

must in principle be bound to the essence from which they are derived. We could falsely interpret the essence by understanding it starting from that which happens because of it, namely, by confusing the [81] transcendental concept of remoteness with that of remote-Being which arises for us at the heart of categorial remoteness. *Nevertheless, it is to the original remoteness that remote-Being owes that which it is.* The non-elaborated concept of distance is still no more than the manner in which natural and pre-philosophical consciousness represents to itself the condition of the phenomenon, and this representation is not yet a thought. Nevertheless, it is with the help of elements which presuppose the essence and which find in it their foundation, that natural consciousness sketches its outline of the essence. No matter how incorrect this sketch may be, it is nonetheless significant. Action at a distance, the theory of species, the concept of 'reflection' and of 'image', the presupposition of distance, still refer only to realities or to processes of an ontic order. But these are valid only as symbols and that which they symbolize is not homogeneous with them, *it is their very foundation.* Actually, it is a matter of circumscribing the essence of the phenomenon; and, if traditional philosophical thought has been shown to be incapable of locating and of maintaining its problematic on the ontological level, nevertheless, its profound design must come to light someday. Heidegger thinks the same thing as Gassendi, but this thing he has thought of in its *ontological truth.*

10. PHENOMENOLOGICAL DISTANCE AND THE SPLITTING OF BEING:

PRESENCE AND ALIENATION

Being is a phenomenon only when it is at a distance from itself. The work of phenomenological distance understood as an ontological power, as a distance-in-the-making and not merely as an already-made distance, is precisely to institute the interval whereby Being can appear to itself. The appearance, on the foundation of phenomenological distance, of the Being which appears, the manifestation of this Being, is identical with its existence. Because it bases itself upon distance, the existence of Being is different from Being itself. It differs from Being itself precisely because that which is at a distance from itself [82] is Being itself, if you will, but at a distance from itself in its non-coincidence with itself, it is Being in difference. Let us consider with Fichte the wall which we say 'is'. That which is intended in the 'is', namely the Being

of the wall, "is not identical with it... but is distinct from this wall as something independent."¹ That which distinguishes Being from the wall itself, that which differentiates them in a radical way, is precisely the difference understood as the essence which permits the wall to be. The Being of the wall is the wall itself in the infinity of the distance which confers upon it, together with its phenomenal condition, existence itself. The existence of the wall is the Being of the wall insofar as this Being is posited in a radical exteriority with relation to itself; it is, to use the strong expression of Fichte, "the Being outside its Being." It is true that the natural consciousness "does not have time to contemplate the 'is' which completely escapes it," on the other hand, to aim at it in a thematic fashion in philosophical consciousness is to be led to posit that "the 'is' in relationship to Being is immediately existence."² Being must exist; it exists necessarily. The ontological argument is not a proof in the ordinary sense of the word; it consists in reading the phenomenal condition of Being. This phenomenal condition is precisely the existence of Being, it is, as Being outside its Being, the very Being of Being.

Existence which thus creates the very Being of Being does not coincide with Being pure and simple, with stable and absolute Being. There is so little coincidence with it that existence is quickly distinguished; in relation to Being, it is in an absolute exteriority, and having withdrawn from it in this exteriority, it posits Being in front of it as a stable Being. Existence is nothing in itself unless it be the act of withdrawing from Being and having annihilated itself in the face of Being, it posits Being in front of it as [83] another absolute existence. "Existence," says Fichte, "must be grasped and recognized and formed as simple existence and must posit and form opposite to it an absolute being of which it itself is no more than the simple existence; it must by its own Being annihilate itself in front of another absolute existence, which gives it precisely this characteristic of a simple image, of a representation ... of Being."³ Existence is thus thought of as the simple image of Being or, if you prefer, as its concept; for, that which is designated under the title of image is nothing other, as far as Being is concerned, than its own exteriority in relation to itself. Image is the

¹ J.G. Fichte, *Die Anweisung zum Seligen Leben*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, V. (Berlin: Veit; 1845) 440.

² *Ibid.* 441.

³ *Ibid.*

name of existence considered as the manifestation of Being, it is the form of Being, which Fichte also calls knowledge. His fifth Conference considers the "characteristic of knowledge in general, which is nothing more than a simple image of an independently given and subsisting Being."⁴ Already in his third Conference, Fichte characterized knowledge as "absolute existence or ... the manifestation and the revelation of Being in its only possible form."⁵

The dualism of Being and its proper image, which comes to be thought of as the phenomenal condition of Being, cannot be limited in its scope; rather, it belongs to the very definition of the internal structure of phenomenality and appears in this way as a prescription of the eidetic order, as an absolutely universal condition, identical to the essence of the manifestation as such. As a result, to such a condition is submitted not only the wall previously referred to, but everything which claims the title of phenomenon, everything that can and wishes to manifest itself, Being itself insofar as its most intimate vocation is precisely its own revelation. The Being of God will be nothing more than the *Unground* which is not only the most obscure but also the most abstract and as such something [84] completely unreal if he in turn does not submit to the conditions which open and define the field of phenomenal distance and of true spirituality. Or to be more exact, God is not himself something which would submit to such conditions; if he is the very essence of spirituality, he is one with its conditions. He is confused with them, it is he who is not only this vocation to manifest himself and to realize himself in this manifestation, but he is the very movement which actualizes this vocation, the power which makes something real. The essence of the divinity is, by consequence, identical to that of this power; that which is thought of in both cases is the internal structure of the absolute, it is the essence of the manifestation as such. Thus the conditions of phenomenality find in the description of the Divine essence, not a particular example, or even a privileged one, of the reality which they would subject to and subsume under themselves as under a general rule, but they find their proper reality, precisely insofar as they are not abstract conditions but the very conditions of reality and as such the absolute ontological reality itself.

Fichte's commentary on the beginning of the Gospel of St. John is located in this perspective; it serves as a repetition of the ontological

⁴ *Ibid.* 462.

⁵ *Ibid.* 442.

presuppositions already evoked, a repetition which because this time it is decidedly situated in the scheme of the absolute, confers on these presuppositions a decisive character. The definition of God as the Word means the understanding of the divine Being as existence. The Being of God exists, it manifests itself in conformity to conditions which constitute the essence of the manifestation, namely the essence of the Divinity itself. That the Being of God exists means in conformity to the condition which constitutes his Being, that God is divided by virtue of the dualism of Being and existence, that the Divine Being can be posited in an appearance only insofar as his own image is produced in front of him by annihilating itself before him, this image, which is the existence and the knowledge of his [85] very Being. The existence of God produced from him as that which he makes exist, thus constitutes the reality of the Divine Being; it is as a Being outside of his Being, as image and existence, the very Being of this Being. The Being of God is existence.

How are we to understand in a more exact way the relationship between Being and existence in God? The existence of God is neither exterior nor posterior to his Being. This "Existence which we distinguish... is not distinct," says Fichte, "it is original,"⁶ as original as his Being. Thus for Fichte as for Boehme before him, we cannot consider the Divine Being apart from the process whereby it emerges into the light, the Father is not able to be dissociated from the Son whom he begets eternally, and his Being is one with this begetting in which it realizes itself. The Word said St. John, is in God, or rather he is God himself. Nevertheless, that which is proposed in the affirmation of the unity of Being and existence is merely the sojourn of the latter under the form of the *Logos* in the original Being of the Father; it is his belonging to the internal structure of the absolute. But this is not to say that this structure is a unitary structure on the foundation of the immanence of existence in it. The difference between the two is hardly suppressed at the core of the absolute by the unity in it of Being and existence; that this difference is rather posited by such a unity and this, in such a radical manner, that it is upon the foundation of this unity that the absolute is handed over to the difference as to its own proper essence. Certainly, it is not correct to continue to distinguish in God, his Being and his existence, to posit on the one hand "a Being such as it is interiorly and in itself" and on the other hand "the form which stems from

⁶ *Ibid.* 480.

the fact that it exists",⁷ because existence is the Being of Being and yet—and for this very reason—because existence is the Being of this Being; this Divine Being is posited [86] outside of it as a Being outside of its Being. The unity of Being and existence has as its consequent the division of Being, its autoseparation from itself and, as Fichte says, "its expulsion outside itself." That which in the Being of God is exterior to him, namely, "everything which in Being is a consequence of existence," namely its 'form', is not at all something which in reality is foreign to the Being of God; it is the Being of God himself precisely insofar as he is, namely insofar as he exists. *Alienation is real not as something external to the absolute, but as constituting its very essence.* It is as something immanent to the internal life of Being, or rather as the very structure of this life, that exteriority unfolds itself and can henceforth share "being dead in itself in a Being repeated twice so to speak, placing it before itself."⁸ Thus existence is in no way different from Being, but is that which makes this Being to be different from itself. Here is how Fichte expresses himself on this subject: "The absolute Being presents himself in his existence... as this independence with regard to his own inner Being; he does not create a freedom outside of himself, but he is himself, in this part of the form, this freedom which is proper to him outside himself, and in this respect he is surely different in his existence from that which he is in his Being and he expels himself from himself in order to return with a new life."⁹

The preceding analyses get their concrete ontological meaning, if we care to locate them, in the *phenomenological cadre* whose true definition they constitute. In keeping with this definition, it becomes apparent that the passage from the Being-in-itself to the Being-for-itself consists in the positing of Being outside itself, it is the passage of Being outside itself; what happens in this passage is the Being-outside-itself of the Being-in-itself and this Being-outside-itself is the [87] for-itself of the Being-in-itself, its existence. In this Being-outside-itself, the Being-in-itself becomes other; it alienates itself and in this alienation, are realized the very conditions of its manifestation. *Alienation is the essence of manifestation.*

The Being which manifests itself is Being-present. *The essence of presence is alienation.* The presence-to-itself of Being is the same as its

⁷ *Ibid.* 509.

⁸ *Ibid.* 402.

⁹ *Ibid.* 512. [Henry's italics]

separation-with-itself in becoming another; it constitutes itself in the splitting of Being, a splitting in which the latter appears to itself and thus enters into the phenomenal condition of presence. "Actually 'presence to'," says Sartre, "always implies duality, at least a virtual separation." And further on: "The presence of being to itself implies a detachment on the part of being in relation to itself."¹⁰ Finally: "Presence is an immediate deterioration of coincidence, for it supposes separation."¹¹

The conditions which define the possibility of a presence and which consequently constitute its very essence, have a universal and transcendental meaning. They are the conditions which remain as long as and insofar as something like the reign of a presence unfolds itself and maintains itself among us. These conditions have been thought of under the rubric of 'phenomenological distance'; therefore, it is valid as an eidetic and insurmountable determination of real Being: the "possibility of the appearance of a datum as a datum," it is "this unbridgeable and perpetually safe distance wherein a presence can be discerned."¹² Understood in its existential and transcendental meaning, the concept of phenomenological distance is identical with the original and ontologically pure concept of alienation. *Alienation is insurmountable.* Being exists only and manifests itself only as alienated Being. Reality is real [88] only insofar as it is itself and other than itself at the same time. Alienation is not merely one eidetic structure among others, it is the very structure of essence insofar as it is absolute essence. *The suppression of alienation is an impossibility of the eidetic order, and the idea of such a suppression constitutes an absurdity from the ontological point of view.* Actually, the suppression of alienation would not be anything, nor could it be a positive phenomenon to which the discourse announcing such a suppression could then refer, unless the conditions of reality were found realized in this suppression. However, these conditions are realized only in the original and pure phenomenon of alienation. If the latter were effectively suppressed, this suppression would be nothing, it would not exist. Such a suppression can actually be produced only on the foundation of alienation in it. And this does not mean that in this suppression the

¹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956) 77.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² M. Dufrenne, "Heidegger et Kant", in *La Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, January 1949, p. 16. [Henry's italics]

phenomenon of alienation would be found to be little by little, and progressively eliminated, as the distance which separates the walker from his goal vanishes when this goal is attained. Alienation opens and defines the field of Being, it is an ultimate ontological structure. The suppression of alienation would not have any ontological meaning. Alienation is rather posited and maintained in such a suppression as the original ontological phenomenon which gives the suppression its foundation and makes it possible. Being exists only as Being-other, but the return of the other to the same, or rather the unity which binds them and which Fichte calls life, does not suppress their duality but presupposes it as its ontological and phenomenal foundation. "This second unity *which is not thereby suppressed but subsists eternally*, within duality this is life itself." ¹³

What can the suppression of alienation mean unless it deals with the ontological phenomenon thought of by us under this title? What should we understand by the unity of the other and of the same if otherness subsists [89] as the very condition of this unity? The latter is posited as that which binds the separate terms, but the bond which it institutes has nothing to do with any process of the ontic order. The unity here in question has an ontological meaning, just as the difference it has just abolished. It is the *unity of the presence*. Presence is precisely that which unites. It is because the essence of presence is immanent to them as the original ontological power which confers upon them their own power that our senses unite us with things, and that our gaze, for example, takes us over there to the tree which is on the hill. The unity of man and the world is an ontological unity, it suppresses alienation insofar as this unity is identical with freedom, namely with the characteristic which unites us with things. The ontological essence of this unity, however, is nothing other than alienation. *The suppression of alienation here in question, as long as we place ourselves on the ontological level, is identical with this very alienation.* Difference is the essence of unity. The essence of presence which is thought of under the rubric of this unity thus receives a very determined structure. *It is the essence of a presence which is obtained through the mediation of phenomenological distance.* Proximity in which this presence makes us live is identical to absolute remoteness whose ontological 'work' has opened a world to us. It is a proximity in remoteness. "We separate ourselves only in

¹³ Fichte, *Die Anweisung*..., 402. [Henry's italics]

order to be more united," says Hölderlin, "in order to be in a more Divine peace with all things and with ourselves."¹⁴ Nevertheless, the union from which this peace is made, finds its principle in that which separates; presence is attained upon the foundation of tearing apart and division.

Thus the presence of Being to itself is not discernible from its distance with regard to itself. The essence of presence, while forming a basis for it in its Being, prescribes for the datum specific characteristics [90] in conformity with which it appears as other in the milieu of otherness. By the same token, that which is given to us is also taken away. Being is there for it as something which it is not and from which it is separated as long as it *is*, by an unbridgeable distance. This explains why a *present* Being can nevertheless be *desired and that this desire be useless*. Because it is the essence which, while being incapable of surmounting itself, closes in upon itself, hems itself in, and in the cold contemplation of itself presents itself to itself only as that which it eternally lacks.

Presence is the foundation of knowledge, it is as such the theme of transcendental knowledge, which is preoccupied not with objects but "with the way we know objects insofar as this must be possible *a priori*." Nevertheless, the Being of objects is the *a priori* itself. In prescribing for objects the conditions for their possibility, the *a priori* confers upon them the characteristics which flow from the Will of the essence. Objects manifest themselves with these characteristics as separated objects which knowledge can never rejoin except through the mediation of this very separation. Knowledge is thus "always knowledge of that which we are not, of that which we do not arrive at becoming."¹⁵ The desire of "conserving the benefit of presence to self... without submitting to the inconveniences of the distance from self" remains a "dream."¹⁶ To obtain presence to self, Being had to separate itself from itself; and the Will, should it truly seek to rediscover itself by surmounting this separation other than by its own mediation, would be no more than a 'useless passion'. Being is the desire of self, it is its own nostalgia.

¹⁴ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Schwab. (Stuttgart: 1874) 284.

¹⁵ F. Alquié, "L'Être et le Néant de Jean-Paul Sartre", in *Cahiers du Sud*, XXIII (1945), p. 654.

¹⁶ F. Jeanson, *Le problème moral et la pensée de Sartre*, (Paris: Editions du Myrte, 1947) 233.

gods".¹¹ These mockeries have a limited significance if the essence is necessarily referred to the phenomenon, if it is upon the face alone that the pure manifestation shines, finally, if the image is always this image.

Thus the essence of manifestation is capable of showing itself only upon the ontic determination and by means of it. It is in the effective Being of the latter that the essence of pure phenomenality finds the condition for its reality; it is in the phenomenon itself that the essence arrives at the phenomenal condition. *However, the essence is not determination, neither is it phenomenon.* If phenomenality finds its immediate effectiveness in the determination wherein it appears, the latter has no less immediately the meaning of not being the essence. *The essence of pure phenomenality is something other than its effectiveness.* Insofar as the essence of phenomenality is other than its effectiveness, it rather finds in the latter its own suppression. The determination manifests the essence, however, in such a way that the essence [136] hides itself in this manifestation. Insofar as the determination manifests the essence, it is its truth. Insofar as the essence hides itself in this manifestation, insofar as it is not coextensive with the effective phenomenological content of the determination, the truth of this content is foreign to it, it is rather non-truth with respect to it. Finally, it is this non-truth of the essence which hides itself in the truth of effective phenomenality. The latter passes itself off as the truth of the essence; but the truth of the essence is the non-truth of its non-truth.

In order to arrive at effectiveness, the essence had to alienate itself. The essence alienates itself not only because it is the becoming-other wherein it realizes itself, but more basically, because it loses itself in this realization wherein it hides itself while manifesting itself. Because the essence can manifest itself in the determination only by hiding itself, that which manifests the essence has the meaning of being also that which hides it. The determination is an enigma.¹² It is the appearance (*Schein*) but an appearance (*Erscheinung*) such that in it that which appears is invariably referred to that which does not appear.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 198-99.

¹² Kierkegaard says that in Greece sensuality (sensitivity) is not culpability but enigma. According to Kierkegaard, the meaning of Greek plasticity resides in the enigmatic character of the sensual (sensible). Cf. *The Concept of Dread*, tr. W. Lowrie, 2 ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) 58.

Insofar as the effective determination manifests the essence while hiding it, it can manifest this hiding only by disappearing. The hiding of the essence in the effective entity means an inequality of the entity with regard to the essence. The suppression of this inequality is the suppression of this entity. The death of the determination is the manifestation of pure manifestation; or rather, since with this disappearance of the entity there also disappears the element wherein the essence finds its effectiveness and truth, this essence cannot be anything without the appearance of the new entity. The essence reaches us only through the 'time' of [137] things; and consciousness which seeks to grasp the essence, though actually misled by it and constantly turned away from the object of its inquiry, cannot but err from experience to experience, from object to object, without finding rest.¹³

14. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ESSENCE AND THE ONTIC DETERMINATION IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Since the philosophy of Being and the philosophy of consciousness exchange their themes, they also exchange their problems. The bond between Being and a being whose phenomenological foundation has just been reviewed becomes in the philosophy of consciousness the bond between consciousness and the thing or between the subject and the object. *The subject is necessarily related to the object because the essence of consciousness, identical to the essence of manifestation understood according to the fundamental presuppositions of monism, is invariably referred to the determination as to its truth.* The phenomenological meaning of the indissoluble bond which unites consciousness and the thing is caught sight of by classical philosophy when it declares that *the subject knows itself only through the object.* Henceforth, the object intervenes in the problematic of the philosophy of consciousness not as a synthetic and contingent addition with respect to it, understood as the essence of manifestation, but as a reality actually implied in this essence as that which alone permits it to realize itself. The essence of manifestation arrives at this realization, namely its self-promotion within the phenomenal condition, only in and through the object. Thus the determination appears in the last analysis as belonging to the internal structure of the essence insofar as the essence of manifestation can find its effectiveness

¹³ Cf. Appendix, Chapter 76.

only [138] in the phenomenal condition whose foundation it must lay. *The object is essential to consciousness as that which permits it to be what it is.* This is why that type of thought which thinks of consciousness in its possibility must recognize the necessity of the element which belongs to the definition of this possibility as such.

The bond between the essence and the determination is visible in the philosophy of Jacob Boehme which, as we have seen, is dominated by the problem of conscious manifestation which it understands as constituting the very structure of the absolute. It is on the foundation of opposition in the absolute that the absolute manifests itself, but the opposition as such as yet only sketches the pure space for a possible manifestation in general. In such a space, which is an undifferentiated milieu, there is not yet any real manifestation. In it there reigns merely a diffused brightness, a light so undetermined that it is actually not a light because it is not yet conscious of itself. Since in its state of primitive indetermination the pure phenomenological milieu is not conscious of itself, there is in it *no effective consciousness*, at least as long as there is in it nothing other than itself. Opposition will signify the bursting-forth of light only if it posits an element opposed to light. That which is opposed to the pure milieu of the manifestation, in such a way that the latter finds in it the condition for its realization, is not in itself, insofar as it is opposed to this milieu, something ontological. The opposed element posited in opposition is the ontic determination. True differentiation presupposes a nature. Consequently, the revelation of opposition, namely the manifestation of the essence of manifestation, is possible only through the mediation of that which, with respect to this essence, namely in opposition to it, is radically 'other'. Thus we see that, according to Boehme, divine Wisdom, which consists in pure objectification, is not able to tear the absolute away from the primitive night of the *Ungrund*, even though to the latter it adds opposition as such, namely the essence of manifestation. In opposing itself to itself, the absolute wants to give itself a [139] mirror in order to see itself, but as long as the opposed element in the mirror is nothing more than the absolute itself, it is not a mirror but something transparent which reflects nothing. *The opacity of the ontic determination is, in opposition itself, the radically other element whereby opposition realizes itself.* This realization of opposition in the determination as effective Being-opposed Boehme affirms to be in the conception of a nature interior to the absolute, namely as constitutive of the very process whereby manifestation takes place. The immanence of the determination to the effective becom-

ing of manifestation also expresses itself in the opposition to the idea of light compared to fire, which implies in it the presence of a sort of 'matter', for under closer scrutiny it seems that this opposition is not one at all, if it is true that *light realizes itself only in the fire*, and thus becomes effective only in its indissoluble union with opaque and radically other Being to which it opposes itself. Fire is the phenomenal condition of light, a condition which the latter attains only upon the foundation in it of opaque and brute determination. The entire Boehmian philosophy of the *body* attests to the necessity of the presence of the ontic element at the heart of the phenomenal essence and as a condition for the realization of the latter. It is because the ontic determination is essential to the realization of the essence that it really does not find itself posited in it at a given moment of time. It is by abstraction that we distinguish in the absolute the moment of the *Ungrund*. Once the absolute is, it is in fact real. *This is why the determination is just as 'old' as it*, because it defines a condition for phenomenality, namely of the absolute itself. *God bears within himself an eternal body because he is the original and pure essence of manifestation in its effective accomplishment.* The determination is included in such an accomplishment as its condition.¹ Insofar as it constitutes [140] the condition of possibility for the effective becoming of phenomenality, a being belongs to the internal structure of the latter. The ontic element is an eidetic structure of the ontological and pure essence of manifestation.

The belonging of the ontic element to the internal structure of the essence of phenomenality, as condition for the possibility of the effective becoming of the latter, is also visible in the philosophy of consciousness of Schelling. The object is thought of by Schelling as the condition for effective consciousness insofar as "self-consciousness is the act whereby the thinking subject immediately becomes object."² The theme according to which *objectification is the becoming of consciousness under the form of the becoming of the object and the realization of consciousness insofar as consciousness must objectify itself in order to appear*, this theme belongs to the Philosophy of Consciousness in general; but objectification which is the realization of the consciousness is not pure objectification. It is the effective objectification in which the determination is present. Therefore, it is in a real object, *in the effectiveness of a*

¹ A. Koyré, *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme*. (Paris, 1929) 303-414.

² Friedrich von Schelling, *System des Transcendentalen Idealismus*, in *Sammtliche Werke*, III. (Stuttgart-Augsburg: Cotta'scher; 1858) 365.

transcendent and as such limited entity, that consciousness manifests itself. That which in the effective becoming of phenomenality enters into the phenomenal condition is the finite determination. "To arrive at consciousness and to be limited are one and the same thing."³ The pure essence of manifestation manifests itself only in a finite form. Schelling conceives this pure essence as a primitive and infinite activity. This is why he writes: "It is the condition of consciousness that this primitive and infinite activity, this essence of all reality, becomes an object to itself and consequently defined and limited."⁴ Hence the concrete and of itself non-conscious entity is, as conscious, the only possible realization of the phenomenal essence of pure consciousness. [141] If, in his *Investigations on Human Freedom*, the nocturnal element which serves as 'reagent' to revelation and in this way constitutes the condition for its possibility can be interpreted as a pure ontological element—insofar as the causal Foundation is not the determination upon which light reflects itself but that which, in the very essence of this light, hides itself, and this not anteriorly to its effective becoming but at the very heart of this becoming—the element different from consciousness is, in the later philosophy of Schelling, clearly posited in its heterogeneity with respect to the essence. It is to a real Being in the sense of a determination, and not to itself, that the essence is opposed in the alienation wherein it seeks conscious existence. The opposition between the simple thought of itself and the idea of an effective creation leading to a real terminus and, as such, a terminus foreign to the pure self-objectification of thought has the same meaning as the critique directed by Boehme against divine wisdom. *This phenomenological meaning is that the pure objectification cannot accomplish its work unless that which survives in it is foreign to it.* Effective separation between creature and God in the phenomenon of creation and the constitutive rejection of pantheism for the sake of an "autonomy of the progeny"⁵ thus find their motif in the conditions which render the effective becoming of phenomenality possible.

Hegel in turn had to understand these conditions which postulate the effectiveness of alienation as conditions for the realization of the essence, namely of the absolute. The essence does not realize itself at the heart

³ *Ibid.* 390.

⁴ *Ibid.* 380.

⁵ W. Jankelévitch, *L'Odyssée de la conscience dans la dernière philosophie de Schelling*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1933) 183.

of the effective becoming of phenomenality which is the concrete spirit unless, in the ontological process of alienation which constitutes the essence, there is included the non-ontological, the radically other terminus, the Being different from this alienation itself. As long as alienation does not signify the existence of this radically other Being, as long as it does not [142] envisage it independently of its relationship to it, "the alienation of self is still incomplete. This process expresses the relation of the certainty of the self to the object, an object, which, just by being in a relation, has not yet gained its full freedom."⁶ Thus Being-other which is encountered in the pure objectification of self of thought is still no more than the concept of Being-other, namely the pure possibility and not the effectiveness of real and concrete appearance. The "sad need... for a mundane reality," of which his early writings already speak,⁷ means that pure appearance can arrive at the effectiveness of concrete appearance only by the "intermixture of historical fact with its life."⁸ Alienation is the essence of objectivity but the latter realizes itself phenomenally only in objective determination. This is why the constitutive alienation of the Logos becomes effective only in nature. In this effectiveness which is that of consciousness there is posited the indissoluble bond which unites the pure concept and the ineffable determination.

The bond which unites the essence to the determination is implied in the effective becoming of phenomenality. The pure essence of manifestation is realized only through the mediation of the Being-in-itself. *Consciousness is always consciousness of some thing.* Consciousness of something is the exterior consciousness of the object which is what Hegel calls 'consciousness'. Insofar as the essence of phenomenality manifests itself only in the phenomenon, the latter is *the appearance* of this essence. The object is the becoming-conscious of the essence of consciousness, it is that which permits this essence to become aware of itself. *Self-consciousness is identical to consciousness.* It is because consciousness is identical to self-consciousness that Being-there has, in a general way, "the significance of pure thought."⁹ Being-there is the

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J.B. Baillie. (New York: Humanities Press Inc., 1966) 806.

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, in *Early Theological Writings*, tr. T.M. Knox. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948) 293-94.

⁸ *Ibid.* 295.

⁹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*. 760.

appearance of thought. The determination is the realization of the essence insofar as it is the becoming-conscious of this realization.¹⁰

The problem of the manifestation of the pure essence of phenomenality had already been posited by Fichte who understood it in his *Conferences*¹¹ as that of the manifestation of 'existence'. Because the solution to this problem had been sought by him in the ontological process of objectification, for this reason it likewise consisted in the 'bursting forth' of the determination as appearance, and, consequently, as the only effective reality of the pure essence of the concept. In questioning this effective reality, namely the becoming [144] conscious of pure existence, Fichte asks concerning this topic: "What happens to it when pure existence grasps itself in this way?"¹² That which happens to existence which

¹⁰ The main themes of the philosophy of consciousness find their origin in the internal structure of the essence of manifestation as this philosophy understands it. The idea of the incompleteness of the subject and of the abstract characteristic of its Being considered in its purity, the affirmation of the necessary existence of a terminus radically foreign with respect to the subject, the conception of this terminus as a 'limit', 'obstacle', 'resistance' opposed to this subject and many other theses of classical philosophy, are actually no more than various ways of expressing itself, always without bringing them to the clarity of a concept peculiar to this philosophy. They are the presuppositions which define the ultimate idea which it makes of the essence of phenomenality. References of such theses to this ultimate idea are at times visible. Hence the will is said to become conscious only when confronted with the obstacle against which it hurls itself. Without this limit which permits it to 'feel itself' the will or action or freedom remains 'undetermined', namely, 'unconscious'. For the same reason, movement becomes 'self-conscious' only when something opposes it. The psychological idea of a resistance to be overcome, the prolongation and expansion of this idea in an ethic of tension and effort understood as implying, as condition for their internal dynamism, the existence of an obstacle to be surmounted and yet never surmounted in fact, these 'pathetic' constructs to which this conception of a battle as eternal as the principal enemy which starts it can lead, all these developments have their foundation in ontology.

¹¹ Already in the early philosophy of Fichte consciousness is understood as a light which become visible only on the obstacle which it encounters. Light which is in itself undetermined, and in the last analysis invisible arrives at the determination of its effective condition only when it shines on an object which, for this reason, the ego is obliged to oppose to itself. One of the fundamental theses of the thought of Fichte whereby *the ego posits the non-ego as the very condition of its possibility* thus has an obviously phenomenological meaning. This phenomenological meaning is still more evident if we recall the origin of the Fichtean problem of the non-ego in the philosophy of Jacob Boehme.

¹² J.G. Fichte, *Die Anweisung zum Seligen Leben in Sammtliche Werke*, V (Berlin: Veit; 1845), 455-56.

grasps itself in this way, namely in objectification, is becoming under the form of conscious determination. Existence exists effectively only as this or that. "In the vigorous return to itself," says Fichte, "it (existence) sees directly that it is this and that, that it bears this characteristic." And further on: "In the reflection upon itself, knowledge, in virtue of itself and of its peculiar nature, becomes divided because of the fact that it is not only evident to itself, which would give it only one terminus, but because of the fact that it is at the same time evident to itself *insofar as it is this or that*."¹³ Because the pure essence of the manifestation realizes itself in objectification only under the form of finite determination, Fichte could understand such a realization as the very advent of the world in its diversity. The pretense of grasping the reason for empirical diversity in the concept itself finds its legitimacy in the understanding of the internal structure of the concept, namely in the definition of the conditions for effective phenomenality. Nevertheless, what happens when this phenomenality becomes effective? "What, therefore, is enclosed in this state of consciousness?... The world," says Fichte, "and nothing else but the world."¹⁴ By world we should understand the sum of beings. *Nothing else happens in the effective becoming of phenomenality except the ontic determination and it alone: effective consciousness is the transcendent entity.*

Is not the pure essence of phenomenality present as such in the real content of the appearance? Does not the absolute itself manifest itself in this effective consciousness? "Is not the Divine life," asks Fichte, "found immediately in this consciousness?... No, because consciousness [145] can do nothing absolutely except to transform this immediate life into a world, and once this consciousness has been posited, this transformation is posited as effected."¹⁵ The effective becoming of the essence of phenomenality in real consciousness is its transformation into a determined appearance of the transcendent entity: In this transformation which makes it real, the essence is likewise lost. The pure essence of phenomenality is objectification itself, transformation as such. However, in its accomplishment, this transformation does not show itself. "Absolute consciousness is itself the immediate accomplishment and for this reason no longer conscious of this transformation."¹⁶ *Pure consciousness*

¹³ *Ibid.* 456 [Henry's italics]

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 457.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

does not arrive at the *phenomenal condition*. *Absolute consciousness is unconscious*. The fundamental ontological process of objectification which defines the essence of manifestation allows the essence to escape in the course of its accomplishment, insofar as in this accomplishment it does not itself arrive at the phenomenal condition of appearance. The type of thought which thinks of the essence of manifestation as objectification encounters a contradiction which is included in the very essence which it thinks about. Thus we see the *philosophy of consciousness invariably constrained to posit the unconsciousness of absolute consciousness through which it strives to think the essence of the phenomenality*. Just as with Fichte the pure existence which defines the essence enters into the phenomenal condition only on the condition of the objective determination without, however, being able to maintain the purity of its original essence under this form, such that "the form always hides the essence from us,"¹⁷ likewise with Schelling pure consciousness which realizes itself phenomenally in the object is actually nothing more, in this realization, than the object itself. Pure consciousness is the process which causes the finite entity to arise, it is "the activity which limits," but "the activity which limits never arrives [146] at consciousness," and this because it "does not become object."¹⁸ The original essence of manifestation, therefore, cannot but remain in the night of its original unconsciousness or else lose itself in the object. In the object the essence of manifestation realizes itself but only by losing itself. The appearance of consciousness in objectification is its own disappearance.

Nevertheless, what happens to the manifestation of consciousness in its purity? Must not such a manifestation be able to be shown if the philosophy of consciousness claims to speak with some authority about the pure concept upon which it founds itself? Schelling cannot remove the paradox of a consciousness which knows itself only when it becomes object nor can he maintain the validity of the pure concept of consciousness other than by making of consciousness the condition for the effective phenomenal appearance of the object. As objectification, consciousness is the primordial act which makes the object possible. "But how can the philosopher assure himself of the existence of this primitive Act...? Evidently he does not have immediate assurance

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 471.

¹⁸ Friedrich von Schelling, *System des Transcendentalen Idealismus*, in *Sammliche Werke*, III (Stuttgart-Augsburg: Cotta'scher, 1858) 391.

thereof, he arrives at its knowledge only by induction."¹⁹ The original essence of manifestation is non-objective and as such it does not belong to the effective sphere of phenomenality. It is only by beginning with the latter, namely with the objective element, that we can reflexively posit the reality of the act which is thought of as the condition of the object. *Reflexive analysis is the methodological expression of the paradox constituted by the non-phenomenal condition of the essence of phenomenality*. This paradox seems to be removed by the opposition inaugurated by Schelling between "the transcendental point of view" and that of common consciousness. Whereas common consciousness knows only the objective because "only the objective reaches common consciousness by intuition" and because "intuition loses itself in the object, from the transcendental point of view we consider [147] the object only through the act of intuition."²⁰ Thus the transcendental point of view directs itself explicitly toward the act which makes the effective phenomenological entity possible, namely toward the transcendental element of pure consciousness. Nevertheless, is pure consciousness in itself 'arrived at', does it itself attain the *phenomenal condition*? It would seem that it does: "The nature of the transcendental viewpoint must lie above all [in its relating to consciousness and in its making objective] that which in every other order of thought, of knowledge, or of action is absolutely non-objective, namely that which eludes consciousness."²¹ Does not the essence of phenomenality, which does not enter into the phenomenal condition, enter into the transcendental point of view? But how? In order to "relate to consciousness" that which is "absolutely non-objective," the transcendental point of view can do nothing but "make it objective." The transcendental can appear only under the form of the object in the internal sense. Rather than confuse the two as Schelling does,²² we must recognize that here again the phenomenal becoming of the essence of phenomenality is the auto-suppression of this pure essence. Tossed back and forth between psychologism and the reflective method, the transcendental philosophy of consciousness cannot in any case yield for itself the reality of the essence whereby it defines itself.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 396.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 345.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² "The only immediate object of the transcendental point of view is the subjective [namely, the pure essence, the transcendental, the absolutely non-objective element] the only organ of this philosophy is the inner sense", *Ibid.* 350.

If the ontic element defines a condition of this possibility, if it belongs to the internal structure of the act of appearing considered in and for itself, then it belongs also to the essence; it is ontological. It is the very definition of such an element as ontic which must be questioned. It is the distinction made within the real between that which is ontic and that which is ontological which must be rethought. For we can no longer dissociate that which appears from the act of appearing if the concrete content of that which appears belongs to the very structure of the act of appearing as a constitutive element. Is a being a condition for manifestation or is it not?

The thesis according to which a being must be understood as an element pertaining to the phenomenal becoming of the essence of phenomenality, as a condition of the Being-effective of the latter, is absurd. *How could a being be that upon which the pure essence of manifestation becomes visible to itself if it were not first already there? And just how could a being be there, namely appear, if the act of appearing considered in and for itself had not once and for all done its work?* It is the accomplished work of the original and pure essence of manifestation which permits a being to be there. Therefore, the essence is itself realized as concrete essence which founds the phenomenal becoming of a being when the latter finally appears. A being always comes too late to realize the effective becoming of the essence, for it presupposes this becoming. When we say that it is the in-itself which becomes for-itself we formulate an ambiguous proposition, for the Being-in-itself has in itself nothing in common with the for-itself. The for-itself designates the phenomenal dimension [151] of existence to which the in-itself as such is fundamentally foreign. That the Being-in-itself penetrates this dimension of phenomenality does not mean that it is *in itself* this light of pure manifestation. Actually this is so little the case that hardly has it entered into this light than it withdraws from it and returns to its night. A being would surely not be able to accomplish such a return to the night of its original condition *if in itself it was identical to the Being of the light*. A being is always this or that. By the singularity of its concrete content, it is the 'different'; but the ontological power which manifests it is always the same. The light which shines upon it is indifferent to the particular nature of a being. It is one, and always the same, task which promotes the determination, regardless and in spite of its contingency, within the open dimension of existence. It is not the determined characteristic of the object, it is its objective characteristic which constitutes the foundation for its phenomenal char-

acteristic. The fact of manifesting itself is foreign to the determined characteristic of the determination. Universal Being does not find its foundation in the contingency of the ontic determination.

Does not the indifference of the act of appearing to the content of that which appears in each case, in fact necessarily imply an independence of the effective becoming of the appearance with respect to the ontic element which shows itself in it, does it not signify the *Selbständigkeit* of the essence? Is not the contingency of the content of the determination which is there, rather the sign of a necessity implied in the accomplishment of the Being-effective of phenomenality? The contingency of the content does not exclude but rather presupposes the existence of this content, regardless of what it is. Thus we see that a diverse empirical *something-or-other* is nevertheless thought of by Kant as that which is required in all real knowledge, and this as a condition. The universal and pure character of the category does not prevent its finding its effective usage only through the mediation of empirical intuition. Thus the contingent character of the ontic determination does not exclude its necessarily belonging to the accomplished Being of the essence. [152]

The phenomenological meaning of the belonging of the determination to the accomplished Being of the essence finds its origin in the understanding of the internal structure of the essence. The essence of manifestation is thought of, and this by the philosophy of Being as well as by the philosophy of consciousness, as opposition. In the ontological process of opposition the phenomenon arises as that which is posited-before. The fundamental ambiguity of the term which thus finds itself posited-before must finally be denounced. *That which arises through the mediation of the essence of opposition in a foreground of light and as the condition for the effective becoming of the manifestation is not a being; it is this foreground itself and as such; it is the transcendental horizon of Being. The work of the essence is exhausted in the unfolding of the transcendental horizon of Being and with this same unfolding the effective becoming of phenomenality is realized.* When this horizon is unfolded, when the field of transcendental visibility is opened, then and only then can a being be there. Far from a being's being the condition for the phenomenal becoming of this original and pure phenomenological field, it is in the visible becoming of this field and only in it that a being can be seen. The Being-there of a being occurs in ontic knowledge; but as a condition for this Being-there, or rather as this Being-there itself as such, ontic knowledge presupposes the accomplish-

17. THE ORIGINAL CHARACTERISTIC OF THE MANIFESTATION OF BEING
AND THE PROBLEM OF NATURAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The assertion which tells us that Being must be able to show itself is ambiguous. This ambiguity grows to the point of leading our inquiry astray and of misinterpreting the meaning of the problematic which aims at the essence while the possibility for Being's showing itself is put into relationship with the methodological task of phenomenology. The methodological task of phenomenology is understood as one of clarification. To clarify means to show, to bring to light that which is initially not beneath the rays of this light. That which must be clarified is that which is first hidden. Once it is put into relationship with the task of the clarification of phenomenology, the possibility for Being's showing itself appears as a possibility which of itself is not effective, a possibility which, to be precise, finds its realization only in and through this task. It is only when phenomenology has accomplished its work that the essence which it clarifies comes to light, namely, that Being shows itself. The first result of the clarification of the concept of phenomenon, however, was to make evident the [166] necessity of effecting a dissociation between this work of clarification which, on the one hand, defines the task of phenomenology and, on the other hand, the reality of the concept which forms its object, namely, the bursting forth of the essence in the effectiveness of its phenomenal condition. *The manifestation of Being, far from being able to be a simple consequence of the methodological work of clarification of all phenomenology, is rather its condition, as it is the condition of all possible manifestation of any being in general.*¹ The manifestation of Being, therefore, does not realize itself in the 'finally' of the accomplished task of phenomenology, but in the 'already' of its primitive condition which, as such, is absolute, as is this 'already' of the effective pure manifestation which makes all activity and all subsequent steps possible. Henceforth, Being manifests itself prior to all work of clarification. 'Already' means not merely as a presupposition for this work itself, but as the absolutely universal condition of all activity of natural consciousness in general.

No less ambiguous is the proposition previously cited,² according to which "to be able to understand the essential determination of this being

¹ Cf. *supra*, chapter 8.

² Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, tr. James S. Churchill. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962) 230; cf. *supra*, chapter 16.

through Being, the determining element itself must be understood with sufficient clarity." The manifestation of Being understood as the determining element of a being (insofar as it is constitutive of the ontological structure of a being) is here interpreted as having to occur in the future. Consequently, the manifestation is referred to a task of clarification which it calls for, and this precisely that the manifestation might occur "with sufficient clarity." *The determination of a being by Being, however, realizes itself anteriorly to the understanding of this determination by the philosopher; this determination anterior to all philosophical understanding presupposes, nevertheless, the manifestation of Being insofar as it is actually nothing other than this manifestation itself.* [167] It is on the foundation of this manifestation that a being is what it is. Being is henceforth given to natural consciousness which in every case grasps a being with its peculiar characteristics; the manifestation of Being is original.

The determination of a being by Being expresses the dependence of that which appears with regard to the act of appearing considered in and for itself. In pure appearing, the determination finds the origin of its destiny; this destiny, which is its own, is foreign to it. That its own proper destiny is foreign to the content of the determination does not mean that it is also foreign to natural consciousness which lives in the presence of this content. In order to devote itself to the exclusive consideration of a being, consciousness must have access to Being. *Being manifests itself to natural consciousness* as that which permits it to be what it is, a consciousness which deals with a being. Consciousness, therefore, lives in the presence of Being, which is this very presence. The presence of Being, in which natural consciousness lives, is not a 'supposed' presence, a condition disengaged by philosophical reflection and thought of by it as the presupposition of all possible relationships to a being. The presence of Being which makes this relation possible, namely consciousness itself, is rather present in itself. Natural consciousness has an effective relationship with a being because the relationship is present, because Being manifests itself. *The reality of the relationship is its manifestation.* The manifestation of the relationship is the manifestation of Being which is given to natural consciousness once it puts itself in relationship to a being. The manifestation of Being is the manifestation of the absolute. The manifestation of the absolute is its absoluteness. The absoluteness of the absolute is the Parousia. Once it has entered into relationship with a being, natural consciousness must maintain itself in the Parousia; it is already absolute knowledge,

viz. it is scientific knowledge which "from its first step arrives at the Parousia of the absolute, i.e. it is near its absoluteness."³

In order to relate to a being, natural consciousness [168] lives in the Parousia of the absolute and this means that Being manifests itself to it. Being does not manifest itself to consciousness from time to time in virtue of a decision which would be proper to it and as such separate from the essence of consciousness. Actually, from its first step, from the fact that it exists as natural consciousness which still cares only for a being, consciousness lives in the presence of Being which manifests itself to it in the Parousia of the absolute. *Consciousness is itself and as such the manifestation of Being.* For this reason, it does not have to be drawn to the place wherein this manifestation takes place. By relating itself to a being, natural consciousness already dwells in the place wherein the manifestation of Being takes place, it is itself this place. "Natural consciousness cannot be introduced into the place where it is already."⁴ This is why there is no introduction to phenomenology. Phenomenology is the phenomenology of the mind. *The phenomenology of the mind is consciousness itself.* Consciousness is in itself, and consequently, also as natural consciousness, the phenomenology of the mind because it is the manifestation of Being, the Parousia of the absolute. "In what way are we in the Parousia of the absolute? We are there according to the habituation of natural consciousness."⁵

That the natural consciousness remains always and already in the Parousia of the absolute means that the manifestation of Being which is this Parousia is original. The habit whereby natural consciousness remains in the Parousia is not an acquired habit, rather it designates the *immediate* condition of consciousness. The condition whereby consciousness remains in the Parousia is immediate because it constitutes the very essence of this consciousness. The essence of consciousness is the Parousia, [169] namely presence in its presence, present-Being as such insofar as present-Being itself is present. The immediate manifestation of a being presupposes this immediate presence of presence, the presence of present-Being itself as such. It presupposes presence because it is itself, as manifestation, this Parousia. For this reason we cannot but question the affirmation of Hegel, according to which "Its appearing

³ Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*. (Frankfurt-am-Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950) 126.

⁴ *Ibid.* 190.

⁵ *Ibid.* 189.

directly and immediately is the abstract form of its actual presence." ⁶ By its immediate and direct appearance, Hegel understands the manifestation of a being. This manifestation is called immediate because in it consciousness directs itself immediately to its object, namely a being. This immediate manifestation of truth, namely the manifestation of a being, is so far from being an abstraction from its present-Being that the latter, namely the absolute concept, rather constitutes the essence of this manifestation as such. In the manifestation of a being the concept is present and this in an absolute sense. The presence of the concept in the manifestation of a being means that present-Being itself and as such is present in this manifestation, it signifies the immediate presence of presence in the immediate manifestation of a being. Because it constitutes the essence of the immediate manifestation of the truth, present-Being could not be abstracted from it. The immediate manifestation of truth is identical to its present-Being it is the absolute concept.

That Being must be able to show itself means, therefore, in the last analysis that it shows itself, and this not as a terminus of a process or of a history, but originally. The original manifestation of Being alone makes possible the manifestation of a being because it constitutes the very essence of its manifestation. The original character of the manifestation of Being means that that which is first present, is not a being, but present-Being itself and as such. That present-Being itself and as such is that which is first present, [170] attests to the *ontological character of the origin*. That present-Being, which constitutes the origin, is present, namely manifests itself, attests to the *phenomenological character of the origin*. The understanding of the ontological and phenomenological character of the origin permits us to grasp the meaning of the proposition according to which the manifestation of Being is original. It shows us which meaning must be given to the affirmation according to which "Being must be able to show itself." Speaking of the primitive religious community and its desire turned toward the past, Hegel says that "This reversion to the primitive is surely based on the instinct to get at the notion, the ultimate principle; but it confuses the *origin*, in the sense of the immediate existence of the first historical appearance, with the simplicity of the notion." ⁷ The origin is certainly not a being

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J.B. Baillie. (New York: Humanities Press Inc., 1966) 275.

⁷ *Ibid.* 764.

which manifested itself in bygone days. The concept, as that which constitutes this very manifestation, this Being-there as such, is nevertheless immanent to the first manifestation of this being, to its immediate Being-there. Therefore, the concept could not be abstracted from this immediate Being-there. It is the concept which is immediate, it is the origin, it shows itself in the origin as *this first act of showing which constitutes the very essence of all origins as such*.

Because the manifestation of Being is original, because natural consciousness remains in truth, in conformity to its essence, it cannot be said to deviate from the truth.⁸ *Consciousness cannot forget Being which constitutes its very essence*. Nevertheless, when we affirm that this consciousness lives, as natural consciousness, in the forgetfulness of Being, we mean that it clings to a being and in so doing considers as nothing that which is not of this nature, namely it considers Being, the appearance of the appearing, as nothing.⁹ Natural consciousness actually [171] directs itself toward a being and in its exclusive preoccupation with it, does not concern itself with Being. Nevertheless, natural consciousness cannot preoccupy itself with a being unless the latter shows itself to it; but the manifestation of a being is as such the manifestation of Being. Being never ceases to show itself to natural consciousness, even at the very moment when it is said to 'forget' it.

Because natural consciousness, in conformity to the essence of consciousness in it, lives in the presence of Being which manifests itself to it, the manifestation of Being to consciousness requires no radical modification in the life of this consciousness. The manifestation of Being takes place constantly, habitually in the life of natural consciousness insofar as it is identical to the essence of this life. The life of consciousness is certainly not monotonous; it is capable of modifying itself. A radical modification intervenes in its life when, ceasing to direct itself toward a being which had heretofore been the object of its exclusive preoccupation, consciousness takes into consideration, no longer this being itself, but the act of appearing in virtue of which a being appears. Such a modification is the reversal (*Umkehrung*) of consciousness. In such a reversal, consciousness directs itself toward the appear-

⁸ Cf. M. Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 163: Natural consciousness "is always already on the way to truth. Nevertheless, it is also already continually turning about and it remains in this state."

⁹ Cf. *ibid.* 144: "In the view of natural consciousness, the appearing of what appears and the reality of the real count for nothing."

ance of the appearing, it represents to itself "the appearing as appearing."¹⁰ Directing itself toward the appearing as such, consciousness grasps that which rules over the appearing, namely its appearance. Reversal is the act whereby consciousness represents to itself the act of appearing itself, viz. pure manifestation as such. In reversal, the appearance of the appearing arrives at representation.¹¹ By arriving at representation, the act of appearing appears. *The representation of the manifestation in the reversal of consciousness is the manifestation of pure manifestation as such.*

In representing the manifestation the reversal [172] realizes the appearance of appearing. Appearance is the essence of consciousness. Reversal is the fact of consciousness. The appearance of appearing in the reversal of consciousness is the act whereby consciousness represents itself in its essence, "whereby consciousness represents itself in its appearance."¹² The reversal of consciousness is the appearing to itself of the appearance. The appearing to itself of the appearance is the presence to itself of the absolute, the Parousia. The manifestation of the absolute to itself in the Parousia requires the reversal.

The representation of the act of appearing in the reversal introduces consciousness to philosophical knowledge, to true knowledge. Philosophical knowledge is true knowledge because in representing to itself the appearance and no longer the thing appearing, it is the knowledge of truth, not of a being. The knowledge of truth is the presence of the absolute to itself, its Parousia. The Parousia of the absolute is the fact of true knowledge.

In representing to itself the appearance of the appearing, true knowledge represents to itself the conditions of the knowledge of a being or rather this knowledge of a being itself. The representation of the manifestation in the reversal, whereby consciousness arrives at true knowledge, is the self-knowledge of the knowledge of a being. The self-knowledge of the knowledge of a being is, as Fichte and Schelling already understood it, transcendental knowledge. Transcendental knowledge is true knowledge.

That transcendental knowledge be not true knowledge, results from the fact that it is the knowledge of natural consciousness which has not

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 178.

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.* 175.

¹² *Ibid.* 181.

yet arrived at true knowledge in the reversal, it results from the fact that the manifestation of Being is original. Being, as has already been sufficiently shown, manifests itself henceforth in natural consciousness which relates itself to a being, insofar as the manifestation of a being is as such the [173] manifestation of Being. But transcendental knowledge is nothing other than the manifestation of Being. Natural consciousness is transcendental consciousness.

Being is pure manifestation. The manifestation of Being is the self-manifestation of pure manifestation. The self-manifestation of the pure essence of manifestation is in no way the result of reversal, rather it belongs to the pure essence of manifestation itself. That Being be able to manifest itself does not mean that the self-manifestation of Being can or must be joined to the essence of Being in the course of or at the end of a process which would permit this essence to realize itself; it means that the essence of Being is self-manifestation. *Self-manifestation is the essence of manifestation.* Again, we should understand how this self-manifestation of manifestation occurs: it is original. Original means that it is not the fact of philosophical knowledge but that of the essence itself. The self-manifestation of the essence is so little dependent on the fact of philosophical knowledge that the latter constantly presupposes it as the very condition for its accomplishment.

18. THE CONCEPT OF REPRESENTATION: ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE AND EXISTENTIELL UNDERSTANDING

The manifestation of Being belongs to the essence of consciousness as constituting its very essence, and as a result, it belongs to natural consciousness. That the manifestation of Being belongs to natural consciousness certainly does not mean that natural consciousness represents it to itself. Rather, it is the ambiguity of the very concept of representation which must ultimately be denounced. When we state that natural consciousness does not represent Being to itself, but only a being, this means that, in its exclusive concern with regard to the latter, it does not preoccupy itself with Being itself and that it 'considers it [174] as nothing'. That natural consciousness does not represent Being to itself therefore means that Being is not the object toward which it aims, the theme of its thought. 'Representation' here designates the thematic object at which consciousness aims as well as this 'aiming at' itself in its particularity. Representation thus understood is a

'yes' or likewise to refuse, to confront with defiance, all are diverse ways of taking an attitude, *diverse modes of a power which is that of freedom*. Insofar as acquiescence and consent are diverse ways of taking an attitude and, as such, modes of freedom, that to which they refer, *that to which they subject themselves, is nevertheless nothing other than that which is subject to freedom and to its power*. Thus, in the 'yes' of consent, Being becomes the 'that concerning which' of which it is never a power or that over which it will never have power. Thus, *ontological passivity which constitutes the internal structure of Being as structure [371] of the original relationship of Being to itself is confused with passivity which is but a mode of freedom and of the power of assuming an attitude*. It is confused with this passivity about which Kierkegaard could say that "It must always be such that there is in it enough activity for it to maintain its passivity."¹⁰

Just as acquiescence to that which in Being constitutes its most interior nature cannot be confused with this nature, so neither can this structure be understood as that which is discovered in such an acquiescence, as if the latter, for lack of coinciding with the structure, at least bore within it, in the experience which it inaugurates and which properly constitutes it, the power of revealing this structure. *The most interior structure of Being is the internal structure of revelation insofar as it reveals itself interiorly to itself; far from revealing this structure, the experience of acquiescence rather presupposes it as that which reveals acquiescence originally to itself insofar as it originally revealed itself to itself.*

That the most interior structure of Being, namely Being itself as originally given to itself in the fundamental passivity of non-freedom, namely, that the internal structure of immanence, constitutes the structure of revelation and hence the essence of the Logos itself, this is what we must understand.

38. THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF IMMANENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF ITS

UNDERSTANDING AS REVELATION: FICHTE

First of all, it is a question of knowing whether in the history of philosophical thought that which constitutes the internal structure of immanence, properly so called, has ever been truly understood. More-

¹⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, tr. Walter Lowrie, 2 ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) 128.

over, to the extent that there was or at least seemed to be a presentiment of such a structure, it is remarkable that it was most often, [372] not to say always, interpreted, not as constitutive of the essence and of the possibility of a revelation, but as excluding this so as rather to designate that which is in principle foreign to the element of phenomenality, namely, a being. Thus it is that *at the very moment when its idea comes to light, immanence is ejected from the proper domain of ontology in order to receive, as we have seen, the meaning of being an ontic category*. However, if we reflect on it, it is not the analysis of a being which leads to its thematic determination as immanent Being, a determination otherwise absurd, for, as we have also seen, a being no more remains in itself than it goes outside itself. Actually, the thought of immanence intervenes on an ontological level. It takes form and determines itself initially in its opposition to the concept of transcendence. Nevertheless, the latter, being understood as the power whereby phenomenality, identified with exteriority, acquires a foundation, while immanence, from which such a power is radically excluded, is itself excluded in turn from the latter, namely, from the essence of phenomenality and is henceforth interpreted as radically foreign to it—as foreign not only to phenomenality itself in its affectivity but from its essence, from what there might be of the non-phenomenal in the ontological element itself. Thus the concept of immanence is paradoxically applicable to a being. Doubtless, the thinking of modern philosophy, for lack of being able to begin with transcendence and its foundation, thinks of transcendence by starting with a being. When it is thought of starting with a being, as that of which a being is deprived, transcendence then opens up to the possibility and even to the need to point to a being itself as to that which serves as its antithetical concept. Thus immanence first signifies non-phenomenality and secondarily that which is characterized by non-phenomenality; this in such a way that the genesis of pure ontological concepts, as it paradoxically takes place [373] starting from a being, corroborates this double meaning.

Implied in the content of the concept of immanence, such as it is determined on a pure ontological level and in a negative way, in its opposition to that of transcendence, is the idea of a subsistence and a permanence in itself; and as far as Being is concerned, this cannot easily be forgotten, if the fact of thus remaining in itself in primitive identity with itself invariably presents itself at the very moment when immanence is grasped in its radical opposition to the traditional con-

cept of phenomenality, as a properly ontological and at the same time fundamental characteristic, consequently as constitutive of Being itself. This is the reason, once it is a question of grasping Being in its most intimate and essential structure, why the idea of immanence occurs to the problematic, and this in spite of its phenomenological incompatibility with the reigning concept of phenomenality. Thus we see that absolute Being is finally understood by Fichte not as the rising up and the becoming of existence in otherness, as the Being-exterior-to-self of Being, but rather as the persistence and the maintenance of the latter in itself in the form of love. Love, says Fichte, in his Tenth Conference, depends directly upon itself, because, "It is the absolute directly supporting and maintaining itself." And again: "This love is nothing other than the maintenance of self by absolute Being."¹ That the maintenance of self by absolute Being means precisely the permanence and persistence of the latter in itself, in the sense of immanence, is seen in the fact that immediately after positing love as this maintenance in itself constitutive of absolute Being, Fichte sets reflection in opposition to it, not as one psychological modality opposed to another, but as a [374] universal structure identified by him with the process of division and difference. "It is not," writes Fichte, following the propositions previously cited, "reflection which in virtue of its essence divides itself and then opposes itself to itself, it is love which is the source of all...reality."² Source of all reality, love is also, according to Fichte, the source of happiness. And it is because love is understood as finding its structure in immanence, as that which is not separated from itself, that man's search for happiness must be called vain if it is pursued "in something other than in that which here already surrounds him so closely that it cannot be brought closer even during the whole of eternity."³ Not being separated from itself but remaining eternally one in unity with itself, love necessarily presents itself henceforth with the fundamental ontological characteristics which in general belong to the structure of unity, namely, in reality and also as a result in its totality: "Love is eternally gathered totally to itself... and as love, always possesses the whole of reality within itself." "Also" continues Fichte, "the division of the one divine life into diverse

¹ J.G. Fichte, *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben*, in *Sammliche Werke*, V. (Berlin: Veit, 1845) 541.
² *Ibid.*
³ *Ibid.* 409.

individuals in no way takes place in love but solely in reflection."⁴ As a result it proves to be not only foreign to the internal structure of love, namely, of life, but also fundamentally incapable of understanding life and of making it manifest for what it is. Rather reflection understands life in such a way that far from being revealed by this transformation, that which makes the essence of life and of love is lost in it; "It is this content and this raw material of love which reflection on life first transforms into a static and objectified essence."⁵

With the opposition to reflection of a structure, from which reflection [375] is radically excluded and which can no longer be comprised by it, there comes to light with Fichte a new philosophy of existence in which the latter no longer designates the simple opposition to self of Being in exteriority nor its foundation, namely, the surpassing of Being itself, but [existence rather designates] that which cannot be surpassed and which, thus not being able to surpass itself, can no longer return to itself in order to posit itself nor attempt to deduce itself nor understand itself. But the impossibility of surpassing itself or of returning to itself is that of Being which, originally bound to itself in unity, cannot be without being already given to itself: it is the impossibility of the origin and of immanent Being. "Existence [Dasein]" writes Fichte, "would not be able to be without finding itself, grasping itself, presupposing itself..." and he adds in an essential proposition: "Because of the absolute character of its existence [Dasein] and because of its being bound to its own existence [Dasein], it is cut off from every possibility of transcending this existence, as it were... It yields itself to this existence without in any way being able to explain how and why it got this way."⁶ Existence which, bound to itself, cannot surpass itself, at the same time proves itself radically independent with regard to that which takes place in such a surpassing, with regard to the representation of self and of the concept, of existence primitively recognized as existence in exteriority, as objective existence: "This existence [Dasein] itself," says Fichte, "reposes in and is founded upon itself, prior to every notion which it has of itself and indissociable from this notion which it has of itself."⁷ That existence thus understood in an essential manner as prior to every

⁴ *Ibid.* 545.
⁵ *Ibid.* 541.
⁶ *Ibid.* 442.
⁷ *Ibid.* 443.

notion which it can have of itself and as radically independent with regard to the latter precisely constitutes the very Being of the absolute, this is what Fichte affirms unconditionally: [376] "Where does it come from," he asks with regard to existence, "*this Being completely independent of all its Being flowing from its own notion and which, on the contrary, precedes it and makes it possible?...*" This is the strong and living existence [*Dasein*] of the absolute itself which alone is capable of being and existing and outside of which nothing is or truly exists."⁸

The radical modification which the theory of existence undergoes when it deals with the existence of the absolute itself, namely, true existence, that which alone "is and truly exists" was understood by Fichte and even explicitly affirmed by him. This is why "having recognized that consciousness in its many forms *which we had previously taken for true existence is really a simple second-hand existence* and the mere appearance thereof and having recognized true and absolute existence as one"⁹ Fichte came to modify in the same way and no less explicitly his theory of the Word, namely, the interpretation given by him to the beginning of the Gospel of St. John. "In the beginning was the Word" no longer signifies in the beginning was the absolute in the conscious form of its existence, namely, in its exteriority with regard to itself, but from the beginning there was love, namely, once again the absolute, but as that which remains in itself, as "eternally gathered totally in itself." Existence no longer means, with regard to the absolute, the exteriority of the latter with regard to itself and to its original and proper Being, *there is no longer any difference between its original and proper Being, between Being and existence, and this precisely because existence has ceased to be the difference:* "Every difference alluded to... between Being and existence, and the absence of a relationship between the two, here proves to exist only for us... it does not exist in any way in itself or immediately in Divine existence."¹⁰ And the identity here posited between Being and existence [377] must be strictly understood as actually characterizing in a positive way the internal structure of existence itself in such a way that, based on the foundation of the understanding of this structure as rather one of opposition and difference and of the simple affir-

⁸ *Ibid.* [Henry's italics]

⁹ *Ibid.* 542-43 [Henry's italics]

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 452.

mation of its immanence to Being, it no longer means the exteriority of Being or Being outside itself. This was precisely the first Fichtean philosophy of the Word according to which the latter was doubtless made identical to the absolute, to be 'in God', in the sense that in reality 'in' means 'outside of', where the being-in-God of the Word means the being-outside-of-self of God himself, the becoming of the absolute in exteriority, as the primitive constitutive becoming of the origin itself in its reality.

At the very moment when it is thus modified in a manner as decisive as it is explicit, the philosophy of existence could not without losing its way totally forget its fundamental ontological meaning beginning with which it defined itself and which conferred upon it its place in the problematic. According to such a meaning, *existence means manifestation*. From true existence, which is that of the absolute itself and to which the structure of otherness is radically foreign, we must show how this existence is in itself and remains, in spite of this exclusion, a manifestation. For Fichte it is a presupposition that things are actually this way and that existence without difference of the absolute is effectively one and an experience. This is obvious in the fact that *love brings happiness* which constitutes the fundamental theme of the religious thought of Fichte and rests precisely on the new philosophy of existence. Happiness is an experience, a form of existence or rather existence itself such as Fichte now understands it insofar as it is nothing other than "the Absolute, supporting and maintaining itself," nothing other than love. Love does not merely presuppose conscious existence insofar as love gives happiness, *its power of* [378] *revelation with regard to the Being of the Absolute is explicitly affirmed:* "What assures the *certitude of God* if not love?" whereupon love is immediately characterized as "depending solely upon itself" and consequently as radically opposed to 'reflection', namely, to the ancient concept of existence. As such, as radically and explicitly opposed to reflection, love is said to be not merely the source of all 'reality' but "source of all certitude and all truth."¹¹ Because absolute existence is identical to the revelation of the Absolute, Fichte, beginning with the Third Conference, could say of existence, precisely insofar as it is immanent, insofar as it "would not be able to be without finding itself, grasping itself, presupposing itself," that "its grasping of self is indis-

¹¹ *Ibid.* 540-1. [Henry's italics]

sociable from its essence."¹² That it should pertain to existence insofar as it cannot be without finding itself as originally and already given to itself, insofar as it is immanent, to grasp itself and hence to be revelation in itself, this is what cannot simply be presupposed, which must rather be given a foundation in an essence. *The bringing to light of an original mode of revelation precisely as finding its structure in immanence is alone capable of furnishing the ontological foundation without which the phenomenological meaning imparted to the new Fichtean concept of existence cannot be anything but a presupposition and ultimately not even that; since such a bringing to light does not take place with Fichte, because the ontological task which should lead to this is neither undertaken nor even merely outlined, the dominant and traditional concept of phenomenality whose rights were thus never truly contested, invariably resumes its power and when it no longer shines forth in exteriority but rather is confused with the simplicity of primitive Beings, existence falls back together with it into indetermination and night.* [379]

Here the thought of Fichte moves in uncertainty; the presupposition of primitive existence cannot maintain itself as a constant pre-supposition, as an effective presupposition; invariably contradictions appear. What is an existence which does not divide itself in exteriority, which does not produce itself in representation? It is precisely an existence which offers no 'reproduction' of itself, an existence 'without image'. *It is necessarily at the moment when it is thus understood in this way by Fichte that its phenomenological character suddenly becomes uncertain, or better, questioned and finally denied.* "The Divine Being does not reveal itself as such to consciousness," says Fichte, "during the inferior stages of the spiritual life of man. At the central point of the spiritual life... it uncovers itself as such to consciousness ...it enters under the demonstrably necessary form of existence and of consciousness as an *image* and as a *reproduction* or as a *notion* which expressly presents itself as a simple notion without in any way trying to pass as the thing itself."¹³ The existence of Being in exteriority, namely, the representation of the Absolute, does not coincide with the Absolute. According to the explicit affirmation of Fichte, it is no more than a simple replica, a simple reproduction, 'an image' of it. *Nevertheless, the latter constitutes the manifes-*

¹² *Ibid.* 442.

¹³ *Ibid.* 444.

tation of absolute Being and as such designates "the central point of the spiritual life." On the contrary, without it the absolute is not uncovered and he who does not live in this image does not live in the presence of the Absolute either, but for this reason dwells "in the inferior stages of the spiritual life."

Nevertheless, what is there of the absolute at this stage? In the absence of all representation, of all image, how can it determine a 'spiritual life'? 'Directly with his real existence and without image, he has at all times entered into the real life of men, [380] simply without being recognized, and continues to penetrate this life in the same way once he is recognized, except when he is also recognized in his image.'¹⁴ Thus the existence of the Absolute which, as existence without image, as immanent existence, is determined in an explicit manner as the element of reality, presents itself at the same time, in a no less explicit way, as that which is not 'recognized', as that which does not manifest itself. The manifestation of this existence, namely, of the absolute itself, is doubtless possible, at least it would seem so here. Manifestation always belongs to representation and is reserved to it, in such a way that it does not happen except with it. In other words, *the manifestation of immanent existence is contingent with regard to immanent existence, it is added on to it in a synthetic way, as representation and this precisely because the internal structure of immanence has not been recognized and understood as the very structure of revelation.* For this reason, the internal structure of immanence is in itself and as such handed over to night. This is why, as long as thought, identified with the 'image-form', is presented as the only mode of manifestation of the absolute—"It is only in pure thought that our union with God can be recognized"¹⁵—then the Divine existence, on the contrary, presents itself, independently of its reflection in otherness, as essentially hidden. "Life," says Fichte, "was in this immediate Divine existence which is the deepest foundation of all living substantial existence, but one which remains perpetually hidden from view."¹⁶ And further on, commenting on the passage according to which "no one has ever seen God"¹⁷ Fichte writes: "The Divine essence is *hidden in*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* [Henry's italics]

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 445.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 481.

¹⁷ John 1: 18.

itself, it manifests itself only under the form of knowledge." ¹⁸ [381] However, would it not be merely for us, to our view as man that the absolute remains hidden, in such a way that knowledge which is merely ours must always be added on in an extrinsic way, and this as a consequence of our limitation? The opposition between the absolute and the existence i.e. a type of knowledge which is as such opposed to it, would not henceforth be considered as interior to the absolute itself, as an opposition concerning it or constituting it, but rather as the simple exterior addition to its Being, identical to its true existence, of a 'second-hand existence', of a knowledge proper to man. It is because there is no "separation between the Absolute or God and knowledge in its most profound roots" ¹⁹ that, as we have seen, "every difference alluded to...between Being and existence...proves to exist only for us, as a result of our limitation." ²⁰ And it is only with regard to this essentially finite knowledge proper to us and external to it that the Absolute can and must henceforth be interpreted as hiding from a ray of light which, because it is not consubstantial with the absolute in the identity of a single illumination, would not be able to clarify its true nature in it. The possibility for the latter revealing itself in itself such as it is remains; it is merely withdrawn from the power of man and his vision. "The eye of man," says Fichte, "hides God from him." ²¹

Can the intervention of man, whose meaning is thus to maintain the possibility of the manifestation of the absolute himself, or more exactly, to leave open, within the problematic, a place [382] for an ultimate ontological interpretation of the internal structure of immanence as revelation, still take on and maintain such a meaning? Is it not rather philosophically suspect? For of himself man has no such power, not even that of producing an inadequate and 'finite' knowledge: all manifestation in general, regardless of its characteristics and even with all its characteristics, is based in every case upon a determined ontological structure. It is the eidetic analysis of the latter that is in question. If a

¹⁸ Fichte, *Die Anweisung zum Seligen Leben*. 486. [Henry's italics]

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 443.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 452. [Henry's italics]

²¹ *Ibid.* 543. Nevertheless, what follows in the text shows that—as our analysis will establish—the impossibility of seeing the absolute cannot be the 'fact' of man, but stems from the very nature of vision, such as Fichte understands it. This is why it finally becomes evident the absolute, God himself cannot see himself such as he is, any more than man can: "He Himself is hidden to Himself through this his eye." (*Ibid.*)

manifestation has the power not of revealing but paradoxically of hiding the absolute at least in what concerns its original and peculiar Being, such a manifestation and its foundation must be clarified in themselves, abstraction made of all considerations of the anthropological order. At the same time, if there exists a mode whose original power is expressed in the revelation of the absolute Being in itself and such as it is, its elaboration and the determination of its structure evidently constitute the fundamental task of ontology. Moreover, to the latter belongs, as an integral part of its task, the understanding of the relationship which unites the two essential modes, the one which hides the Absolute and the one which reveals it, according to which all possible manifestation in general takes place. To be exact, the understanding of this relationship has shown that there is not any finite knowledge which is not essentially revelatory of the Absolute. If transcendence rests in immanence, the latter is present, by its own work, wherever there exists a relationship in man, insofar as the latter has the possibility of relating himself to something in general. Must we then say that the immanent existence of the Absolute whose essence consists in the original revelation of himself actually loses this power of revealing himself when this takes place 'in man'? Or else that it does not take place in man and that in the last analysis human existence is separated from absolute existence? But this, as we have just seen, is an eidetic impossibility and as such an absurdity if the [383] immanent existence of the absolute is the essence of all possible existence in general. And how could Fichte who stated "The insight into the absolute union of human and Divine existence is certainly the most profound knowledge to which man can elevate himself" ²² maintain such an absurd separation? Whether man elevates himself to this knowledge of unity or not, the latter exists as a universal ontological and, consequently, insurmountable structure. It is this structure which actually constitutes the foundation of the entire religious philosophy of Fichte: 1) of his conception of Christ who was able to recognize in himself the identity of his Being and that of God—thus presenting himself not as the exception or the paradox but as the universal law of all existence wherein he merely asks that in it we recognize this law as our most proper destiny and the certain foundation of our salvation—2) of his interpretation of truth which, as identical to the existence in man of the Absolute, 'exists', is "accessible to man" ²³ is a good; finally, 3) of his horror,

²² *Ibid.* 483.

²³ *Ibid.* 554. [Henry's italics]

shared with the greatest religious thinkers, with Kierkegaard, for example, of all who do not recognize such a truth for what it is, as the revelation of the Absolute itself in its intimate Being, a horror of all scepticism as well as of all relativism in general.²⁴ *Why then was Fichte not able to discard the theses which are properly those of scepticism and of relativism, why does he say that "we know nothing of this immediate Divine life, for upon first contact with consciousness it already transforms itself into a dead world," and again that "form", namely, existence, manifestation as such, always "hides the essence from us."²⁵ Why does his thought invariably hide itself in the shadows with the thinking of classical philosophy and is seen to be constrained, as is the latter, to [384] finally abandoning the absolute and at the same time the essence of consciousness itself to the fundamental indeterminacy of that which escapes into unconsciousness and the night?²⁶ Why, unless the latter conceptions of Fichte concerning the manifestation itself, its structure and its possibility, were precisely the same as those of classical thought, the same as those of ontological monism in general?*

For, as we have seen, it is not man who can be held responsible for the hiding of the absolute and its disappearance. That the absolute, as Fichte understands it as a primitive existence in immanence, does not manifest itself, this comes from the absolute itself and from his nature, more precisely, from the fact that the internal structure of immanence is not grasped by Fichte as originally revelatory of self, as that of revelation. For him as for many other thinkers, as far as the manifestation is concerned, there exists only one power, that of monism, to which existence as immanence henceforth necessarily hides itself, and this not by reason of a deficiency in this power, whereby the knowledge which it brings forth would be a 'distorting' knowledge—it distorts nothing—but because it is a knowledge of ideality, not of reality. The latter, the reality of the absolute, this is precisely what must be understood, not merely, and this in a doubtlessly determining manner, as constituted in its internal structure by immanence, but also as a phenomenological reality, as a phenomenological reality of an absolute which henceforth ceases to be that about which we can say anything we wish, in such a way that everything we say about it

²⁴ *Ibid.* 551-567.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 471. [Henry's italics]

²⁶ *Cf. supra*, chapter 14.

becomes a pure hypothesis about a Being which is itself purely hypothetical. *The phenomenological reality of the absolute is no more than its original* [385] *belonging to itself in immanence, than the mode according to which it maintains itself and remains in itself. This is why, upon closer inspection, the understanding of the internal structure of immanence as revelation could not be added on to the simple understanding of this structure, it is identical to it.*

Such an understanding, which is identically that of the internal structure of immanence and of the original essence of revelation, is precisely what was lacking to Fichte for him to be able to give an effective content to the fundamental intuitions of his religious thought, as would later be lacking with infinitely more serious consequences to all modern ontology. Actually speaking, this understanding is hardly ever encountered in history unless, however, it is found in an exceptional thinker whom they used to call, and with good reason, a master: Eckhart.

39. ECKHART

The understanding of the ultimate ontological structures which constitute the essence of reality is not the *prima facie* goal which Eckhart sets for himself. He is interested only in the care of souls and the activity to which he dedicates himself to arrive at this is not of the speculative order, it is preaching. Eckhart preaches to the soul about its possible union with God. He instructs it about what it must do to raise itself to this union where it will find both its salvation and its happiness. Therefore, it is not the internal structure of the absolute itself or God, it is the relationship of man to the latter which constitutes the theme of the thought and the preaching of Eckhart. Moreover, to relate oneself to God, to make the absolute manifest, is possible only through the work of manifestation, through the work of the absolute itself. This is why, as the problematic necessarily recognized it from the first moment of its efforts to grasp it and to understand it in its goal and in its means,¹ *the relation to the absolute depends on the nature of* [386] *the absolute and its internal structure or rather it is identical to them; the existentiell union of man with God is possible only on the foundation of their ontological unity.* Such is precisely the teaching of Eckhart: According to him, it is the absolute who, in the accomplish-

¹ *Cf. supra*, chapter 8.

form to the content, is understood in such a way that nothing escapes it; as Eckhart says, "When one thing fills another, their boundaries are all mutual and there is no space between. It has breadth and length, depth and height."⁶⁹ The adequate character of this experience and its strict adaptation to a content constituted by it, the determination of reality beginning with this experience and as identical to it, this is what makes the nature of reality intelligible, the manner in which it presents itself to itself in its own profusion, the "riches" and the "sweetness"⁷⁰ of Being. Actually, Eckhart was not merely content to name these riches and this sweetness; he grasped them in their foundation beginning with the innermost structure of reality, insofar as it itself, as unity, constitutes [407] its own content. "The joy of the Lord," he says, "is the Lord Himself."⁷¹

However, there is lacking to the determination, such as it accomplishes itself, starting with the foundation and its most interior structure understood as unity, starting with what constitutes the experience of Being in its own phenomenological characteristics, its riches and its sweetness, there is lacking the explication of a presupposition in which the essential contribution of the thought of Eckhart is actually contained, according to which unity as such determines an experience, the self-experience of Being in its self-enjoyment, the fundamental ontological presupposition according to which the internal structure of immanence is that of revelation.

40. THE FUNDAMENTAL ONTOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITION OF THE THOUGHT OF ECKHART AND THE ORIGINAL ESSENCE OF THE LOGOS

The understanding of the internal structure of immanence as that of revelation, as that of constituting in a more precise way the original essence of revelation, is with Eckhart a constant presupposition of his thought and at the same time the object of his most explicit affirmations. Actually, it is in an explicit way that the essence, which is to itself its own content, is interpreted upon the foundation in it of its identity, not as a dead and lost being in its night, but rather as Reason,

⁶⁹ Meister Eckhart, tr. R. Blakney. 153.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 160.

⁷¹ Maître Eckhart. *Traité et Sermons*, tr. anon. (Paris: Aubier, 1942) 196.

namely, as a power of intelligibility whose intelligible content is likewise constituted by this power, consequently as a power of revelation precisely insofar as it remains in itself and does not relate to anything 'other'. Thus we see that immediately after declaring that the content of the essence which he calls 'the Lord' is constituted by the essence "and nothing else," Eckhart adds: "And the Lord is living Reason, essential and existing, which understands itself, [408] which is and lives absolutely only in itself."¹ Because it is and lives absolutely only in itself, Reason which understands itself, namely, whose phenomenological power consists in self-revelation, does not reveal itself according to the mode of manifestation which has been thought of in these investigations under the title of 'understanding' but, on the contrary, according to the structure of unity. It is as fundamentally determined in understanding by unity that we must understand understanding which, according to Eckhart, affects the essence and belongs to it in such a way that accomplishing it without any mediation, understanding reveals the essence for what it is, not in the milieu of otherness, but in itself, stripped of all foreign elements: "Simple reason is so pure in itself," says Eckhart, "that it understands the pure, naked Divine Being without medium."² This necessity of understanding the essence of revelation which takes place as unity in its radical opposition to the ontological process of objectification is visible in the critique inaugurated by Eckhart in the name of unity against intuition which finds its foundation in such a process: "While we are still looking at it, we are not in it. As long as a man has an *object under consideration* [intuition], he is not one with it." Nevertheless, in the absence of all intuition, when the process which serves as its foundation does not occur, a manifestation does take place which is the revelation of the essence itself in its reality. "Where there is nothing but One," adds Eckhart, "nothing but One is to be seen."³

Life has been understood as that which itself constitutes its own content on the foundation in it of unity: *Because unity is as such fundative of a revelation, so also life, as constituted by unity, is constitutive and fundative of a revelation; it is in itself a revelation.* [409] "This is life

¹ Maître Eckhart. *Traité et Sermons*, tr. anon. (Paris: Aubier, 1942) 196. [Henry's italics]

² Meister Eckhart. *Selected Treatises and Sermons*, tr. James M. Clark & John V. Skinner. (London: Collins-The Fontana Library, 1963) 244.

³ Meister Eckhart. *A Modern Translation*, tr. Raymond B. Blakney. (New York: Harper & Row-The Cloister Library, 1941) 200. [Henry's italics]

eternal, to know thee, the only true God," says Eckhart,⁴ namely, life itself in its essence insofar as it relates to itself in unity, and not in otherness to a finite horizon. Because this horizon is excluded from the reality of essence and life, a reality determined in essence and life by unity, it is precisely this essentially infinite reality which reveals itself in unity and in its perfect self-reliance. This is why "No one knows better what eternal life is than eternal life itself,"⁵ why "whatever has most being is most known," and finally why to a super-abundant Being there corresponds super-abundant knowledge. Moreover, we could not consider the latter as a particular modality of existence, for example, a privileged modality, it is an ontological structure which is determined as unity and revelation at the same time. This is what constitutes this "original idea, in which all things are one," wherein, according to Eckhart, resides "rest," which he likewise without equivocation calls "God."⁶ Here in this original, ontological region wherein the soul "tastes God himself as he was before he ever took upon himself the forms of truth and knowledge," the experience of the absolute takes place which, as adequate experience of its reality in unity, leaves outside it all transcendent determinations. "There," adds Eckhart, "the soul knows its purest knowledge and takes on Being in its most perfect similitude."⁷

Thus, with the interpretation of the structure of unity as constitutive of the "purest knowledge," i.e. of the original essence of revelation, the ultimate foundation of union, placed by Eckhart at the center of his meditations, between the soul and God, is discovered. What can such a union actually mean unless the manifestation to the soul [410] of God himself in his unity with it? The determination of the essence of the soul as constituted by the absolute remains a simple speculative affirmation as long as this essence does not manifest itself in the soul as its own. But this manifestation in the soul of the essence is the fact of the essence; it is the essence in reality which manifests itself to itself in such a way that the union of the soul with God expresses nothing other than the internal unity of the essence itself and becomes effective in the manifestation only insofar as this unity as such is found to be constitutive of a manifestation, only insofar as the internal structure of immanence is that of revelation. That which Eckhart affirms as union is

⁴ *Ibid.* 50. John 17: 3.

⁵ *Ibid.* 165.

⁶ *Ibid.* 142.

⁷ *Ibid.* [Henry's italics]

effective only in manifestation, i.e. only insofar as its concept is recognized in its positive phenomenological meaning. "Man is not blessed," he says, "because God is in him and so near that he has God—but in that he is aware of how near God is, and knowing God, he loves him."⁸ *The knowledge of God upon which the phenomenological, i.e. the effective, meaning of union is founded is nevertheless the fact of God himself such that the auto-revelation of the absolute, as it takes place in unity, determines in its unity and with it, and consequently as being phenomenologically identical to it, the very essence of the soul.* "By the same kind of knowledge by which God knows himself..." says Eckhart, "the soul receives its being from God, without any mediation."⁹ Because the essence of the soul, its revelation, is constituted by that of God, by the original revelation of the absolute to itself in unity, this is why nothing can penetrate it except in this absolute form of revelation constitutive of its essence, why "nothing gets to him [man] without...going through God's sweetness,"¹⁰ why "everything that happens betrays [411] God when a man's mind works that way."¹¹ Nevertheless, that which penetrates the soul in this absolute form of revelation, which constitutes its very essence and which, as fundamentally determined in it by unity, is the original revelation of the absolute to itself, is none other than God such as he is in himself in his nakedness. This is why, as Eckhart says, man is theognostic, "ein Gottwissender Mensch." It is because he is a man who knows God, that God, according to Eckhart who recalls here the very words of the Gospel of St. John, speaks to him in these terms: "I have not called you servants but friends. The servant does not know what his Lord does", but friends know all, for that is the nature of friendship."¹² It is also because he is such that all who participate in his essence will be able to say, as John again relates: "You adore what you do not know; we adore what we know."¹³

The interpretation of the structure of unity as constitutive of an experience does not merely confer upon the union of man with God its ultimate foundation; it further determines in a strict way the nature of this experience, namely, the very essence of revelation. Because the

⁸ *Ibid.* 129.

⁹ *Ibid.* 214-215. [Henry's italics]

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 67-68.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 17.

¹² *Ibid.* 215-216; John 15: 15.

¹³ John 4: 22.

latter takes place in unity, it arises and becomes effective independently of the ontological process of objectification and of the phenomenality produced by it; it manifests itself and its manifestation is not that of a horizon or of exteriority. "The Image," says Eckhart, "has no image by means of which it is seen." It is because the revelation of the essence is not the Being-seen in the image of otherness that the soul, whose power of revelation rests upon that of the essence or rather is identical to it as constituted by it, "understands and [412] knows" in this power and through it, "immediately and without image." Nevertheless, the image which is previously "rarefied in the air and light and carried into the eye as an image,"¹⁴ this very form of the image, to speak more precisely, is what manifests itself. Thus there is, alongside the original revelation of the essence such as it takes place 'without image', a phenomenality proper to the latter such that precisely in it 'images' and, in general, phenomena in the sense of the phenomena of the world, are possible. Thus the concept of phenomenality is divided in the essential eidetic analysis. This division is the one instituted by Eckhart between what he calls "twilight knowledge" which takes place in the form of images, i.e. in exteriority *where in principle the 'creature' itself as such is grasped* and, on the other hand, "daybreak knowledge," whose structure is unity and which as such encloses in it nothing distinct or represented, *to which the creature can yield only on condition of being grasped, not in itself, but in its Being-identical to the Being of God, i.e. on condition of being grasped in Unity.* "When one knows creatures as they are in themselves, that is 'twilight knowledge', in which creation is perceived by clearly distinguished ideas; but when creatures are known in God, that is 'daybreak knowledge', in which creatures are perceived without distinctions, all ideas being rejected, all comparisons done away with in the one that is God himself."¹⁵

It is this same distinction in the structure of ontological knowledge between a manifestation taking place in unity and another in exteriority which Eckhart again expresses concerning man when he says with Scripture, "There is an outward man [413] and, along with him, an inner man."¹⁶ For, once the existentiell meaning is discarded with which such a distinction in the analysis is first invested, its ontological foun-

¹⁴ Meister Eckhart, tr. R. Blakney. 167.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 74.

dation as well as its true meaning appears. The interior man is the noble man, "aristocratic because he is One and *knows* God and creatures *as they are One*";¹⁷ it is the internal, ontological structure of a mode of manifestation which is thought of in such a way that the content of this manifestation is actually always constituted by the essence itself. But the ontological meaning in virtue of which the distinction instituted by Eckhart between the interior and the exterior deals with the power of manifestation considered in itself and in its pure structure is not to be inferred by us as the final foundation for the edifying themes which intervene in his problematic, it is explicitly affirmed by him: "The soul has two eyes," he says, "one looking inwards and the other outwards. It is the inner eye of the soul that looks into the essence and takes being *directly* from God. *That is its true function.* The soul's outward eye is directed toward creatures and perceives their external forms, but when a person turns inwards and knows God in terms of his own awareness of him, in the roots of his being, he is then freed from all creation and is secure in the castle of truth."¹⁸

The revelation of the essence in unity is not merely juxtaposed to the manifestation of the horizon; it constitutes its foundation. This is why it does not suffice to say that "the agent of the soul which enables us to see is one thing and the agent by which one knows that he sees is another," but in a more essential way, that "the agent which makes us conscious of seeing should rank above [414] the agent of vision itself."¹⁹ Nevertheless, any datum has an equivalent right to that of any other datum whatever. The affirmation, as far as pure data themselves are concerned, of a higher dignity in one with respect to the other, remains speculative as long as it merely refers to the recognition of a bond of foundation which unites them. In other words, this recognition must itself take place in another way and elsewhere than on the level of speculation, i.e. *with the bringing to light, at the interior of effective vision and as its original phenomenological content, of the original phenomenological content of the essence.* It is because the latter effectively constitutes the original phenomenological content of vision that everything which manifests itself in it manifests itself in it originally and belongs to it; but the original phenomenological content

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 79. [Henry's italics]

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 216. [Henry's italics]

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 80.

of vision is, as the original phenomenological content of the essence, Unity. This is why unity encloses in it, in its phenomenological reality which is that of the essence, all phenomena, why "God has hidden all things in Himself. They are not this and that, individually distinct, but rather, they are one with [his] Unity."²⁰ The unity of all phenomena in the ontological milieu wherein their manifestation is originally revealed is a constant theme of the thought of Eckhart: up above, he says, we truly know things "as changeless...as undivided and almost as if they were one. Things that are widely separate here are near together there, where everything, is present at once."²¹ The ontological milieu wherein the unity of all phenomena takes place is nevertheless not the object of a metaphysical affirmation and does not as such constitute any higher world; it is the milieu, co-extensive with their manifestation, wherein the latter is revealed and originally arrives at effectiveness. As a result, in the effectiveness of this manifestation [415] and wherever it takes place, unity is present as an original phenomenological content. The soul, insofar as it sees, "has a power, in which all becomes one," and it is thus that essentially, namely, in the effectiveness of its phenomenological reality, "It gathers together what is scattered and dispersed,"²² and "the more simply will he understand all multiplicity in himself."²³

Insofar as the revelation of the essence in unity is not merely juxtaposed to the manifestation of the horizon but rather phenomenologically constitutes the foundation of its effectiveness, it constitutes the effective, universal, phenomenological foundation of all possible manifestation in general, the essence of the Logos. Thus, in Eckhart, the theory of the Word becomes intelligible as the point where the ultimate intuitions of his thought gather and culminate. The Word, understood by him according to religious tradition, is likewise called the Son of God. This means that revelation in its effective, phenomenological accomplishment is the work of the absolute. How this task takes place, how revelation arises in effectiveness is, as we have seen, in unity. For this reason, such an arising of revelation in the effectiveness of its original phenomenality is the act of remaining in

²⁰ *Ibid.* 148.

²¹ *Ibid.* 141.

²² *Meister Eckhart*, tr. J. Clark & J. Skinner, 193.

²³ *Ibid.* 243. "Let your soul stay where it belongs," says Eckhart again, "and then everything will be with you.", tr. R. Blakney, 135.

itself of the absolute; such an act is the original arising of revelation. Speaking of the Godhead understood as the Abyss, i.e. of the original self-revelation of the essence in unity, Eckhart says in a previously-cited text, here quoted in its entirety, that God "gives birth to his only begotten Son, so that we are at once his Son. His birth is his indwelling and his indwelling is his *epiphany*."²⁴ Thus, [416] that which constitutes the internal work of the absolute in its original accomplishment is determined both in its phenomenological character and in its structure. This internal work, by reason of such a character, can be understood as the very essence of the Logos. "What is God's telling?" says Eckhart, "It is God's work."²⁵ A similar work, in keeping with its structure, with the structure of this operation which constitutes the essence of the Logos, determines the Logos in its identity with this structure. Such is the structural ontological foundation which presides over the establishment of the relationships existing between God and his Word, between the Father and the Son. Commenting on the text of St. John according to which "the Word was in God," Eckhart adds: "It is completely like Him and *immediately* with him—neither deeper nor higher, but only like him."²⁶ Eckhart takes pains to show us in what rigorous and radical sense these propositions must be understood when, in another passage, ontologically more explicit, he rejects as *still belonging in its reference to the 'eternal archetype', to the area of transcendence*, the concept of equality which as such shows itself ultimately to be incorrect for characterizing the relationships between the Son and the Father: "in the archetype...the Son is equal to the Father. But in the Essence wherein they are one they are no longer even 'equal' for *equality already presupposes difference*."²⁷

It is with this ultimate ontological meaning, as radically exclusive of all relationship to transcendence, that the Unity, affirmed by Eckhart, between the Father and the Son, between the essence and the Word, must be understood. This is why such a unity, in spite of appearances, has nothing to do with the unity, for example, which the young Hegel recognizes between Jesus and God, and to which he will attribute, in opposition to the Jewish mentality, existence. According to him,

²⁴ *Meister Eckhart*, tr. R. Blakney, 190.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 135.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 180.

²⁷ *Maître Eckhart. Traités et Sermons*, tr. anon. (Paris: Aubier, 1942) 249. [Henry's italics]

its universal accomplishment goes hand in hand with its maintaining of its traditional concept as elaborated within the horizon of monism. Thus we see that after he has understood it beginning with the very structure of original existence, Malebranche deplores the absence of any idea relative to original existence, and interprets such an absence as *the terminus and not the beginning of an inquiry*, as closing a path rather than opening one, and henceforth preoccupies himself with remedying it, as we have said. Neither does the *cogito* considered in itself henceforth lead to much, and it is abandoned in such a way that its abandonment by Cartesians corresponds paradoxically to the moment when one of them discovers therein (however without fully clarifying it) its decisive meaning.⁵ [532] At least Malebranche firmly maintained, as constituting the absolutely original ontological dimension wherein the concrete modalities of our existence and this existence itself are developed, the phenomenological effectiveness of that which manifests itself other than under the form of extension. The effectiveness of this manifestation *sui generis* places its contents outside the grasp of the critique and thus confers, whether we want it or not, on the propositions which enunciate it something like an absolute rationality. This is why, as Malebranche recognized, we could not question that which the 'intimate sense' teaches us of our existence and its modifications, why, moreover, it defines *the sole path of access to these modifications, because it constitutes their essence, the sole mode possible for their revelation*. That which teaches us something on a given topic and uncovers it such as it is, this is what we call knowledge. That the latter, under the pretext that it does not take place in extension nor through the mediation of ideas should be called imperfect or not true, *in no way takes away from the phenomenological content of the phenomenon which it constitutes by itself*; it merely attests to the impotence of thought equaling its own discovery.

49. THE ONTOLOGICAL MEANING OF ECKHART'S CRITIQUE OF KNOWLEDGE

The extension of the Logos to the totality of its fundamental ontological dimensions and its expansion by way of the exhaustive concept of phenomenality is what characterized the thought of Eckhart. This is

⁵ This meaning would have gone totally unnoticed in the further course of Western philosophy had it not been for Maine de Biran who alone gave it an in-depth interpretation.

why the critique of knowledge receives in him its radical meaning which does not consist merely in making evident a phenomenological dimension which is of itself foreign to exteriority, but it consists even more in the determination of this original dimension and its internal structure. *Beginning with the latter, beginning with the internal structure of Being itself, we find* [533] *included the impossibility for knowledge attaining this Being*. Furthermore, this understanding in no way takes place as it were by accident, in the abrupt bursting forth of an intuition in no way bound to the system and persisting uselessly on the fringe of such a system. The clarification of the internal structure of the revelation constitutive of Being and of its reality is the explicit and central theme of the problematic inaugurated by Eckhart. Hence, the critique of knowledge, insofar as it is rooted in the very nature of the Logos, becomes attached to the essential contents of this problematic. The propositions in which such a critique is explicitly formulated are consequently never constituted by simple affirmations but they are constantly given due foundation. Because the mode of this foundation is phenomenological, because the truth of these affirmations is perceived in the structure of the original Logos constitutive of the absolute Being, the statements which together comprise the critique of knowledge manifest among themselves the unity of this structure; they determine the successive moments of a single analysis, which is that of Being. It is interior to this ontological task of clarification and as belonging to it that Eckhart's critique of knowledge ultimately takes place. This explains its systematic character. The fundamental intuitions of religion are no longer found dispersed in their historical appearance, but truly comprised in the system, grasped in an internal vision of Being, which vision they constitute. This is why the theoretical explanation of this critique includes in it as its motive, or rather as its very content, the structural ontological determinations of reality elaborated by Eckhart and in a general way by the problematic which reiterates them. For this reason, the critique of knowledge, such as it is worked out by Eckhart, will here be retraced only in outline fashion.

The essential structural determination of Being, made evident in the theory of the Logos, has the following meaning: The experience of Being, identical to Being itself, is possible [534] only on the foundation of unity and through this unity. Consequently, in the structure of this unity and in the maintaining thereof resides the internal possibility of Being, its essence. Such a possibility, on the other hand, is in principle excluded from the ontological milieu which is that of know-

ledge. Thus in the very structure of Being is based the impossibility of knowledge arriving at Being. *Such an impossibility expresses nothing other than the irreducible opposition of two phenomenological essences; it is because the phenomenality which constitutes its reality has nothing to do with that which defines the milieu of knowledge that Being cannot show itself in knowledge.* Because the phenomenality constitutive of Being and the phenomenality of knowledge have nothing in common, because they differ in their nature, in that which is responsible for their very phenomenality, *the effectiveness of the one, in the arising of its manifest content, implies in each case the non-effectiveness of the other.* The irreducible opposition between phenomenological essences has this ultimate meaning. In keeping with this meaning and because the manifestation of an essence determines in it the non-manifestation of its phenomenological anti-essence, *every appearance with regard to the pure original data which fundamentally structure reality and define it is identical to a disappearance.* This is why knowledge cannot develop the milieu wherein that which it attains becomes visible; such a milieu cannot become itself visible without banishing beyond its light that which remains irreducible to knowledge in its essential phenomenological content. In its positive development knowledge accomplishes a task of hiding in every case. Nothing that knowledge produces—neither the objective realities which it sets free nor the ideal milieu wherein the multiple determinations of transcendent Being move about—constitutes an approach to the essential or involves in any degree whatever, even under the form of a 'simple appearance', a manifestation of the absolute. "The least creaturely idea that ever entered your mind is as big as God...Because it will keep God [535] out of you entirely. The moment you get [one of your own] ideas," adds Eckhart, "God fades out and the Godhead too."¹

The phenomenological meaning of these propositions, their reference to the eidetic structures of pure phenomenality, becomes unequivocal when speaking of everything which, outside us and in us, constitutes a first layer of transcendence, a 'bit of knowledge', for example, of joy, of fear, of confidence and of all determinations of existence precisely insofar as they are known, insofar as they are no more than an 'intermediary'. Eckhart, taking his inspiration from Boethius, declares: "As long as you stick to them [things] and they to you, you

¹ *Meister Eckhart. A Modern Translation*, tr. Raymond B. Blakney. (New York: Harper & Row—The Cloister Library, 1941) 127.

shall not see God."² It is because the phenomenality of God, which is constitutive both of his Being and of the possibility of arriving at him, because this phenomenality is not exteriority in which knowledge moves about, it is because, as Eckhart states in a proposition which he borrows from St. Paul, "God lives in a light to which there is no approach,"³ that he hides himself from all knowledge and "dies" to the soul when the soul "is intent on external things."⁴ It is this incompatibility of the essential phenomenological structures which Eckhart expands upon further when, speaking of 'truth' understood by him as the original essence of revelation in its opposition to the ideal milieu of knowledge, he states simply: "Truth is to be found within and not in visible phenomena."⁵ It is because, on the foundation of the incompatibility of their essential phenomenological structures, truth cannot be found in its 'external manifestations' nor manifest itself in the milieu of knowledge, that all inquiry taking place [536] in this milieu invariably fails to find the absolute itself phenomenologically interpreted and understood as the essence of this original truth. Speaking of the latter, i.e. of God, Eckhart says: "The more one seeks Thee, the less one can find Thee"—and addressing himself to man—"You should seek Him in such a way as never to find Him. If you do not seek Him, you will find Him."⁶

Thus, the failure of knowledge is founded in the milieu wherein the inquiry which characterizes all knowledge as such develops. That which, in the structure of this milieu, constitutes the foundation of such a failure foreseen and intuitively affirmed by religious thought, Eckhart explains as follows. Commenting on the appeal made by the Jews to Moses to explain to them the words of the divinity which they themselves were unable to understand, "They stood afar off," says Eckhart, "and that is the reason they could not hear God."⁷ The impossibility of reaching God, of 'understanding him', an impossibility visible in the feebleness of all perception,⁸ thus resides in the very structure of

² *Ibid.* 166.

³ *Ibid.* 140; I Tim. 6: 16.

⁴ *Ibid.* 133.

⁵ *Ibid.* 198.

⁶ *Meister Eckhart. Selected Treatises and Sermons*, tr. James M. Clark & John V. Skinner. (London: Collins-The Fontana Library, 1963) 245.

⁷ *Meister Eckhart*, tr. R. Blakney, 149.

⁸ "Multiplicity is already there in what little we know of the Godhead," says Eckhart. *Maître Eckhart. Traités et Sermons*, tr. anon. (Paris: Aubier, 1942) 249.

the milieu opened by phenomenological distance and constituted by it in objectivity. The meaning taken on by objectivity of constituting not a path but an obstacle for him who wishes to join himself to the essence is affirmed by Eckhart when, long before young Hegel cited it, he refers to the words of Christ to his disciples, "Not only to his disciples of that time but also to all who want to be his disciples and to follow him to higher perfection: 'it is expedient for you that I go away.'"⁹ Precisely because it does not concern merely his disciples, the disappearance of Christ does not take place as a mere historical event; it finds both its foundation and meaning in the ontological structure of the Word itself, namely, in [537] God. God, at least if the problematic looks to his original essence, the essence of the Logos in him, could not strictly speaking disappear from the world for the very reason that he never showed himself there. Because the impossibility for God's manifesting himself in the world is rooted in him, in the original essence of his Godhead, it is the preservation of this original essence, *the preservation of his own essence that Christ pursues in the invitation addressed to his disciples of not attaching themselves 'unduly' to his own person, more exactly, as Eckhart says, to 'his humanity,'*¹⁰ namely, to his objective appearance, in the fact that he forbids them to confuse this appearance with his own Being.

The eidetic incompatibility of his true Being with his appearance does not merely determine the immediate attitude of Jesus, in Eckhart it constitutes the foundation of the critique which he directs against the concept of God. Because the original essence of the Logos is not the phenomenality of knowledge, everything which phenomenizes itself in knowledge, even God himself insofar as he is known, shows itself to be without any relationship to the original essence, without relationship to the Godhead. This is why "it is the well-ordered design of God that the soul should lose him," because "insofar as the soul still has a God, knows a God, has a notion of God, it is still a long way from God."¹¹ Here the unusual affirmation comes to light according to which "we must emancipate ourselves from God himself."¹² If nothing suffices for Reason, "even God in

⁹ Meister Eckhart, tr. R. Blakney, 199; John 16: 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 199.

¹¹ Maître Eckhart, *Traité et Sermons*, tr. anon. (Paris: Aubier, 1942) 248.

¹² Meister Eckhart, tr. R. Blakney, 229.

person,"¹³ if he is "never again satisfied with a god, or anything that is a god's,"¹⁴ it is because the mode according to which he phenomenizes himself in knowledge and which determines his concept lets the original essence of the Godhead escape, which original essence constitutes the very essence of [538] the soul. It is because the soul cannot rest in God, cannot find itself in him, that "I pray God that he may quit me of god, for unconditioned being is above god."¹⁵ That these prescriptions and the ethic which they seem to comprise are rooted in eidetic structures of pure phenomenality, the imperative which they formulate first and foremost expresses nothing other than the rejection of a transcendent God who is not the essence, Eckhart affirms simply: "I shall not find God nor even imagine him apart from myself, but as my own and belonging to me." Furthermore, this is why "I shall not do anything...for God...nor for any cause extraneous to himself, but only for that which is his own being and the life that is in him."¹⁶ That the essence does not reside outside us but in our own life, and this because it is the very essence of this life which is ours,¹⁷ this is what Niels later sensed in his own way, but all of it is said here and given a basis. *The philosophical content of atheism is present in Eckhart, understood by him in its truth, by starting from the structural heterogeneity of the fundamental phenomenological dimensions elaborated in the problematic of the Logos and as the expression of this heterogeneity.*

This heterogeneity, namely, the impossibility of an eidetic order whereby it opposes any claim at grasping the original essence of the Deity or of knowing the Godhead, in the dimension of exteriority, finds its strictest and most explicit formulation in the theory of the external archetype which designates precisely that very first manifestation of God in the milieu of otherness and hence implies the influencing of the spirit by this milieu as by a transcendent reality. Precisely for this reason, [539] a radical opposition is inaugurated between the essence and its archetype and far from being able to consist in the archetype, the revelation of the essence rather presupposes its suppression and annihilation. This is why, as Eckhart says in a crucial statement borrowed from St. Denis: "The greatest pleasure

¹³ *Ibid.* 169.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 232.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 231.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 182.

¹⁷ "What is life? God's being is my life." *Ibid.* 180.

50. THE FACELESSNESS OF THE ESSENCE

To the extent that it does not manifest itself in the world, in the pure milieu of visibility wherein every thing becomes visible in itself, insofar as it is neither this nor that, the essence is invisible. Deprived of the light which arises in the horizon opened by transcendence, and fundamentally foreign to this light which belongs to the world and which since Parmenides defines the day of presence and its effectiveness, it rather remains in the night and becomes penetrated by it. How the essence is subject to this empire of the night, and with what force it maintains itself in darkness and abandons itself to it, this is what the essence tells us. No horizon of light, not even the possibility or outline of this horizon, ventures forth from that which is bound up with itself in the absolute unity of its radical immanence. Thus the work of the Night takes place in the essence on the foundation of its very structure and is constituted by this structure. Because such a task rests on the structure of the essence and is constituted by it, that which it accomplishes is neither accidental nor provisional, but is bound to the essence as identical to it and as its reality. Night is the reality of the essence and it is in this way, namely, as its very reality and as its essence, [550] that the night penetrates the essence. The essence of the foundation resides in the reality of the essence. That the foundation cannot be grasped and escapes all knowledge, that it envelops itself in the night and remains therein, that it is the Abyss, results from its essence. The power of the night is the power of the essence, it is the invisible which it realizes and accomplishes because of what it is.

That which the essence realizes, that which it accomplishes because of what it is, is revelation, the original revelation of self where its reality resides. That which the essence is in its reality insofar as it accomplishes the task of the revelation, *insofar as it reveals itself originally*, the problematic demonstrates henceforth with compelling evidence: *The original revelation of the essence to itself, which is constitutive of its reality, is the invisible*. Because it constitutes the original revelation of the essence to itself and of its reality, *the invisible is not the antithetical concept of phenomenality, it is rather its first and fundamental determination*. However, this proposition must be correctly understood. It in no way signifies the inclusion in the essence of phenomenality of an element foreign to its phenomenological effectiveness, an obscure foundation of this effectiveness which of itself would not manifest itself. *The invisible is co-extensive with the original*

essence of phenomenality, co-intensive with its effectiveness. Co-extensive with the original essence of phenomenality, co-intensive with its effectiveness, *the invisible phenomenizes itself in itself as such; it is phenomenon through and through, revelation and, even more, the essence of revelation. Night penetrates the essence of revelation as that which reveals itself in it as it is. Night is the revelation of the essence of revelation, it constitutes the effectiveness of its specific phenomenological content and defines it*.

Thus, the concept of the 'invisible' is determined in the positivity of its peculiar phenomenological meaning. It follows that the invisible is nothing 'obscure' in the sense of that which remains of itself foreign to the element of revelation. The immanence whose reality it characterizes is not 'shadowy' in the [551] sense of the alchemists. Thus in a singular way comes the clarification of the presentiment which haunted the problematic from its inception; there is a clarification of the idea that the fact of not appearing remains totally undetermined and its concept deprived of meaning as long as appearing itself has not been recognized in its fundamental structural determinations interior to the exhaustive working-out of its scientific clarification; it becomes clear that the idea that that which does not appear is perhaps a non-appearing only with respect to a unilateral and abstract conception of the essence.¹ When this task of clarification is accomplished the immediate definition of the invisible as the simple privation of phenomenality is overthrown. *If negation included in the concept of the invisible is not that of phenomenality but determines the mode according to which phenomenality phenomenizes itself originally and helps us to conceive the concept*, the claim of seeking the origin of all knowledge in the visible and its powers, a claim which was explicitly formulated by Kant² and which in fact dominates the entire development of Western philosophy, loses its rights and is reversed.

The determination by the concept of the invisible of the mode according to which phenomenality originally phenomenizes itself and the original determination of this phenomenality must be thought out. *The invisible is not merely revelation in itself through and through, it rather defines the nature of this revelation*. If the ontological elaboration

¹ Cf. *supra*, chapter 8.

² "...we have no other sources of knowledge but these two [sensitivity and understanding]." Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. F. Max Müller. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1961) 191.