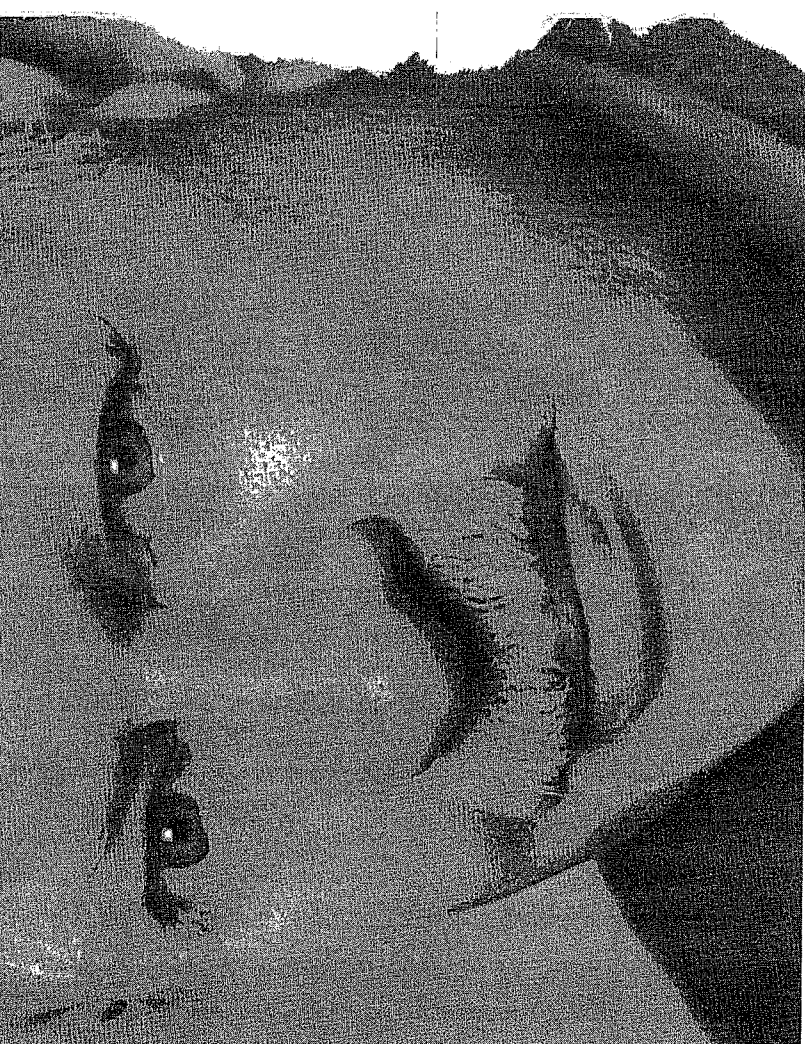


Kenneth
BURKE

**A Grammar
of Motives**



Survey of Terms for Substance

Geometric substance. An object placed in its setting, existing both in itself and as part of its background. Participation in a context. Embodied most completely in Spinoza's cult of "Euclidean" relations, logically ("necessarily") derivable from one another. These relations exist all at once, implicitly, though they may manifest themselves, or be made manifest, in various *sequences*. (As soon as certain antecedent steps are taken in the demonstration, certain consequent steps are "inevitable.") The plastic connotations can lead readily into strictly materialistic notions of determinism, as with the novelist, Theodore Dreiser, who professes to view all ultimate motives in terms of "chemism."

Familial substance. In its purity, this concept stresses common ancestry in the strictly biological sense, as literal descent from maternal or paternal sources. But the concept of family is usually "spiritualized," so that it includes merely social groups, comprising persons of the same nationality or beliefs. Most often, in such cases, there is the notion of some founder shared in common, or some covenant or constitution or historical act from which the consubstantiality of the group is derived. Doctrines of creation extend the concept of familial descent to cover

the relationship between the craftsman and his product ("the potter and the pot," as with the agent-act ratio).

This in turn moves us closer to purely logical derivations, of actualities from potentialities, of the explicit from the implicit, of conclusions from principles (that is, "firsts"). Plotinus' characterization of God as *to proton* would be a case in point, or Bonaventura's notion of the world's development from *rationes seminales*, an expression clearly combining the ideas of logical and biological descent. The stress upon the informative nature of beginnings can in turn lead us to treat christenings, inaugurations, and the like as aspects of familial substance. There is the girl of high spirits, for instance, who says of herself that she was born during a hurricane, as though the quality of her temper in later life were derived from the quality of the scene prevailing at her birth.

Biologists, in their concern with vital reproduction, necessarily give prominence to concepts of familial substance, in terms for genus and species, cellular structure, and the like. Often they study the responses of organisms at various levels of development, in the expectation that laws of behavior discovered at one level will apply to levels far higher in the scale of complexity. They expect differences, of course, but they also expect the processes at both the higher and lower levels to be "substantially" the same. Thus in an article of biological vulgarization published in one of the "cultural" magazines, a writer observed that, though we may lose confidence in the brotherhood of man, we can still be sure of our consubstantiality in a more inclusive concept of family: "protoplasm" (incidentally, another "first").

Since the taking of nourishment involves a *transubstantiation* of external elements into elements within, we might treat nutritive substance as a combination of the contextual and familial sufficiently notable to deserve a separate designation. Just as the organism dies when deprived of all food, so it will die in part when certain strategic ingredients are absent from its food. Thus, though one might not want to contend that a sufficiency of iodine will make men wise, we can say that a deficiency of iodine will greatly prod them to be stupid. And manganese has been called the chemical of "mother love" because, without manganese, hens won't set. (Similarly, the pituitary has been called the "mother love" gland, since a deficiency of the pituitary hormone in the female is accompanied by "lack of devotion to its offspring.") Modern

chemistry prompts us to stress the scenic aspect of the nutritional motive, as the chemist would seek to reduce the efficient principle in both manganese and the pituitary hormone to a common basis. Even a stock to which a scion has been grafted may be considered, from this point of view, as a part of the scion's environment, hence an environmental control upon food supply. For any motivational special factor which is theoretically assigned to the organism (in the sense that a horse and a tiger, a dandelion and a daisy, exemplify in their behavior and development different loci of motion), can be theoretically dissolved into the environmental. If you put a hungry horse and a hungry tiger in a cage together, for instance, you would thereby get not one environment but two, since the tiger would be so drastically momentous an aspect of the horse's environment, and the horse would be a nutrient aspect of the tiger's environment. And any change of nutritive elements such as accompanies glandular transplantations or the injection of hormones is analyzable as a "new physical situation." Dr. Andras Angyal observes in his *Foundations for a Science of Personality*, "A morphological distinction between organism and environment is impossible." He also reminds us, "The blood has been called 'internal environment' by Claude Bernard." Accordingly, he employs the concept of a "biosphere" in which "subject (organism)" and "object (environment)" are merged as a single process.

The title of Robert M. Coates's fantasy, *Eater of Darkness*, could be translated: "The agent whose substance is one with the substance of darkness" (though we should next have to make an inquiry into the author's use of "darkness" to discover the special attributes of the term in his particular thesaurus). Totemic rites and the sacrament of the Eucharist are instances where the nutritive emphasis becomes submerged in the notion of familial consubstantiality. "Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you what you are."

Directional substance. Doubtless biologically derived from the experience of free motion, since man is an organism that lives by locomotion. Frequently, with metaphors of "the way," the directional stresses the sense of motivation from within. Often strongly futuristic, purposive, its slogan might be: Not "Who are you?" or "Where are you from?" but "Where are you going?" Thought in terms of directional substance gained many fresh motives since the Renaissance, and the greater mobility that went with the development from status to con-

tract, alienation of property, the growth of the monetary rationale, and revolutionary innovations in the means of transportation and communication. The directional is also susceptible of conversion from "free" motion into the "determined." Thus, one may "freely" answer a call, yet the call may be so imperious that one could not ignore it without disaster. And statistical treatment of supposedly "free" choices may disclose a uniform response prevailing among the lot.

The directional has encouraged much sociological speculation in terms of "tendencies" or "trends." With such terms, the substantial paradox is not far in the offing. If a man did *not* make a certain decision, for instance, we might nonetheless choose to say that he had a "tendency towards" the decision. Indeed, any tendency *to* do something is, by the same token, a tendency *not* to do it.

The directional is embedded in the very word, "motivation." And we may note four related nuances, or perhaps puns, with corresponding philosophies. Doctrines that reduce mental states to materialistic terms treat *motion* as motive. When an individual's acts are referred to some larger curve, we get *movement* as motive. For instance, individual immigrants came to America as part of a general movement westward. "Movement" in such cases can be either purposive or necessitarian, since one's place in a "movement" is like one's enlistment in a "cause" (and Latin *causa* is defined as: *that by, on account of, or through which anything takes place or is done; a cause, reason, motive, inducement*). Terminologies that situate the driving force of human action in human passion treat *emotion* as motive. (In his *Principles of Literary Criticism*, I. A. Richards offers a good pun for reducing *emotion* in turn to *emotion*, when he proposes that we speak not of the *emotions* aroused in us by art but of the *commotions*.) And one can mystically select the *moment* as motive. Such "moments" are directional in that, being led up to and away from, they summarize the forgoing and seminally contain the subsequent. But in themselves they "just are," being an "eternal present" that has wound up the past and has the future wound up.

All metaphors or generalizations, such as *homo homini lupus*, or "life a pilgrimage," or "the economic man," that treat one order of motivation in terms of a higher order or lower order, are examples of substantiation; and they reveal the paradox of substance in that the given subject both is and is not the same as the character with which and by which it is identified. Such statements about motivating essence, often

made in passing and sometimes serving as the midrib of a work, are the stock in trade of imaginative literature. As such, they can be most fully studied under the heading of Symbolic. And much that we have written in *Permanence and Change*, *Attitudes Toward History*, and *The Philosophy of Literary Form* could be read as an elaboration of this paragraph. The name of any well-developed character in a fiction is the term for a peculiar complexity of motives.

Dialectic Substance

From the standpoint of our present study, all the foregoing types could be considered as special cases of a more inclusive category: dialectic substance. Dialectically considered (that is, "dramatically" considered) men are not only *in nature*. The cultural accretions made possible by the language motive become a "second nature" with them. Here again we confront the ambiguities of substance, since symbolic communication is not a merely external instrument, but also intrinsic to men as agents. Its motivational properties characterize both "the human situation" and what men are "in themselves."

Whereas there is an implicit irony in the other notions of substance, with the dialectic substance the irony is explicit. For it derives its character from the systematic contemplation of the antinomies attendant upon the fact that we necessarily define a thing in terms of something else. "Dialectic substance" would thus be the over-all category of dramatism, which treats of human motives in the terms of verbal action. By this statement we most decidedly do not mean that human motives are confined to the realm of verbal action. We mean rather that the dramatic analysis of motives has its *point of departure* in the subject of verbal action (in thought, speech, and document).

A poem, by shifting the imagery of its metaphors, permits us to contemplate the subject from the standpoint of various objects. This effect is dialectical in the sense that we see something in terms of some other. In a more restricted sense, however, the dialectical considers things in terms not of *some* other, but of *the* other. The sharpest instance of this is an *agon* wherein the protagonist is motivated by the nature of the antagonist, as with the situating of socialist motives in resistance to capitalism, or the unifying effect of the Allied Nations' joint opposition to Hitler. There is a grim pleasantry that runs, "Of course we're

Christians—but what are we being Christians *against*?” In earlier days, when the devil enjoyed great personal prominence, he could perform this noteworthy role of agonistic unification which, in our era of humanistic progress, we generally assign exclusively to human vessels.

The ambiguity of external and internal motivation has recently plagued some enemies of Fascism who saw that an effective war against the Fascist nations would require many “Fascist” measures on the part of the Anti-Fascists. As the Irish poet, George Russell, once stated the form of their predicament: “We become the image of the thing we hate.” And the great dialectician, Coleridge, has observed that *rivalres* are the opposite banks of the *same* stream. And it was dialectically, or dramatically, necessary that the *devil* should be an *angel*; for were he of any less noble substance, the Christian *agonia* would to that degree have fallen short of thoroughness in imagining a common ground on which the two great conflicting motives, good and evil, can join battle.

The most thoroughgoing dialectical opposition, however, centers in that key pair: Being and Not-Being. For the contextual approach to substance, by inducing men to postulate a ground or context in which everything that is, is placed, led thinkers “by dialectical necessity” to affirm that the only ground of “Being” is “Not-Being” (for “Being” is so comprehensive a category that its dialectical opposite, “Not-Being,” is the only term that would be left to designate its ground). The Neo-Platonist, Plotinus, carried such thinking to its ultimate limits, in the direction of that “negative theology” whereby the divine substance, as the ground of all that we experience in the material world, could be designated only by the absence of any attributes such as we in our material existence can conceive of. He would evolve a dialectical process that, beginning with material things, in the end had completely transcended its beginnings, thus arriving at a totally immaterial vision of God as an abstract Oneness. Accordingly, in his belief that material existence is estrangement from God, he is said to have been unwilling to name either his parents or his birthplace (the abstract concept of dialectical substance here leading him to proclaim his identity by a *negative* reference to the familial and the geometric).

The process of transcendence may, of course, be reversed. Then the ultimate abstract Oneness is taken as a source, a “first”; and the steps

leading up to it are interpreted as stages emanating from it. Or terms that are contextual to each other (such as Being and Not-Being, Action and Rest, Mechanism and Purpose, the One and the Many) can be treated as familiarly related (as were Being to be derived from Not-Being, Action from Rest, Mechanism from Purpose, the Many from the One). Or, in general, actualities may be derived from potentialities that are in a different realm than the actualities. The most obvious instance of such a derivation would be a naturalistic assertion that the “conscious” is derived from a “pre-Conscious,” or that the state of life is derived from a condition of “pre-life.” However, many less apparent variants are possible. The human person, for instance, may be derived from God as a “super-person.” Or human purpose may be derived from an All Purpose, or Cosmic Purpose, or Universal Purpose, or Absolute Purpose, or Pure Purpose, or Inner Purpose, etc. And instead of a “pre-conscious” as the source or latent form of consciousness, we may have a subconscious or unconscious or “collective unconscious,” etc.