

Horizon

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A whole may be fully actual as what it is while remaining open to participation in an actuality that does not yet exist.

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I have an example nearer than anything I could construct. My body lives through organs, and each organ through cells. Each cell is alive in its own right: maintaining a difference between itself and its surroundings, exchanging matter, repairing itself, responding to conditions, carrying forward a history. I do not do any of this in their place. No cell separately performs the activity of the organ, and no organ separately commands the life of the body. Yet neither the organ nor the body is actual without what participates in it. I breathe, eat, move, attend, remember, and act through activities no single cell or organ performs and none could separately command. Yet my embodied life is not one more activity added to theirs; it is actual through their participation.

The relation can be followed downward. My life returns through the organs and cells that make it possible. It feeds and regulates them, differentiates their activity, repairs and replaces their cells, and sometimes requires cellular death. Neither an organ nor a cell of this body is merely an item located inside an exterior container. What a cell does, which signals matter to it, what it may become, and how long it continues are partly determined by the organ and life in which it participates. But neither direction settles the other. My organs and cells do not cease to be living wholes by being parts of me. My embodied life is actual only through them, but it is not therefore merely an aggregate of them.

Nor do these participations stop at the cell or at the skin. Cellular life occurs through molecular activity and molecular activity through atomic relations; through breath, metabolism, and action, the organism participates in atmospheric, ecological, and planetary relations that neither begin nor end at its boundary.

This is already enough to make the difficulty visible. A whole can be complete as the activity it is and still participate in another completeness. If a greater whole becomes actual through overcoming dispersion or defection, the defect need not be located in its participants. Defection names a failure of participation that becomes legible only within the whole whose continuation it threatens. In sustaining that participation, the greater whole makes actual a relation in which what is whole is also part.

Nothing here requires that every plurality become a further whole. Cells can fail to organize, organs can fail to form, organisms can disintegrate. The activities that might support a life do not compel that life to occur. Before the further whole is actual, we are not entitled to treat it as a whole already waiting fully formed for its pieces. There are actual activities and, perhaps, a possibility of further actualization. If that possibility becomes actual, it does so through what was already actual without having been contained or commanded there.

How this happens is the question. It is tempting to answer by naming the terms: level, order, field, manifold, emergence. But each name brings an account of the relation before the relation itself has been understood. *Holon* helps only because it does less. It names what is at once whole and part, leaving open how such participation becomes possible and what, if anything, passes between its wholeness and its participation.

Aristotle begins closer to this difficulty than the usual opposition between immanence and transcendence allows. He distinguishes activities from movements that produce something beyond themselves. Building is incomplete while the building remains unfinished. Seeing is not. At any moment in which one sees, the activity is actual and its end is present. Contemplation is not a route to a product left behind when the thinking is done. Its completion is in its exercise.

Yet an activity already complete in this sense can receive a further completion. Pleasure, Aristotle writes, completes activity not as an indwelling disposition but as a supervening perfection, like the bloom upon those in the flower of youth.¹ Pleasure in this sense is proper to the activity itself rather than a separable good obtained through it. It is not another movement that seeing, thinking, or playing must perform before it becomes what it is. Nor is it merely an effect occurring afterward. Where the activity is already complete in its exercise, pleasure does not repair a lack; it completes the activity further. Once present, it intensifies the activity, makes it more exact, and helps sustain it. What arrives upon the activity returns through it.

This is the relationship I have called graceful completion. An activity can be undertaken well or badly. Attention can be prepared, obstructions removed, habits cultivated, and the activity sustained. These conditions matter. They can also be violated: distraction, coercion, self-surveillance, and the attempt to force an arrival can interrupt the very activity upon which it might supervene. Yet the completion cannot be commanded simply by adding one more operation. It arrives or it does not.

Calling this grace does not oppose it to responsibility or achievement. One may be responsible for becoming capable of what one cannot produce on demand. Aristotle's ethics is largely an account of such formation. Virtue does not deliver the chief good as an external prize; the good becomes actual in excellent activity, most fully for Aristotle in contemplation. Habituation, practical judgment, friendship, and the organization of a life make this actuality possible. They do not manufacture its completion from outside. Transcendence, on this account, need not be departure from activity. It can occur as an activity's becoming more fully actual than its participants can separately ensure.

The point is easy to lose because *complete* is made to mean finished, and further perfection is then heard as proof of prior deficiency. But an activity can lack nothing required for its present actuality while remaining open to a perfection that is not one of its requirements. Its completion need not exhaust its completability. Indeed, only what has become actual can participate in what its actuality makes possible.

This gives us the first part of the relation without yet explaining the whole. Actual activities can support a further completion. That completion is neither one more part nor an independently existing thing. When it arrives, it can become consequential within the activities that occasioned it. But Aristotle's bloom does not by itself tell us whether such an arrival can change what will later be possible, much less whether repeated or sustained actualizations can become a new faculty. It establishes the strangeness we need to preserve: what is already complete may be completed further without having been incomplete before.

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The realization of an activity as complete does not always arrive quietly. My first experience of it was startling enough to be sublime. The activity did not reach a result I could place before myself. What changed was the actuality of the activity itself. It was suddenly possible to recognize a completion that had not been produced, yet was not foreign to what I was doing. The distinction between being carried and acting, between receiving and realizing, no longer held in the same way.

Familiarity changes this. States once encountered as overwhelming can become more available, more discriminated, and less disruptive. What first required withdrawal into an ecstatic, formless absorption in direct knowing may later remain present while one stays responsive to the world, the body, and other people. This does not make the earlier experience false. Nor does it establish that a new faculty has been developed. It shows only that the same possibility need not continue to appear under the same phenomenological conditions.

The difference between a peak state and a stable structure matters here, but it cannot be allowed to decide the matter in advance. A peak may pass without consequence. Its memory may become a story told by a life otherwise unchanged. Conversely, what becomes stable may not be the peak made permanent. The ability to remain grounded while in contact with what the peak disclosed may be a different actuality, impossible to identify by intensity alone. If there is a conversion from state into possession, the possession is real; but neither recurrence nor confidence is enough to show what has been possessed.

Even *path* risks saying too much. Before a possibility has become actual, successive activities are not necessarily stages on a known route. Calling them a path can project the destination backward and turn contingency into development. Yet treating each event in isolation loses the possibility that one actualization changes the conditions of another. The difficulty is to hold both: no later faculty is given in advance, and the history of activity may be constitutive of what becomes possible.

We therefore cannot begin by defining a supersensible faculty. At most we can ask whether a complete activity may open a possibility that further activity can actualize; whether such actualizations can change the one acting; whether the change can become an ability available for renewed exercise; and what would justify saying that anything more than an altered state has occurred. The path is not an answer to these questions. If there is a path, it is part of what must be discovered.

Kant's mathematical sublime places this uncertainty inside the activity of our faculties. Its difficulty is not that an unbounded series is conceptually obscure. There is little strain in understanding that counting may continue or that a line may be extended. Mathematical estimation can proceed indefinitely by numerical concepts. The sublime appears when the imagination is asked not merely to continue apprehending parts but to comprehend magnitude in one presentation, and the demand for an absolute whole exceeds what sensible presentation can give.²

Succession matters to Kant because apprehension can continue while comprehension reaches a maximum. But mere succession is not the heart of the experience. More units do not eventually produce the whole that reason demands, because the inadequacy is not simply a shortage of time or memory. The imagination encounters a demand whose measure cannot be supplied by repeating its present operation. In the displeasure of that inadequacy and the pleasure bound to our rational vocation, the subject becomes sensible of a capacity that cannot itself be presented as another sensible magnitude.

Kant is exact about where the sublime belongs. It is not a supersensible object hidden behind the mountain, the ocean, or the stars. Nature occasions the judgment; the relation among our faculties gives it its peculiar force. Nor does the experience create rational capacity from nothing. Without cultivated susceptibility to ideas, Kant says, what occasions sublimity may appear merely fearsome or senseless. The experience discloses and exercises a relation for which some capacity must already be present, while the exercise may also be where that capacity becomes determinate for the person undergoing it.

Mathematics draws attention beyond Kant's privileged examples. Its sublimity need not lie primarily in very large numbers. The imaginative and generative activity of mathematics is itself unfathomably beautiful. Finite acts of thought enter relations whose further consequences cannot be surveyed in advance. A proof can be complete, wholly binding, and at the same time make possible questions that did not exist for us before its completion. Mathematics is not sublime because we fail to understand the concept of unboundedness. It can become sublime when our embodied activity is adequate to a real completion and, through that very adequacy, becomes answerable to a generativity it cannot encompass.

This is not yet Kant's argument, and it should not be placed under his authority. It is what his distinction helps us notice. The failure to present a whole is not evidence that a higher whole exists. Still less does insufficiency prove that a new faculty is being born. Failure can remain failure. Overwhelm can be confusion. What the sublime may disclose is narrower and more consequential: the present exercise of a capacity need not contain the measure to which it nevertheless finds itself answerable.

The experience can therefore intimate a vertical relation without supplying its ontology. Something about an actuality exceeds the way that actuality can presently be held. Whether this is an already possessed rational vocation, the first intimation of a possible development, a transient alteration, or some combination cannot be read directly from the force of the experience. The sublime makes the question unavoidable and leaves it unanswered.

Steiner takes up the possibility at the point where Kant refuses positive supersensible perception. He does not describe the supersensible only as a rational idea negatively exhibited by the failure of sensible presentation. He claims that disciplined exercises can develop organs of perception through which supersensible realities become positively experiential.³ In his account these organs are not passive receivers. Their perceiving is itself activity; preparation and perception change the organization of the one who knows.

The claim cannot be reached by extending Kant a little farther. Kant's sublime does not establish Steiner's world, organs, or path. Nor can Steiner's description of their development be used as evidence that they are actual. The proposition that a faculty can be developed is not the faculty, and a description of exercises is not their successful completion. At the beginning, what Steiner calls an organ is—unless his stronger account has been independently warranted—only a possibility of actualization.

This restraint is not external to Steiner's own account. He insists upon patience, prior cultivation, sound judgment, and the possibility of false or malformed development. Practices can produce delusive pictures rather than knowledge. The path therefore cannot be certified by intensity, novelty, or the practitioner's conviction alone. If supersensible perception is possible, its actualization would have to include increasing powers of discrimination: some way for appearance to correct appearance, for error to become identifiable, and for the result to bear consequences beyond the vocabulary that first suggested it.

What Steiner contributes here is thus initially a question of form. Could activities available to us now participate in the actualization of a capacity that is not yet available as a capacity? Could the activity through which something becomes perceivable also develop the ability to perceive it? If so, precondition and consequence would not be cleanly separable. A susceptibility would have to be possible for the exercise to begin, while the exercise might be where that susceptibility becomes actual, articulate, or one's own.

But each modal word matters. The activity *could* participate; the possibility *might* actualize; what arrives *may* be retained. None follows automatically from the last. Conditions can be cultivated without grace arriving. An arrival can occur without being integrated. What is integrated can become possession without becoming a faculty of positive perception. And a genuine faculty, if such a thing actualizes, need not disclose the object its practitioner expected.

The pathwise character of the possibility cannot be collapsed into the formula that a completion exceeding one's powers becomes a power of one's own. That grammar imagines a completed thing crossing a boundary into an unchanged possessor. On the stronger possibility, there is no faculty available at the outset and no unchanged subject waiting at the end. There are actual activities, each with its own possible completion, whose consequences may change what further activities can become actual. Only if those changes themselves compose—only if a way of perceiving and acting becomes genuinely exercisable—would possession be an appropriate word. Even then the possession would exist as a capacity whose reality must be renewed in activity, not as a peak permanently stored.

Steiner's writing therefore gives this inquiry its farthest horizon, not its conclusion. He says, at strength, that a further capacity can become actual and describes practices intended to participate in that actualization. The truth of that possibility remains to be earned in its exercise and in the discriminations the exercise makes possible.

We can return now to the cells without pretending that they prove what Steiner claims. Their relation to me makes one structure difficult to deny at the scale of ordinary life. Wholes participate in wholes. A cell's complete activities support a life they do not separately contain. That life, when actual, returns through the cells as conditions, constraints, communication, repair, differentiation, and aim. The supporting and returning movements do not belong to two systems subsequently attached. One living relation is actual through both.

Subvenience names this relation insofar as actual activities come underneath the possibility and actuality of a whole. *Supervenience* names the same relation insofar as the whole, irreducible to any activity taken separately, becomes consequential through what supports it. Neither word names a place. The organism is not spatially above its cells, and the cells are not ontologically beneath it like a foundation that could remain what it is after the house is removed. What changes is participation: what each activity is doing as part of the whole.

It may be that a holonic relation, once actual, is always properly both supervenient and subvenient. The cells support the organism only insofar as an organism is actual through them; the organism returns through activities without which it would not exist. But the reciprocity of the actual relation must not be projected backward into its possibility. Supporting activities do not guarantee a further whole. Before actualization there may be no supervenient actuality at all—only activities capable, under conditions not yet fully known and perhaps not fully commandable, of participating in one.

This qualification preserves the difference between development and destiny. An acorn is not an oak, although its activity can participate in becoming one. A contemplative exercise is not a supersensible organ, even if it can participate in actualizing one. A plurality is not a people merely because common life is possible. The further whole cannot be counted among the givens used to explain its own arising.

Nor does its possible arising make its supports incomplete. A cell is not an unfinished organism. A person is not a deficient collective. An activity does not become less complete because its completion makes a further completion possible. This is the crucial holonic release: what is complete as a whole can become participant as a part without ceasing to be complete as that whole.

The converse also holds. The further whole, if it actualizes, does not exhaust what supports it. My life does not use up the possible relations of my cells. Some can be cultured outside my body; some participate in reproduction; all belong to evolutionary histories extending beyond me. Their participation is real without being total possession. A whole can return through its parts as their present coordination without becoming the final account of what they are or may become.

This is how possession can remain compatible with perfectionism. A capacity can become genuinely mine. A practice can become second nature; a peak can leave a stable structure; a way of attending can become available without the conditions that first made it startling. Nothing is protected by denying this achievement. The mistake would be to make possession final—to suppose that because a possibility has become actual, actuality has exhausted possibility.

Emersonian perfectionism begins from the contrary experience. The attained self is real, not an approximation waiting to be excused by its successor. Yet only from within what has been attained can a further self call. The call does not prove that this further self will become actual. It makes the present self answerable to a possibility that the present actuality has helped disclose. Completeness and further perfection are not contradictory because the further does not supply what the present lacked in order to be present. It becomes possible through what the present has actually become.

This is what *horizon* can name without becoming another machine.

A horizon is neither an object waiting at a distance nor the edge of what exists. It is how an actuality can be oriented by more than it presently gives. We can move toward it, but what we reach is not the horizon transported into our possession. Real places are reached. They alter where and how anything further can appear. The horizon remains—not because every arrival fails, but because arrival makes another relation possible.

The openness of a complete activity to further actuality may be called *transcendability*: the possibility that what is already actual and complete may participate in the actualization of an ability not yet available to it, without containing or commanding that ability in advance.

Its horizon is not its incompleteness. It is how transcendability appears from within present actuality. Sometimes no further completion arrives. Sometimes pleasure supervenes and vanishes with the activity. Sometimes an overwhelming completion may change what later becomes possible. Sometimes repeated activities may compose into a capacity that can be possessed and exercised. The strongest possibility is that a new faculty becomes actual, bringing into experience relations that were previously unavailable as such. Nothing requires these possibilities to collapse into one story.

Aristotle gives us actuality without exhaustion: an activity may contain its end and receive a perfection it cannot command, while a life may be formed toward a good actualized rather than produced. Kant prevents this openness from becoming a known object: in the mathematical sublime, a present capacity finds itself answerable to a whole it cannot present, yet the experience yields no positive knowledge of a supersensible object. Steiner advances the stronger, pathwise possibility that disciplined activities may participate in actualizing a capacity not yet actual as such. Read holonically, such a capacity would neither leave its supports behind nor reduce to their assembly. It would arise through already complete activities and return consequentially through them without exhausting what they may become.

These are not three authorities converging on a result. They hold apart three moments that should not be hurried together: completion that cannot be commanded, excess that cannot be positively presented, and a possible faculty that cannot be treated as given before its actualization. Their tension gives the vertical relation its first discernible shape.

That shape is not a ladder of fixed levels. It is the possibility that complete activities may participate in a further actuality, and that this actuality, if it occurs, may change what can thereafter become actual through them. The first movement is neither ascent nor construction from below. The second is neither domination nor a gift from a separate above. A whole that was only possible could become real only through both: enabled by what it completes, consequential within what enabled it.

The formulation must remain conditional because the future whole cannot explain itself before it exists:

Complete activities may together make possible a completion none can separately command. Such a completion need not become actual. If it does, it may return through those activities; that return may change what they can subsequently make possible.

Each qualification is structural, not rhetorical hesitation. Remove the first and possibility is confused with actuality. Remove the second and conditions are confused with causes sufficient to compel grace. Remove the third and a completion is confused with its consequential return. Remove the fourth and return is confused with transformation of what may later become actual.

I remain a whole among wholes. My organs and cells do not wait unfinished for me to complete them, yet I am actual through their activity, and my actuality is present in what they can do. If there are ways in which I may likewise become participant in a life, intelligence, or faculty not yet actual, their possibility does not diminish what I am. Nor does my present completion guarantee their arrival. It gives them somewhere to occur.

The horizon is not the promise that they will. It is the openness of actuality to more actuality without either becoming less real.

Notes

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.4–5. Aristotle says that pleasure completes activity as a supervening end or perfection, “like the bloom on those in the flower of youth,” and that the pleasure proper to an activity increases it. The relation matters here because the activity is already complete in exercise; pleasure neither supplies a missing product nor remains causally inert once it arrives.
2. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §§25–29 and the General Remark following §29. Kant distinguishes the mathematical estimation of magnitude by number from the aesthetic estimation in which imagination attempts comprehension in one intuition. The sublime properly concerns the subject’s state and its relation to ideas of reason, not a sublime object positively presented in nature.
3. Rudolf Steiner, *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, ch. V, “Knowledge of the Higher Worlds—Concerning Initiation,” together with *Knowledge of Higher Worlds and Its Attainment*. Steiner describes spiritual training as developing active organs of perception, insists that it begin from sound judgment and discrimination, and warns that malformed development can yield inaccurate or delusive perception. His positive account is treated here as a possibility whose actuality cannot be inferred from Kant’s negative presentation or from the phenomenology of a peak state.