

arises behind the theme in which he is presented. This "saying to the Other"—this relationship with the Other as interlocutor, this relation with an *existent*—precedes all ontology; it is the ultimate relation in Being. Ontology presupposes metaphysics.

5. *Transcendence as the Idea of Infinity*

The schema of theory in which metaphysics was found distinguished theory from all ecstatic behavior. Theory excludes the implantation of the knowing being in the known being, the entering into the Beyond by ecstasy. It remains knowledge, relationship. To be sure, representation does not constitute the primordial relation with being. It is nonetheless privileged, precisely as the possibility of recalling the separation of the I. And to have substituted for the magical communion of species and the confusion of distinct orders a spiritual relation in which beings remain at their post but communicate among themselves will have been the imperishable merit of the "admirable Greek people," and the very institution of philosophy. In condemning suicide, at the beginning of the *Phaedo*, Socrates refuses the false spiritualism of the pure and simple and immediate union with the Divine, characterized as desertion; he proclaims ineluctable the difficult itinerary of knowledge starting from the here below. The knowing being remains separated from the known being. The ambiguity of Descartes's first evidence, revealing the I and God in turn without merging them, revealing them as two distinct moments of evidence mutually founding one another, characterizes the very meaning of separation. The separation of the I is thus affirmed to be non-contingent, non-provisional. The distance between me and God, radical and necessary, is produced in being itself. Philosophical transcendence thereby differs from the transcendence of religions (in the current thaumaturgic and generally lived sense of this term), from the transcendence that is already (or still) participation, submergence in the being toward which it goes, which holds the transcending being in its invisible meshes, as to do it violence.

This relation of the same with the other, where the transcendence of the relation does not cut the bonds a relation implies, yet where these bonds do not unite the same and the other into a Whole, is in fact fixed in the situation described by Descartes in which the "I think" maintains with the Infinite it can nowise contain and from which it is separated a relation called "idea of infinity." To be sure, things, mathematical and

moral notions are also, according to Descartes, presented to us through their ideas, and are distinct from them. But the idea of infinity is exceptional in that its *ideatum* surpasses its idea, whereas for the things the total coincidence of their "objective" and "formal" realities is not precluded; we could conceivably have accounted for all the ideas, other than that of Infinity, by ourselves. Without deciding anything for the moment as to the veritable significance of the presence of the ideas of things in us, without holding to the Cartesian argumentation that *proves* the separated existence of the Infinite by the finitude of the being having an idea of infinity (for there perhaps is not much sense to proving an existence by describing a situation prior to proof and to the problems of existence), it is of importance to emphasize that the transcendence of the Infinite with respect to the I which is separated from it and which thinks it measures (so to speak) its very infinitude. The distance that separates *ideatum* and idea here constitutes the content of the *ideatum* itself. Infinity is characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is the absolutely other. The transcendent is the sole *ideatum* of which there can be only an idea in us; it is infinitely removed from its idea, that is, exterior, because it is infinite.

To think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object. But to think what does not have the lineaments of an object is in reality to do more or better than think. The distance of transcendence is not equivalent to that which separates the mental act from its object in all our representations, since the distance at which the object stands does not exclude, and in reality implies, the *possession* of the object, that is, the suspension of its being. The "intentionality" of transcendence is unique in its kind; *the difference between objectivity and transcendence will serve as a general guideline for all the analyses of this work*. We find that this presence in thought of an idea whose *ideatum* overflows the capacity of thought is given expression not only in Aristotle's theory of the agent intellect, but also, very often, in Plato. Against a thought that proceeds from him who "has his own head to himself,"⁶ he affirms the value of the delirium that comes from God, "winged thought."⁷ Delirium here does not have an irrationalist significance; it is only a "divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention."⁸ The fourth type of delirium is reason itself, rising to the

⁶ *Phaedrus*, 244a.

⁷ *Phaedrus*, 249a.

⁸ *Phaedrus*, 265a.

ideas, thought in the highest sense. Possession by a god, enthusiasm, is not the irrational, but the end of the solitary (and which we will later call "economic") or inward thought, the beginning of a true experience of the *new* and of the noumenon—already Desire.

The Cartesian notion of the idea of the Infinite designates a relation with a being that maintains its total exteriority with respect to him who thinks it. It designates the contact with the intangible, a contact that does not compromise the integrity of what is touched. To affirm the presence in us of the idea of infinity is to deem purely abstract and formal the contradiction the idea of metaphysics is said to harbor, which Plato brings up in the *Parmenides*⁹—that the relation with the Absolute would render the Absolute relative. The absolute exteriority of the exterior being is not purely and simply lost as a result of its manifestation; it "absolves" itself from the relation in which it presents itself. But the infinite distance of the Stranger despite the proximity achieved by the idea of infinity, the complex structure of the unparalleled relation designated by this idea, has to be described; it is not enough to distinguish it formally from objectification.

We must now indicate the terms which will state the deformalization or the concretization of the idea of infinity, this apparently wholly empty notion. The infinite in the finite, the more in the less, which is accomplished by the idea of Infinity, is produced as Desire—not a Desire that the possession of the Desirable slakes, but the Desire for the Infinite which the desirable arouses rather than satisfies. A Desire perfectly disinterested—goodness. But Desire and goodness concretely presuppose a relationship in which the Desirable arrests the "negativity" of the I that holds sway in the Same—puts an end to power and emprise. This is positively produced as the possession of a world I can bestow as a gift on the Other—that is, as a presence before a face. For the presence before a face, my orientation toward the Other, can lose the avidity proper to the gaze only by turning into generosity, incapable of approaching the other with empty hands. This relationship established over the things henceforth possibly common, that is, susceptible of being said, is the relationship of conversation. The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face. This *mode* does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the

⁹ *Parmenides*, 133b-135c, 141e-142b.

Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its *ideatum*—the adequate idea. It does not manifest itself by these qualities, but καθ'αυτὴ. It *expresses itself*. The face brings a notion of truth which, in contradistinction to contemporary ontology, is not the disclosure of an impersonal Neuter, but *expression*: the existent breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being to spread out in its "form" the totality of its "content," finally abolishing the distinction between form and content. This is not achieved by some sort of modification of the knowledge that thematizes, but precisely by "thematization" turning into conversation. The condition for theoretical truth and error is the word of the other, his expression, which every lie already presupposes. But the first content of expression is the expression itself. To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching [enseignement]. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. In its non-violent transitivity the very epiphany of the face is produced. The Aristotelian analysis of the intellect, which discovers the agent intellect coming in by the gates, absolutely exterior, and yet constituting, nowise compromising, the sovereign activity of reason, already substitutes for maieutics a transitive action of the master, since reason, without abdicating, is found to be in a position to *receive*.

Finally, infinity, overflowing the idea of infinity, puts the spontaneous freedom within us into question. It commands and judges it and brings it to its truth. The analysis of the idea of Infinity, to which we gain access only starting from an I, will be terminated with the surpassing of the subjective.

The notion of the face, to which we will refer throughout this work, opens other perspectives: it brings us to a notion of meaning prior to my *Sinngebung* and thus independent of my initiative and my power. It signifies the philosophical priority of the existent over Being, an exteriority that does not call for power or possession, an exteriority that is not reducible, as with Plato, to the interiority of memory, and yet maintains the I who welcomes it. It finally makes possible the descrip-



tion of the notion of the immediate. The philosophy of the immediate is realized neither in Berkeley's idealism nor in modern ontology. To say that the *existent* is disclosed only in the openness of Being is to say that we are never directly with the existent as such. The immediate is the interpellation and, if we may speak thus, the imperative of language. The idea of contact does not represent the primordial mode of the immediate. Contact is already a thematization and a reference to a horizon. The immediate is the face to face.

Between a philosophy of transcendence that situates elsewhere the true life to which man, escaping from here, would gain access in the privileged moments of liturgical, mystical elevation, or in dying—and a philosophy of immanence in which we would truly come into possession of being when every "other" (cause for war), encompassed by the same, would vanish at the end of history—we propose to describe, within the unfolding of terrestrial existence, of economic existence (as we shall call it), a relationship with the other that does not result in a divine or human totality, that is not a totalization of history but the idea of infinity. Such a relationship is metaphysics itself. History would not be the privileged plane where Being disengaged from the particularism of points of view (with which reflection would still be affected) is manifested. If it claims to integrate myself and the other within an impersonal spirit this alleged integration is cruelty and injustice, that is, ignores the Other. History as a relationship between men ignores a position of the I before the other in which the other remains transcendent with respect to me. Though of myself I am not exterior to history, I do find in the Other a point that is absolute with regard to history—not by amalgamating with the Other, but in speaking with him. History is worked over by the ruptures of history, in which a judgment is borne upon it. When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history.