

ON THE NECESSARY FORM OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE
VITAL DETERMINATION OF EVERY BEGINNING THEREOF

There is a musical work that we should listen to every time that the exasperation or the tiredness that are inevitably associated with every search, no matter how serene it may be, threaten to disenamour us of philosophy.

The “Goldberg Variations,” a rare example of perfect accord among structure, sense and content, of genius and method (profound harmony – indistinguishability – of expressive freedom and formal necessity), esthetically represents the most profound characteristics of metaphysical thought, the ones that are most difficult to express and to recognize.

May the reader, therefore, permit me to use this seemingly extravagant metaphor.

As “*Vierter Teil bet Clavier Übung*” (the third, surely not by chance, is a “*Dreifaltigkeitsmesse*” that, in keeping with the sacrality of the number that gives it form and name, seeks to express the perfection of creation, the vastness and the clear firmness of the divine), these variations, steeped in the mystique of the number “4”, the number of creation, but also of the human, of space, of the physical elements and of time itself, stand in contrast with “3” as creation with demiurge, as activity with intelligence and necessity, imperfect with perfect, incomplete with eternal.

Here we find sublimity side by side with irony, grandeur with modesty; the “*Variationen*” close by reopening, end by commencing all over again (they are “*Übungen*” and cannot be anything but such).

They return to the starting point after a surprising articulation of variations without ever having ceased to be, at every point and moment, one and the same thing. The fine poetry of the principle of the variation (on a theme) makes it possible to give a form to the logically impossible, to the perceptively obscure, to the apparent absurdity of every feeling, to time itself; in it – and through it – what remains identical is the changing or, if you prefer, what changes is the manner of being identical.

Each of these passages brings a philosopher to my mind: one rigid and obscure, another sadly beautiful, one arid and involved, another obsessive and vehement, yet another serene and elusive.... What distinguishes them is – always and invariably – also what they have in common.

In the same way philosophy is similar to that initial (and final) “Aria”; it is the guide and the profound trace or path that, even though you can follow it in many different ways, remains originarily identical. In Plato as in Kant, in

Aristotle as in Husserl, we have essential and vertiginous evidence: "Knowledge commences with experience but does not derive from it." Living this evidence and exploring its implications, its radically problematical and even equivocal nature, feeling its pervasiveness and imminence, all this is philosophy.

Not only does knowledge commence in somebody who lives and therefore thinks, takes form in a subject to the extent to which he or she gathers (or, if you prefer, "rediscovers" or "remembers") its form, a subject who, constituting this knowledge, is also constituted by it (*Ausbildung*).

But knowledge cannot derive even from this, it is not here that it has its origin; if it were so, there would exist no obstacles to knowledge, it would be as natural as breathing and the limits of things would also be the same as those of the mind that thinks them and this mind would be one thing and these things, thoughts.

Between the experience of the subject and knowledge in general there does in fact exist an ineludable but not by any means obvious link, a necessary but hidden link. Indeed, if knowledge, always presupposing its evidence, were to find its occasion in something presumptively possible without losing any part of its necessity in crossing this accidental nature of its giving itself – rather, if it is valid solely by virtue of this apparent contingency and nonessentiality that undoubtedly represents its limit and therefore also its possibility – it is clear that this possibility of the person who knows would have to carry within it exactly the same form, a form that is neither occasional nor casual, as the form of the thing that thereby comes to be known.

Without which, indeed, there would be neither knowledge nor ignorance. It is by virtue of this inevitableness of the subject, of the subjective giving itself of the objectively known (true), that every radical philosophy – straining towards the origins – notwithstanding its many thematic and methodic "variations," cannot but constitute itself at first as anything other than the science of subjectivity (monadology).

Philosophy as the science of "knowing subjectivity" has its object in the clarification of the principle of experience; this is the point from which it must necessarily start and to which it must return time and time again. Feeling strains to seek its own beginning, its necessary (determinant) form, starting from its own occasional commencement; it can do so, because while this initially hidden beginning reveals itself, it determines – first of all – this selfsame and seemingly nonessential form from which one must necessarily start.

But recognizing one's own life and the authentic living of the subject in the knowledge and the intentional activity that inaugurates and directs it may seem like a paradox; knowledge as "activity," thematized into this radical form,

appears to us as the most obvious operation, but – at one and the same time – also as the one that is least comprehensible for each individual consciousness.

Let us consider the pure phenomenological structure of consciousness; it can be recognized as identical within the unforeseeable flow of one's own lived experiences, in the flood-like opacity – the inexhaustible variety – of one's own eventual correlates. This recognition is given as continuous experiencing of uninterrupted modifications in the continuous modification of one's own lived experiences (*Vormeinung, Mitmeinung, Täuschung, Erinnerung...*) and cannot be separated from grasping (gathering) the unity and the uniqueness – the permanence and complete and secure subsistence – of this flow (the horizon of experience as unbroken and inevitable experience of the horizon in its indeterminate aperture), starting from determinate and finite (successive) modifications and always returning to them. This feeling the succession (of perceiving in perceiving) contemporaneous with the constitution by successive moments of the feeling, which thus becomes a feeling of the succession within the succession of the feeling, prevents consciousness from becoming or thinking of itself as an "object." The so-called "self-consciousness" is in fact evidently given in each feeling, it is innate in it, as it were, and is neither its condition nor its consequence. A "reflecting" consciousness is already fully self-conscious; it feels the feeling. This feeling the feeling is not "object" but always no more than *of* objects.

Indeed, "perception" cannot but be the thought of perception. Reducing consciousness to just one thing among other things (i.e., reducing perception to an object) means thinking of it as something fictional, or as a function or abstraction. On the other hand, the objectivated subject lends itself to being analyzed by variously orientated specialist disciplines; it is the object of logic inasmuch as it is knowing (reasoning), of biology inasmuch as it is living, and of psychology inasmuch as it is moved emotionally by certain feelings or is affected – or afflicted – by a character.

Nevertheless, a consciousness cannot be reduced either to any one of these abstract forms nor to any of the theories connected therewith; the latter are obviously derived from it. Not vice versa.

Unlike any one particular knowledge, philosophy should thus give itself as the "*Idee einer Wissenschaft von den Bedingungen der Möglichkeit von Theorie überhaupt.*"¹ The characters of this mode of knowledge will be altogether particular and will place it "hierarchically" higher than (above) any special theory or technique.

If I understand the "subject" in the most obvious and natural sense, i.e., as an individual, as a single person, philosophy becomes to all intents and purposes impossible. If subjectivity "is subjective," philosophy is impossible,

because in that case every one of its beginnings is also an originary beginning, though the very fact that one affirms the absoluteness of subjectivity makes it wholly impossible for such an originary beginning (principle) to exist. One can readily pass beyond this argument by limiting oneself to not denying the evidence by virtue of which a consciousness is recognized as a subject that in general – constitutively – knows and which therefore “by chance” does not “know” something or something else, but in which, just as in every other individually determined cognitive act, it always finds in knowing the typical activity within which every individual learning and reflecting finds its own relative place and a sense by virtue of which also every individual subject, precisely through its limitation, irreducibility and changeability, the intimate solitude – the imperfection – that are peculiar to it, has to operate by starting from its being necessarily “consciousness in general,” being universal. The object in general, on the other hand, seems an empty matter, a substrate that is as inert as it is indifferent – merely passive and static, but also irreducible, stolid – just as the subject that “in general” knows this object seems a rigid and mute fiction.

“Subject” and “object,” nevertheless, transcend themselves to the extent to which they “are said” in an abstract manner, become disjointed in the reiterated attempt of giving to feeling the ordered logical structure of a proposition and in feeling the absurdity of this statement and this attempting. The contemporaneity of subject and object, their unity in perception – and in thinking the perception (the reflecting) – originarily oppose themselves to the nonessential act that endeavours to suspend its insuperable character of contemporaneity in the form of subject-attributes-predicate. The principles – as also the “logical” expressions – are in permanent contradiction to the temporality from which they derive.

The first and most delicate passage of the phenomenological method consists of the modification of the natural attitude into the naturally unnatural one of the “epoché”; philosophy teaches, first and foremost, the need for unlearning.

It is in the profound oscillation between the idea of an “objective” science independent of experience (logic or mathematics, for example) and the powerful intuition of the evidence of subjectivity operating as objectively constituent that the occasion for phenomenological reflection imposes itself. Indeed, for phenomenology it becomes clear that it is impossible to reduce knowledge to subjectivity and subjectively learnt objectivity to relativity; it has to be precisely in the inevitability of objectivity giving itself subjectively – of the hidden but inexorable operating of an “objectively subjective” – that

one has to recognize *both* the objectivity of this subjective constitution *and* the objectivity of what nevertheless has come to be known subjectively.

The Husserl of the first few pages of the *Sechste Untersuchung*, precisely because he still moves within the prejudice of an ultimate and analytical definition of the principles of knowledge, finds himself in the continuous and inevitable embarrassment of not being able to demonstrate the unitary (identical) character of "*Intention*" and "*Erfüllung*" (in knowing the true as also in knowing the immediately false), and this precisely because, distinguishing them abstractly, he is obliged to assume the idea of "*adequatio*" as evidently valid and, making this assumption, he has to consider as really separate moments that in intuition are given as inseparable. Analytical and incorrect, because not originary, is the distinction between (acts of) "*statische*" and "*dynamische Erfüllung*,"² whereas the former – thematized (or reflected) as *Intention* – should really represent the (logical) condition for the latter; the temporality that distinguishes them – since that of the former is an invariant logical space and that of the latter a linear and punctual succession of lived experiences causally arranged within that space – does not confirm either the possibility that acts of static and dynamic "*Erfüllung*" (realization) can give themselves separately (i.e., be distinguished) or the necessity that "outside time" there exist permanent and invariable contents (logical truths) that do not derive from some act of realization or, and this really amounts to the same thing, an intention, independently of a mind that thinks them, of a consciousness that lives them.

As an aside: The perfect unity of feeling as the identity of consciousness and correlate or of intention and realization (which are a metaphor thereof) cannot be "said" by any language that postulates its opposition, that induces its (in)difference. *This syntactic equivocation gives rise to the tendency to identify contradiction with error.*

The sole language capable of rendering account of "pure" feeling – with which every kind of abstraction can try to grapple without avail – lies beyond having to be logical, makes methodical and ironic use of paradox itself, affirms it continuously to deny its presumed contradictory nature, and lies even beyond the very "principle of contradiction," affirming its radical absurdity and recognizing its character of negator of time and, consequently, also of itself. There exists a pure language capable of grasping the continually recomposed discard, the revelation of what is hidden, the uninterrupted loss and gain of feeling in feeling without abandoning to the extreme edges of this desert garden just two, distant things. Eyes different from one's own way of looking. This is poetry.

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