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PRESENTATION

Gérard Granel was born in 1930, in Paris; he died in 2000, in Toulouse (France). He was a charismatic teacher, a demanding writer, and an indefatigable translator. (He also created Trans-Europ-Repress Publishers (T.E.R.) in 1981 and made accessible in French some difficult, but major philosophical writings.)

Granel belongs to the generation of French philosophers who threw off the yoke of academicism, broke with the right-thinking tradition, and put a stop to French spiritualism. He has been the first to greet the early writings of Jacques Derrida.

What makes his “untameable singularity” within this theoretical constellation is closely connected to the fact that he always refused any form of compromise and said quite openly what he had to say. In a lot of respects, he appears, in the contemporary field, as a solitary fighter whose biting humour (nourished by a reading of Aragon’s *Traité du style*) brought him some enmities.

Thus, a lot of Husserlian philosophers who had favourably welcomed his thesis on Husserl (*Le sens du temps et de la perception chez Husserl*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969) were offended by his foreword to the *Crisis* (1976), which explains that Husserl’s testament is a “completely obsolete text”, a “pure example” of “Western theoretical paranoia”; and they did not forgive him for suspecting that the come back (in the end of the Eighties) of Husserlian phenomenology could mean “the revival of Husserl’s worst, namely the twinned revival of spiritualism and scientism”.

Granel made his first weapons in the “French school of perception”, under the leadership of Michel Alexandre; he discovered Heidegger in listening to Jean Beaufret’s lectures, when he was studying at the “Ecole Normale Supérieure”. Not only his questions, but also the form they took are marked by *Being and Time* which he considers as the real key of Heidegger’s whole corpus. It is noteworthy, however, that Granel’s relation to Heidegger is a *free* one, and not that of an exegete, or of an historian of philosophy, as already indicated by Beaufret’s extremely critical reaction to his “Remarques sur la relation de *Sein und Zeit* à la phénoménologie husserlienne” (1970).

Obviously, Granel came to phenomenology through Heidegger. Nonetheless, he devoted one of his two thesis to Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology – from which he drew the conviction that it is only possible to grasp the aim of Heidegger’s breakthrough with the background of Husserl’s questions and by contrast with the Husserlian theses. For him, although the first has succeeded where the second has failed, phenomenology need, nevertheless, to reelaborate some Husserlian questions somewhat neglected by Heidegger: the question of perception as a form of disclosedness, the question of logical materiality (*i.e.*, Husserl’s material a priori and the question of “logical formalities”). According to him, the

last one has not only been mishandled by Husserl, but also circumvented by Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger himself. Only Wittgenstein's investigations and some Desanti's lessons enable us to enlighten it and to identify what is at stake. (It has to be emphasized that Granel discovered Jean-Toussaint Desanti's writings relatively late, but with great enthusiasm, and that his approach to the problem of formality is, in many respects, very close to that of Desanti's.)

From his acquaintance with *Being and Time*, Granel drew the conviction that the analytic of everyday life is the real point of Heidegger's project, and that, contrary to what has often been supposed, the goal of the distinction between authentic and non-authentic is not to suggest that the *Dasein* can only "find" himself if he "loses", at least temporarily, the world. For, what *Being and Time* really claims, in Granel's view, is that the *Dasein* can only:

- (1) refer to one's self in a practical mode (*i.e.* "praxical" in Granel's own terms);
- (2) be a Self if he really assumes his everyday life, including all its non-authentic aspects.

Therefore, according to Granel, the appropriation of the "pre-understood" and self-understanding are one and the same thing, and the hermeneutic circle brings us back *from* the world *to* the world.

Granel's approach to the analytic of everyday life allows him to connect Heideggerian questions to Marxian ones. We find a first implicit attempt to lay down such a connection in his "Incipit Marx" (cf. *Traditionis traditio*). In this 1969 study, he interprets Marx's characterization of atheism as a "secondary thing" in the light of the hermeneutical circle, and shows that we can find, in the *1844 Manuscripts*, a genuine ontology which, in reality, develops a double concept of production: production as industrial (capitalistic) production on the one hand, and production of life, world, consciousness, world-history, on the other hand. This two-sided approach shows that Marx's fundamental goal is to understand man essentially *as producer*.

Later on, Granel will push this connexion ahead. He will show that, despite all the points of disagreement existing between Marx and Heidegger, we can make them hold a dialogue which enables us to lay down first foundation-stones of a "praxology". This praxology, which has roots in Aristotle's practical philosophy (on which Heidegger as well as Marx have worked), links Heidegger's determination of the *Dasein* by everyday activities and Marx's conception of Being as production.

Moreover, Granel asserts that, in order to really understand the epoch in which we live and bring to the fore the essential features of today's world, we have to articulate the Heideggerian claims on modern and planetary technique with the Marxian approach to capitalistic phenomena.

So, we have to credit Granel with having engaged the "dialogue with Marxism" which his "Heideggerian brothers" (as he once called them, not without some mischief) have not, up to now, felt the need to do, and that the late Heidegger acknowledged the possibility, but never opened up – and certainly not by chance.

This dialogue of which Granel, in fact, only delivered drafts and fragments – his disease having prevented him from writing *Marx again* which he was thinking about – would have

reasserted the “essential finitude” of the *Dasein*. Granel had acknowledged straight off such a finitude as Heidegger’s *Urthese*, and also found a trail of it, in the numerous references to Aristotle by Marx. This *Marx again* would have undoubtedly shown that our world is becoming trade, and that the globalisation is ruled by an autotelic process of infinite totalisation. It would certainly have developed a “phenomenology of merchandise” and highlighted the bonds which link from now on all the sciences, all the cultural, artistic etc, activities to the production of merchandise. Furthermore, it would have incited resistance – and not resignation as François Fédier did. In effect, the late Granel was stretching an exploratory practice of variations (on the pattern of Husserl’s “eidetic variation”) in order to listen to the imperceptible “cracks” in our own time – especially the “leaps” of the non-European, finite, humanities. At this level, his principal aim was to explore, with Heideggerian tools, what the future holds in store of Marx’s philosophy. And although his approach to Marx’s analysis of the “automatic substance” (*i.e.* the essence of capital) and Marx’s deconstruction of the “logic of infinity” is based on Heidegger’s conception of the essence of technique, he nonetheless always expressed, at least implicitly, reservations about the Heideggerian characterization of historicity in fatalistic terms. Indeed, according to him: “only that which one does not resist is irresistible”.

Philosophically, Granel’s route did not go through any split. On the contrary, it testifies a real obstinacy, since always going towards a toughening of *the* initial questions. His main aims are clearly indicated in the two last 1998 texts: *Loin de la substance, jusqu’où?* and *Monoculture, inculture*. This route proceeds to integrate:

— New authors – after the trio constituted by Kant, Husserl and Heidegger and read in the light of a deconstruction of the Cartesian opening: Marx, then Gramsci, and later on, not only Wittgenstein, but also Desanti, Lacan, Leonard de Vinci.

— New fields of analysis: first painting, then mathematics, linguistics, political economy, psychoanalysis.

— New conceptual questions: perception, as a form of disclosedness was rapidly complicated by the question of praxis that Granel considered as a sort of dual of the former; later on, appeared the question of the “interlaced capitalization of technique and wealth”, the question of the popular, in its irreducibility to populism; the question of the “archi-formality of Nature” and its recovering by the modern concept of “nature”, the questions pertaining to the non-overlapping between “rational symbolic systems” (chiefly natural languages) and raw *perceptum*, etc. It is noteworthy to stress that Granel carried out this last one throughout a meticulous exploration of the specific problems raised by the “showing into language”.

Autobiographically, Granel did go through a change. Whereas, the young Granel had a deep Christian faith and fought *inside* the Catholic Church itself (see *Traditionis traditio*, 1972), at the beginning of the Seventies, he lost his faith and started to fight against “the new temporal reign of the spiritual religiosity” the Catholic Church is trying to impose on the world. Besides, whereas, in May 1968, Granel took part in the demonstration of support for General Charles De Gaulle, his reading of Marx’s *Capital* and his discovery, in the early Seventies of Gramsci’s writings finally led him to redefine his political position. The convictions he adhered to, from the early Seventies have sometimes been ranked with those of

the extreme-left wing. This hasty and not very relevant assimilation has however the merit of drawing attention to his absolute distrust of liberalist creeds.

Thus, the mature Granel introduced an oxymoron: “liberal fascism”, in order to stress that liberalism could also envelop soft (not immediately recognizable) forms of fascism; and he happened to present himself as a “paleo-marxist”, in quoting the famous Marx’s assertion: “As for me, I am not, in any case, a Marxist”.

It is difficult, and, in a sense, impossible, to put a label on his philosophical work, not only because he never gets himself mixed up in any philosophical clan and because his free courses deal with a very diversified and complex network of problems, but also because the aim of his unconventional exegesis of Heidegger’s “step backwards” (*Schrittzurück*) is to bring to the fore the necessity to change the boundaries considered obvious by Modern philosophers, but closing the access to genuine philosophical radicality (*i.e.*, a radicality without radicalism).

According to him, if we want to reach such a radicality, we need not only, as Husserl invites us, exhume the intuitive categorical logicity which Modern tradition disregarded for the benefit of logicity conceived as a “theoretical artefact” (artefact through which phenomena are rebuilt from Descartes’ “simple natures”). We have to go further and recognize the existence of a “perceptual logic”, the enigma of which is left bare by “the difficulty of painting encountered by the artist”. One of Granel’s main insights is that this logic reveals “the insaisissability of Being” and that such an insaisissability cannot be clarified by what Merleau-Ponty presumed to be a world of wild essences, since it opens a “play of significance” already incorporated in a historico-existential constellation and invested by a “talking imagery”. Indeed, for Granel, as well as for his closest friend (the poet and philosopher Michel Deguy), the first task of an authentic phenomeno-*logy* is to “show in language”, and to show what language says through being silent. If it is impossible to label Granel’s work, it is however possible to distinguish two great axes, in using the metaphor of the “two dragons” (the material one, and the historial one) which he leans on, in his “Lecture de l’‘Origine’” (see *Etudes*, 1995).

The first axis is concerned with the “world-formality” as disclosed by the *perceptum* as such; it runs through all the different questions connected with what he presents in terms of the “*immemorial*” and characterizes as “the Disclosed in its vastness”, or “the unapproachable at hand”; at this level, Granel’s goal is to revisit the *a priori* and to free it from the deadlock of Modern transcendentalism.

The second axis deals with “archi-politics”, in its irreducibility to *Realpolitik*. It presupposes that Marx’s *Kapital* represents an interruption in the course of the “history of the European world” – interruption which “completely disrupts” European humanity and gives us a genuine key to understanding the contemporary world and to exploring what the future holds for us (see his “Préface” to the *Krisis*).

Obviously, these two axes are interwoven. As testified by the very idea of the “ontological kenosis” that the late Granel puts forward, “the unapproachable at hand” is neither, in his view, a lost origin to be rediscovered, nor an unfathomable ground to be excavated. On the contrary, it refers to everyday familiar phenomena – in other words, to

what is open to view, what we have always before our eyes, but are unable to notice. Consequently, Granel asserts that:

“the future of *Being and Time* depends more on an approach to the logical formality imperceptibly ruling language than on a sort of revealing power by which the *Dasein* would succeed to exist *in person* in the Being itself” (“Ipse Dasein”, *Etudes*).

As explained by Jean-Luc Nancy in his foreword to *Granel: le combat, l'éclat, l'ouvert*, Granel wanted to tell the “world-brilliance” and to fight against the fences and the ideals not reopenable by this brilliance”. He wanted it, as also pointed out by Nancy, “earnestly”, and sometimes “furiously” and has been “a *figure* in the strong sense” – a figure, we must add, that often disturbed and annoyed.

In 1982, he simultaneously published a pirate edition of Heidegger's *Die Selbstbehauptung der Deutschen Universität* and his own interpretation of this accursed text (see “Pourquoi avons-nous publié cela?”, *De l'université*). This twin publication seems to have given rise to a real distrust of him by a lot of French philosophers. Anyway, up to now, the ones who discoursed on the relationships between Heidegger and Nazism have disregarded the hypothesis of “mirement” (that is, a reflection-effect which makes an object seem higher than it really is) that Granel puts forward to explain Heidegger's position in this text, in arguing that his 1933 monumental blunder was: (1) to believe that an “essential possibility” could reflect itself in an “actual possibility” (in the case under consideration, in the *Führerprinzip*), and (2) to attempt to “hijack Nazi politics for the benefit of the destruction of the history of ontology”.

Furthermore, Emmanuel Faye, who gave rise, in 2005, to a new Heidegger affair – and a media one – maintains, in his interview to *Le point* (June 2006), that “university teachers, like Gérard Granel, have eulogized” Heidegger's accursed text and considered it as a genuine “philosophical text, without noticing that it is built around a promotion of the students' new rights which amount to nothing more than an anti-Semitic legislation”. Such an accusation is not only absolutely unjust towards its recipient, but also deeply distressing for its author. And I am afraid that Faye and his followers – and maybe also Heidegger's ‘groupies’ who consider their idol as “Irreproachable” – are on the verge of becoming, like the most prominent German intellectuals whose Marx was referring in a famous passage, “grumpy, pretentious and mediocre epigons”. Moreover, I am afraid that they are losing their intellectual integrity and all their scruples.

Granel, for his part, was so scrupulous that he refused to carry on his Moral lectures when the French army was practising torture in Algeria – he always considered the ethical requirement as the *first* requirement of the philosopher's task. And he used above all his great talent as an orator to satisfy this requirement. And if, unlike Socrates, he has written, he was nonetheless convinced that the “*thought in philosophy*” springs from oral tradition. His lectures were a genuine *work in progress* teaching rigour and endurance; they were also bench beds for a lot of his writings.

One of the goals of the Gérard Granel website is to bring to the surface the immersed part of his works. Another one is to give a synopsis of them and to bring to the fore their main aims.

Many of Granel's former students, old friends and constant readers have helped me a lot in the accomplishment of Granel's site. Too afraid of forgetting some of them, I will not venture to name them. But I need to say that the site project could not have been achieved without the perseverance of two philosophers close to Granel – namely Françoise Fournié and Fabien Grandjean – and without the complicity of another of Granel's friends, the painter Alain Lestié.