At the end of Chapter 5 four questions were asked which the rest of this book is supposed to give answers to, four questions occasioned by that answer to the question of self-knowledge we ended up in, namely that the truthful answer to the question ‘who am I?’ is not a regular answer but that the question is no longer asked. In the last chapters different aspects of the questions about individualism and freedom were discussed. We are now on our way to the next question, about will and action, a question which is obviously closely connected to the former one. One connecting link is a specific picture of the world, a picture which from that perspective in which freedom and will are emphasized seems to be of central significance: the world as resistance.

A discussion of such a picture of the world could also be motivated in the following way. In order for me to be me, there must be some kind of contrast, someone might say, a contrast to that which is not me. If I can answer the question ‘who am I?’ by giving a direct description of myself, I can also answer it by giving a description of that which is not me, he might continue, in that way arriving at an answer to the question indirectly; to every direct answer to the question ‘who am I?’ there is a complementary description of that which is not me, and vice versa. That which is not me could be given the name ‘the world’. (Understood in this way, the traditional ontological orientation of philosophy is consequently not without relevance for philosophy understood as striving for self-knowledge even though the relevance may be very indirect; one of the aims of this chapter is to draw attention to this connection.) For example, you could say that the complement to freedom is that which constitutes an obstacle to freedom; the world – that which is not me – is then understood as resistance.
1 The world as resistance

A common philosophical idea – in fact far more common than one might be inclined to believe – is that the world, reality, is fundamentally experienced as resistance. And, to be sure, there are many ordinary situations which such a description seems to capture: I am walking on the street, inattentive, and collide with a lamppost; the reality of the lamppost appears to me in that resistance I experience; I implicitly took it to be possible to walk straight on, but it was not possible. The philosophical idea is, however, far more wide-embracing than this. The idea is that this is the relation reality always has to me, that this is what the world is for me. Or, more modestly, that this is the fundamental character of the relation.

In Plato’s dialogue *Sophist* it is said that there is a group of philosophers, primarily to be identified with materialists like Democritus, claiming that only what offers resistance (προσβολή) when you squeeze it in your hands is. Here the sense of touch has been given priority, as is often the case in the history of philosophy. (That it is the sense of sight that has most often been given priority, a claim which you meet with in many quarters, is not correct; the examples which those who write the history of philosophy in this way point to no doubt exist, but they are far from as numerous as often believed.) The distinction between primary and secondary qualities, an extremely momentous distinction in modern philosophy, can be understood as a distinction between different senses, and here the sense of touch corresponds to the primary qualities. The one leading the discussion in Plato’s dialogue, a visitor form Elea, modifies the materialist conception of what is by making it less (obviously) physical but retains the centrality of resistance: a thing really is if it has the capacity to affect or be affected. This modification brings with it a modification of the role resistance is supposed to have. For it is clear that if resistance is supposed to be the fundamental way in which that which is is experienced the resistance has to come from something like matter, from something non-conceptual and formless. If that which the resistance comes from does not have that character there are other aspects of what is than its offering resistance, and if these aspects are not to be accounted for in terms of a deeper lying form of resistance, in which case the modification is in the end merely apparent, resistance is consequently not the only way in which that which is is experienced.

Another expression of the picture of the world as resistance is to be found in the belief/desire-model, a classic model of our life of action, a model which can be traced back at least to Leibniz, who describes