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*Helmuth Plessner in post-civil and post-humanist times*

Früchtl, J.

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Josef Früchtl

# Controversial Democracy

Helmuth Plessner in post-civil and post-humanist times

To read a philosophical text is not only to become acquainted with a world of thought and language, but also to embark on a gentle journey through time. To read Immanuel Kant's historico-philosophical essays is to move in the small, from today's perspective small-town, and at the same time large world of Königsberg, shaped by trade journeys, stories and foreign-language books, the world of the Enlightenment, according to Walter Benjamin, in the midst of a "meagre restricted existence", of "humanity" in the "narrowness of the bourgeois parlour" (Benjamin 1972, p. 157; my transl.). One could almost say that even his main work, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), shows the conditions of the possibility of knowledge as well as the conditions of the possibility of humanity. To read Georg W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) is to follow a Beethoven symphony in words, and that means, if Theodor W. Adorno is to be believed (Adorno 1973, p. 411–412), to have the ambivalent victory of the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution in mind.

If you read a text by Helmuth Plessner, written more than a hundred years later, there is no question of bourgeois-revolutionary pathos and propulsive force, and yet there is a very bourgeois tone running through his writings. By "bourgeois" I mean an ethos, an ethical-cultural attitude that refers back to an old European humanist tradition. Plessner's writings are characterised by a sober tone, clear writing style, humorous asides and sometimes – especially in the early polemic *The Limits of Community* – essayistic elegance and rhetorical pointedness. From this emerges a nobility of attitude that has a Stoic foundation in bearing what is difficult to bear, but whose nobility lies precisely in its "dignified fragility" (Habermas 1981, p. 134: "würdevolle Zerbrechlichkeit"). This is a bourgeoisie presented in literature by Thomas Mann and in film by Luchino Visconti. From a political-philosophical perspective, what seems most interesting is how this bourgeois ethos is combined with a liberal utopia, in other words, how fragility and vulnerability are given dignity and steadfastness.

## 1 Two current questions

I would like to pursue this connection here by first concentrating on Plessner's text *The Limits of Community* and then expanding on his anthropology at the end. With this text, Plessner responds to the situation of upheaval after the First World War, in which political debate is determined by an intensified mode of struggle. Confrontation is sought in word and deed, from polemics to street fighting, from insults and threats to outright violence. This situational context alone makes Plessner's writing interesting today. At the same time, our context is different. As everyone knows, we live in a

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time in which hate speech, fake news, propaganda and lies have become the everyday tone of debate. In the political context, Carl Schmitt's notorious distinction between friend and foe, which consequently thinks in terms of war, is reappearing everywhere, especially in right-wing nationalist parties and movements. What makes the difference is the digitalisation of communication media. The networks of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. tend to allow everyone to turn their private opinion into a published opinion, i. e. one that is disseminated *en masse*. Disinformation, half-truths, propaganda, lies and emotionalised polemics reach a different quality when they become totalitarian, i. e. when they are either taken over by the state to the delight of all dictators and autocrats (until now in the firm hands of men) or left to the anarchy, anonymity and hidden manipulation strategies of the digital net world. From a political-democratic point of view, the digitalisation of communication is a great step forward, because now everyone is not only a reader – as was the case with the invention of printing and the introduction of compulsory education – but in principle also an author, a writing individual. Morally, culturally-ethically and also politically, however, this does not prove to be progress, and in this respect the pressing question is whether and how we can learn to better deal with politically heated emotionalisation and its new technological medium (cf. Habermas 2020, pp. 26; cf. Habermas 2022).<sup>1</sup> So it is against the background of this question that I first approach Plessner.

The second reason for my approach to Plessner is philosophical-scientific. Since the mid-1960s, Louis Althusser and others have been emphasising, against the ubiquitous Sartrean Marxism, that Marx can only carry out his analysis of capitalism because he leaves behind the humanism of his early writings. At the same time, Michel Foucault surprises us with the thesis that the subject is only the effect of a discourse and disciplinary technique and promises in a poetic line “that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (Foucault 1994, p. 387). Subsequently, at the end of the 20th century, a dazzling posthumanism from various scientific schools of thought gains acceptance: as a critique of traditional humanism, as ethics beyond the human species, as technological perfection, transformation and finally substitution of the human species (cf. Hayles 1999, Bennett 2001, Bennett 2010). Philosophically, it goes back to Martin Heidegger's famous “Letter on Humanism” from 1946. It says there that it is not the human being that is “essential”, but “Being”, that which shows itself. In this respect, it is about a non-metaphysical humanism that makes man, as one of the famous formulations in Heidegger's letter puts it, the “shepherd of being” (Heidegger 1993, p. 234, 237). As is well known, this is Heidegger's reaction to, among other things,

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1 “The printing press turned all users into potential readers ... Now the so-called ‘new media’ have turned all users into potential authors – and just as the users of the press first had to learn to read, the use of the new media must also be learned” (my transl.). The question that leaves Habermas “irritated and perplexed” is how the anarchic digital world, which is disintegrating into partial publics, is still supposed to be able to maintain a “civil public sphere” in which political attention can be bundled – certainly also manipulated – by professionally managed newspapers, radio and television and enable a common formation of opinion and will.

Jean-Paul Sartre's no less famous writing "Existentialism is a Humanism", also from 1946. Since one could only speak of the essence of man from an omniscient divine creator's perspective, for Sartre man, the human being, is rather what he makes of himself in existentialist terms. My second question to Plessner, then, is what his anthropology still has to say to the posthumanistically oriented humanities and especially cultural studies, a question that attracts extended attention if one realises that 20th century philosophy, under the password of the linguistic turn, is taking a big step beyond subject philosophy and is exposing philosophical anthropology to a subject-philosophical suspicion.

## 2 Radicalism and philosophical extremism

How can we escape the brutalisation of socio-political debate? This is my question following Plessner's polemic on *The Limits of Community*. Plessner himself sees the "brutalization of the conventions of conflict" as the flip side of the utopia of "revolutionization". He offers a first interesting thesis by deriving both socio-political tendencies from the dominant so-called Western, i.e. European-North Atlantic anthropology, namely from the "anthropology emphasized by Lutheranism", which, it may be added, goes back to Platonic idealism (Plessner 1999, p. 59). The "split (*Zerklüftung*) in humans between interiority and objectual body", idea and meaning, spirit and matter, speaking with Kant: between the a priori and the empirical, is accordingly distributed at the beginning of the 20th century socio-politically between the communist-revolutionary universal pacifism on the one hand and crude, capitalist-motivated "interest egoism" on the other. With this description alone, it is clear that Plessner's politics requires a new anthropology that eludes a dualistic way of thinking. It is also immediately made clear by Plessner in the same context, which historical model he is orienting himself towards in his bourgeois anthropology, which has yet to be philosophically founded, namely the pre-bourgeois epoch of chivalry. Here, life is indeed "a site of struggle", but also "a noble play; with regard to this life, the laws of decency, the reciprocal respect of human worth, and the inviolability of the central elements of human life were observed (Plessner 1999, p. 59)."

Moral-political brutalisation and the utopia of peace are thus seen by Plessner as two sides of the same coin, namely a dualistic anthropology. Radicalism is a product of this anthropology. It means the "belief in the healing power of the extreme" (Plessner 1999, p. 47). In retrospect, we can say that extremism was not only dominant in politics in the 1920s, but also in philosophy. As Herbert Schnädelbach (1985, p. 14) has pointed out, this period saw the emergence of the philosophical schools that shaped the 20th century (and still shape our time): With Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921), linguistic-analytical philosophy, including logical positivism, breaks powerful ground; with *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Georg Lukács offers neo-Marxism or Western Marxism an initial document; with *Being and Time* (1927), Martin Heidegger opens up the philosophy of being, including phenomenology, existen-

tialism and ontological hermeneutics, to its continuing success. Politically speaking, the philosophy of being and neo-Marxism form two extremes (cf. Bolz 1989), while analytical philosophy qua philosophy is politically neutral.

Two additional points are interesting. Firstly, from a US perspective, one must point to the successful spread of philosophical pragmatism with Charles S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. The book in which Dewey summarises his view of pragmatism, *The Quest for Certainty*, appears in 1929, while Mead has been giving his famous lectures in Chicago for some time, which are then published as *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934). In *The Public and its Problems* (1927), Dewey defends a conviction that he has already expressed in *Democracy and Education* (1916), and which we will encounter again in the connection with Plessner, namely that the difficulties of democracy are the opportunities of education and culture. That defense is an answer to the political writer Walter Lippman, who in his book *Public Opinion* (1922) denies that democracy can function in the form in which Dewey imagines it, namely as a way of life, as an ethical ideal, because the vulgarity of the media appeals to the simple instincts of the people (cf. Oelkers 2009).

Philosophical pragmatism thus explicitly offers a democratic counter-model to any philosophical extremism. On the other hand, this also applies to that independent but also marginal position within German-language philosophy that is associated with the name of Ernst Cassirer. From 1923–29, he published his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, a Kantian philosophy of culture in which being, nature or the world can only have the form that man gives it symbolically-constructivistically. In 1929, the famous Davos disputation with Heidegger took place, in which Cassirer embodied a professorial and modest counter-image to Heidegger's extremism. However, he did not become an educator or have a broad academic impact.

Returning to philosophical anthropology, it can now be said that it too emerged in the period of awakening after the First World War. It shares with all the aforementioned schools of thought, from analytical philosophy to neo-Marxism and from the philosophy of being to pragmatism, the turning away from the dualistic world view of Cartesianism, Platonic idealism and finally Christianity. But its impact is not on the same level as that of the four schools of thought mentioned above.<sup>2</sup> What gives it a certain topicality again at present, in the form of Plessner, is its decided renunciation of philosophical and political extremism. I would now like to go into this in more detail.

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2 Some believe that it entered the stage of "indifference" in the 1960s at the latest (Schnädelbach 1983, p. 279). – For the sake of completeness, the philosophy of life (Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, Henri Bergson) should also be mentioned here. It fights "against the dead and the rigid", i.e. "against an intellectualistic civilisation that has become hostile to life, against education that is tied up in conventions and alien to life, for a new feeling for life, for 'real experiences', for the 'real' in general", but in its educational writings it belongs to the 19th century. In the 20th century, it was "almost completely absorbed by existential philosophy and existentialism" (Schnädelbach 1983, p. 172).

### 3 Anthropological actualisation of a bourgeois ethics

Plessner's topicality, as I stated at the beginning, lies fundamentally in a non-dualistic anthropology. It is questionable, however, whether the historical-ethical model he associates with his new anthropology can also be updated. In view of the "storms of steel" of the First World War – an expression of Ernst Jünger, also a political extremist between the world wars<sup>3</sup> – the memory of the life form of chivalry, in which fight, play, decency and dignity are happily united, seems simply unworldly. Now Plessner could certainly point out that the ethical ideal of chivalry in varied forms runs through European culture from the Renaissance – Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528) – through the early modern period – Baltasar Gracián's *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia* (1647) – to the time of Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, in which it appears under the concept of the "beautiful soul" in a form that is as bourgeois as it is aesthetic (cf. Früchtl 1996, pp. 268ff., 281ff., 310ff; Accarino 2002, pp. 131ff.). But it is easy to see that Plessner defends his ethical ideal neither with a historical-sociological nor with an aesthetic-cultural-historical analysis, as one can do with Norbert Elias' *Process of Civilisation* or Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education*. Plessner does refer explicitly to Schiller; but he does not unfold him on his own account. He only touches on aesthetics, only alludes to Schiller's famous 'play', but does not bring it into fruitful interplay with ethics and politics (cf. Plessner 1999, pp. 145). I will describe what this might look like in a moment.

But first, back to the question of why Plessner believes that the chivalric-aristocratic-bourgeois ideal of life can be updated. What are his arguments to demonstrate that decency and dignity can be guaranteed precisely through behaviour that is contracted in the concept of play? Anthropology again offers the answer. It is not yet that of "ex-centric positionality", which Plessner presents four years after *The Limits of Community* in his book *The Stages of the Organic and Man* (1928). Rather, his anthropology in 1924 is shaped by the philosophy of life. It is a philosophy or ontology of the "soul".

Following the ancient Greek origin (*psyche*), "soul" here is the term for the totality of all affective-emotional and mental events in the human being. It means an infinite referential connection between these events, in other words, referring back to Aristotle and scholasticism, an individual "ineffable". The thesis: "individuum est ineffabile" has initially only an epistemological meaning, since the generality character of concepts cannot grasp phenomena in their particularity and concreteness. Plessner combines it with an ontological meaning by taking up the again Aristotelian conceptual pair of potentiality and actuality and giving it, with Schelling, a late idealist or early existen-

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<sup>3</sup> *In Stahlgewittern* (1918), translated as *In Storms of Steel* or *In Steel Thunderstorms*, is Jünger's first published book. It describes his experiences of World War I and makes him a famous writer not only in Germany.

tialist undertone. According to this, the “fullness of being of the soul” is never exhausted in what it currently is, but is “eternal potentiality”, has a “foundational character” (*Urgrundcharakter*) or “non-foundational character” (*Ungrundcharakter*). It therefore has an “ambiguous character”: “it pushes towards and, at the same time, pushes away from being fixed and determined.” It pushes towards fixation and objectification, socio-philosophically “to be seen”, because, firstly, without this push it could not say who or what it is at all, and because, secondly, socio-philosophically it is a being in need of recognition and acknowledgement. At the same time, it pushes away from fixation because a “definitive judgement” and “determination” deprives it of the “possibility of being different.” Thus, prefiguring Sartre’s analysis of the gaze, Plessner writes: “We want ourselves to be seen and to have been seen as we are; and we want just as much to veil ourselves and remain unknown.” The conclusion is: “Out of this ontological ambiguity arises with iron necessity the two fundamental forces of psychological life: the impetus to disclosure – the need for validity; and the impetus to restraint,” which Plessner calls “modesty” (*Schamhaftigkeit*) (Plessner 1999, p. 105, 108 f.).<sup>4</sup>

The act of self-representation thus has two opposing sides. As an act of representation and as an act of concealment, it is as necessary as it is impossible. In Kant’s and Derrida’s sense: The conditions of possibility of self-representation – representation and concealment – are at the same time conditions of impossibility. In the sense of Romanticism, self-representation is always only the provisional result of an infinite striving. And since this ambiguity applies to all living beings of the human species, they must, to put it more cautiously: they should actually (if they have the strength and stoic attitude to endure the ambiguity) also form a corresponding ambiguity among themselves, a “fragile counterweight”, which Plessner describes in the chivalric-aristocratic-bourgeois tradition as the “dance-like spirit” and the “ethos of grace” (Plessner 1999, p. 130). The game that keeps social relations in a pleasant ambiguity is the social response to the ontological ambiguity of the human being.

## 4 Anthropology and aesthetics

This shifts the question of whether and how an ethics of play can be justified today to the question of whether and how the corresponding anthropology can be justified, all the more so in times of proclaimed posthumanism. In order to give an answer to this that takes Plessner seriously in his strengths, one must first take the step that he himself quickly took. Instead of giving anthropology a life-philosophical foundation in the concept of the soul, it is more productive to locate this foundation in the sensual, more precisely in the distinction between the body (that we have, *Körper*) and the lived body (that we are, *Leib*), i. e. the “excentric positionality” (Plessner 1928). The ambiguity be-

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<sup>4</sup> There is also a Hegelian background: “Someone is only something through their possible recognition from other persons” (p. 134); “what is psychological wins itself only when it loses itself” (p. 144).

tween representation and concealment in the infinite act of self-representation returns here in the act of conceptual objectification, which makes the body analysable and controllable, and in the act of intangible subjectivation, which refers to the body as a substrate of experience, as lived body (*Leib*). In the first case, one describes oneself from the perspective of the third person as a body that has these or those properties. In the second case, however, one can only describe oneself from the perspective of the first person: I am the one who has certain experiences, or upon whom certain experiences impose themselves as I live my life. I am the one who lives and has experiences.

From the point of view of developmental psychology, it is illuminating to differentiate that the objectification of the body is an ability that is only acquired in adolescence (cf. T. Habermas 1988). Primary in the temporal sense is the mode of experience in which the subject is present to itself without comprehending itself objectively. This concept-remote, not completely conceptless self-presence has, as one must say in a next, this time small step, the status of an emotion.<sup>5</sup> However, the bodily concentrated feeling is primary not only developmental-psychologically, but also – a third step – following the logics of experience. As long as being human means being an experiential being, we cannot disregard the concept-remote dimension of the (lived) body. For to have an experience – an expression that is emphasised in German in an active sense as *eine Erfahrung machen*, “making” an experience – means, from Hegel via Dewey to Gadamer and Adorno (cf. Früchtel 1996, pp. 52 ff., 69 ff.), to enter into an opposition and conflict with that which is different, that is, with that which eludes our concepts and always retains something immediate.

This brings me to the last, for me decisive step, which leads to aesthetics. Plessner always dealt with problems of the art of his time, but he did not do so systematically. Aspects of art are, of course, always significant in his anthropological writings, from the “Aesthesiology of the Spirit” (1923), which declares *aisthesis*, the sensual, to be the basis, to the *Anthropology of the Senses* (1970), which investigates the “speechless spaces” of music in particular. It is not convincing to ascribe to him an “aesthetic anthropology” that goes beyond “anthropological aesthetics” and assigns art a “key position” in his philosophy (Fischer 2007, p. 241, 257). But both approaches confirm that anthropology, in order to be convincing, is dependent on the aesthetic dimension. In conclusion, I would like to explain this briefly in three points.

If, firstly, we take up the anthropologically central point of the experience of the body and emphasise it as a constitutive component of experience in general, the question arises philosophically as to how this experience is accessible, that is, in what form we can speak of it. It cannot be the form of propositional language that objectifies the body as body. It must paradoxically be a form of non-linguistic speaking, and for this

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term ‘emotion’ not as a generic or class term, but as a type term. Emotions typically show certain aspects: They are connected with physiological reactions (e.g. racing pulse), with behaviour (‘fight, freeze or flight’), intentional (one is afraid of something), partly cognitive (one fears something because it is dangerous). But not all feelings show these aspects or show them equally. In this respect, they (merely) form a type.



paradox there is a specialised sphere in the social-human form of life, namely art. Here, the expression “I am (body)” expands to “I am for others”. Here, being becomes “communicable”, as Kant points out in his analysis of aesthetic judgement (Kant 1987, pp. 61 f., 157 ff.). Especially in music, we are dealing with a “non-linguistic quality”, which “nevertheless lives from an inner reference to language” (Plessner 1970, p. 218).<sup>6</sup> Plessner writes this with reference to Adorno, and indeed in the latter’s *Aesthetic Theory* we find vivid sentences like this: “Etruscan jars in the Villa Giulia are meaningful (*sprechend*) in the highest degree.” The “language-like” about the jars “touches most closely with a There I am (*Da bin ich*) or This is me (*Das bin ich*) (Adorno 1970, p. 171 f., my transl.)” This being-there, scholastically speaking: this *quodditas*, unlike the being-what, the *quidditas*, cannot be determined conceptually or propositionally, but only shown. The act of cognition must be imagined here as a gesture, carried out with the means of art, music, the visual arts, literature. Art refers to that which is distant from a concept, to that which makes itself known in a feeling. In other words, it presents it. What a feeling is, what anger, hatred, jealousy, love is, we often only know through a work of art. It gives form to the feeling in its non-linguistic nature. That is its *presentational* achievement.

However, the achievement of art in dealing with the specific linguistic character of body-bound experience lies – the second point – not only in presentation. Further achievements can be named in moderation, compensation and, above all, transformation. Art acts as a moderator because it never expresses experiences directly and without form, and through form they receive a conscious objectification. The cry of pain is already a first objectification; included in music – in Joe Cocker’s “With a Little Help from My Friends” – the pain becomes a memory of physical-emotional pain. Art also compensates by counterbalancing real experiences through its design. In this achievement, however, art is not exclusive. This service is also provided by social institutions and, on the level of experience itself, by a network of emotions. The feeling of shame can thus be well balanced by pride and vice versa; fear cannot be understood without hope, and vice versa. On the social level, balancing is an achievement of intersubjectivity, which is concretised in relationships of friendship, love and solidarity. A social network of this kind is able to balance out the emotionally tinged experiences of fear, aggression, envy and shame in their effects that endanger democracy. Transformation, on the other hand, is again an excellent achievement of art and popular culture. In simple terms, “Take your broken heart and make it into art.”<sup>7</sup> Politically speaking: Give your disappointment, your indignation, your anger, even your hatred a

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<sup>6</sup> This also allows Habermas to warn against a “philological imperialism” (1981, p. 140). – In the more recent discussion, Martha Nussbaum, correcting her cognitivist theory of emotion, points out that feelings, as can be seen in infants, animals and music, are not necessarily bound to the medium of language (cf. 2003, esp. chapter “Need and Recognition”).

<sup>7</sup> The quote comes from Carrie Fisher, very well known for her role as Princess Leia in the *Star Wars* films. Meryl Streep picks it up at the Golden Globe Awards in January 2017, shortly after Donald Trump’s election victory.

(sometimes only small) productive twist by combining it with a poem, a pop song, an advertising slogan, a joke or your own form of expression. Sing (like little Amelia from Ukraine) a song from a Walt Disney movie when you have to seek shelter from bombs in a basement; use mockery and satire to make the Russian dictator, devastating a neighboring country with his army in a war of extermination, into a pinched “poison dwarf” (Putin’s nickname from his KGB days) and “guttersnipe tsar” (the writer Viktor Yerofeyev); use the late-night shows and cabaret as a daily psychic cleansing ritual, and so on. etc.

It is these achievements of art, but also of popular culture, to deal with our body-bound experience in a productive way that make them useful for philosophical anthropology and, in the case of the presentational achievement, even irreplaceable. Finally, if one asks what makes these aesthetic performances possible, this leads directly to the third point that connects aesthetics and anthropology. Plessner probably knows the term under which this connection must be addressed, but unfortunately he is in no way aware of the potential hidden in the term. We are talking about the concept of play.

Schiller gave this term the highest theoretical distinction because it allows an analogy between aesthetics, ethics and politics. In this, Schiller proves to be an erudite and productive student of Kant. For it is from Kant that he takes over the analysis of the aesthetic structure of experience, which is what makes it possible to understand the experience- and emotion-processing achievements of the aesthetic. They are made possible by the dynamic and creative interplay of the oppositional components of all experience. For Kant, these are the cognitive components of imagination and understanding or reason, i. e. our ability to produce images on the one hand and to think in terms of concepts and ideas on the other. Whenever we make an aesthetic judgement and exclaim: “How beautiful!” or “That is sublime!”, we are thus indicating that our cognitive components are at play. However, it must be emphasised that these components are in strict opposition to each other: One does what the other does not want. The imagination stands for “lawless freedom”, but the mind stands for logical “lawfulness” (Kant 1987, p. 320, § 50). The opposition seems to be resolvable only towards one side or the other. Either the imagination, in its unbridled freedom, produces forms that overtax our cognitive faculty, or this faculty, conversely, restricts the imagination. But if we perceive an aesthetic object – be it a landscape, a bouquet of flowers, a colourful summer dress, a shabby corner of a house or a work of art – there is neither a contradiction of the experiential components nor a subordination of one of them. Instead, there is a dynamic and reciprocal stimulation and positioning of the oppositional components. This is precisely what Kant means by “play”. And on this basis, one can understand why we speak in aesthetic matters as if they were about a cognitively justified state of affairs. This as-if is central. This gives us an explanation of why we cannot “dispute” or objectively decide in aesthetic matters, but we can “quarrel”, and quarreling means trying to fight out a consensus, a level of common ground (Kant 1987, p. 338, § 56). Quarreling about aesthetic judgements, we thus carry out the *communitisation of a confrontation* (cf. Früchtel 2021).

This description of the structure of aesthetic experience leads us unmistakably back to the initial question that Plessner posed in *The Limits of Community*: How can we escape the brutalisation in socio-political debate? How can we learn to better deal with politically highly emotionalised situations? Plessner's partly bourgeois-historical, partly anthropological answer is: by taking "play" seriously. My answer is: by taking the *quarrel in play* seriously, an entanglement that has its model in aesthetic experience. To argue in aesthetic matters is a training in dealing with our somatically underpinned and emotionally reconnected experiences in such a way that they become communicable, accessible to ourselves and others. There can certainly be no final determinations here, but at least an opening space for forms of expression that are not merely private, affective and dogmatic; for forms of expression that retain a subjective, affective-emotional basic layer, but do not dogmatise it, but present, model, compensate and transform it. Therefore, politically speaking, the infinite *aesthetic quarrel* accommodates a *controversial democracy*, and this above all in a time in which the bourgeoisie as a culturally hegemonic social type, which still unmistakably shaped Plessner, has dissolved and posthumanism either, in its technological variant, works undaunted on overcoming the body, on denaturalisation, or conversely, in its natural-philosophical and -ethical variant, emphasises what connects the human with the non-human species in a great ontological relationism: Everything that is, is what it is, in connection with everything that is. Plessner could agree with this. Of course, one must not forget that it is one thing to give an ethics or, moreover, a universalist moral philosophy an anthropological backing, another thing to derive from it a concrete ethics such as that of play or concrete universalist norms. The latter certainly requires an additional theoretical effort. But it is good to see that successful films such as *Cloud Atlas* (2012) and *Avatar* (2009) are doing their part to give relationist ontology a popular narrative and thus support the aesthetic education of the children of modernity.

So, this is my answer to the two questions posed to Plessner at the beginning, how we can counteract socio-political brutalisation and justify anthropology in post-humanist times. We need an aesthetically expanded, non-dualistic anthropology for this. If we bring the whole thing back to the question of how we can justify an ethics of dignified fragility with Plessner, my answer is: we have to justify the humanistic ethics of play with a non-dualistic, possibly ontological-relationist, i. e. posthumanist anthropology and at the same time, going beyond Plessner, use its aesthetic potencies.

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