

INTERNATIONAL  
PHILOSOPHICAL  
QUARTERLY

23111  
VOL. IV NO. 1

FEBRUARY, 1964

ARTICLES

- |              |  |                     |
|--------------|--|---------------------|
| BRUSSELS     | <u>On Self-Evidence in Metaphysics</u>             | <u>Ch. Perelman</u> |
| KANSAS STATE | Spontaneity: Its Arationality<br>and Its Reality   | Carl R. Hausman     |
| JERUSALEM    | Whitehead and the Heritage<br>of Modern Philosophy | Zvie A. Bar-On      |
| TUFTS        | Seven-Valued Logic in Jain Philosophy              | George B. Burch     |
| DELHI        | Theories of Language in<br>Indian Philosophy       | S. S. Barlingay     |
| COLORADO     | Kinds of Theoretical Communication                 | William Sacksteder  |

CONTEMPORARY CURRENTS

- |         |  |                      |
|---------|--|----------------------|
| FORDHAM | Recent Anglo-American Views<br>on Perception       | Kenneth T. Gallagher |
| FORDHAM | The XIIIth International Congress<br>of Philosophy | W. Norris Clarke     |

Single Copy  
\$1.75  
Per Annum  
\$6.50

BOOK BRIEFS

108  
P 414  
vol. 2, n° 66  
BRUXELLES-UNIVERSITE



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY  
NEW YORK

HEVERLEE-LOUVAIN  
BELGIUM

# INTERNATIONAL PHILOSOPHICAL QUARTERLY

**Editorial Direction:** *IPQ* is edited by the Department of Philosophy of Fordham University (New York, U.S.A.) in collaboration with the Professors of Philosophy of Berchmans Philosophicum (Heverlee-Louvain, Belgium), under the direction of the following Jesuit Professors of Philosophy:

*American Editor-in-Chief*  
W. Norris Clarke

*European Editor*  
Maurits Huybens

*Coordinating Editor*  
Joseph F. Donceel

*American Executive Editor*  
James M. Somerville

*European Executive Editor*  
Herman Morlion

*American Assistant Editors:* John Flynn, Quentin Lauer, Gerald McCool

*European Assistant Editors:* Albert Poncelet, Frans Vandebussche, Louis Van Bladel

*Managing Editor:*

Beatrice Burkel

**Orientation:** *IPQ* has been founded to provide an international forum in English for the interchange of basic philosophical ideas between the Americas and Europe and between East and West. Its primary orientation is to encourage vital contemporary expression—creative, critical, and historical—in the intercultural tradition of theistic, spiritualist, and personalist humanism, but without further restriction of school within these broad perspectives.

**Editorial and Business Correspondence:** Manuscripts should be typed double-space, with footnotes separate. Authors should retain a carbon copy for use in correcting proofs. All manuscripts, subscriptions and correspondence should be sent to the following addresses:

*From all countries outside  
Continental Europe:*

International Philosophical Quarterly  
Fordham University  
New York 58, U.S.A.

*From Continental Europe:*

International Philosophical Quarterly  
Waversebaan, 220  
Heverlee-Louvain, Belgium

## Subscriptions

*Regular:* one year = \$6.50 (special subsidized rate for Asia: \$3.00).

*Sustaining:* one year = \$25.00 (provides one subscription for donor and three Asian subscriptions gratis, whose recipients donor may name, or partial subsidy for five Asian subscriptions).

*Institutional:* one year = \$25.00 (provides two subscriptions for donor and helps subsidize several low-cost foreign subscriptions).

*Payment* may be made either to New York or Heverlee-Louvain. If to latter, please indicate number of Belgian francs: 325 fr. b. (Postcheck: 6968.91, I.P.Q., Louvain, Belgium.)

*Foreign Agent:* Duckett's Ltd., 140 Strand, London, W.C. 2.

*IPQ* appears in February, May, September, December, and is published by:

**FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS**

# On Self-Evidence in Metaphysics

Ch. Perelman

108  
P414  
n°66

SINCE PARMENIDES, classical metaphysics has presented itself in the guise of an absolute knowledge that is independent of all contingency, subjectivity, and history and opposed to the inconsistency and variability of mere opinion. The current of scepticism which throughout its whole history has fought against the pretensions of metaphysics has never questioned this absolutist ideal itself but only the possibility of achieving it. The situation is still basically the same today. The various forms of positivism are willing to admit the progressive, and therefore imperfect, character of all science, while they deny purely and simply the possibility of a meaningful philosophy which could provide any sort of knowledge other than tautological. The reason is that, while they have taken as the touchstone of their critique the Kantian thesis of the existence of synthetic a priori judgments, they have never challenged his more fundamental position that all metaphysical propositions must be apodictic; and this apodictic character, of course, they are willing to accord only to analytic propositions. The philosophical method that is in harmony with this conception is that of linguistic analysis, whose aim is to reduce all philosophical theses to tautologies or to propositions lacking any proper cognitive content and thus to deprive them of any genuine human significance or importance.

For myself, I believe in the meaningfulness and the importance of philosophy. But I do not believe either in the necessity or the self-evidence of its theses. I do not believe that the proverbial controversies and interminable discussions that mark the whole history of philosophic thought are due to the lack of lucidity or the positive errors of philosophers, but that they result rather from the very nature of the enterprise itself. The aim of philosophy is to elaborate

Don de l'Université - Mars 1964



principles of being, thought, and action that are humanly *reasonable*, and not to discover eternal and immutable principles, as traditional metaphysics has always sought to do. Such principles require an absolute foundation, which has traditionally been assured to them by recourse to *self-evidence*. It is for this reason that I consider a critical examination of the role of self-evidence in metaphysics as a necessary methodological prelude to a "philosophy of the reasonable."

#### SUBJECTIVE SELF-EVIDENCE NOT SUFFICIENT

In order that self-evidence may fulfill the role assigned to it in metaphysics, namely, that of anchoring a system to unshakable truths, it is essential that we do not look on it as a purely psychological datum. That there are "self-evidences" which we do not think of challenging for the moment, no one doubts or has ever doubted. But that such evidence is an infallible guarantee of the unshakable truth of its object, this is what we have every right to put in question so long as self-evidence is accorded no more than the status of a purely psychic datum. For, thus understood, self-evidences can be not only relative but even deceptive.

In his article entitled "Quelques points de vue concernant le problème de l'évidence,"<sup>1</sup> P. Bernays notes that a piece of self-evidence connected with one stage of an intellectual process can be lost at a more advanced stage, and he gives as example the loss of the self-evidence which used to belong to naive realism. On the other hand, a self-evidence can be acquired, as is the case in mathematics, thanks to a greater familiarity with its object. Again, the history of mathematics gives us many examples of how so-called self-evidences can deceive us. Let me add, for many centuries the typical example of a self-evident proposition was provided by the thesis that the whole is greater than each of its parts. Yet this proposition is not true for infinite sets. For the series of even numbers constitutes only one part of the series of whole numbers; and the possibility of establishing a relation of bi-univocal correspondence between each whole number and each even number which is its double proves that the series of whole numbers is not larger than that of even numbers.

<sup>1</sup> *Synthèse*, 5 (1946), 321-26.

Purely psychological self-evidence, then, is not sufficient to ground an absolutist theory of knowledge. Its role as infallible guarantee of truth demands that all the variable and contingent elements be eliminated from subjective self-evidence in order to justify the passage to objective self-evidence. The latter will not be susceptible of degrees. In the measure in which authentic self-evidence involves the guarantee of the truth of its object it can admit of no degrees, since all doubt must be excluded from it. Now, the absence of all doubt and the certitude accompanying this state cannot depend only on the will of the subject. The assent given to a proposition, therefore, must be a reflection of the self-evidence of its object, that is, of its objective self-evidence.

What is it that guarantees for us this passage from subjective self-evidence, which alone is given to us, to objective self-evidence, the indispensable instrument of an absolutist metaphysics? The history of philosophy teaches us the existence of two types of guarantee, which complement each other. The first has recourse to the intervention of God, that is, of a perfect being; the second is founded on the very nature of the object of the evidence.

#### TWO TYPES OF OBJECTIVE GUARANTEE

1. The divine guarantee is obtained either by the fact that at the moment of evidence God illumines our reason (the Augustinian current), or by recourse to the existence to a natural faculty whose normal functioning permits us to attain the truth, because God is not a deceiver. The latter is the response to the hyperbolic doubt in Descartes. After the natural doubt, which enables us to purge our minds of all our insufficiently guaranteed beliefs, Descartes thinks up the hypothesis of the *malin génie*, and this leads him to doubt even what he conceives with clear self-evidence. As a consequence of this hypothesis, Descartes tells us very clearly in the *Third Meditation* that without the proof of the existence of a non-deceiving God he does not see how he "could ever be certain of anything." He repeats this in the *Principes de la philosophie* (I, 13), namely, that "it is impossible for there to be any certain knowledge until the latter has come to know the one who has created it."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For this whole problem, see P. Thévenaz, *L'homme et sa raison* (2 vols., Neuchâtel, 1956), especially the chapter entitled "L'évidence et le statut métaphysique de la vérité," I, 126-46.

If we take our starting point from the Christian conception, according to which God is the Truth, self-evidence makes us participate, in a certain fashion, in the divine truths. Since the existence of truth in God has been admitted from the beginning, self-evidence is only the manifestation of God within us; thanks to it, we participate in an absolute and objective truth. Thus, as Thévenaz puts it elegantly, "the divine guarantee heals in classic fashion the wounds opened by the *malin génie*."<sup>3</sup> This guarantee will finally make it possible to set up subjective self-evidence as an ultimate and unshakable criterion of truth.

2. If we turn now to the conditions in which self-evidence is produced, we are led to make an analysis of its object. Now, all self-evidence depends on an immediately given object. The reason is that all derived knowledge, of whatever sort, results from the transfer of evidence from the premisses to the conclusion; therefore, in order to avoid an infinite regress, the truth of the conclusion must, in the last analysis, be guaranteed by a present and manifest object which will provide the point of departure for all further knowledge. In the absence of certitude with respect to the foundations, which self-evidence alone can provide, no conclusion will ever be completely assured.

Now when is it that self-evidence emerges in any mind attentive to its object? The traditional analyses distinguish two kinds of self-evidence. One results immediately from a particular relationship of its object to the knowing subject: and by this very fact it becomes personal and contingent. The second is founded on a relationship between the elements themselves within the object: in this case it is considered objective and necessary.

The first type of self-evidence, founded on the intimate intuition of our own states of soul, was already noted, in passing, by Aristotle,<sup>4</sup> but analyzed with considerably more emphasis by St. Augustine.<sup>5</sup> According to the latter, we cannot be deceived in affirming that we are conscious or that we are alive: our internal states, immediately perceived, cannot lead us into error and are the basis of all other certitudes.<sup>6</sup> This thesis, developed at length by Duns Scotus, is at the roots of the Cartesian *Cogito*. One whole tradition of

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 165.

<sup>4</sup> *Metaphysics*, B, 1011 a.

<sup>5</sup> *De Trinitate*, XV (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, XLII, 1073).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. my article, "Évidence et preuve," *Dialectica*, 11 (1957), 22 ff., reprinted as "Self-Evidence and Proof," in *The Idea of Justice and the Problem of Argument* (London: Routledge, 1963), pp. 111 ff.

phenomenology, deriving from Brentano, affirms its primacy. The latter writes:

Die Sicherheit der Urteile inneren Wahrnehmung beruht darauf, dass der Urteilende zu seinem Gegenstand nicht im Verhältnis blosser Kausalität steht, sondern im Verhältnis realer Identität. Die innere Wahrnehmung ist nichts anderes als die Konstatierung eines gegenwärtigen psychischen Phänomens, wir erleben sie fortwährend an uns selbst.<sup>7</sup>

For Brentano, all our internal perceptions are self-evident.<sup>8</sup> This is the type of justification characteristic of what we might call "philosophies of the immediate," which seek to found an indubitable knowledge on the self-evidence of a reality present as such to our consciousness.

The self-evidence of necessary propositions would have another foundation, since they would be nothing else but the reflection of an objective self-evidence resulting from the fact that there are self-evident propositions. This is what Duns Scotus calls "evidentia rei in se," or its intelligibility stemming from what it is.<sup>9</sup> A proposition will be called self-evident when it is known as true in virtue of the terms which it contains: "ex suis terminis ut sui sunt." Hence it is not self-evident because it is actually perceived as true by some intellect, but because it can be apprehended by any intellect which understands the proper meaning of the terms and which sees that the predicate is essentially contained in the subject. In this sense, the self-evidence of a proposition will be founded on its analytic character and, in the last analysis, on the principle of identity.

This is the thesis defended by Leibniz, who, not satisfied with an intuitive knowledge of the axioms,<sup>10</sup> wished to reduce them to the primitive axioms that he called the "identicals."<sup>11</sup> Suspicious with regard to the intuition of the so-called simple terms, he insisted that every primitive proposition should consist of an *identity* analytic in character. If this analytic character is not immediate, but demands further recourse to definitions, the proposition will not be "per se nota" but "nota per aliud."

<sup>7</sup> F. Brentano, *Die Lehre von richtigen Urteilen* (Bern, 1930), 154-55.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>9</sup> Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*, in *Opera Omnia* (Paris, 1891-95), IX, 836. Cf. Peter C. Vier, *Evidence and Its Function according to John Duns Scotus* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y. 1951).

<sup>10</sup> Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement* (*Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. Gerhardt, V, 67).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

This distinction has been taken up again by modern theoreticians of logic. They distinguish between explicitly analytic propositions, which result from the replacement of variables by particular values in logical truths, and implicitly analytic propositions, which are reducible to the former after the elimination of the terms introduced by means of explicative definitions.<sup>12</sup>

The conception of self-evidence of a Descartes, founded on the immediate intuition of simple natures, and that of a Leibniz, are not compatible. Since the latter applies to analytic propositions, the fact that the predicate is contained in the subject presupposes the complex make-up of the latter. Hence a deeper analysis of these two conceptions of self-evidence seems to us indispensable.

#### SELF-EVIDENCE FOR DESCARTES

For Descartes, error results from a combination of elements produced by the imagination and thus cannot affect the knowledge of simple natures, which, being clear and distinct, never contain anything false.<sup>13</sup> This knowledge is not founded simply on internal self-evidence but also on the guarantee provided by the divine omnipotence, which excludes all deceit and assures the objective validity of our clear and distinct ideas. This is what M. Gueroult brings out powerfully in the basic work he has consecrated to Descartes:

Il s'agira de se demander non seulement si les choses correspondent aux vérités que j'aperçois dans les essences, mais si mes idées claires et distinctes elles-mêmes sont des essences, bref, si ce que j'affirme, moi, au nom de ma raison, est vraiment l'expression d'une raison universelle et objective et non point de nécessités inhérentes à ma nature subjective; si les liaisons que j'établis entre ces idées ont une valeur objective ou si elles ne valent que dans la sphère limitée de mon moi.<sup>14</sup>

For Descartes, the passage from self-evidence to truth requires the guarantee of the divine veracity. This guarantee does not seem necessary to Brentano, but at what price? At the price of considering evidence not as criterion of the truth of what is evident, but as providing the very definition itself of truth. In effect, Brentano tells us,

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Arthur Pap, *Semantics and Necessary Truth* (Yale Univ., 1958), especially Chap. 5: "Analytic Truth and A Priori Knowledge."

<sup>13</sup> Descartes, *Regulae* (*Oeuvres*, éd. de la Pléiade Paris, 1952 p. 50).

<sup>14</sup> M. Gueroult, *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons* (Paris, 1953), I, 32.

if I wish to define truth as the adequation of the idea to its object, I must first assure myself of my knowledge of that very term whose adequation I am trying to show, which would involve me in an infinite regress. In order to avoid this impasse, truth must be defined with respect to evidence:

Truth is attributed to the judgment of one who judges correctly (*richtig*), that is to say, to the judgment of one who judges as he would judge who had evidence, that is to say, to one who affirms what he would affirm who would judge with evidence.<sup>15</sup>

In this conception, the principle of non-contradiction becomes the evidence that one who would affirm the negation of what is affirmed by one who judges with evidence cannot be judging with evidence, in other words, that a judgment and its negation cannot both be evident. Every axiom must be an apodictic judgment, known on the basis of an immediate and self-evident knowledge.<sup>16</sup> This is the evidence which guarantees the principles and the solid anchoring of all knowledge. Thus the perspective of Brentano turns out to be in conformity with the conclusions arrived at by Thévenaz in his examination of the basic point of departure in both Descartes and Husserl:

Une philosophie du point de départ radical est une philosophie qui, dès sa racine même, fusionne intimement le premier acte temporel de la raison et la valeur intemporelle de la raison, qui tend à réconcilier le temporel et la logique, autrement dit qui s'amorce immédiatement par un acte absolu, un acte porteur d'absolu ou qui engage d'une certaine façon un absolu et par là même engage l'homme tout entier dans la réflexion qui pose ou dévoile le principe premier et apodictique.<sup>17</sup>

#### SELF-EVIDENCE FOR LEIBNIZ

The thesis of Leibniz, which makes self-evidence depend on analyticity, is based on the claim that the negation of analytic judgments leads to a contradiction. But the self-evidence of analytic judgments presupposes the univocity of their terms. If this condition is not observed—and this is the case with almost all the ap-

<sup>15</sup> Brentano, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>17</sup> Thévenaz, *op. cit.*, I, 149.

parent tautologies of our language—then expressions like “Business is business,” “War is war,” “Children are children” become at once meaningful and contestable. But what guarantees this univocity? Nothing else but a convention concerning the handling of symbols of the same form, a convention, moreover, from which has been eliminated a priori any problem concerning the criterion which would permit us to judge when two symbols are of the same form.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, is the principle of identity itself the expression of an objective truth or merely of linguistic conventions, of accepted rules of operation? On the supposition that the axioms of a system of formalized logic can be assimilated to rules of operation—and the Polish logician Jaskowski has been able to demonstrate the equivalence between several deductive systems with axioms and systems without axioms possessing only rules of operation<sup>19</sup>—what significance must we attribute to the self-evidence of these axioms, in view of the fact that the rules of operation capable of replacing them cannot, as such, lay claim to truth? Either these axioms are, like the rules of operation themselves, purely conventional and arbitrarily affirmed, that is, if we accept Carnap's principle of tolerance, which allows us to construct artificial languages any way we wish; or else they are convenient and useful, because they make possible a coherent systematization of our thoughts and acts. In any case, they no longer bear the mark of necessity.

If the self-evidence of analytic propositions corresponds to nothing more than their conformity with certain accepted rules of operation, is it then possible to ground an *infallible knowledge* on the self-evidence of certain intuitions, as Descartes and Brentano suggest? On the supposition that the self-evidence of certain intuitions results from the identity of what is perceived with the perceiving subject, is it possible to pass from this evidence to that which confers evidence on a judgment? Let us not forget that every judgment requires the intervention of a language which, insofar as it is a means of communication, cannot on principle coincide with an incommunicable intuition. The language must be understood and the judgment capable of being identified even by one who lacks the particular intuition in question. Otherwise the knowledge involved would lose

<sup>18</sup> Cf. my report, “Logique, langage et communication,” in *Relazioni introduttive du XII<sup>e</sup> Congrès International de Philosophie* (Florence, 1958), I, 125-37; reprinted as “Logic, Language and Communications,” in *The Idea of Justice and the Problem of Argument*, pp. 143-53.

<sup>19</sup> Jaskowski, *On the Rules of Suppositions in Formal Logic* (Warsaw), 1934.

its intersubjective character and could no longer be distinguished from some kind of mysticism.

The above remarks do not imply that a science can dispense with all recourse to intuition of any kind, and that the blind are in the best position to judge about colors. But it does mean that one must be able to check in some way on what has become the object of intuition of another. Now all such checking, all intersubjectivity, in fact, presupposes assertions which transcend in many ways particular intuitions that a particular subject has experienced at a certain moment in the past. The communicability of an assertion requires a certain extrapolation with respect to the intuition that is its object and which, by nature, is unique, entirely subjective, and limited in time. Even if I wish to register, for my own self, what I have experienced at a certain moment in the past, I can do so only by using a language which remains comprehensible to me even after I have ceased to experience what it recounts. It follows that no assertion, of any type, can be identified with the intuition that it is presumed to describe.

In conclusion, self-evidence founded on the identity of subject and object is concerned with an intuition which can indeed be a lived fact, but which cannot lay claim to the truth. Every assertion, before it can be judged true or false, must first be meaningful. Linguistic statements are made up of symbols which, by definition, cannot coincide with what they designate. In this case, how is it possible to identify the truth of a judgment with the self-evidence of an intuition?

#### CLARITY OF IDEAS INSEPARABLE FROM CONTINGENT CONTEXTS

For Descartes, in the intuition of simple natures idea and reality coincide. This means, to take an example which Descartes would accept, that the clear and distinct ideas of point, straight line, or angle coincide with the objective essences of point, straight line, or angle. But this supposes the existence of a world of objective essences, which we are capable of grasping intuitively and of understanding perfectly, in isolation and independence of their relations with other things, that is, independently of all context. To admit that the insertion in a new context might necessitate a rectification of the ideas which correspond to simple natures would amount to admitting that these ideas are not clear and distinct. And this would be to undermine the very foundation of the Cartesian theory

of self-evidence. But we know today, thanks to the non-Euclidean geometries, that a notion like that of straight line cannot be completely defined and understood in isolation and independence from those of space and of plane, with which it is intimately related. The same thing is true a fortiori of notions describing situations whose context can vary in an unpredictable manner.

Few notions current in law are as clear today as that of "natural death." Nevertheless, I can easily imagine a situation in which it would become an object of intense controversy. Article 578 of the Napoleonic Code defines "usufruct" as the right to use things which are the property of another as though one were the proprietor, but with the obligation of preserving their substance. Article 617 tells us that usufruct terminates with the natural death of the usufructuary. This last prescription suffers from no ambiguity in present-day circumstances. But would this still be true if new techniques made it possible to preserve human life indefinitely in a state of hibernation? Should the proprietor be indefinitely deprived of the usage of his property if the usufructuary decided to put himself into a state of hibernation for a period of a thousand years, for example? In such a situation, unless appropriate legislation clarified the issue, it is undeniable that the notion of "natural death" as it is found in Article 617 would cease to be as clear as it had previously been.

These examples, borrowed from different domains, seem to prove that a notion is clear, not independently of its context, but because, in the presently known contexts, one cannot foresee any case where its application could reasonably lead to controversy. To sum up, the passage from what is actually known to an absolute knowledge can take place thanks to the intervention of a divine mind, for which all these questions arouse no difficulty. The self-evident intuition of a simple nature would in this case coincide with God's own vision, the clarity of which cannot be put in question, the role of self-evidence thus being to guarantee to men a share in the divine knowledge. But if we refuse this easy way out and try to solve the problem on the level of man himself, we must examine more attentively the conditions on which depend the clarity of ideas and the self-evidence of propositions which result from joining together such clear ideas.

It is possible to maintain that an idea that is clear in presently known contexts will always remain so, if we are assured of an exhaustive knowledge of all its possible contexts. This claim can be more easily justified when the field of application of an idea has

been artificially limited, as is the case in a formal context. But when such a limitation is not a priori realizable, the clarity of an idea must remain an hypothesis subject to the test of every unforeseen case of application. It is easy to see how the assertion under these circumstances that an idea or a text is clear is not, most often, the expression of an objective state of affairs. It betrays rather a *lack of imagination* or a *lack of experience*. As Locke tells us:

Many a man who was pretty well satisfied of the meaning of a text of Scripture, or clause in the code, at first reading, has, by consulting commentators, quite lost the sense of it, and by these elucidations given rise or increase to his doubts, and drawn obscurity upon the place<sup>20</sup>.

If Descartes had been forced to make the clarity of ideas depend on all the possible cases of their application, he would have abandoned the criterion of self-evidence. If in fact he did grant to it a scope that was not limited to mathematics but universal, the reason is that he believed a complete knowledge of simple natures is possible independently of their relations with other realities, and that it is possible to rediscover the whole from its elements. It is precisely in this that the mechanist vision of the universe consists. It was such a vision, joined to the irreducible opposition set up between *scientific knowledge* and *opinion*, which outlawed a priori a probabilist conception of knowledge. For in this conception of scientific knowledge the slightest doubt, or even the intervention of a probability which can make us hesitate, was a sign of error. Science thus conceived can advance only in a quantitative manner, by an increase in the number of clear and distinct ideas, without this progress being able to put in question any already acquired knowledge. The history of such science would consist only in its accretions and extensions, not in its modifications, whereas, on the contrary, according to contemporary theoreticians like Bachelard,<sup>21</sup> that which is of primary importance in the progress of knowledge and what enables us to define it best is precisely the elimination of error.

#### CARTESIAN IDEAL AS ASOCIAL AND AHISTORICAL

Cartesian science, on the contrary, must, in order to be constituted as science break completely not only with error but also with

<sup>20</sup> Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chap. 9, no. 9 (ed. Fraser, Oxford, 1894), II, 109.

<sup>21</sup> G. Bachelard, *La philosophie du non* (Paris, 1940).

opinion and probability. Founded on self-evidence, it has nothing to do with traditions, which are only prejudices. In fact, it belongs to a theory of knowledge proper not to a human, but to a divine mind, to a unique and perfect mind which can do without all education, in the sense of initiation into recognized traditions, and which repudiates any *formation* of the mind. From this results the asocial and ahistorical character of all properly scientific knowledge; for every element which bears the social and historical mark of its origin can be nothing but prejudice or error, of which the scientist must purify his mind before he begins. The only scientific education which would be recommended within this perspective is a purification of the mind of all that it has been taught before its contact with the philosophy of evidence.

This theory presupposes, methodologically speaking, a complete separation between theory and practice; for, if they were joined together and if theory had to rely on practice for the elaboration and checking of its theses, it would never have been able to achieve complete assurance of its own validity. In a conception which makes theory dependent on practice, theories are only hypotheses whose value is subordinated to verification and control by its consequences. But if theory and practice are separated, theory itself, once become independent, regains its former—and etymological—meaning of intuition and of contemplation.<sup>22</sup> But this contemplation would be one in which the knowledge of the object is in no way influenced by the subject. As Heidegger puts it, it would leave the object exactly as "that which it is and such as it is."<sup>23</sup> If knowledge is openness to being, if it can be compared to a beam of light leveled from a projector, it is essential that this light in no way deform what it illumines, and therefore that the illumination should undergo no influence from the knowing subject.

In such a perspective, where self-evident knowledge results from the identity or the perfect parallelism between the object and the idea of the object, all deformation due to language must also be eliminated. The latter is likened to a veil, and thus incurs the legitimate suspicion thrown by the mystics on all *discursive* reasoning. The rationalists, for their part, according to whether they are realists or nominalists, will seek to make the intervention of language

<sup>22</sup> Cf. my exposé on "Les rapports théoriques de la pensée et de l'action," in *Entretiens philosophiques de Varsovie* (Warsaw, 1958), pp. 23-28.

<sup>23</sup> M. Heidegger, *De l'essence de la vérité* (trad. franç., Louvain, 1949), pp. 84, 88.

as inoffensive as possible in order to render perfectly transparent the veil that it cannot help but be. They will achieve this end either by thinking up a perfect language whose terms coincide with the objective essences of things, or by considering language as a purely conventional instrument which has no influence on our knowledge as such, the various languages being considered as capable of being perfectly translated and of transmitting without ambiguity the identical message. What is important, no matter what solution is adopted, is to eliminate the role of this disturbing factor and to succeed, in the last analysis, in grounding an adequate knowledge on self-evident intuitions.

What such an epistemology really does is remove all meaning from the opposition between realism and idealism. For once one admits self-evidence, whether rational or sensible, with its double character of element of knowledge and authentic manifestation of the real, there is no further reason for distinguishing between the subject and the object.<sup>24</sup> Ordinarily, in such a philosophical conception, the objective essences, whether situated in a divine mind or not, serve as models for the sensible order and must be rediscovered by means of self-evident intuitions. It is easy to understand, accordingly, how, in opposition to any kind of methodological pluralism, the method for the proper guidance of our reason must here be solely one of purification. We must eliminate from our knowledge all that is an individual, subjective, social, or historical contribution, in a word, everything contingent, in order to rediscover the universally valid use of this reason, which is common to all men and is only the partial reflection of the divine mind. The man of science will thus bend all his efforts to rediscover true knowledge, solid as a rock, after having swept aside the shifting sands of opinion. Epistemology will have to concern itself only with the obstacles to a perfect knowledge, which knowledge will be revealed as soon as the deceptive veils have been lifted. The role of the philosopher is to track down relentlessly all the sources of error. Once he has liberated his mind from opinions and prejudices the truth will shine forth like the sun emerging from clouds blown away by the wind.

For this way of looking at things, valid knowledge is not the product of a truly human effort, of a long tradition, which gathers up into as coherent a whole as possible all that the genius of creative

<sup>24</sup> Cf. my article, "Opinions et vérité," *Les Études philosophiques* (1959), 135; reprinted as "Opinions and Truth," in *The Idea of Justice and the Problem of Argument*, p. 130.

thinkers has brought forth throughout the centuries, and which is passed on to young minds by means of a patient initiation. It is rather something already given, which has simply to be seen, and this vision is within the reach of all. From this follows, we might add, a pedagogy based on active methods, such as we find heralded by Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "Let him [your pupil] know nothing because you have told it to him, but because he has understood it himself; let him not learn science, but invent it."<sup>25</sup> A pedagogy of the immediate goes along with an epistemology of the immediate; science is complete in itself; we need only to rediscover it.

This perspective, which I might call theological, in the sense of taking the divine knowledge as its model, cannot help but lead to scorn for anything that is the product of history, of culture, of every specifically human creation. Diversity within it is always the sign of error; disagreement, if it is not an expression of bad will, results from a lack of clarity and distinctness and betrays the intervention of disturbing factors which must be eliminated. Man is only a more or less confused reflection of the divine mind, the norm and ideal of all scientific thought. True liberty is nothing but conformity to the pre-established divine order, all human originality being nothing but licence and source of error and vice. History is but the history of our weaknesses. What counts is the return to God, unique source of truth and salvation.

#### CAN METAPHYSICS REMAIN HUMAN AND SURVIVE?

But the fact of the matter is that the study of human philosophies and sciences, such as they actually reveal themselves and develop in human history, together with a detailed examination of the manner in which our thought is actually elaborated, transmitted, modified, and advances, would open up to us quite different perspectives on the whole question. The conclusions of such researches would certainly not permit us to rediscover what exists from all eternity in the world of ideas or in the divine mind. But it would contribute to this more humble and realistic result: to legitimate a knowledge whose criteria are immanent within it and which is a purely and authentically human achievement. In other words, metaphysics today must either learn to live and nourish itself—and

<sup>25</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Émile* (Paris, 1898), p. 181.

especially to communicate itself—not on the basis of an unshakable self-evidence, but of the best available evidence, or else it must renounce any claim to be a truly human enterprise, adapted to our historical human condition, that is to say, it must renounce its fundamental aims, being reduced to non-significant trivialities. This, to my mind, is the fundamental challenge posed to metaphysics in the context of contemporary epistemology.

INSTITUTIONAL AND SUSTAINING SUBSCRIBERS\*

Luis Abella, Flushing, N.Y.

Canisius College, Buffalo, N.Y.

Francis P. Clarke, Univ. of Pennsylvania

Thomas J. Curran, Palo Alto, Cal.

Fordham University Alumni Federation

Dean, Fordham University Graduate School

Charles T. Gallagher, Jr., Wilmington, Del.

Mercy College, Westchester County, N.Y.

Newton College of the Sacred Heart, Mass.

J. O'Neill, San Francisco, Cal.

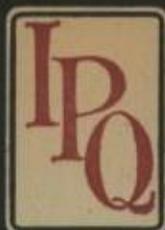
Our Lady of the Holy Cross Abbey, Berryville, Va.

Mr. & Mrs. George H. Sinnott, East Orange, N.J.

Chauncey Stillman, Esq., New York

William E. Whitehead, Jr., Cincinnati, Ohio

\* \$25 a year, helping to subsidize low-cost Asian subscriptions.



Preview of the Coming Issue:

MAY, 1964

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| <i>P. T. Raju</i>  | <i>Wooster College</i>       |
| What Is Reason?  |                              |
| <i>Suzanne Mansion</i>                                   | <i>Louvain</i>               |
| Aristotle's Theory of Knowledge and French Phenomenology |                              |
| <i>Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R</i>                              | <i>Toronto</i>               |
| The Aristotelian Conception of the Sciences              |                              |
| <i>Salomon Bochner</i>                                   | <i>Princeton</i>             |
| Aristotle's Physics and Today's Physics                  |                              |
| <i>John H. Haddox</i>                                    | <i>Texas Western College</i> |
| The Aesthetic Philosophy of José Vasconcelos             |                              |
| <i>Bernd Magnus</i>                                      | <i>Fairleigh Dickinson</i>   |
| Heidegger and the Truth of Being                         |                              |
| <i>Michael Novak</i>                                     | <i>Harvard</i>               |
| An Empirically Controlled Metaphysics                    |                              |

fordham university press