

The quantitative and qualitative comparison discussed above proceeds without much ado. They may involve technical difficulties (e.g., the invention of scales or money, or agreement on the aspect from which comparison will be made), but at least we know what we are doing.

Yet there is another dimension of comparison. Sometimes I face a situation when I do not know how things fit together, I do not yet know their ‘what’ or ‘how’ or ‘how much’.¹³ I may have the feeling that ‘there is something’, but I do not yet know, what it is. I grope in the dark. For instance, I watch a movie, read a book, look at a painting, and I feel that there is something significant there, something important. But I may not be sure in what way exactly it is important, or how it relates to those other things that I have been doing and investigating—or, in the final account, how it relates to the person I am.¹⁴

Let us look a little bit further, what does the ‘groping in the dark’ involve, or the feeling that ‘there is something there’. First of all, it involves

¹³Outside of the most general determinations that these things or ideas ‘exist’ and that they ‘have some relation to me’ some relevance. But all this remains completely empty, undetermined, and obscure.

¹⁴The person I am, can be seen as a specific way of relating things and relating to things, a specific way that marks out also what is important and relevant.

a feeling of tension that can be experienced as exciting, disturbing, or uneasy. In any case, it requires that I do something. It concerns me, it is relevant to me, but I do not yet know how it ‘fits’: how the different elements of the situation fit together, and how it fits together with myself. This is the intensive dimension of comparison.

Although the meaning is obscure, this tension¹⁵ is not completely indistinct. In all situations there is some articulation. But I always grasp only part of it, and partially. If I delve deeper, I may find out that the true (or truer) articulations are, in fact, different, and I may also see why they appeared in such a way. The Earth seems flat, but after some learning (geography lessons) and/or experience (taking an airplane), I understand that it is curved. I will also understand the reason of the apparent flatness: the curvature is, from a human perspective, too slight to be perceived without some sophisticated intellectual or technical tools. The former articulations need not disappear, but they will be inserted into a wider context of more articulations.

So, when something puzzles me, I am already immersed in some articulations, but I feel that further articulations lie hidden and implied (literally, ‘folded in’), and the tension I feel urges me to find them, to bring them into clarity, to fold them out or explicate them.

This applies both to very sophisticated scientific and philosophical research, as well as to our very first explorations of the world as infants. The basic scheme is the same: feeling of tension, implied obscure articulation, effort to explicate it and to bring it to clarity, new situation with new tensions, and the cycle repeats itself. It is useful to bear in mind the very first steps of developing knowledge, because if we immediately start to consider the most sophisticated expressions of knowledge, we may lose

¹⁵The psychological tension corresponds to some intensity in the world. Intensity expresses various tendencies of things, both in relation to their inner articulations, and to external things. If a kettle is heated from below, a heat difference is created and the water inside it will tend to move upwards. And this intensive situation may be expressed in different solutions: calm diffusion, regular convection cells, and violent boiling (see DeLanda 2002). In mental problems, the psychological tension may become quite decoupled from the objective intensities, but this separation can never become complete. A distinction can be made in the mode of actualization of intensities. Where cognition becomes decoupled from reality, the tension cannot unfold in cooperation with other beings, and its operation will remain repetitive, tedious. For more on this, see below, in next section, where two intensive movements are described. The intensity is intended to correspond to Deleuze’s intensive actualization and spatio-temporal dynamisms (see Deleuze 1994, Chap. 5). Of course, the notion of intensity has also been criticized (e.g., Garcia 2018).

sight of the fact that they are part of an already very unfolded understanding that has required very many subsequent steps of unfolding, a maturation process. By going back to the initial stages, we can better appreciate how fundamental this kind of intensity is.

1.2.5 *Obscure and Clear Sides*

What aspects can we distinguish in this tension and unfolding? Most simply, we could distinguish between two sides, the clear and obscure. Some articulations of the situation are clear, and others lay in obscurity. We should avoid the temptation of imagining the obscure side to be in the likeness of the clear side. They do not differ in degree (as the metaphor of light/darkness would suggest, where adding more lumens will add more clarity, at least up to a point), but they differ in nature. Why is the **obscure** side obscure? Because its articulations are not juxtaposed, unfolded, or explicated, but interpenetrating, folded, implicated. The mature (unfolded) plant is not already there in the seed (the folded phase). The capacity of the seed to develop into an unfolded plant lies in obscurity. The seed does not follow some ‘idea’, a kind of a picture of the mature plant (with its juxtaposed parts)¹⁶ but unfolds its folded articulations in an intensive process that takes time or rather that creates temporality, since ‘time’ is nothing but the sum total of all the different actualization processes combined. Of course, the obscure and folded side will not disappear when the plant reaches maturity—it still goes on living, adapting to the situation, unfolding its capacities, relying on the articulations of its obscure ground.¹⁷

This tension does not have to be felt in the psychological sense, and it characterizes any situation, involving also inanimate entities. A physical system also tends toward some state—not in the sense that it would represent this state as a goal, but this state will simply occur as an outcome of the process itself, as the explication of its implicit articulations. Manuel DeLanda (2002) brings the discussion to the field of the philosophy of

¹⁶With the discovery of DNA, the old preformist ideas have become popular again, the idea that in the genes the mature unfolded organism is ‘already there’ But it is ‘already there’ only for the external observers who project their expectations onto the organism. The organism itself is in some phase of unfolding its capacities, and the DNA serves for it the same purpose as lecture notes for the lecturer, so that things would not go off the rails. DNA is only one component or tool (inherited from our ancestors) in the unfolding process, and its effectively 2D structure does not give in advance the mature 3D form.

¹⁷I have developed these ideas in a couple of articles, see Ott 2019, Ott 2020b, 2021.